

BCIM NEWS

The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum (BCIM) for Regional Economic Cooperation, of which ICS is the liaison office for India, is committed to the enhancement of connectivity between East and Northeast India, and Bangladesh, Myanmar and China's southwestern province of Yunnan. A number of initiatives are currently afoot to improve transport connectivity in the region for the promotion of trade and tourism (exemplified in the proposed Kunming to Kolkata Overland Car Rally), as well as the level of people-to-people contacts.

A recent effort in the enhancement of people-to-people contacts, was the exchange visit of fourteen eleventh standard school children of The Sri Ram School, Aravali (Gurgaon), with the very well-regarded Kunming No. 1 Middle School. The project was conceived and initiated by Mr. Ravi Bhoothalingam, ICS Visiting Fellow and member of the Indian delegation to BCIM focusing on Tourism, and Prof. Ren Jia of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, and enthusiastically taken up by the Director of the Sri Ram School, Mr. Mark Parkinson. The fourteen students spent 10 days in China, from 16th to 26th November 2007, staying in the homes of their Chinese partner-students. They attended activity, sports, music and dance classes, as well as classes in English, Chinese, Maths and Sciences, and went on a number of outings to places of scenic interest in and around Kunming.

The students and the teacher who accompanied them, Ms Girija Balakrishnan, returned enormously enthused by the wonderful experience they had had, and deeply appreciative of the warm hospitality of their Chinese host families and all concerned. They were particularly impressed by the discipline of the Chinese students, both in academic and extra-curricular activities, and by the wide public interest in India. They were thrilled to be interviewed on Kunming television. The students are now looking forward to the return visit of their Chinese friends early in 2008.

On 10th January 2008, the students made an illustrated presentation regarding their visit for teachers of other branches of the Sri Ram School in the Delhi region, as well as Mr Ravi Bhoothalingam, Prof. Patricia Uberoi, director of ICS, and Mr Sun Weidong and Ms Sun Xinquan of the Chinese Embassy, New Delhi, who had graciously arranged an Orientation function for the students prior to their departure for Kunming. While there have been an increasing number of India-China college and youth delegation exchanges, , this was probably the very first exchange of middle/high school students. Many other schools have now expressed interest in such exchange programmes, and also in the short-term exchange of teachers. The latter would seem to hold much potential for cooperation among the BCIM countries.