

CORRIDOR LINKING INDIA, MYANMAR NO LONGER UNDER BRI FRAMEWORK

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Chinese President Xi Jinping. AP Mark Schiefelbein

India's decision to skip the Belt and Road Forum (BRF) may have led to the exclusion of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor from the list of projects covered by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) umbrella.

In an annex tagged with the Joint Communiqué of the Leaders' Roundtable of the BRF, which concluded in Beijing on Saturday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry website has not listed the BCIM as a project covered by the BRI — the giant connectivity initiative spearheaded by China to revive the ancient Silk Road across Eurasia and Africa.

Instead, South Asia is covered by three major undertakings — the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC); the Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan Multi-dimensional Connectivity Network, including Nepal-China cross-border railway; and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

India's non-participation

Citing "sovereignty" concerns, India, for the second time, did not participate in the BRF, as the CPEC passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

The 2,800-km BCIM corridor proposes to link Kunming in China's Yunnan province with Kolkata, passing through nodes such as Mandalay in Myanmar and Dhaka in Bangladesh before heading to Kolkata.

Significantly, a report titled, "The Belt and Road Initiative Progress, Contributions and Prospects," released by the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative on April 22, did list the BCIM as a BRI project. Last September, the BRI had got a high octane boost when Myanmar inked an agreement with China to establish the CMEC. The 1,700-km corridor provides China yet another node to access the Indian Ocean.

The CMEC will run from Yunnan Province of China to Mandalay in Central Myanmar. From there it will head towards Yangon, before terminating at the Kyaukpadaung Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the Bay of Bengal.

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