Sachin Chaturvedi: A new path to South Asian integration

To succeed, BBIN needs to learn from the mistakes and other experiences of similar integration experiments. The grouping should continue to focus on areas that can bring quick results, including tariff and non-tariff barriers, trade facilitation and border infrastructure.

BBIN initiatives are advancing through two joint working groups, focused on the areas of water resources and power, and connectivity and transit. The first group is exploring hydropower projects that would be undertaken jointly by at least three countries on an equitable basis and on developing grid connectivity.

The second working group, which produced the motor vehicle agreement, is looking at ways to improve cross-border movement of cargo and tourists by road and rail as well as strengthen actual border infrastructure. One result is the well-equipped Phubari road crossing between India and Bangladesh. Another future initiative could involve visa reciprocity.

The success of the BBIN cooperation model could show the way forward for strengthening and deepening economic partnership across the entire South Asian region. While China is building its own links into several South Asian states, it is even more important that connectivity inside the region is improved from its current sorry state.

Sachin Chaturvedi is director general of Research and Information System for Developing Countries, a government-supported think tank in New Delhi