

Burma

China Opens Rail Line With Access to Indian Ocean via Myanmar

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A new rail line providing China with access to the Indian Ocean via Myanmar was opened on Aug. 25 on the Chinese side of the border.

The rail line stretches from Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province, to Lincang, a prefecture-level city in China's Yunnan Province opposite Chin Shwe Haw, a border trade town in Myanmar's northeastern Shan State.

The rail line will enable China to trans-ship cargo from Singapore Port via Myanmar. Cargo will be shipped from Singapore Port to Yangon Port. From there it will be transported to Chin Shwe Haw in the Kokang Self-Administered Zone by road, and then by rail from Lincang to Chengdu. It will take three days to get from Lincang to Chengdu by rail, according to the Chinese Embassy in Myanmar.

The route is the first to link western China with the Indian Ocean. And it will significantly reduce the time needed to import cargo to landlocked Yunnan Province. The route will go through Mandalay, Lashio and Hsenwi on the Myanmar side.

The route is expected to become the lifeblood of international trade for China and Myanmar, while providing a source of income for Myanmar's military regime.

Meanwhile, measures are under way to establish a border economic cooperation zone in Chin Shwe Haw as part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the planned zone will become an intermediate economic hub for Yunnan Province's imports and exports.

According to the Chinese Embassy in Myanmar, Yang Haodong, the secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in Lincang, said at the opening ceremony of the railroad last week that Lincang would continue to take responsibility for implementation of the BRI and "Economic Pivot" and wished to write a new chapter in the "pauk-phaw" friendship between the two countries.

The Lincang-Lashio border trade expo was also held from Aug. 26-30. The expo is the second of its kind with 172 Chinese companies and 27 Myanmar companies participating.

Myanmar companies reportedly exhibited jade and gems, marine products, furniture and agricultural products.

China has also been working to develop a deep seaport in Kyaukphyu Township in Rakhine. The Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone and Deep Seaport Project, which is part of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, is expected to allow Chinese trade to bypass the congested Strait of Malacca near Singapore while boosting development in landlocked Yunnan Province.

China's efforts to build a rail line linking Shan State's border town Muse with Mandalay as part of the direct rail link with Yunnan and Kyaukphyu have been delayed by fighting between Myanmar's military and ethnic armed groups. The proposed rail line goes through areas controlled by ethnic armed groups and escalating clashes after the February coup are hampering the project.

Lincang is adjacent to Kokang Self-Administered Zone in northern Shan State and is just 150 kilometers from Lashio, the largest town in northern Shan State.

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