

Seychelles stalls project for Indian naval base

Plans upset: The announcement came on Friday when Seychelles President Danny Faure arrived in India. PTI

The Parliament of the Seychelles will not ratify India's plans to build a naval base in the western Indian Ocean region. Officials of the Seychelles government announced this on Friday when the country's President, Danny Faure, arrived in India on a six-day state visit.

News reports suggest that the Opposition members in the Seychelles Parliament argued against allowing India to build a naval base on the strategically located island of Assumption saying it would infringe on the country's sovereignty. The government said the proposal to seek ratification of the project would not be presented to Parliament as the Opposition had already said that it would not clear it, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Barry Faure told *Reuters* over telephone.

"The state visit of President Faure is part of regular high-level exchanges between India and the Seychelles, and will accord an opportunity to review our wide-ranging bilateral cooperation, including in the fields of defence and security and development partnerships," said the External Affairs Ministry.

Mr. Faure will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Monday. The dignitary and his senior Cabinet colleagues are also scheduled to visit Gujarat, Goa and Uttarakhand.

Coast guard facility

Seychelles has indicated that instead of allowing India to run the base, it would like to develop a coast guard facility at the Assumption. The Indian project was to include facility for Indian ships and an airstrip that would allow New Delhi to guard the energy lanes vital to India's economy.

The Parliament's decision follows several protests by civil society activists in the archipelago nation who have urged the government to remain non-aligned and avoid tilting towards either India or China. Leader of the Opposition Wavell John Charles Ramkalawan had earlier stated that he would block the government's move to seek clearance from Parliament.

India had earlier tried to reach out to Mr. Ramkalawan, who was extended special courtesies during the PIO-Parliamentary Conference, a global meet of leaders from the Indian-origin people. However, he declared on March 27 that the project would not take off.

The agreement for the base was signed on January 27 when the former Foreign Secretary of India S. Jaishankar travelled to the country.

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