

CHINA OPENS FIRST ROAD-RAIL TRANSPORT LINK TO INDIAN OCEAN

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

The first shipments on a newly-launched railway line from the Myanmar border to the key commercial hub of Chengdu in western China, that provides China a new road-rail transportation channel to the Indian Ocean, were delivered last week, state media reported on Tuesday.

A “test cargo” through what is being called the China-Myanmar New Passage arrived at the Chengdu rail port in Sichuan province on August 27, the official China News Service reported.

The transport corridor involves a sea-road-rail link. Goods from Singapore reached Yangon Port, arriving by ship through the Andaman Sea of the northeastern Indian Ocean, and were then transported by road to Lincang on the Chinese side of the Myanmar-China border in Yunnan province. The new railway line that runs from the border town of Lincang to Chengdu, a key trade hub in western China, completes the corridor.

“This passage connects the logistics lines of Singapore, Myanmar and China, and is currently the most convenient land and sea channel linking the Indian Ocean with southwest China,” the China News Service said, adding that “the one-way journey saves 20 to 22 days”.

China also has plans to develop another port in Kyaukphyu in the Rakhine state, including a proposed railway line from Yunnan directly to the port, but the progress there has been stalled by unrest in Myanmar.

Chinese planners have also looked at the Gwadar port in Pakistan as another key outlet to the Indian Ocean that will bypass the Malacca Straits. Gwadar is being developed as part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to the far western Xinjiang region, but has been slow to take off amid concerns over security. The costs and logistics through CPEC are also less favourable than the Myanmar route with the opening of the rail transport channel from the Myanmar border right to western China’s biggest commercial hub, Chengdu. Transportation time on the railway line from the Myanmar border to Chengdu takes three days.

The Irrawaddy website that focuses on Myanmar news said the route is “the first to link western China with the Indian Ocean”.

The railway line currently ends in Lincang on the Chinese side opposite the Myanmar border trade town of Chin Shwe Haw. Plans are underway to develop Chin Shwe Haw as a “border economic cooperation zone” under the Belt and Road Initiative.

The Irrawaddy said the route goes through Mandalay, Lashio and Hsenwi on the Myanmar side and “is expected to become the lifeblood of international trade for China and Myanmar, while providing a source of income for Myanmar’s military regime”.

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