

India seeking foothold in ASEAN through Myanmar-Experts

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Naypyidaw [[Myanmar](#)], May 15 (ANI): [India's](#) change in approach from a 'Look East' policy to an 'Act East' policy is aimed at gaining a foothold in the Association of South East Asian Nations ([ASEAN](#)), experts familiar with these moves have said in the wake of the recent visit to [Myanmar](#) by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.

In an interaction with the [Myanmar Times](#), Professor Prabir De of the [ASEAN-India Centre](#), which is a part of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries, said the completion or near completion of the Sittwe and Dawei projects in [Myanmar](#) is very important for [India's](#) efforts to establish a link with [ASEAN](#) countries through Myanmar. "Digital connectivity and infrastructure are important for boosting links with [Myanmar](#)," Professor De was quoted as saying.

He, however, pointed out that both [India](#) and [Myanmar](#) are guilty of missing out on several deadlines for projects, despite having access to a USD 1.75 billion special fund it has extended to [ASEAN](#).

It may be recalled that both [India](#) and [Myanmar](#) had signed a framework agreement in 2008 for the ambitious Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project, which involves using a combination

of sea, river and road transport to link Kolkata and other eastern India ports with Mizoram via Rakhine and Chin states.

According to the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper, India has also awarded the contract for the final stage of the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway to be built from Paletwa to Zorinpui, which is on the border with Mizoram, as well as completed the building of the Sittwe power and inland water terminal in Paletwa in 2016. The project has been delayed due to the unrest in Myanmar's Northern Rakhine state and the Rohingya refugee crisis arising thereof since last August.

The Myanmar Times quoted experts as saying that they now believe that New Delhi is getting increasingly proactive in the context of completing projects to purportedly prevent China from bagging investment to develop the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port and a special economic zone (SEZ).

According to Professor De, the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway project was originally to be completed in 2014, but now has a new target of 2020.

The highway is likely to be ready in three years, according to Myanmar's Ministry of Construction.

This project is being built by over 70 companies, which are also constructing 69 bridges on the Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa section in India and upgrading 120.74 kilometres of road on the Kalewa-Yargi section in Myanmar, the ministry said.

The Myanmar Times quoted political analyst U Kyaw Lin Oo, as saying that it is now too late for India to think that Myanmar would still need its support in infrastructure because there are now many other developers from other countries, such as China, are already extending support to Myanmar.

Oo added that even though Myanmar is a gateway country for India to boost its relations with ASEAN, India could not compete with China, which has strong ties with the country in trade and tourism.

Its another matter that Swaraj during her two-day official visit last week met the Myanmarese leadership across the board to discuss the progress being made in the implementation of agreements signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Myanmar last year. (ANI)