



## Proposal for China Myanmar Economic Corridor

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### Why in News

China's President Xi Jinping will be visiting Myanmar to mark the **70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Myanmar.**

President's visit will focus on the three pillars of the **China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)**— the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone, the China-Myanmar Border Economic Cooperation Zone and the New Yangon City.

- CMEC is a branch of the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** in the Indian Ocean.
- The CMEC to the Bay of Bengal is the replica of the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** that connects Beijing's western province of Xinjiang to Karachi and Gwadar on the Arabian Sea.

### Historical Background of CMEC

- The East India Company and the British Raj were eager to develop connectivity into Yunnan through Burma to promote trade between India and western China.
- In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian Railways surveyed the route for a railway line from the Arakan coast (Myanmar) to Yunnan (China), but could not implement it.
- Thus, China will be implementing the vision of the East India Company.

### Key Highlights of Visit



- **Connectivity and Infrastructure:**

- The visit is likely to pave the way for **greater connectivity** between **China's southwestern province of Yunnan and the eastern Indian Ocean.**
- The major infrastructure projects like the development of a **Special Economic Zone (SEZ)** and a deep-sea port at Kyaukpyu and the **construction of a railway line from the China border to Mandalay in central Myanmar** will be discussed.

The railway will connect Kyaukpyu on the western seaboard of Myanmar and Yangon in the south where the **Irrawaddy River** flows into the Bay of Bengal.

- The visit is also expected to revive the **hydel dam at Myitsone** and the **copper mining project** that had to be suspended a decade ago.

- **Economic Relations:**

It will reinforce **China's status as the most important economic partner of Myanmar**, and rejuvenate the **historic special relationship** between the two countries.

- **Diplomatic Relations:**

- The US and the West that have been critical of Myanmar's handling of the Rohingya problem. **China**, in contrast, has played the **role of mediator** between **Myanmar and Bangladesh.**

China is making the case that some of its BRI projects can help alleviate the Rohingya conflict by accelerating the development of the Arakan region.

- By developing ports such as the Gwadar and Kyaukpyu, **China aims to lower its strategic dependence on the Malacca straits** — the vital trade link between the Indian and the Pacific oceans, which is the **Indo-Pacific Command of the U.S.**

- **Historical Relations:**

CMEC enforces the centuries old idea of **Southern Silk Road by China.**

## Impact on India

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- China's economic stakes in the Bay of Bengal will signify larger maritime presence and naval engagement in the region which in turn reinforces **the string of pearls policy by China.**
  - The **String of pearls is a geopolitical theory** referring to the network of Chinese military and commercial facilities extended from the Chinese mainland to Port Sudan in the Horn of Africa.
  - But this theory is denied by China and it views its actions as their efforts to strengthen a new maritime Silk Road.

- Like CMEC and CPEC, China is also developing the China-Nepal Economic Corridor (CNEC) which will link Tibet to Nepal. The endpoints of the project will touch the boundaries of the Gangetic plain. Thus three corridors signify the **economic as well as strategic rise of China in the Indian subcontinent.**

## Steps to be Taken by India

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- India should focus on making a more effective contribution to **Myanmar's development and security.**
- India needs to focus on quickly completing its own infrastructure projects in Myanmar and develop a new strategy for commercial partnership that is in tune with India's own capabilities and strengths.
- India needs to strengthen its collaboration with like-minded partners **like Japan** which has a growing economic presence in Myanmar. Thus, **India's Act East Policy** and **Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy** needs to combine.
- India also needs to revive the dormant dialogue with China on the **BCIM corridor involving Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar.**

**Source: IE**