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CHINA MOVES FIRST ON LEDO ROAD

India recently offered to renovate the Ledo Road through Myanmar. The signing of a new MoU suggests that Beijing is moving to secure the route before New Delhi acts.



China Moves First on Ledo Road

During the junta leader's visit to China, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed for the Kanpiketi–Myitkyina–Pansaug Highway Project. The plan would link Kanpiketi, a border town to Tengchong City, Baoshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province, to Myitkyina in Kachin State, to Pansaug on the Myanmar–India border, following the historic Ledo Road. The agreement was signed between Transland Public Co., Ltd. of Myanmar and Yunnan Baoshan Hengyi Industrial Group Co., Ltd. of China. This highway project is part of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC), one of the key economic corridors under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)¹. However, India has long resisted BCIMEC, citing concerns that it could undermine its sovereignty. Nevertheless, just last month, India offered the junta assistance for the redevelopment of the Ledo Highway. Therefore, this new agreement could also be seen as China's attempt to take the initiative before India becomes actively involved.

The road is commonly known as Ledo Road, a once logistic route connecting British India and China, built during World War II by US Gen. Joseph Stilwell and also known as Stilwell Road. Myanmar historian Thant Myint-U wrote in his 2011 book *Where China Meets India: Burma and the New Crossroads of Asia* about the Ledo Road as a desperate U.S. effort to keep China in the war against Japan. He describes the difficult 1938 construction of the Burma Road using 200,000 Chinese laborers with shovels or bare hands, resulting in around 2,000 deaths amid mountains and hills. UK wartime PM Winston Churchill called the project "an immense, laborious task, unlikely to be finished until the need for it has passed". But for decades, the road lies hushed, years under a vicious wind.

Yet, implementation is hampered by rough terrain and conflict. The route runs through Sadung and Kanpiketi, held by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which is fighting against the central power and operates along the Ledo Road. Meanwhile, the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC) is preparing to retake rare-earth mining areas such as Pangwa, adding to the complications. Bilateral talks between the SSPC and KIA, soon—likely under Chinese pressure to advance its interests—are expected after the SSPC's proposed elections. ■

● The Kanpiketi–Myitkyina–Pansaung Highway Project

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The Kanpiketi–Myitkyina–Pansaung Highway Project envisions a highway linking Tengchong in Yunnan's Baoshan Prefecture to Kanpiketi on the Kachin State border, then through Myitkyina and along the Ledo Road to Pansaung on the Myanmar–India border. Preparations are also underway for the Kanpiketi Border Economic Cooperation Zone and the Myitkyina Economic Development Zone (Namjin Industrial Zone) along the route. Both initiatives were first agreed upon during the NLD government's tenure.



Data as of September 12, 2025, is part of research conducted by the ISP–Myanmar's China Studies. It may vary from other sources due to differences in methodology and data availability.