

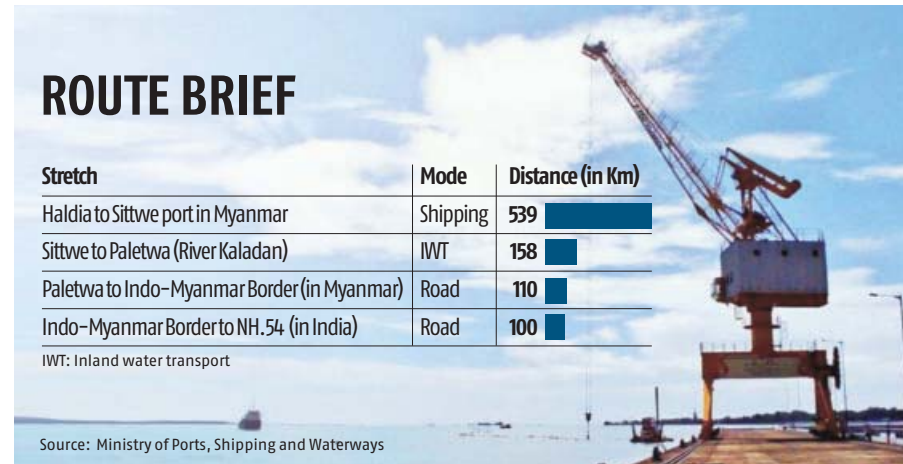
Strategic Sittwe port begins ops

DHRUVAKSH SAHA
New Delhi, 9 May

India's strategically important Sittwe Port in Myanmar began operations on Tuesday after Union Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal received the first vessel at the port, which was flagged off from Kolkata five days ago.

"This will promote trade connectivity and people-to-people ties between India and Myanmar and the wider region, and will help boost the economic development of northeast states under Act East policy of the government," Sonowal said at the event. "I am confident that the Sittwe port will act as the gateway of India to Southeast Asia, ushering growth and progress."

The project is part of the \$484-million Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP), and has been built under grant assistance from India. The primary aim of the project has been to create an alternative route for better connectivity with



northeast India. The port connects to Paletwa in Myanmar through an inland waterway and from Paletwa to Zorinpui in Mizoram through a road component.

So far, the narrow Siliguri Chicken's Neck corridor is the only feasible route for transportation. According to the Centre, this is a far more feasible route for the trade and commerce between the northeast and the rest of India over the

existing route. Sonowal claimed the new port would effect a drop of 50 per cent in costs and time of logistics over the Chicken's Neck corridor.

"While the length of road from Kolkata to Agartala is around 1,600 kms and takes four days, the Sittwe to Chittagong to Sarboom to Agartala will be done in two days, saving cost and time," Sonowal was quoted by the ministry as saying on Monday.

Officials present at the event said the project, the agreement for which was signed way back in 2009, had been gaining strategic relevance over the years as India-China ties took a hit over the past few years, owing to several border skirmishes and China's expansionist approach. Having infrastructural presence in the country was an important objective which will now be met, a source said.