

ROUNDTABLE

Dawei: Change and Regional Connectivity [Roundtable]

Coordinator

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Roundtable Description

Five centuries of history as a crossroads of economic and intellectual exchange has endowed Dawei with a rich cultural and social heritage. Located along with the Tanintharyi mountain range and the Andaman coast, Dawei is abundant in natural resources. Within this unique historical and geographic context, the area has been targeted for the development of the Dawei Special Economic Zone (DSEZ) project, which, if realized, would be one of the largest petrochemical industrial estates in South East Asia.

The DSEZ is a bilateral economic cooperation project owned jointly between the national governments of Thailand and Myanmar. The project was launched in 2008, and land has been cleared and initial infrastructure development began. The project will comprise an industrial estate area including a deep seaport and dockyards; an oil refinery complex; steel mill; fertilizer and petrochemical plant; pulp and paper processing plant; medium and light industry factories; and one or more electric power plants. Also planned is a new oil and gas pipeline to Thailand, a large reservoir, a quarry, and an international road linking the DSEZ with Thailand.

There have been critical flaws in the process of land confiscation and payment of compensation under the project. Furthermore, project developers have failed to engage in meaningful consultation with affected communities, and the project's compensation process has been found to be flawed and lacking in transparency.

Panelists will examine the impacts of the DSEZ, and the legal obligations of Myanmar and Thai governments to protect the human rights of communities and individuals affected by the project under international, regional, and domestic legal obligations and standards. In addition, panelists will address the environmental and social impacts of mining and energy projects, and changes in the local fishing industry.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily stalled the development of the Dawei SEZ and related projects, the Myanmar government has made clear that its post-COVID-19 relief plan will entail fast-tracking overseas investment projects, including Thai outbound investment and increasing Chinese interest in the Dawei region. In the context of economic recovery following the pandemic, panelists will reflect on the vision of Dawei and regional civil society groups to promote more equitable and inclusive development, cognizant of the rights of local people to participate in development decisions affecting their land, livelihoods, and cultural heritage.

At the same time, Dawei has been hit hard by economic losses in the wake of the pandemic.

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The Tanintharyi region's economy is reliant on fisheries, small-scale farming, and migrant work in Thailand, with many families depending upon remittances from abroad. In this context, panelists will discuss broader issues of migration and cross-border labor movements.