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<http://atimes.com/2015/04/chinas-ambitious-mt-everest-tunnel-is-unsettling-india/>

China's ambitious Mt. Everest tunnel is unsettling India

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China's chasing other projects besides a new Silk Road economic belt that spans Central Asia and Europe. But one proposed endeavor might raise the ire of China's neighbor – India.

India's Economic Times reported Thursday that China plans to build a 540-kilometre strategic high-speed rail link between Tibet and Nepal passing through a tunnel under Mt. Everest. The Times says the move "could raise alarm in India about the Communist giant's growing influence in its neighborhood."

Beijing's state-run China Daily Thursday quoted Wang Mengshu, an expert at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, as saying the project is rumbling ahead despite expected engineering hurdles.

"A proposed extension of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway to the China-Nepal border through Tibet would boost bilateral trade and tourism as there is currently no rail line linking the two countries," China Daily said.

Details of the Mt. Everest project are sketchy. It's expected to be completed by 2020. But there are no cost estimates.

A 1,956-km long Qinghai-Tibet railway is already said to link the rest of China with the Tibetan capital Lhasa and beyond.

The tunnel and its high-speed trains are expected to boost bilateral trade with Nepal, especially in agricultural products. Tourism is also expected to benefit.

“The changes in the elevation along the line are remarkable. The line (will) probably have to go through Qomolangma so that worker may have to dig some very long tunnels,” China Daily quoted Wang as saying. (Qomolangma Mountain is the Tibetan name for Mt Everest.)

The rugged terrain of the Himalayan mountains is expected to limit the rail link to a maximum speed of 120 kmph.

Wang reportedly said the project is being undertaken at Nepal's request and that China has already begun preparatory work.

The Times says Losang Jamcan, Chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region, told Nepalese President Ram Baran Yadav during his visit to Tibet's provincial capital Lhasa last month that China plans to extend the Tibet railway to Kermug, the Chinese town nearest to Nepal border where a border trade port has been built.

The Times added: “Besides Nepal, China had earlier announced plans to extend its Tibetan rail network to Bhutan and India. During his recent visit to Nepal, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had asked the officials to conduct a feasibility study to extend the rail network to Kathmandu and beyond.

Hu Shisheng, Director of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, told official media earlier that the aim of the rail line is to simply improve the local economies and people's livelihoods. China has been scaling up its ties with Nepal much to the chagrin of India to stem the flow of Tibetans travelling through Nepal to meet the Dalai Lama in Dharamshala.”

The Times said Beijing recently increased its annual aid to Nepal to \$128 million from \$24 million.