

Chapter-5

CONCLUSION

India-Myanmar relations are moving ahead with firm determination. There has been spurt of high level visits from both sides of the countries. The newly elected President of Myanmar Thein Sein came to India on a state visit on October 12–15, 2011. During the visit, India congratulated Myanmar on its transition towards democracy and offered all necessary assistance in further strengthening the democratic move, in an inclusive and broad-based manner. India realized that promoting closer ties with Myanmar would promote mutual interests. Recently, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Myanmar aimed to promote the strategic relations. The importance of the regions are seen when leaders of a few Asian Countries came into visit. All leaders gave more importance to regional stability.

During Prime Minister's visit (May 27–29, 2012), both the leaders welcomed the range and frequency of engagement between the two countries that had intensified significantly since Myanmar's transition towards a more democratic form of government in March 2011. And, they committed to further enhancing these exchanges so as to take bilateral cooperation to a higher level. India and Myanmar signed 12 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) on matters of mutual concern, wherein development and connectivity were the key watchwords. The understanding is that improved connectivity would lead to greater access between the two countries, while cooperation in fields such as agriculture, trade, and education and information technology would address Myanmar's developmental needs. The major projects that were discussed during the Prime Minister's visit is the progress of the Kaladan multi-modal transit and transportation project for road connectivity between two nations that extends national highway 54 on Indian side to Myanmar border. This mega project after its completion will ensure seamless movement of goods between India and Myanmar. India is also developing the Dawei project in Myanmar. This strategically important deepwater port is being touted as the biggest infrastructure project ever in Southeast Asia that offers a viable chance to unite the fast-growing South Indian region with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The mood in Myanmar today is upbeat. The political reforms are unfolding. Once again, the people of Myanmar are testing the limits of freedom. Large demonstrations to protest against power outages have been held in front of Sule Pagoda in Yangon and in Mandalay. Threatening to spread to other cities, these protests evoked memories of the 1988

movement and the 2007 uprising sparked by the monks. The April 2012 bye-elections showed that the National League for Democracy (NLD) is still popular. The real test is to come in 2015 when general elections are due. From India's standpoint, a durable solution to Myanmar's political transition lies in settlement among its three stakeholders-political parties, ethnic groups, and the military. It will shape India's further relationships with Myanmar. The relationship between the post-colonial states has undergone periods of magnanimity and mistrust. The current period, especially after Prime Minister Manmohan's initiative, seems to be inching towards an era of market led mutual cooperation.

Myanmar is very close neighbour for India. But different government always create problem between India and Myanmar. India always supports democracy. India never gave recognition to military government in Myanmar. China takes benefits of this time. But the high hope could land India in depression, if the Myanmar-China relations are counterpoised. Myanmar is aware of the rising profile of China and India these countries naturally appears in its strategic planning. China is major investor in Myanmar and its military relations are causes of concern in India. China uses its deeper pockets to secure the natural resources and increasing stakes in Myanmar. A democratic and independent-minded Myanmar is more likely to bend towards India than China. India is face with a multi-billion opportunity to strengthen its stake in Myanmar by deepening its economic engagement strategy. Such a strategy is expected to dramatically alter the economic character of eastern and north-eastern India. India faces a huge challenge. However, India also sees an opportunity. Myanmar can be expected to maintain strict neutrality and engage both India and China focused on economic development. Myanmar's cooperation would be in interest of the countries. A lot of would depend on Myanmar's response to India's gestures. Myanmar is opening its wings towards ASEAN and East Asia. Myanmar may consider Japan and South Korea for future trading partners. As it has been decided that Myanmar is going to be the next ASEAN chairman, its international acceptability is poised to increase its diplomatic weight.

Myanmar shared common heritage of many centuries with India. India-Myanmar relations are rooted in shared historical, ethnic, cultural and religious ties. As the land of Lord Buddha, India is a country of pilgrimage for the people of Myanmar. Both India and Myanmar got their Independence in 1947. The democratic experience in Myanmar was short lived and in 1962, the military took over the reins and rule till date. Indians in 1962 were asked to leave Burma and relationship between the two countries soured. India and Myanmar share a long land border of over 1600 km and a maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal. A large

population of Indian origin (according to some estimates about 2.5 million) lives in Myanmar. Myanmar's geographic location largely lies between China and India. Several of India's north-eastern states, afflicted with more or less separatist insurgencies, share a long border with Myanmar. The borders are impossible to patrol closely and thus porous, with population, insurgents, and local trade spilling across in both directions.

The two decades between India's open support for the pro-democracy forces in the 1988 movement and the recent exchange of bilateral visits at the highest levels have clearly demonstrated New Delhi's desire to pursue its strategic and economic goals in Myanmar. However, it has left unresolved the dilemma of how to pursue its stated goals without compromising its commitment to human rights and democratic principles. Myanmar is India's only neighbour that has a surplus trade balance with India, principally because of the large quantities of agricultural produce and pulses that it exports to India. India has also invested in major infrastructure projects in Myanmar, including in the transportation and energy sectors, which it needs to protect. Myanmar is also India's gateway to ASEAN countries through Thailand and Laos, being the only ASEAN country with which India has both a land and maritime border. As Myanmar opens up to the outside world, India can aid it hugely in promoting its emerging democracy.

To the north, China's long border with the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh is a source of tension, as China claims the entire state as an integral part of its territory. Myanmar can connect China with parts of India's northeast beyond Arunachal Pradesh. Myanmar also offers China geographical access to Bangladesh. Positive developments in bilateral relations have occurred in all areas since the mid-1990s, especially under the two coalition's governments led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2004). Myanmar's cooperation is critical for maintaining peace and security in India's Northeast Region, since many insurgent groups operating here seek sanctuary in Myanmar. Myanmar can be of help in the development of the Northeast region. Of late, India's look east policy has gathered momentum; Myanmar has assumed additional importance as the unavoidable geographical link for greater overland connectivity between India and ASEAN.

India's proposed railroads have gone inbuilt, and highways between eastern India and Burma remain closed. Modernization projects have been slow to show progress. Weapons, drugs and insurgents still pass freely over the long border the two countries share. Even if these issues were resolved, Burma's interest in Indian assets may be limited. While

Myanmar's government has sought Indian expertise in certain areas such as software development, telecoms and services; it is less interested in what India may have to offer in key economic areas such as mining, heavy industries or infrastructure building. Nor does Myanmar's army look to India as an alternative to China as a source of military hardware. Now that relations with the West are on the mend, the Tatmadaw (Burma's armed forces) can anticipate eventually having access to the world's most advanced military technology. Development megaprojects are also beyond India's means - for these, Myanmar is more likely to seek partners in Japan or ASEAN.

The second bigger challenge is communalisation of Myanmar's society. The alienation of Muslim population of Myanmar will burn the finger of India as well. India's complete Look East will get a shock. Much of the anti-Muslim violence has been concentrated in areas crucial to Chinese and Indian interests. A critical component of India's 'Look East' strategy, India's presence in Myanmar assists it to project power deeper into Southeast Asia and offset Chinese domination of the region. India financed and built Myanmar's deep water port in Sittwe, which is north of Myanmar's offshore natural gas fields. The Sittwe port is the cornerstone of India's massive Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, which aims to connect eastern India with Myanmar through a sea route between Kolkata and Sittwe and a road and river route from Sittwe to India's eastern Mizoram state.

However Sittwe has also been the site of Myanmar's worst anti-Muslim violence. Sittwe's strategic infrastructure would be extremely vulnerable to attack if Rakhine's Rohingya Muslims seek assistance from outside jihadist organisations. Mizoram and the other six eastern Indian states neighbouring Myanmar are also all grappling with their own separatist insurgencies. These insurgent groups have cooperated in the past with Nepalese Maoist guerrillas as well as Pakistani jihadist organisations. They would likely cooperate with Islamist militants in Myanmar. These violent groups always try to destroy the peace full atmosphere of India. Myanmar's government cooperation should be helpful to stop like these insurgencies. Myanmar is also very helpful for development in the north east states.

The main objective of India's Look East Policy is to enhance political and economic relations with South East Asian countries. Myanmar is one of them. In recent times, Indian policy makers have begun to position Myanmar highly in the Look East Policy framework. India has quite delicately handled the ongoing phase of transition in Myanmar. Being a neighbour of India, Myanmar attached importance to security cooperation between the

ASEAN and Myanmar. The Indo-Myanmar relationship should be viewed from a less moral value based approach to a more pragmatic one or from idealism to realism. Myanmar is India's only land bridge to Southeast Asia.

India's relationship with Myanmar is not only important for economic purpose but for strategic and security purposes also. The location of this country is such that it offers a bridge for reaching to the ASEAN countries. India is very intense to develop and maintain both economic and strategic relationship with ASEAN countries. If it engage Myanmar positively the Look East Policy thrust of Indian foreign policy will become little more than a formula. As the world's most crowded democracy, India could do much more help Myanmar in its democratic change. But so far India's new policy has benefited Myanmar more than it has helped India's cause. The relationship was very intimate during the era of Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru and the Myanmar's leader U Nu. However, this could not remain the same in the following years through Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi tried to restore it. But for his sad demise, it could not see the light it was destined to. The present government in both the countries try to make close relationship.

India and Myanmar cooperates each other in different sectors of Morden life such as agriculture, industry, trade and commerce, education, science and culture. India being the regional power and wishing to emerge as the world power has to engage with ASEAN countries in a very intense way and for that reason Myanmar will play a very important role. On the other side, India tries to oust the Chinese influence in Myanmar. China playing a tricky role it used Myanmar against India. Neither has Indian been able to contain China, nor has Myanmar Government been able to destroy the problem of north eastern insurgency. Indian Government wants to solve the north eastern problem through Myanmar help. Despite many odds India is doing all it can, to mend the relationship with Myanmar. Many agencies are operative and weaving strong ties between the two countries. The Indian diaspora in Myanmar can play a crucial role in strengthening India–Myanmar ties. Historically Burma was the richest country of Southeast Asia with the active support of Indian diaspora but today with the absence of Indians, Myanmar has miles to go before it regains the lost status. The Indian diaspora in Myanmar should mobilise the Indian community to start lobbying for Myanmar's permanent seat in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), as this will improve their position in the host country. If Myanmar obtains permanent membership in SAARC with India's support, India will get a platform to engage and interact with Myanmar's "civilian" regime. Myanmar will also enjoy the benefits of the

South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in which trade within the member countries will be duty free. India and Myanmar have also continued to interact at the regional and subregional levels through ASEAN, Bay Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Mekong Ganga Cooperation forum and SAARC (Myanmar is an Observer since 2008). Myanmar became a BIMSTEC member in December 1997. It took over as the chair of BIMSTEC from India in 2006.

In 2012, India and Myanmar reached an agreement to open the fourth Border Liaison Office (BLO) in the Nagaland sector. Three BLOs are already in operation in the Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram sectors. BLOs have served as mechanisms to promote cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of both countries. The BLO forum has been a product of a high-level meeting between the two countries in May 2012. Officers posted at the BLOs discuss and sort out issues relating to local security and crime, to strengthen bilateral cooperation on border issues. Indian policy is no more frost bitten by any ideology. Therefore, national interest demands strong ties with Myanmar. India has been a facilitator between Junta and the West. It seems further that India will cash Myanmar once it controls the driving seat of ASEAN.

There is going to be a tough time for India in Myanmar. The changes that are taking place in Myanmar, support Indian policy for future bilateral ties. However, China has economically and strategically occupied the major areas of Myanmar. In fact, it would be a tough task to overtake China despite the US supports to Indian ventures. But this is the way move ahead. The political reforms will strengthen the democratic structure and it will ultimately encompass the rebel groups of Myanmar. The process of political reform has just begun. A new discourse is needed to develop an inclusive political culture and democratic community based on the rule of law and respect for human rights, especially those of free association and free speech. There must be space for civil society to operate and protections for the rights of self-expression by ethnic minorities. The two neighbours have a historic opportunity to come close to each other once again and transform their bilateral relations as well as the larger region. Myanmar is rich in natural resources, and consistent and long-standing cooperation with India will help it develop its true potential. For India, cooperation with Myanmar will help transform the North-East, bolster its Look East Policy (LEP), and help it emerge as a major Asian power.

