

Chapter 2

POLITICAL RELATION BETWEEN INDO-MYANMAR

India and Burma have a historical connection that goes back to the fifth century. Since then have enjoyed mutual contact in the realm of trade, commerce, religion, law, political philosophy and culture. Both countries were colonized by the British empire when Myanmar (Burma) was fighting for gaining independence against the British colonial rule. At that time Burmese leaders were associated with Indian leaders. That relationship has seen and downs in 50 years' timeperiod. The two countries have not once reached a point of diplomatic stand-off or conflict since independence.¹ The lowest point came after the 1988 people's uprising when India was the first neighboring country to criticize the Burmese military government. The Indian Embassy in Rangoon actively supported the pro-democracy student activists and many entered India for shelter after the military coup in 1988. From 1988 to 1990, India followed a policy committed to open support of the forces of democracy and "complete disengagement" with the ruling military junta in Burma.²

For India Myanmar is strategically important because of its geostrategic location linking the regions of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. Myanmar, with an area of 6,76,552 sq. km. (2,61,218 sq. miles) shares common borders with five countries: China (2,185 km), India (1,463 km), Bangladesh (193 km), Thailand (1,800 km), and Laos (235 km).³ Myanmar borders four strategically sensitive north-eastern states of India, namely, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh. The insurgent groups active in India's north-eastern region had established sanctuaries in Myanmar's bordering states – Kachin, Sagaing, and Chin – for cross-border activities. Myanmar also has a 1,930 km long coastline in the Bay of Bengal and is only 30 km away from the strategic Andaman Islands of India.⁴

Historically, India has very friendly relationship with Burma. However; India's relation with Burma has become cold relation due to the 1988 uprising. A new junta regime came in power after September 1988 uprising in Myanmar. This uprising has forced India to refocus on Burmese policy. With the new geopolitics of the region by the late eighties and the early nineties, India had to re think its policy and to drop its neglected attitude towards its eastern bordering countries.⁵

This chapter illustrates India's first diplomatic attitude India defined in the late eighties – early nineties towards the new state of Myanmar. From idealistic point of view, and analyses the U-turn in Indian diplomacy (as known 'a volte-face) towards the Burmese

junta in 1993. The chapter discusses the region. The Indian foreign policy and Indian government adopted realistic approach towards Burma. Finally, the chapter shed lights on some perspectives on this new Burmese policy with a focus on its limits.⁶

INDIA'S MYANMAR POLICY: THE FIVE DRIVERS

Essentially, four considerations have been involved in the redrafting of India's Myanmar policy. Each of these drivers has been so vital to India's national interest that they have forced the country to overlook the concerns of pro-democracy groups in that country.

A. Power Centre's won't change in Myanmar:

To begin with, there is a realization in New Delhi's policy circles that the military would remain the *de facto* power centre in Myanmar for likely future. Hence, it is careful to do business with the actual rulers, than courting the pro-democracy lobby who are in no position to address India's concerns. As a result, neither the plea of pro-democracy activists nor the American requests to play a balancing act figure prominently in the Indian policy making process.⁷ General Than Shwe's India visit in July 2010 had coincided with the Obama administration's regeneration of sanctions against Myanmar. A day before Than Shwe arrived in India, Philip Crowley, US State Department spokesman urged India "to send a clear message to Burma that it needs to change its course".⁸ The Indian government has favored to stay away from the US-led blame against the military junta for its human rights violations and attack on the National League for Democracy (NLD) members. At the government level, India, along with China and Association of Southeast Asian Nations, (ASEAN) Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia ASEAN countries, was silent when the world fated the Burmese government for blocking Aung San Suu Kyi outside Yangon and later putting her under house arrest. India was in the minority group of nations that voted against the decision of the International Labor Organization (ILO) to take action against the regime for failing to curb forced labor in the country.⁹ Tint Swe, a member of Myanmar's government-in-exile, subsequently said that such resolutions are ineffective tools against Myanmar's military leadership. India's assessment that nothing would change dramatically in Myanmar in the November 2010 elections has further been vindicated. The military continues to rule the country through the proxy civilian government.¹⁰

B. Growing Presence of China in Myanmar:

India fears that the Chinese influence in Myanmar is dispersal by the day. In 1949, Burma was one of the first countries to recognize the People's Republic of China. Although

the Chinese government has always denied that it has any military ambitions in Myanmar, the American and Indian agencies have claimed that the Chinese are building monitoring facilities at Myanmar 'sports near the strategic Straits of Malacca as part of their so-called "string of pearls" strategy to encircle India. But relations between both countries soured in the 1960s following anti-Chinese riots in Rangoon.¹¹ The military regime under General Ne Win had maintained a policy of equidistance from both India and China. The Myanmar's elite have always been suspicious of the motives of the two big neighbors. Although following an attack on pro-democracy protesters in 1988, when the West imposed broad sanctions on Myanmar, China stepped into the void, providing aid and weapons and ramping up trade. Northern Myanmar was opened up to Chinese trade in a big way by the mid-1990s.¹²

The Myanmar government, at the end of the 1980s, turned to China to fulfill its plan of enlarging and modernizing its armed forces. Over the years, this close military cooperation with China has been cemented. Currently being a largest supplier of weapons to Myanmar, China also provides the Myanmar Army with training in the technical use of weapons and weapon systems.¹³ Goods bought from China over the years have included armored personnel carriers, tanks, fighter aircraft, radar systems, ammunition, surface-to-air missiles and short-range air to-air missile systems. Much of the weaponry, such as an August 2008 batch of 200 military trucks, were observed crossing into Myanmar through Roiling the China-Myanmar border. China is also assisting in undertaking a maritime survey of its territory. Media reports in late August 2010 indicated that two Chinese warships arrived at Myanmar's Yangon port on a 'friendly visit', marking the first such port call since 1988.¹⁴ An unnamed Chinese diplomat told, "These two navy destroyers arrived at Yangon's Thilawa port on Sunday to promote relations between the two militaries." Additionally, China has acted for a number of years as a protective shield for Myanmar in the United Nations Security Council by vetoing resolutions against the military junta. In September 2009, China blocked the inclusion of Myanmar on the agenda of United Nations (UN) Security Council.¹⁵

c. Quest for Energy:

India currently ranks as the world's eleventh largest energy producer accounting for about 2.4 per cent of the world's total annual energy production, and also as the world's sixth largest energy consumer, accounting for about 3.3 per cent of the world's total annual energy consumption.¹⁶ Despite its large annual energy production, India is a net energy importer, mostly due to the large imbalance between oil production and consumption. Myanmar's oil and gas reserves are of critical interest to India's future energy requirement. Myanmar has oil

reserves of around 600 million barrels and total gas reserves of 88 trillion cubic feet (TCF).¹⁷ Despite protests from the West, Indian companies like the overseas arm of India's Oil and Natural Gas Commission – ONGC Videsh Ltd, Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL), – have made investments in the oil and energy sector of Myanmar. It was during the 2001 visit of the then external affairs Minister Jaswant Singh to Myanmar that India started seriously thinking about bringing gas from Myanmar. The February 2003 visit of Myanmar's General U Win Aung to India further boosted this cooperation in the hydrocarbon, power and energy sectors, particularly in the exploration of Myanmar's onshore oil and gas reserves.¹⁸

In 2008, Myanmar withdrew India's status as preferential buyer. In addition Myanmar declared its intent to sell them to China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) for 30 years beginning 2013. Starting October 2009, the CNPC started building a crude oil port in Myanmar to cut out the long detour oil cargoes take through the congested and strategically vulnerable Malacca strait. Earlier, in a similar move in December 2005, Myanmar had declined gas supply to the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India pipeline. This had made the proposed tri-nation Myanmar-Bangladesh-India pipeline project redundant. However, India has little option but to stay engaged in Myanmar.¹⁹

D. North-Eastern Insurgency:

For decades, majority of the seven states in India's north-eastern region have witnessed emergence and growth of insurgency movements with demands ranging from index, tribal rights etc. Estimates indicate that the number pendency, autonomy of such groups could be as high as 130. While a number of these insurgencies have ended, many still continue impacting on the security situation of the region.²⁰ Myanmar, contiguous to Mizoram, where insurgency ended in the 1980s and also to Nagaland and Manipur where insurgency is still continuing, has served these armed groups in a variety of ways. Since the beginning of these armed insurrections, ethnic ties and tribal linkages between the people on either side of border has facilitated their movements and finding of safe haven and camps in those areas. Narratives on the insurgency movements, both by Indian as well as foreign scholars, detailed such activities.²¹

There also have been occasions when the Myanmar used the rebels as a bargaining chip against India. Indian Army sources believe that, currently, there are approximately 40 to 50 camps of Northeast-based insurgent groups in Myanmar. Out of these 25 to 30 are identified as bigger camps or of established nature. The long presence of the insurgents in Myanmar has provided them with a vital sense of security. In the event of any long-term military operation

in stateslike Manipur, the insurgents have the option of moving into their safe bases in Myanmar.²² As the counter-insurgency operations have intensified in Manipur, these bases have served as the training centers for fresh recruits. Moreover, it is in these camps that the insurgents amass weapons procured from a variety of sources in Southeast Asia and possibly China.

The north-eastern insurgents have also indulged in smuggling of drugs from Myanmar. While outfits like the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in Manipur have an ant substance abuse policy, groups like the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) have freely indulged in such trade. The easy availability of such drugs have made youth in states like Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland vulnerable to a host of problems including Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). It is estimated that Manipur's share in the estimated 3.5million AIDS/ HIV cases in India is over 11 per cent.²³ The Myanmar's drug lords are also encouraging tribal farmers, and in some cases the insurgents to plant poppy. Unless these new plantations are destroyed and gainful agricultural alternatives provided to the farmers, the India-Myanmar border will soon be dotted with poppy fields feeding the processing plants in western Myanmar.²⁴

E. Looking East:

India started moving towards Southeast Asia to build strong economic, strategic and Political ties with these countries. The Look East Policy has marked a strategic shift in India perspective. It started with the aim to enhance economic relations with ASEAN countries and has reached towards the strategic, political and institutional linkage. India's Look East Policy (LEP), launched in early 1990s under the P. V. NarasimhaRao-led Congress government to connect the Indian economy with the flourishing economy of neighbouring Southeast Asia, necessitated that India mends its fences with Myanmar.²⁵ The broad objectives of the LEP during the 1990s were three-fold – to institutionalize linkages with ASEAN and its affiliates; to strengthen bilateral relationships with member states of ASEAN; and to carve a suitable place for itself to prevent Southeast Asia falling under the influence of any one major power. The LEP continued to receive serious attention during the National Defence Academy (NDA) regimes well.²⁶ The then Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh made two visits to Myanmar in 2001 and 2002 the first visit was to inaugurate the India-Myanmar Friendship Road, and the second to start talks on building the ambitious Trans-Asia highway project. Myanmar was crucial to the Indian government in view of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi- Sectoral

Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Kunming Initiative, an effort involving India, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh.²⁷

Boosting bilateral relations through political visits:

- Rajiv Gandhi continued the Indira Gandhi policy of idealism, although he did visit Myanmar in 1987, marking the first visit of the country by an Indian Prime Minister in almost nineteen years.²⁸
- Finally, in 1992, the Burmese government responded positively to India's offer to normalize the bilateral relationship. An eight-member Burmese delegation led by U Aye, Director-General of Political Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visited India on 11 to 14 August. In 1992 and met the senior officials in the ministries of External Affairs, Home, Defence and Commerce of the Government of India. This was the first ever official Indo-Burmese senior-level meeting.
- In March 1993, India's Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit visited Rangoon and met the Burmese leaders including Lt. General Khin Nyunt. These two bilateral visits were viewed as misunderstanding-managing exercises for both countries. At the same time, India specifically asked the Burmese government to release all political prisoners and stressed that India continued to support restoration of democracy in Burma.²⁹
- An official delegation to Rangoon on 10–11 June 1994 in order to review the Arrangement for operationalization of the Border Trade Agreement (BTA) With Burma.
- Another round of official talks was held with Burma from 10–12 January 1995 to finalize the arrangements for operationalization of the border trade agreement with Burma. From 3 to 12 April in the same year, at the invitation of the then Indian Minister of State for Commerce, P. Chidambaram, a Burmese trade delegation visited India to discuss matters relating to bilateral relations, economic and border trade.
- The Deputy Home Minister of Burma Col. Tin Haling, accompanied by four Officials and the Burmese Ambassador in India, called on the Commerce Minister of India on 17 August 1995 and had a wide-ranging discussion on Various aspects of boosting bilateral trade relations.³⁰
- Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Saleem I. Shervani visited Burma in November 1997. He inaugurated the second Indian Trade Exhibition in Rangoon.
- Indian Commerce Secretary P.P. Prabhu visited Burma in the first week of November 1998 to promote trade between the two countries. During his visit it was proposed that

India enter into joint ventures for exploration and exploitation of nickel and coal deposits in upper Burma.

- Maj. General Nyunt Tin, Burmese Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, visited Delhi in August 1998, exploring the possibilities of India's participation in Burma's agricultural sectors. In February 1999, a 10-member strong delegation from Myanmar Computer Federation visited Delhi and Bangalore.
- Indian foreign Secretary K. Raghunath visited Burma on 25–28 February 1999 at the invitation of Deputy Foreign Minister of Burma.
- A delegation from Burma's Ministry of Science and Technology led by Minister U Thaung was in June 1999 in India. He met with Indian industrialists during his tour. He signed an agreement with Indian Human Resources Minister Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi in cooperation in science and Technology between the two countries.³¹
- In July 1999, a high-level meeting between Home Ministry officials of Burma and India was held in New Delhi. The meeting "identified ways and means to strengthen mechanisms for cooperation on issues like cross border terrorism, sharing of intelligence on real time basis, setting up of better communication links, etc." The meeting also agreed to review the work relating to the maintenance of the boundary pillars on the Indo-Burmese boundary. Moreover, India agreed to organize training for anti-narcotics officials to take strict measures in checking illegal narcotics smuggling across the Indo-Burmese border. During their stay in Delhi, the Burmese delegation called on Indian Home Minister L.K. Adana, Commerce Minister Ram Krishna Hegde and Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Ms. Vasundhara Raje.
- General Maung Aye visited India 14–21 November 2000 at the invitation of Indian Vice-President Mr. Krishnan Kant. The high-powered Burmese delegation, which included six senior ministers besides Maung Aye, was given the kind of "ceremonial welcome" which is usually reserved for visits by heads of State or government to India.
- General Maung Aye's visit was the first high-level contact between India and Burma since 1988. Business and security were the two main agendas during his visit. Before this, several senior ministers, bureaucrats and military officials of the two countries had exchanged visits. These visits included former Indian Army Chief V.P Malik's visit to Burma in January and again in July 2000. In January, General Maung Aye paid a one-day trip to Shillong, the headquarters of the eastern command of the Indian Air Force. At that time, his trip was at the invitation of General Malik.³²

- Two official visits of Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh himself, in Tamu 2001, (to formally inaugurate the 160 km - long India – Myanmar friendship road built on Burmese and Tamu and Kalembo in the Chin State) and Yangon in April 2002 (to deal with Burmese and Thai officials on the Asia –Highway project) further enhanced these Indo – Myanmar formal economic relations
- In January 2003, the Burmese Foreign Affairs Minister, U Win Aung paid a first independent trip to New Delhi, Hyderabad and Calcutta. His 6 day visit was again marked by the willingness of closer ties and of non-interference with internal affairs. This policy trend was again confirmed when India did not react negatively to the clashes that occurred between pro – democratic groups and military regime followers on May 30, 2003 and led to the “ protective custody” of Aung San Suu Kyi.
- In October 2004, General Than Shwe , leading a delegation of eight cabinet ministers for six day talk , visited Delhi and both side signed an agreement on security , cultural exchange and hydro – electric power.
- In March 2006, President Abdul Kalam visited Myanmar to sign an agreement on cooperation in remote-sensing technology and sign two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) on cooperation in the petroleum sector and in Buddhist studies. Besides these three accords of cooperation, India agreed to extend more than US\$37 million in loans to Myanmar. Further visits in course of 2006 focused largely on the troubled border and defiance talks and also discuss arms sales.³³
- On 23 April 2007, an 18 member Myanmar Army delegation, led by Brigadier – General Tin Maung visited Kolkata, for the 30th biannual liaison meeting of army officials from both countries. Issues relating to cross – border insurgency, arms smuggling and border management were discussed.
- Visits by Vice Senior General Maung Aye, Vice – Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council of the Union of Myanmar in April 2008. M. Hamid Ansari, Vice President of India in February 2009 was also important.³⁴
- S.M. Krishna, External Affairs Minister visits Myanmar in December 2010 and June 2011. During the June visit, both sides signed a US\$60 million project for construction of an 80- kilometer road linking Rhi with Riddim in Myanmar’s mountainous Chin province.³⁵
- Prime Minister Manmohan Singh undertook a three-day visit to Myanmar on 27 May 2012, the first such visit by an Indian Prime Minister in 25 years. During the visit, Singh

met the new civilian leadership in the new capital, Naypyitaw, and NLD leader DawAung San SuuKyi in the old capital, Yangon. The Indian PM's first visit in 25 years almost coincided with Aung San Suu Kyi's first visit outside the country in 24 years. However, the Nobel laureate postponed her Bangkok visit to meet the Indian Prime Minister. India and Myanmar signed 12 MoUs on matters of mutual concern, where in 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. One of the important agreements reached was regarding cooperation between a Myanmar and an Indian University and cooperation between a Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs think tank and two Indian think tanks, one of which is the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyse.³⁶

Cooperation between India and Myanmar in the regional/Sub-regional Context

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok by the five original member countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined on 8 January 1984, Vietnam on 28 July 1995, Laos and Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April 1999.³⁷ The ASEAN Declaration states that the aims and purposes of the Association are to increase speed the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavors in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian nations, and to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.³⁸ The partnership between India and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) comprising Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam has been developing at quite a fast pace.

India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992. Mutual interest led ASEAN to invite India to become its full dialogue partner during the fifth ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in 1995. India also became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996. India and ASEAN have been holding summit-level meetings on an annual basis since 2002.³⁹ As the only ASEAN country which shares a land border with India, Myanmar is a bridge between India and ASEAN. A few proposals for cooperation have been implemented

and some are under discussions with Myanmar within the framework of ASEAN's Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) programme.⁴⁰

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation

(BIMST-EC): On 6 June 1997, a new sub-regional grouping was formed in Bangkok and given the name BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Cooperation). Myanmar attended the inaugural June Meeting as an observer and joined the organization as a full member at a Special Ministerial Meeting held in Bangkok on 22 December 1997, upon which the name of the grouping was changed to BIMST-EC.⁴¹ In the first Summit on 31 July 2004, leaders of the group agreed that the name of the grouping should be known as BIMSTEC or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.⁴² Since 1997, ASEAN, BIMSTEC and since 2000, Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) have been crucial forms for India-Myanmar cooperation. The wide area of cooperation under each of these forums, ranging from free trade agreements, education, culture, transport, communication and tourism creates enormous opportunities for both countries to grow closer and prosper. These forums, apart from bilateral diplomacy, provide opportunities for sustained dialogue and engagement.⁴³ Myanmar is a signatory to the BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement. Myanmar is the lead country for the energy sector. Myanmar trades mostly with Thailand and India in the BIMSTEC region. Myanmar's major exports to India are agricultural products like beans, pulses and maize and forest products such as teak and hardwoods. Its imports from India include chemical products, pharmaceuticals, electrical appliances and transport equipment.⁴⁴

Mekong Ganga Cooperation: Myanmar is a member of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) since its inception in November 2000. MGC is an initiative by six countries-India and five ASEAN countries namely Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam-for cooperation in the fields of tourism, education, culture, transport and communication linkage in order to be solid foundation for future trade and investment cooperation in the region.⁴⁵ The organization takes its name from the Ganga and the Mekong two large rivers in the region communication. The chairmanship of MGC is assumed by member countries in alphabetical order.

India also sees Myanmar as a conduit for its Look East policy opening opportunities for trade with South East Asian giants. Multi-lateral initiatives like BIMSTEC and Mekong Ganga Cooperation provide a platform for enhanced regional cooperation and connectivity.⁴⁶

However non availability of road linkages is likely to delay facilitation for some years to come. This is also attendant on border security in Myanmar-India border areas where a

number of groups are operating with impunity and conducting cross border activity in the North East. Some key political, economic and security issues that came up for discussion are as per succeeding paragraphs.⁴⁷

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was established on December 8, 1985 to organize and unite the governments of its seven original members: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka to promote mutual progress and development.⁴⁸ Myanmar was given the status of observer in SAARC in August 2008. South Asia, is a continent sized region centered on the Indian peninsula thus referred to as a Sub-Continent. Myanmar is contiguous to SAARC and is the land bridge with ASEAN.⁴⁹ Over the years SAARC has taken some important steps in regional cooperation. However the potential remains unrealized due to political, economic as well as historical differences as well as lack of geographic congruity. India's close trade and historical ties with Myanmar will be one of the main factors behind India's support for Myanmar's SAARC membership.⁵⁰

Strategic Relations between Indo – Myanmar:

In recent months, a number of developments-both real events and media events have put Myanmar in the spotlight and underline the prime strategic importance of this country with a population close to 50 million. For China, India and Southeast Asia, Myanmar's significance is defined by its position as part of the same landmass and its location at these three entities' tri-junction.⁵¹

1. Myanmar in India's pasture of Vision

India has its own selfish reasons for building close relations with Myanmar. The two countries share a border for almost 1500 km. In addition, Myanmar's east coast, which is another 1900-plus km, butts against the Bay of Bengal/Andaman Sea waterway, where India's maritime and strategic interests run supreme. And Myanmar has almost 200 km of border with Bangladesh, a nation that is now in the process of becoming integrated via trade and infrastructure with India and other South Asian nations in its proximity.⁵² One of India's immediate security concerns vis-a-vis Myanmar is the decades-old instability in India's northeastern states. To ensure an uninterrupted high level of growth for at least the next three decades, India must strengthen its eastern borders and use the oceans to bring in resources that such a developmental program requires and, at the same time, send out various agro-industrial and technological products to markets abroad.⁵³

In part, this was a burden left from the Cold War days, when India, a non-aligned nation, was virtually isolated and its neighbors were aligned with the West-led anti-Soviet camp. That camp included Islamic jihadis and others who were virulently anticommunist.⁵⁴ They also sported a hard-headed anti-India bias picked up from the West, who was their ideological leader and to a large extent their financial and military benefactor. Western Cold War leaders claimed India's non-alignment was not only as a "disease," but a form of anti-West socialism. This ideology gave birth to all kinds of anti-India activities in the region. Myanmar, by contrast, is in a different situation.⁵⁵

Though it is under attack from the West, both China and India can provide the necessary help to make this country grow. To improve connectivity with Myanmar, India has taken up a number of road and port construction projects. India has constructed the 160-km Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyoroad from the Manipur border.⁵⁶

2. Beyond Myanmar: increase India's vision

In this context, a key development occurred in 1991, when the Indian Ministry of External Affairs announced the adoption of the "Look East" policy aimed at forging closer ties with Southeast Asia. India became a sectoral partner of ASEAN in the core sectors of trade, investment and tourism in late 1991, and the policy concept was further strengthened by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government in 1999.⁵⁷

Myanmar is an important land bridge to Southeast Asia. But despite the 1991 adoption of the Look East policy and the various initiatives that followed, things hardly moved. That was partly due to what was happening in Bangladesh, a key element for India to secure a viable access to Southeast Asia and beyond.⁵⁸ Bangladesh remained unstable under a leadership that was making alliances with various anti-India elements within and outside of the country. Myanmar's northern borders abutting China also constitute a tri-junction with India's eastern border, forming a strategic bridge between South Asia and South East Asia that is a vital area of influence for India's security.⁵⁹ There had been a phenomenal growth in Chinese influence in Myanmar, particularly after the Western nations slapped a ban on the sale of arms to Myanmar in 1989. This was a matter of serious concern among many Indians, as it brought the "threat" from the Chinese mainland nearer to the Northeast.⁶⁰ Moreover, Myanmar's support was considered essential to curb drug trafficking and Myanmar-based insurgency threats to India's Northeast. Perhaps the most significant development that should provide a strong impetus to India's Look East policy is the recent change in government in Bangladesh.⁶¹

The Kunming Initiative got its name on August 17, 1999, at a conference on regional cooperation and development among China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh held in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province in the southwestern region of China. The Stilwell Road, which stretches from Ledo in Assam to Myanmar across the Phangsupass, joins Bhamo in Myanmar and then extends to Yunnan province in China. The road covers a distance of 1,043 miles from Ledo to Kunming. The distance from Ledoto Kolkata is about 1,065 miles.⁶² India's Home Ministry opposes the proposal, ostensibly in view of the continuing militancy problem in the region, but such opposition flies in the face of the initiative's unanimous endorsement by India's seven northeastern states. These states have made known their intent to re-open the road to increase the volume of trade with Southeast Asian countries.⁶³ Their enthusiasm is well founded. If the Stilwell Road is reconstructed fromLedo in Assam to My kina in Myanmar-an admittedly difficult, mountainous250-mile stretch-it can then be extended to the Moreh-Tamu (India)-Kalewa (Myanmar) crossing on the Chindwin River.⁶⁴

Indian engineers have already built this road-it was completed in 2001-and a bridge over the Chindwin can extend the road as far as Mandalay, which is on the Myanmar railway system. Another Indian northeastern state, Mizoram, which shares as much as 450 miles of border with Bangladesh and Myanmar, could be linked to Akyab (now, called Sittwe) in Myanmar. It should be noted that Bangladesh has already agreed to connectAgartala in Tripura with Chittagong. The whole project, once completed, will open up the entire northeastern region of India, making it the commercial outlet for eastern trade.⁶⁵

3. Security of Northeast India

India shares a 1670 km. long land border and, a maritime border of 200 km. with Myanmar. The Indo-Myanmar border remains comparatively peaceful, and there is no noteworthy border conflict between the two countries. However, the separatist feelings and legacy of discontent among the various tribes straddling the borders still survives. Until recently, many northeast insurgent groups like the Naga rebels, Mizo rebels and the Meitis had their bases in Myanmar.⁶⁶ Some Myanmar tribal's belonging to the kuki Chin group was reportedly fighting for merger of lands inhabited by them with India. Various terrorist groups operating in Northeastern India have bases and camps in the areas in Myanmar bordering the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram.⁶⁷ The National Socialist Council of Nagaland -Khaplang (NSCN-K) has its training camps and its Central as well as General Headquarters (GHQ) in Myanmar. The United Liberation Front of Asian (ULFA) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) also have camps in Myanmar. Among the

other groups known to have a presence in Myanmar are the Kuki National Army (KNA) and Kuki National Front (KNF).⁶⁸

The insurgent groups on both sides of Indo-Myanmar border have found it suitable for their free movement across international frontiers. They face no problem in crossing the border because of the free passage between the border towns of Moreh in Manipur and Tamu in Myanmar.⁶⁹ The NSCN and ULFA activists use this route for drug trafficking and use the sale proceeds for procuring arms. In order to stem the tide of border crossing by the insurgent groups, the Indian and Myanmar officials held a meeting in June 1999 to have a detailed discussion on the problem of cross-border terrorism in the Northeastern India.⁷⁰

At the same time, now that Bangladesh is trying to get back on its feet and Dhaka has begun to crack down on the northeast insurgents hiding in Bangladesh, many of the groups are in the process of shifting to Myanmar. "In fact, ULFA is in the process of shifting to Myanmar because of the pressure from Bangladesh," observed a senior Indian security officer in the state of Tripura. While Indian insurgents hide along the porous borders, thick with forests, along the northeastern states of Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura, illegal weapons syndicates smuggle in through the same borders small and medium arms and Ammunition, besides explosives, to the northeastern militant groups.⁷¹ Reports indicate that these Myanmar nationals, arms and drug smugglers, have made the state of Meghalaya's capital, Shillong, their meeting point for arms transaction with northeast rebels, a top Indian intelligence official told the media.⁷²

Since India's trade and economic relations with a number of Asian nations situated east of India's eastern borders must go through Myanmar, this smuggler-terrorist nexus needs to be uprooted. This is not only a major security concern for India in a highly vulnerable location, it also creates problem for New Delhi in strengthening its ties with the smaller South Asian nations located in the general area. India's access to the western coast of Myanmar should be a long-term objective.⁷³ India has set up strong naval and air bases in the Andaman and Car Nicobar islands to provide security to India's eastern coast, the southern coast of Bangladesh, a long western coastline that serves Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia, and ensure all-time safe access for all those countries to the Indian Ocean-Arabian Sea trade route.⁷⁴

The Indian Ocean: possible Rivalry

Now, the importance of the Indian Ocean is even more pronounced, although it cannot be wholly India-centric. The security of various nations' access to the Indian Ocean through the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal should, nonetheless, remain the prime responsibility of

India. A strong interlinking with Myanmar at every level will further ensure the security of these waterways.⁷⁵ India will have to take into account the intent of China, who does not want India to exert absolute control over the waterways between the western coast of southeast Asian countries and India's vast east coast. India has already made progress in converting its brown-water navy to a blue-water navy. The Indian Air Force is also acquiring air-to-air refuelers and longer-range transport aircraft.⁷⁶

In India's strategic thinking, greater cooperation with Myanmar on cross-border counter-insurgency efforts and building a pipeline from Myanmar's gas fields to its northeastern provinces. Which are among the most power-starved provinces in the country, is the most effective way to save the secessionist movements in these areas "Myanmar is of special importance to China, and the shift in New Delhi's stance has thus generated a sense of rivalry between the two for the affections of Myanmar from the tangibles of trade and investment to the intangibles of cooperation and support for their respective regional influence."⁷⁷ China and India are all anxious to tap Myanmar's huge oil and natural gas reserves. China and India are also seeking access, through Myanmar, to the Indian Ocean to help open up the poor, landlocked provinces in their southwest and northeast, respectively". At the same time, no matter what the exact nature of Beijing's naval presence in and around India's coastal waters is, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea will remain the essential supply route for many nations around the world - the lifeline, in fact - and that includes both China and India.⁷⁸ It is relevant to point out what New Delhi and Beijing must keep in mind at all times: for their own interests, or because of hostility toward India and China, external powers will continue to fish in the troubled waters should China and India fail to come to a clearer understanding of the importance of keeping the waterway power-neutralization is central to strengthening.⁷⁹

Some conflict between both countries:

1. Insurgency in North-East

One of the important drivers for India to engage Myanmar is the issue of insurgency in its North East. India has a long border with Myanmar which runs for nearly 1643 kilometers alongside the states of Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The ongoing insurgency in the region is not new and has been in existence since the early years of Indian independence.⁸⁰ Currently, there are at least eight insurgent or militant groups / outfits in the area which have been operating from the Indian and Myanmar territory. It is believed that these groups have received financial, logistic and military support allegedly from

external sources in South Asia and also from Southeast Asia. They have established sanctuaries safe heavens with the connivance of sympathetic groups and communities in the neighborhood.⁸¹ The Indian security forces have conducted counter insurgency operations but the insurgents have managed to escape to neighboring areas where the law enforcement agencies are either weak or disinterested. However, there have been attempts in the past to flush out these insurgents from Myanmar. For instance in November 1991, the Myanmar military conducted raids against Manipuri rebel bases and arrested 192 insurgents including UNLF chief RajkumarMeghan. This served as a useful instrument to launch Operation Golden Bird in 1995, a joint operations to intercept a huge consignment of arms being transported by insurgent groups from Cox Bazar in Bangladesh to Manipur.⁸² India and Myanmar have been holding regular border liaison meetings and during the 46th meeting held in August 2012, Myanmar and India discussed several measures along the border aimed at pushing the insurgents out of the Myanmar's territory. It was also informed that the Indian security forces had stepped up the vigil in districts in the tribal-dominated areas.⁸³

2. India's maritime Security

Myanmar shares a boundary with most of the northeastern part of India. The Indian states of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh all share borders with, or are very close to, Myanmar. India and Myanmar face a number of maritime security challenges in the Bay of Bengal. These are essentially Non Traditional Security (NTS) issues and emerge in the form piracy, terrorism, gun running, drug smuggling, illegal fishing, and human smuggling.⁸⁴ The Indian Prime Minister also highlighted the issue during his recent visit to Myanmar in April 2012 and observed that both India and Myanmar need to “expand our security cooperation that is vital not only to maintain peace along our land borders but also to protect maritime trade which we hope will open up through the sea route between Kolkata and Sittwe”.⁸⁵

3. Myanmar role in Oil Infrastructure and Environment Protection

India is on the path of rapid economic growth and to sustain this growth, sustainability of energy supply is indispensable. India depends heavily upon West Asian oil but because of instability in this region India also aims to diversify its energy supply sources.⁸⁶ Although Myanmar has only a limited potential to satisfy India's energy quest in comparison to West Asia, because of its geographical proximity and the availability of natural gas and eco-friendly source of energy. Myanmar is an attractive target for India's energy diplomacy. There is thus an immense possibility for energy cooperation between India and Myanmar

both in the hydropower and the hydrocarbon sector. However, this potential has not been actualized fully so far because of certain political and economic reasons.⁸⁷

Myanmar is rich in offshore oil and gas reserves and it is estimated that it could be holding nearly 300 bcm of gas. A number of energy companies from China, France, India and South Korea are actively engaged in exploration activities. These mega offshore energy projects also need to be viewed from the environmental security matrix.⁸⁸ These emerge in the form of pollution by the enhanced shipping traffic and the chances of accidents resulting in oil spills which can potentially impact on the fragile ecosystem in the Bay of Bengal. It will be useful to establish hot lines between the maritime enforcement agencies of the two countries to respond to environmental crisis so that requisite response capabilities.⁸⁹

4. Drug Smuggling

Myanmar has been identified as a major source of poppy cultivation (spread over nearly 43,600 hectares) in Asia and there are several processing units spread in the thick jungles in the north of the country. Although the Myanmar government has taken initiatives to curb poppy cultivation and production, the illicit trade continues.⁹⁰ Ironically for India, the constants of geography and the location of the two primary sources of illicit opium in Asia i.e. the Golden Crescent comprising of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Golden Triangle formed by Myanmar, Thailand and Laos, have resulted in it turning into a transit country for processed narcotics. India and Myanmar have devised a strategy to counter drug smuggling and the issue is discussed at the highest level. Early this year, during the annual Home Secretary-level meeting at Naypyidaw, the two sides agreed to initiate necessary steps to prevent smuggling of drugs, arms and ammunition.⁹¹ In 2010, the two sides had agreed to the Ratification of Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty on Criminal Matters (MLAT) and this legal arrangement is a useful instrument to address a number of transnational crimes including insurgency, drug smuggling and gun running taking place across the borders of the two countries.⁹²

6. Illegal migration

The impact of climate change is most noticeable in the Bay of Bengal. There are fears that large tracts of Bangladesh's coastline may be inundated, coastal areas could be contaminated by sea water which would adversely impact on agriculture. Such a situation would result in social chaos forcing people to move to other places to seek livelihood.⁹³ A 2008 report by the National Defence University, Washington concluded that climate change

induced events could result in thousands of Bangladeshi refugees entering India and it is plausible that some could enter Myanmar illegally through the sea routes. In the past, India maritime security agencies large number of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar who reached the A and N coast after they were intercepted by the Thai military and later set adrift.⁹⁴

Conclusion

Myanmar is India's only land bridge to Southeast Asia. India and Myanmar jointly have a very old history of close relationship. India and Myanmar have shared historical, ethnic, cultural, and religious ties, which got disrupted on account of various internal and external exigencies. India's relationship is not only important for economic purpose but for strategic and security purpose also. China's and India's stances on the Myanmar issue are based on their strategic thinking in this country. China has since the late 1980s been heavily involved in Myanmar strategically and economically. The Indian government was particularly worried about the China-Myanmar strategic links and the prospects of the Chinese navy gaining a foothold in the Bay of Bengal. Myanmar's location is central to strengthening India's Look-East policy, energy security and counter balancing China's influence in Southeast Asia. China and India's competition is best manifested in the energy field. Myanmar is rich in oil and natural gas. India need rich-resources of Myanmar, with its oil and gas deposits were also a strong attraction for India. Being a neighbor of India, Myanmar attached importance to security cooperation between the ASEAN and India. The Indo-Myanmar relationship should be viewed from a less moral value based approach to a more pragmatic one or from idealism to realism. Both nations need to transform their existing co-operative relations in to a new strategic partnership. They have also discussed about the illegal human trafficking and insurgency of north-eastern states. Myanmar's cooperation is necessary for developing India's North-East region. And India has also offered all possible support to assist Myanmar in its pursuit for better connectivity and overall development.

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