

Chapter- 3

ECONOMIC RELATION BETWEEN INDO-MYANMAR

Since 1993, India has taken a pragmatic stand in its relationship with Myanmar. As it has realised that political, economic and military relationship must be strengthened to maintain a peaceful environment in its North-East region. India and Myanmar relationship has changed radically because of the reasons like, the economic development of North-East region. India's trade increasing with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).¹

Myanmar is important for India for the success of its Look East Policy. Ever since India has started pursuing its Look East Policy. Myanmar has gained prominence in the India's foreign policy. India is also becoming one of Myanmar's largest investors, investing in sectors such as oil and gas, agriculture, fisheries, pearl cultivation, infrastructure, mining and tourism.² India is a major consumer of Burmese oil and gas, as well as a major investor in Burma/Myanmar's economy. Like the As ASEAN, India asserts dialogue, rather than sanctions, is the most effective way to persuade the Burmese government to improve the political and human rights situation in the country.³ Though some observers see India's interest focused as well on access to strategic resources. India is one of Myanmar's major trading partners and one of the largest markets for its goods.⁴ The most startling fact is that bilateral trade between India and Myanmar has grown more than eighty times in the last twenty eight years.⁵

Indo-Myanmar Economy through ASEAN:

Geographically, Myanmar is a gateway to South Asia and can be a central hub for exchange of goods, services and technology. Underdeveloped infrastructure and favourable institutional and business environment seriously limit the participation of the economy into regional and global networks.⁶ The

cross-border connectivity plays a very important role in this scenario. Establishing better connectivity in all means namely material, institutional and people-to-people connectivity will allow Myanmar, India and then, the other South East Asian countries.⁷

Moreover, regional inter connectivity through infrastructure development, trade Assistance and regulatory co-ordination among the respective economies such as India, Myanmar and other ASEAN members can make each economy more dynamic and bring enormous benefits to the entire region.⁸ Myanmar, having 678,500sq km area for about 50 million people, is rich in natural resources. Fertile cultivable land, valuable forest (343,767 sq km) , large water bodies (20,760 sq km) , huge deposits of strategic and critical minerals like coal (15 million tonnes), oil (7 million tonnes), natural gas (283 billion cubic meter), limestone, copper, lead, zinc, iron, granite, tin, nickel, marble, tungsten, antimony, gold and precious stones – all these have made Myanmar a great economic power house.⁹ But all these potential have not been realized. In fact, it is a country of huge potential with very weak resource – industry linkages. For these valuable resources every country wants to good relationship with Myanmar and India is one of them. Myanmar and India have historical, cultural and natural links.¹⁰ Myanmar's economy has been dominated by the agriculture sector with around 50-40 percent of Gross domestic production (GDP) and its 70 percent of the population have been living in rural areas. Myanmar became a member of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in July 1997.¹¹

Since then, Myanmar apparently has shown interest in close co-operation with the ASEAN member countries in all means diplomatic, social, material and institutional co-operations.¹² ASEAN and India are natural partners and their policies, and business will expand economic opportunities and support increased trade and investment through wider and stronger connectivity. The potential of India's connectivity with ASEAN is enormous and has become strategically imperative.¹³

The Free Trade Area (FTA) that ASEAN and India are now working on could also further facilitate this approach. This regional integration will contribute towards not only economic cooperation but also enhancing regional security. The economic corridor would present new age of inter connectedness in the region. Through linking the ASEAN Free Trade Area and the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area the corridor would constitute as one of the largest free trade area.¹⁴ China Free Trade Area and the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, the corridor would constitute as one of the largest free trade areas. Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar hope to create a corridor that would effectively combine road, rail, and water and air linkages in the region. This interconnectedness would facilitate the cross-border flow of people and goods, minimize overland trade obstacles, ensure greater market access, and increase trade. India and ASEAN should focus on building and enhancing transport network in the North Eastern Regions of India.¹⁵ Its immediate neighbourhood since transportation plays a vital role to open up geographical and mental space for greater economic integration. A vital element in sustaining the dynamics of this emerging economic relationship would be to develop trust and confidence each other and operationalize the framework agreement.¹⁶

Besides developing linkages with ASEAN, the Look East Policy (LEP) also encompasses a sub-regional dimension that covers two organizations namely the Bay of Bengal initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and Mekong –Ganga Cooperation Initiative (MGCI). Myanmar being a member of both organizations again becomes important for India in its endeavors under the aegis of the LEP.¹⁷ Consequently, the issue of enhancing connectivity with Southeast Asia through Myanmar occupies an important place in India's agenda towards Myanmar. India is involved in a trilateral highway project connecting Moreh in India to Mae Sot in Thailand via Bagan in Myanmar.¹⁸ The project in its later stage also includes the promotion of a highway from Kanchanaburi in Thailand to Dawei deep seaport in

Myanmar.¹⁹ As the only ASEAN country, this shares a land border with India. Myanmar is a connection between India and ASEAN. India-Myanmar relationships have adequately developed in all dimensions keeping in line with the treaty of friendship signed between the two countries in 1951.²⁰ This was followed by a number of agreements and bilateral cooperation. ASEAN is India's one of the largest trading partners, bilateral trade in goods crossed US\$75 billion in 2011. India's trade with ASEAN is likely to cross US\$100 billion in 2013.²¹

Trade between India and Myanmar

Trade between Myanmar and India has rapidly been growing in the recent years. India stands Myanmar's 4th largest trading partner after Thailand, China and Singapore. India is Myanmar's second largest export market after Thailand, absorbing 25 percent of its total exports. India is also the seventh most important source of Myanmar's imports.²² Economic interests have been a major factor driving the closer relationship between India and Burma.

The first India – Myanmar Bilateral Border Trade Agreement was signed in New Delhi in January 1994 and was implemented in April 1995 with the opening of a cross border point between Moreh, India and Tamu, Myanmar.²³ The agreement provides facilities by which trade is being carried out through the designated border posts has also helped in checking illegal trade of goods and monitors the activities of insurgent groups between India and Myanmar. India is becoming one of Burma's largest export markets. Both countries are looking at cooperation in a host of areas, including agriculture, IT, automobiles, textiles, telecommunications and oil and gas.²⁴ India is also becoming one of Burma's largest investors, investing in sectors such as oil and gas, agriculture, fisheries, pearl cultivation, infrastructure, mining and tourism²⁵.

The geo - economical location of Myanmar provides her ample scope for both sea trade with 2832km long coastline, and overland trade with neighbouring China (2185km), Thailand (1800m), Laos (235km), Bangladesh (193km) and India (1463km) with whom she shares borders respectively.²⁶ The pre – colonial trade was characterized by export of agro – forest and mineral based products and import of manufactured goods. Export basket predominantly consisted of rice, ivory, pepper, catch, teak, other timber, lac, cotton, tea, gold and silver whereas import basket usually included firearms, silk, paper, textiles and various manufactures.²⁷ Agriculture sector dominates the bilateral trade. Myanmar is the second largest supplier of beans and pulses to India next only to Canada, accounting for one third of India's total requirements of imported pulses. India imported pulses and beans US\$ worth 1090 million.²⁸ In 2001 - 2002, the bilateral trade between Myanmar and India reached US\$ 323.43 million (but largely against India as Myanmar exports almost eight times more than India does: US\$37.57 million worth of Indian exports to Myanmar against US\$ 285.86 million imports).²⁹

Moreover, the Border Trade Agreement of 1994 allowed only 22 items to be legally traded across the Indo – Burmese border. The shipping links between India and South-East Asia remain largely cheaper and more convenient than land trade by road via Myanmar. Reviving the ancient Burma roads to transform them into economic corridors linking India and China is the dream of many diplomats and businessmen in the region.³⁰ Myanmar contributes to nearly one fifth of India's imports of timber. Timber and wood products accounted for more than 37% of Myanmar's exports to India (US\$ 400 million). Other items of India's exports include pharmaceuticals products, steel and iron products, electrical machinery, Mineral oil, Rubber and articles, plastics etc. Pharmaceutical products accounts for 23 percent (nearly US\$ 76.09 mn) of

India's exports to Myanmar in 2011-12. Over 10 Indian companies dominate Myanmar pharmacymarket.³¹

INDIA MYANMAR BILATERAL TRADE

India-Myanmar Bilateral Trade (in million US\$)

Year	India's Export	Myanmar's Export	Total
1997-98	49.31	224.01	273.32
1998-99	30.12	173.76	203.88
1999-00	34.10	171.59	205.69
2000-01	52.71	181.69	234.4
2001-02	60.89	374.43	435.32
2002-03	75.07	336.04	411.11
2003-04	89.64	409.01	498.65
2004-05	113.19	405.91	519.11
2005-06	110.70	525.96	636.66
2006-07	139.95	781.93	921.19
2007-08	185.43	809.94	995.37
2008-09	221.64	928.97	1150.61
2009-10	207.94	1289.8	1497.77
2010-11	194.75	876.13	1070.88

2011-12	217.65	763.32	814.6
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(Table No. 0.1) Source: Export Import Data Bank, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India. Official website <http://commerce.nic.in/eidb/default.asp>

Bilateral negotiations between India and Myanmar were not a cakewalk as both had differences over two particular issues. First, Myanmar was not willing to accept the Indian wish to retain control over the Sittwe port given its huge investments. Second, as per the agreement, Myanmar was obliged to invest about US\$10 million in this project but was unable to do so.³² The problematic issues were resolved when India softened its stance and agreed to hand over the port soon after its completion. It also agreed to provide a soft loan of US\$ 10 million to Myanmar. Although India signed this project on Myanmar's terms, it nevertheless is a step towards boosting the economy of India's Northeast by facilitating the transport of goods via road and river from the landlocked states.³³ The region to Sittwe port and from there on to markets in Southeast Asia and beyond. Currently, the trade volume between India and Myanmar have reaches to US\$1.5 billion now and during the recent 4th Joint Trade Committee Meeting held in New Delhi in September, 2011. Both sides have targeted to double the trade volume to US\$ 3 billion by 2015.³⁴

Currently there are more than 70 Indian Companies and 65 Myanmar Companies actively engaged in various trade and investment categories namely: construction materials, timber and logs, pharmaceuticals small, machineries, agricultural and industrials, developments, engineering, electrical equipment's, transport facilities, motor vehicle production, energy sector, computer and software, information technology outsourcing, graphic and arts, hospital equipment's, gems and jewelleryes.³⁵

India and Myanmar Concavity through North East Regime (NER):

Apart from oversea trade, India is one of Myanmar's major trading partners for border trade. Since early 1990s, Myanmar has begun a new era of economic integration with countries across the globe. More significantly, economic ties between countries have grown quite strongly over the entire period.³⁶ There were close diplomatic, political and economic ties between Myanmar and India. Trade relations between the two countries existed for centuries and India has played as a supplier of consumer goods for Myanmar and importer of pulses and beans from Myanmar too. When the closer cross-border economic ties are being forged between Myanmar and India.³⁷ Border trade has come to be seen as a mean with a high potential in the context of emerging Asian regionalism. As noted above, trade activities across India-Myanmar border is perceived as not only a two-country affair but also an Asian regional cooperation.³⁸

The first India – Myanmar Bilateral Border Trade Agreement was signed in New Delhi in January 1994 and was implemented in April 1995 with the opening of a cross border point between Moreh, India and Tamu, Myanmar. The agreement provides facilities by which trade is being carried out through the designated border posts has also helped in checking illegal trade of goods and monitors the activities of insurgent groups between India and Myanmar.³⁹

India and Myanmar share 1,643 kilometer-long common border along the Potkai Hills. India's four states; Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh share international border with Myanmar. Under the agreement trade is currently carried out through three designated border points one each in Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. In Manipur the border trade post is at Moreh, in Mizoram it is at Zowkhathar and in Nagaland it is at Lungwa.⁴⁰ Another trading point at Pangsau Pass in Mizoram is currently under discussion. The volume of trade between India's North East states and Myanmar has not been encouraging. The export growth is

around 7 percent against the import of 32 percent. The Myanmar-India border trade for the first quarter of 2006-07 amounted to just 2.91 million dollars. Lack of communication of understanding between the elected banks on both sides, control on exports as well as on items in barter trade, and cross-border insurgency are being cited as major hurdles in two-way trade.⁴¹ Right now only 22 items are allowed to be exported and imported under the free trade agreement signed between India and Myanmar.

List of 22 Commodities:

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 1. | Mustard/ Rape Seed | M |
| 2. | Pulses and Beans | |
| 3. | Fresh Vegetables | |
| 4. | Fruits | F |
| 5. | Garlic | C |
| 6. | Ginger | C |
| 7. | Spices | C |
| 8. | Spices (excluding Nut Meg, Mace, Cloves, Cassia & Cinnamon) | S |
| 9. | Bamboo | E |
| 10. | Micro forest products excluding teak | |

11.
Betel Nuts and Leaves Commodity as may
12.
Tobacco be mutually agreed upon between the two sides
13.
Tomato
14.
Reed Broom
15.
Sesame
16.
Resin
17. C
Corriander Seeds
18. S
Soybean
19.
Roasted Sunflower
20.
Food Items
21.
Katha
22.
Ginger

Source: Director General of Foreign Trade (1995).

(URL: <http://www.dgciskol.nic.in/vaanijya0907/B%20Vaanijya%20Article.pdf>.)

On the other hand, India supply clothes, shoes, medicines, woolens and engineering goods to Myanmar. These items are in great demand in Myanmar.

To boost border trade, the Government of India has agreed to equip better communication facilities in Moreh and also to sanction necessary funds to the government of Manipur state for organizing seminar-cum-awareness programmers/workshops on border trade. Moreover, the Central government was considering a 100-crores budget proposal of the Manipur government to set up an “ExportPromotion Industrial Park” in Manipur State.⁴²

Major exports into Myanmar: Cotton yarn, Primary and semi-finished steel, Steel bars and rods, Motorcycles, Electrical machinery, auto parts, soya bean meal , pharmaceuticals, Engineering goods , Meat and meat products, Cement, Chemicals and allied products.

Major imports from Myanmar: Betelnut, dried ginger, green mung beans, black matpe, turmeric roots, resin and medicinal herbs.⁴³

Economic cooperation & Development projects:

India is also becoming one of Burma’s largestinvestors, investing in sectors such as oil andgas, agriculture, fisheries, pearl cultivation, infrastructure, mining and tourism. Major Indian’s Companies in Myanmar Oil and Natural Gas Company Videsh, India (ONGC Videsh) ,The Gas Authority of India, Limited., India (GAIL), Vimal Organics, Jubilant Energy, National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC), Jaguar Overseas Ltd, Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Ltd.⁴⁴ Projects executed by Indian companies in recent years cover a variety of sectors such as roads, railways, telecommunication, automotive, energy andremote sensing.

The most significant investment is India’s involvement in the massive Shwe gas project, which will include a gas pipeline running toIndia. Indian companies Oiland Natural Gas Company Videsh, India (ONGC Videsh) andThe Gas

Authority of India, Limited., India (GAIL) are partners in the gas project being led by South Korea's Daewoo.⁴⁵ The project is expected to become the regime's largest single source of earnings, providing, on average, US\$580 million per year for the regime for twenty years, or US\$ 12 billion. This doesn't include contract fees to regime-owned Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprises (MOGE), and several other bonuses that could be paid to individual generals. History appears to be repeating itself.⁴⁶ As with the Yadana and Yetagun gas projects, there are already reports of increased human rights abuses in the area. Counterinsurgency aircraft and tactics, including applying Dhruv and Lancer light-attack helicopters manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL). Helicopters such as these are designed to attack targets on the ground.⁴⁷

An important step was taken in this direction when the 160 Kilometer long road provided linking the border town of Tamu to Kalembo and Kalewa, to the Indian border town of Moreh and the 225km Rih-Tiddim –Falem road was built to connect Champai in Mizoram to Rhi in Myanmar. Such collaborative arrangements were intended to liberate the Northeast from its geographic isolation while Myanmar would stand to benefit from Indian investment in infrastructure and as for Thailand it would open road connectivity to a huge market.⁴⁸ Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) set up and subsequently upgraded a data processing center in Myanmar for remote sensing applications. The Tata's have set up a turbo truck assembly plant with assistance from a line of credit by the Indian government. Earlier, a project for high-speed link in thirty-two Myanmar cities was completed by the Telecommunication Consultants India Ltd. Company (TCIL)⁴⁹

Although the authorities concerned have not released figures of expenditure on or investment in these projects, a rough calculation might show that in the past decade the Indian government and public sector companies have invested, spent and committed a cumulative sum of nearly \$500 million on the

entire basket of projects, excluding those still in the discussion/investigation phase.⁵⁰ Other Cooperation is an important pillar too, notable for its diversity and capability in terms of influencing people's lives and enhancing their productive skills. Capacity building and human resource development have emerged as a point of principal focus, judged by the developments in the past five years.⁵¹ Under the highly successful Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme and related schemes, over two hundred Myanmar nationals have been receiving training in diverse programmes in institutions of excellence in India, with full funding being provided by the Indian side. However, considering Myanmar's needs, the ITEC facility was considered inadequate. Through concerted efforts and guided by a long-term vision, the two governments have collaborated successfully to establish and operate four India-Myanmar Centers, each relating to enhancement of information technology (IT) skills, entrepreneurship development, English language training and industrial training.⁵²

These have already shown their worth through their popularity in Myanmar and their ability to train hundreds of young people every year. This innovative approach has demonstrated the vast potential for further cooperation in this sector. India's economic success today is largely due to its capability to produce a massive number of engineers, medical, management, IT, and other professionals. On the other hand Myanmar's development is hampered by paucity of trained manpower.

It stands to reason therefore that this cooperation should be expanded significantly within a short time frame.⁵³ Apart from education and capacity building, culture, tourism and other means of strengthening people-to-people relations have been employed with imagination and vigour by the two countries to deepen their friendship. Media exchanges may need further attention. In this context, the role and contribution of the Indian Diaspora in Myanmar should also

be kept in view. Through dialogue and cooperation at the government level, efforts should continue to address such grievances as they may have.⁵⁴

Government- and business-level relations have a chance to get real momentum only when people-to-people relations are revitalized. In the post-election era in Myanmar, both sides have an unprecedented opportunity to carry this cooperation forward in a decisive manner.⁵⁵ More importantly, human interest stories about these exchanges and flourishing cultural links need to be told on a much larger scale, especially in India, in order to create a solid constituency that supports further investment of time, effort, energy and money in building closer links with Myanmar. This is a challenge for those involved in practicing public diplomacy in both countries. They need to be urged to meet it head on.⁵⁶ A major flagship project under construction is the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project, for which construction commenced in December 2010. It aims to link Kolkata and other East Indian ports through coastal shipping to Sittwe on the Arakan coast in Myanmar and provide further connection through the Kaladan river route and road to Mizoram on the Indian side.⁵⁷ Further, the Trilateral Highway project, with the objective to link Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand through Myanmar, has been under discussion/investigation for quite some time. The highway has been on the agenda for 15 years. The Indian government spent US\$30 million building 100 miles (160 km) of new road from the India-Burma border at Moreh-Tamu across Sagaing Division in 2001, but it still ends in dust and mud in the middle of nowhere.⁵⁸

India has jumped to the tenth largest investor from its thirteenth position an approved investment of US\$ 273 million out of total estimated investment of US\$ 41.4 billion from 32 countries in 529 projects, as of December 2012. New Foreign Investment Law has been passed by the Myanmar Government on November 02, 2012 and the by-laws and rules are framed by the respective departments/ministries. 100 percent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is

allowed.⁵⁹ The controversial clause of requiring US\$5 million minimum investment has been dropped. It also increases the maximum shareholding of foreign parties to 50 percent in certain sensitive sectors, including manufacturing, farming, agriculture and fisheries. Myanmar new investment law allows foreign investors to lease land for an initial period of 50 years with an option to renew. Foreign companies will be entitled to tax exemption for first five years and no-tariff on raw materials and allowed to exchange and transfer investment.⁶⁰

India and Myanmar have signed Bilateral Investment Promotion Agreement (BIPA), Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA). These agreements provide e entrepreneurs from India and Myanmar for free flow of bilateral investments and business profits will only be taxable in the source State. Both the agreements have been approved by India and Myanmar.⁶¹ With Myanmar taking promising steps towards becoming a market economy and opening up for investment, Indian business community has also stepped up its activity in Myanmar. Business delegations have been visiting Myanmar regularly and a number of business events are taking place in Myanmar.⁶²

How to Improve Border Trade:

There are certain suggestions made by the traders to improve the India-Myanmar Bilateral trade. There is an appeal to include items like mango, bicycles and its parts, lifesaving drugs, cosmetics, fertilizers, imitation jewellery, textiles and pan-masala in the list of the agreement. It's also suggested to reach an agreement between the United Bank of India, Moreh branch and Myanmar Economic Bank, Tamu branch to enable smooth trade operations at the Manipur border post.⁶³ There is demand for transport subsidies and more facilities to importers and exporters especially those dealing with Myanmar. There should be creation of special economic zone to facilitate the bilateral trade. There is plea for maximum rest on the movement of the trader as

the existing land pass issued by the Myanmar authority is usable to restriction on traveling through land from Moreh to other parts of Myanmar.⁶⁴

There is also demand that Indian government should introduce International bus service linking Moreh with Mandalay. Till date, the Burmese junta does not allow the Indians to visit Burma through land routes. There is provisional entry facilities for Indian tourists through Moreh-Tamu trade point but tourists are asked to come back the same day before evening. Hence, it is an impossible for the tourists to visit Mandalay, which needs at least 12 hours to arrive there from Moreh- Tamu point. The bus service linking Moreh with Mandalay would not only just help the traders, but also bring in tourists from Myanmar to India. To arrest the ongoing illegal trade, it's suggested that the items of third country origin should be brought under the ambit of Indo-Myanmar Trade Agreement or under the clearance of third country origin goods vide luggage rule 1944.⁶⁵

Conclusion:

Myanmar is a very important neighbour for India. In recent times, Indian policy makers have begun to position Myanmar prominently in the 'Look East Policy' framework. Indian government wants to make good relations with Myanmar. And border trade is very important for any country economy. In recent years, India-Myanmar relationship is growing in a unique way and the result of that is seen in India's engagement in several river and land based projects in Myanmar. The formal cross border Indo-Myanmar trade has now been abridged to a mere drop and almost the complete Indo-Myanmar border trade is now informal in nature. The commodities imported through the informal channels are largely third country products coming from further east and south-east of Myanmar; mostly consumer goods manufactured in China, ASEAN countries. In contrast, the informal exports to Myanmar from the Indian side are manufactured in India itself. However, it is worth noting here that very little of these exported goods are produced within the North Eastern region. The trade

in its present form is thus useful for the North East region, for that matter even for Myanmar, only to the extent that these commodity inflows satisfy local consumption demand.

But boost to production and income generating activities from this trade is minimal on either side of the border. With the current political developments in Myanmar, coupled with various initiatives taken by Government of India for bilateral cooperation, Indian companies may explore business opportunities in Myanmar especially Oil & Gas sector. In future both countries try to cooperate in political, economic and strategic way.

Endnote

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