

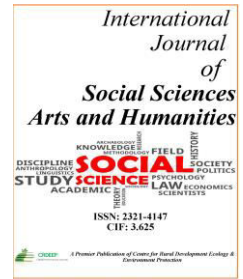
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## Review Paper

# A Review on Indo-Myanmar Relations: Way Forward

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### ABSTRACT

Relationship with Myanmar has become more intensified because of her trade & Commerce, insurgency, drug and other bilateral issues between the two countries which have deep rooted relations in the field of social, culture etc since ancient times. India is known as a sub-continent and is expanding her friendship building through a number of policy implementation for her domestic and external issues especially with the neighboring countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The focus has been towards the south-east Asian countries for their potentiality and strategic importance in the recent years. With modern approach though different in their government functioning system after both the countries gain their independence India is compelled to have good and cordial relations with Myanmar with whatever situation in the country in manner of government in India and change of political system in Myanmar either a democratic or military government.

## Introduction

Myanmar become the center for political studies in South East Asian nations due to her alternate change of her political system unlike the other world communities. With the system of internal unrest for her uncertainty having the ideology of capturing power by 'Tatmadaw' the military and on the other hand the civilian freedom movement under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi. The nation had been in the record of changes with the changes of leaderships since her independence in 1948 till 1988 and again in 2012 with the latest coup on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021. Nevertheless, Myanmar's relations with India managed to stay connected with both the Military government and Civilian government because India wants to have smooth relations with her neighbors so they become one of the most effective instruments for India to co-exist and develop herself with the aim of having good relations with her neighbors specially the South-East Asian countries. The participation on Myanmar Military Day two months after the coup of 2021 symbolized that India's decision on relation with Myanmar is not deterred. India is a member of both SAARC and ASEAN and contributed in many fields towards building regional cooperation dependable to one another. The principles of India's foreign policy strategies are subjects even adore by neighboring countries as India uphold to maintain her long last relations with the South-East Asian countries. She engaged on issues like trade, commerce, diplomacy, bilateral, joint military exercise etc. India had a border sharing with Myanmar covering more than 1640kms with the three states of North East India viz: Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. India and Myanmar had been under the colonial rule and had struggle for freedom from the colonial rulers. Both the countries shared their ancient history, culture, custom, trade and commerce etc. and one of the most important partners in cooperation. Though both the country fought for democratic freedom which they had achieved, their political system became different as Myanmar was under the military rule 1962 after a decade of their independence in 1948. Despite their differences in political system both the country come into an agreement on trade and economic co-operation between both the governments in 1994. The border trade agreements become one of the key areas of cooperation. Exports and imports through land routes of North East India states to Myanmar whereas India is a developing country Myanmar is under developed country and have rich potentials.

## Methodology and Data Sources

The methods used in the article is analytical and descriptive with quantitative method using both primary and secondary sources.

## Historical Background

After their independence from the British rule Indo-Myanmar relationship had been fluctuated. From 1948-1962 relation was friendly and cordial during the days of Prime Minister Nehru and Prime Minister U Nu. But from 1962-1988 relations virtually froze with the military rule under Ne win adopting an isolationist policy. Domestic policies including the expulsion of ethnic Indians soured the relations. Then from 1988 as a result of the sympathy of the Indian government to the pro-democracy

movements which started in 1988, the relations were completely strained. The visit of the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1987 laid the foundations for a stronger relationship between India and Myanmar. However, the recent political reforms and transition to democracy are developments of great significance for India Myanmar relations.

Geo-strategically, Myanmar's importance for India arises from these factors, Myanmar is the second- largest of India's neighbors and the largest on our Eastern flank. Myanmar provides the Eastern littoral of the Bay of Bengal. An unfriendly Myanmar hosting foreign naval presence would be a grave threat to India's security. Myanmar has a big border with China in the North, contiguous with the Sino- Indian disputed border. It also acts as a bridge between India's North Eastern States and the Southern provinces of China. Geo-politically, with a friendly Myanmar, India could add more substance to her 'Look East' policies of building up relationships with South East Asia, as Myanmar shares common borders with Laos and Thailand.<sup>1</sup>

The last change in Indo-Myanmar relationship can be traced to the then Indian Foreign Secretary, J.N. Dixit's visit to Myanmar in 1993. On March 30, 1993 both sides signed an agreement for mutual cooperation for preventing illicit trafficking in narcotics, drugs and arms. In 1995, the Indian and Myanmar's military launched a joint military operation named '*Operation Golden Bird*' against several North-Eastern rebels active across the Indo-Myanmar border. In the same year both countries concluded a border trade agreement and by that agreement two border trade posts were opened, one at Moreh in Manipur, India and the another one in Tamu in Sagaing Division, Myanmar. According to our Ministry of External Affairs, the bilateral trade between India and Myanmar was around US \$ 365 million over the period April-June of 2009-2010. The bilateral trade between India and Myanmar has actually shown a steady growth from US \$ 12.4 million in 1980-81 to US \$ 995 million in 2007-2008. In 2001, the 160 km long Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road, built by our Border Roads Organization, was opened. This change is described by S.D. Muni as a period when realism and political pragmatism emerged as the guiding principle for Indian foreign policy and commitments to democracy faded into the background.<sup>2</sup>

**Border Trade Relations:** While border trade was formalized with China and Bangladesh and Thailand as already mentioned earlier, India remained strongly committed to the restoration of democracy in Myanmar. As mentioned above, it was during this time (1989-1991) that a number of officials from the foreign office, defense and intelligence establishment opposed the Government of India's support extended to the Pro-democracy movement and the "limited support" extended to democracy in Myanmar's rebels. These officials strongly felt that transition from military rule to democracy in Myanmar was a distant dream; and it was necessary "to emulate the ASEAN's policy of "constructive engagement" with the Junta. They argued that if India did not improve relations with the Junta and since democratic transition was a far-cry Myanmar would become a Chinese satellite".<sup>3</sup>

The visit of Senior General Than Shwe to India in 2004 is significant. The Myanmar Times in its issue of November 1 - 7, 2004, on its front page published a photo of Senior General Than Shwe, the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, flanked by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and the then President of India, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. Senior General Than Shwe visited Bodhgaya and Kolkata during his trip, his visit was preceded by several other high-level visits from Myanmar side. India reciprocated to Myanmar by sending high-level delegations. Our former President Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, visited Myanmar in March 2006. This visit broadened the path of future cooperation between the two countries. A wide range of areas were identified in which India would become partner for Myanmar.

This includes promotion of trade, the volume of which during the years 2003-04 \$ 470 million. But the target was set to make it US \$ 2 billion within next three years by signing of MOUs between Union of Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), Confederation Indian Industries (CII), and Bengal Chambers of Commerce and Industries. Cooperation on hydro-carbon sector near Rakhine coast, I.T sector, skill development and capacity building, gas and oil exploration and such areas India could come up. Myanmar, with her huge natural potential and rich agriculture can offer India a lot. Myanmar was addressed by our President as a "trusted partner" and Myanmar's role in integrating India more with the ASEAN forum had been highlighted. Importance was duly given to two border posts at Moreh-Tamu in Manipur and Zowkhatthar-Rhi in Mizoram, to make the full utilization of the facilities for promoting border trade.<sup>4</sup>

### Political Relations

After the democratic transition under a quasi-civilian government led by National League for Democracy under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi and the military having '*veto*' power of 25% reservation in the newly drafted constitution of the country. With the general election of 2015, the National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in both the state and National Parliament.

India's relations with Myanmar have been driven by the strategic rationale of developing a counterweight to China's dominance in Myanmar. It is competing with China in deepening economic ties, infrastructural development and in transfers of significant lethal military equipment and cooperation in military training. Alongside this, in 2014, the two countries signed an agreement on coordinated patrolling and intelligence sharing sealing insurgent access to sanctuaries across the border.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>SHARAN P., "Government and Politics of Burma", B.V. Gupta M. D, Metropolitan Book Co. Pvt Ltd 1983, Netaji Subhash Marg New Delhi, Pp 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid p 2

<sup>3</sup> Das Gurudas, Singh N Bijoy, Thomas C.J, "Indo-Myanmar Border Trade: Status, Problems and Potentials", Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi 110059, 1st Edition 2005, ISBN- 81-8370-007-1 p-86

<sup>4</sup>Bhattacharya Swapna, "Dialogue October-December", 2009, Volume, 11 No 2', Experiencing the Depth Bond between India and Myanmar, Pp 5.

<sup>5</sup>Bose Tapan & Manchanda Rita (Sage, 2017).

The relations between both the countries had been more or less constant in either of the governments and from Indian side the then Foreign Secretary J. N Dixit had been the mentor after his visit to Myanmar in the month of March and August 1993. "In his memoirs Dixit writes, (i) Attempts should be made to normalize relations whatever the government is in control of Myanmar. (ii) Myanmar is geo-strategically important to India as it borders with China and Bangladesh. Its closeness to the India's security, (iii) Indo-Myanmar cooperation is necessary to counter smuggling, drug crimes, and insurgency causing security threats to India's North-East. The above developments clearly indicate three things.

Firstly, From Indian side China economic and strategic penetration into Myanmar is a serious concern to India.

Secondly, at the same time it was more concerned with insurgency causing security threats to India's North-east.

Thirdly, Of course, measures for checking drug smuggling, drug crimes were not less important. For this three aspects India strongly felt that cooperation with Myanmar was absolutely necessary. In the later years, economic cooperation, trade, cross border projects and activities like international terrorism, drug trafficking etc. become aspects of mutual interest<sup>6</sup>. Having in mind with the above statement India was compelled to have relations with her neighbors particularly Myanmar for Cooperation as to bolster and protecting her interests through building confidence measures. The position of India stands clear that whatever government is control in Myanmar, India needs to have a stable relation for certain reasons in order to gain from the policy safeguarding her regional interests and managing her domestic problems through the relations. So, India welcomed the people's mandated government which was a quasi-civilian government led by National League for Democracy under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi. India as a democratic country have a feeling for people's rule and so supported pro-democracy movement at the same time contained the same agenda of relationship with the military government mainly because of her domestic issues in the North East region particularly insurgency and drug trafficking. India is also serious to check the policy of Chinese intervention in the region which is one of the main reasons to have close watch while maintaining relationship with Myanmar.

*Current Developments*, the latest development in Myanmar which is under the coup from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 taken over by the military "the Tatmadaw" by the military Generals under the General Min Aung Maung Hlaing after the November general election of the National Parliament (Pyithu Hluttaw) the Lower House losing an embarrassing defeat to other political parties spearheaded by National League for Democracy with allies and the NLD party won a single majority party. (Pyithu Hluttaw-the Lower House), the Amyotha Hluttaw – The Upper House also known as the House of Nationalities). According to *Special Report, "United States Institute of Peace"*, 2301 Constitution Ave. NW. Washington, DC 20037, p-8 [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org) "the referendum on the 2008 Constitution was widely criticized by the international community on the grounds that it was a fraudulent. Under this provision the constitution, 25 percent of seats in the parliament are appointed by the Commander-In -Chief of the Country's Defence Services. The lower house has 440 members (110 for the military) and the Upper House has 224 members (56 for the military), and the seat in regional and state assemblies vary depending on the population".<sup>7</sup> India's intention to have cordial relations with Myanmar has to do with her security itself on various fields, and dependent by Myanmar as a neighboring major country. India has been endorsing Myanmar democratization but also tries to maintain the same when military is the government. Because she had issues which are directly and indirectly affected particularly in the North-East region and the Chinese intervention in Myanmar having commercial relations opening their companies and also support some insurgencies of the country and even the Indian insurgents are a save heavens encouraging the idea of proxy war with the state of India. India being a democratic country endorsed democratization in Myanmar which undermines the military Generals and so having equal rate and normal relations has been the usual move by India which led to the sending of Indian representative on the military day known as 'Tatmadaw Day' two months later after the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 coup whereas other western countries including EU refused to sent their representatives. "India was among eight countries that attended a military parade in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw on March 27 to mark Tatmadaw Day. Myanmar's military is called 'Tatmadaw'. The other countries to attend the Tatmadaw's annual parade were China, Russia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand".<sup>8</sup> India's attendance at the annual military parade in Myanmar last week was significant in the view that along with Bangladesh, it was the only major democracy to offer some kind validity to the military coup in that country. While China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand don't have democracy, Russia and Pakistan have their own issues that make their democratic electoral processes suspect. It is clearly an indication that India's policy towards Myanmar cannot stand firm on one sided as she need to maintain showing her readiness to have relations on whatever governments is in place at Naypyidaw in order to gain confidence and trust of Myanmar. The provision in the constitution for the military a stumbling obstacle for the civilian government to push for major reforms in the country until it limited the role of military interference as it is already compromised and accepted in drafted constitution giving the military extraordinary powers that allows to let the military involved in the political system of the country. Thus, "the military presumably acting at the behest of the Commander-In-Chief has signaled its unwillingness to accept any modification of this provision. Most recently the military members of parliament have proposed some constitutional amendments of their own. These will strengthen the key executive branch decision making body, the National Defense and Security Council, giving it power to dissolve parliament and impose martial law more easily than the current constitution allows. The proposal was clearly designed to signal military discontent with the active parliament and the speed of transition"<sup>9</sup>, which ultimately led to the military takeover from the quasi-civilian government which has just live for tenure of five

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<https://thewire.in/south-asia/india-myanmar-rohingya-refugee-military-tatmadaw>

<sup>6</sup>Das Gurudas, Singh N Bijoy, Thomas C.J, "Indo-Myanmar Border Trade: Status, Problems and Potentials", Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi 110059, 1st Edition 2005, ISBN- 81-8370-007-1 p-86

<sup>7</sup>Kipgen Nehginpao, "Democratization Myanmar", Routledge, New Delhi, London, New York, South Asia Edition 2016, ISBN 978-1-138-66787-7, p-135

<sup>8</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/india-attends-military-parade-myanmar-months-after-coup-why-significant-1785075-2021-03-30>

<sup>9</sup>Special Report, "United States Institute of Peace", 2301 constitution Ave. NW. Washington, DC 20037, p-8 [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)

year. The dream and expectation of the people of Myanmar particularly the pro-democracy is once again put into illusion of their political ideology and is in question as and when will their aspiration of becoming a democratic nation shall be far away from their hope.

### Conclusion

Conclusion, In whatever situation as India will usher her best to carry on her relationship building with Myanmar due to a number of issue as mentioned in the above, India will have to be serious but cautiously while moving ahead with either of the government to earn confidence from generals like as she did advocated with the democratic government to a stability as the principles of India's foreign policy is out mostly regarded and matured to the maintenance of status quo with any country of the world community but particularly important for the neighboring countries that she shared her border in the region.

### Recommendation

The Present article recommends that new research can be carried out by scholars and researchers through the study of South East Asia nations, the ASEAN particularly with Myanmar's struggle to democratization and its challenges ahead.

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