

CHANGING STRATIES IN INDIA– MYANMAR RELATIONS

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BACKGROUND

Bilateral relations between Burma (officially the Republic of the Union of Myanmar or the Union of Burma) and the Republic of India have improved considerably since 1993, overcoming tensions related to drug trafficking, the suppression of democracy and the rule of the military junta in Burma. Burma is located south of the states of Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India. The Indo-Burmese border stretches over 1,600 kilometers.¹

Myanmar (formerly Burma) was made a province of British India by British rulers and again separated in 1937. India established diplomatic relations after Myanmar's independence from Great Britain in 1948. For many years, Indo-Burmese relations were strong due to Myanmar previously having been a province of India, due to cultural links, flourishing commerce, common interests in regional affairs and the presence of a significant Indian community in Myanmar. India provided considerable support when Myanmar struggled with regional insurgencies. However, the overthrow of the democratic government by the Military of Myanmar led to strains in ties.

By 1949, Burma was engulfed in a civil war while putting down communist rebellion and armed ethnic insurgent groups. Rangoon was about to collapse. India came to Burma's aid providing arms to the Burmese army and organising loans from the Commonwealth nations. Rangoon was saved. In 1951 India and Burma signed the Treaty of Friendship. India became the largest importer of Burmese rice.

After the 1962 Indo-China war, China started aiding India's North-East insurgents groups on the one hand and on the other hand started supporting the Burmese communists and the ethnic insurgents groups which helped in warming up the Indo-Burma relations. In 1967,

¹ ["Asia Times: Myanmar shows India the road to Southeast Asia"](#). Retrieved 2 April 2016.

India and Burma signed the boundary agreement to solve the border issue between the two countries. Burma also co-operated with India in its fight against the Northeast insurgents groups. But then, Deng Xiaoping assumed power after Mao's death, initiated economic reforms and changed China's foreign policy of exporting communist revolution, replacing it by trade and investment. By 1980s, China stopped supporting Burma's communists and ethnic insurgents and made inroads in Burma in the pretext of brokering peace talks. China-Burma relations warmed up and the Indo-Burma relations suffered. India started aiding the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) with the assurance to stop training/sheltering the Northeast insurgent groups, which they readily obliged.²

MYANMAR AND INDIA'S 'LOOK EAST POLICY'

After Soviet Union disintegration, In the early 1990s, Indian former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao initiated the look-east policy to develop the India's relations with South East Asian states. Myanmar, is the gate way of 'India's Look East Policy'. It is like bridge between South and South East Asian Regions.

Geographically, the northern borders of Myanmar form a junction with Bangladesh, China and the North Eastern India. Myanmar is an important country on the rim of the Bay of Bengal, lying astride India's southeastern trade routes. The southeastern coast of Myanmar is close enough to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India, so developments in that area could affect India's security interests in the Bay of Bengal.

For Myanmar's part, the government suffers economic and political sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union, and its government does not entertain hopes for getting any aid from them. Despite being admitted to ASEAN, Myanmar's prospects for receiving major economic help are bleak. Only China undertakes some significant development projects, mostly in the field of infrastructure. But China alone is not in the position to satisfy Myanmar's needs in foreign aid and investment. Hence Myanmar's government plans to receive such support from India's government and big business.

Myanmar says its relationship with India is based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which are: ; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual

² <https://www.timesofassam.com/headlines/india-myanmar-relations-past-present-secenerio/>

benefit; mutual respect for each others' , territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression and coexistence.

Insurgency in North-Eastern India The insurgency in North-Eastern India is one of the threats to India's internal security. The insurgency problem in the North East States of India cannot be controlled effectively without help from Myanmar. The drugs from Myanmar and the arms from Thailand are smuggled to the Indian insurgent groups from Tamu and a few other places on the Indo-Myanmar border. Myanmar's help is very much needed to effectively stop this traffic.³

INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. India-Myanmar-Thailand Friendship Highway

India and Myanmar have agreed to a 4-lane, 3200 km triangular highway connecting India, Myanmar and Thailand. The route, which is expected to be completed by sometime during 2016, will run from India's northeastern states into Myanmar, where over 1,600 km of roads will be built or improved.

The route begins from Guwahati in India and connects to Mandalay in Myanmar, route continues to Yangon in Myanmar and then to Mae Sot in Thailand, which then continues to Bangkok.

2. Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Route

The Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project will connect the eastern Indian seaport of Kolkata with Sittwe seaport in Myanmar by sea; it will then link Sittwe seaport to Lashio in Myanmar via Kaladan river boat route and then from Lashio on to Mizoram in India by road transport. The project was scheduled to be completed by 2014 according to Governor of Mizoram Vakkom Purushothaman., but as of Nov 2014 it is likely to be completed by 2016.

CHANGING INDIA-MYANMAR RELATIONS

1. India, Myanmar signed 3 MoUs including Cooperation in field of Power Sector

India and Myanmar have signed three Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) to boost bilateral relations between two neighbouring nations. These MoUs were signed in New Delhi

³ C.s KUPPUSWAMY, "MYANMAR- CHINA Relations: Implications for India ." paper no 596, South asia analysis group.

after delegation level talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the visiting State Counsellor of Myanmar Aung San Suu Kyi. Signed MoUs are MoU for designing an academic and professional building programme for insurance industry of Myanmar. MoU on Cooperation in the field of Power Sector. Under it India has offered to enhance power supply from Moreh in Manipur to Tamu in Myanmar. MoU on Banking Supervision. It was signed between Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Central Bank of Myanmar.

2. Kolkata-Mizoram trade route via Myanmar to open soon

A deep water port built in Myanmar's Sittwe by India is ready to be commissioned. Thus, open Kolkata-Mizoram trade route via Myanmar. The Sittwe port is starting point for the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project in Myanmar. Once shipments arrive at Sittwe port from Kolkata, they will be transferred to smaller freight carriers which would sail upstream into Mizoram.⁴

3. SBI becomes first domestic bank to open branch in Yangon, Myanmar

India's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) has announced the opening up its foreign branch in Yangon, the capital city of Myanmar. With this, SBI became the first domestic bank of India to open a branch in Myanmar. The Yangon branch is the 54th foreign branch of the SBI. This branch further extends the global presence of India's largest lender in 37 countries through 198 offices.

4. Union Cabinet approves MoU between India and Myanmar for cooperation in field of Traditional Systems of Medicine

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Myanmar in the field of Traditional Systems of Medicine. Decision in this regard was taken by the Union Cabinet meeting chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi. Key Facts The MoU will provide structured frame work for promotion of AYUSH/Traditional Systems of Medicine in Myanmar. It will boost the importance of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) systems of medicine and conservation, production and standardisation

5. India and Myanmar to strengthen Defence ties

⁴ India Myanmar Current Affairs, General knowledge Today, (Feb. 20, 10:00 AM), <http://currentaffairs.gktoday.in/tags/india-myanmar>.

India and Myanmar have announced plans to strengthen their defence cooperation during a joint consultative commission (JCC) meeting held in New Delhi. JCC meeting was chaired by Union External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Myanmar's Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin. The meeting had released joint statement on various aspects. They are Both countries to work together on effective border management especially on the issue of cross-border insurgency and terrorism. India has reaffirmed to provide defence assistance program as part of its Goodwill Diplomacy to Myanmar in order to modernise their Armed Forces⁵.



⁵ Ibid