

After reading the chapter, the reader will be able to develop an analytical understanding on the following:

- Historical background of diplomacy
- Defence and security relationship
- Extremism in Myanmar
- Rohingya issue
- Commercial diplomacy
- Border trade
- Border Issues
- Operation Golden Bird
- Kaladan multi modal transit transport project
- Analysis of recent visits
- India's core interests in Myanmar

DIPLOMATIC HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The most important connecting link between India and Myanmar (previously known as Burma) is Buddhism. In the ancient times, Gautama Buddha sent the two monks, Tapusa and Bhallika, with eight strands of his own hair to promote Buddhism in the Myanmar region. Tapusa and Bhallika built a pagoda in Shwedagon, which is now known as the Shwedagon Zedi Daw. Ashoka, during his reign, also sent missionaries to Burma. The people of Burma, since the ancient times, have been majorly Kshatriyas and their origins can be traced back to India, in the Gangetic valley. The 17th century Pyu dynasty used Indian titles like Hari Vikramaditya and Surya Vikramaditya. In modern times, the British had exiled Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal Emperor of India, to Yangon in Myanmar and the Konbaung King of Myanmar to Ratnagiri.

In 1951, India and Burma established diplomatic relations through a treaty of friendship. Although the bedrock of the relationship is the India–Myanmar Treaty of Friendship signed in 1951, the foundation of the Indo–Myanmar relations was laid down by the visit of Rajiv Gandhi in 1987. After the victory of Ne Win in Burma, he undertook drastic nationalisation which led to lot of discrimination from the Indian diaspora present in Burma. The Indian diaspora in Burma had British origins as Burma is an erstwhile British colony that gained independence in 1948 and the British had taken a large number of Indians to work in Burma as plantation workers. The regime of Ne Win did not boost the Burman economy, plunging the nation into deep economic crisis. In 1988, Ne Win's resignation led to a referendum on whether or not multi-party democracy needed to be adopted in Myanmar. General Saw Haung took control of Myanmar and established the

state law and order restoration council (SLOC). In 1990, SLOC announced elections. However, as per the SLOC, the election was to be held only for the purpose of redrafting the Constitution of the Myanmar.

In the elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 392 of 485 seats and the rest were won by the National Unity Party (backed by the army). The NLD demanded immediate transfer of power on the basis of popular vote. This led to a confrontation based on the political values of democracy and autocracy. India has always been a supporter of NLD. Subsequently, Aung San Suu Kyi, the founder of NLD, was put under house arrest because of China's support of SLOC. Post 1992, Myanmar decided to head towards an open economy and joined ASEAN as a member and ended martial law. It also revived its relations with India. Since 1993, Indo–Myanmar relations have prospered. The military backed party is called Union Solidarity and Development Party, or USDP.

As India, at the end of the Cold War, announced its Look East Policy, the significance of Myanmar increased. In 2011, Thein Sein took steps to promote democracy. In the same year, Thein Sein visited India while in 2012 Suu Kyi visited India after her release from house arrest. Manmohan Singh also visited Myanmar in 2012 and these visits eventually brought security and developmental diplomacy back on track. In the March 2016 elections, NLD won again and Htin Kyaw became the new President of Myanmar. Myanmar remains extremely important to India for its proximity to Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Bhutan and India's North East. It also shares a border with China. The Myanmar territory is used by insurgents for drug trade and narcotics crimes. India had maintained cordial relations with Myanmar despite it being under military rule for a significant time and even today, Myanmar remains a focal point of India's Act East Policy.



Act East Policy and Myanmar

Myanmar is the most crucial state for India's Act East Policy. Under the Act East Policy, India has realized the economic potential of boosting up connectivity with Myanmar as it will be a gateway to South East Asia. The importance of Myanmar in the Indian foreign policy can be judged from the fact that India announced the Act East Policy in the territory of Myanmar in 2014 (at the backdrop of 12th India-ASEAN Summit). Under the Act East Policy India has decided to boost connectivity with Myanmar to leverage the geographical proximity. The connectivity with Myanmar can be a gateway to South East Asia. Taking advantage of 2014 – India – Myanmar MOU on border cooperation and intelligence sharing, India on 9th June 2015 conducted a surgical strike against the insurgent groups. India is also connecting with Myanmar to leverage Buddhism through the Buddhist circuit where India intends to use Buddhism's cultural heritage to promote tourism and create job.



India and Myanmar jointly have to address bottlenecks to ensure implementation of the five themes. The two sides need to immediately push bus and air connectivity. To

support the Indian private sector in Myanmar, there needs to be enhanced presence of Indian financial institutions in Myanmar. India and Myanmar should as sub-regional groupings like Mekong-Ganga cooperation, BIMSTEC and BCIM etc. India has decided to leverage its Diaspora to enhance the cooperation in the five themes envisages above.

INDIA–MYANMAR BORDER ISSUES

Myanmar and India share both land and maritime borders but since the 1990s, there has also been a growing proximity between China and Myanmar, who also share a land border. Myanmar continues to witness piracy and ethnic crises. Myanmar has focussed its security policy more on ethnic issues and intra-state conflicts than on international issues. Military has dominated Myanmar politics for a long time and has secured legitimacy in Myanmar society. India, on the other hand, began to realise the security significance of Myanmar after it implemented its Look East Policy.

The growing presence of China in Myanmar has increased India's concerns. Myanmar also has proximity to the Andaman and Nicobar islands. China is undertaking port construction in Myanmar. India felt that China would probably encircle India and thus, this fear compelled India to go for security cooperation. In fact, from Myanmar point of view, the deepening of its relations with China compelled it to diversify and it became natural for Myanmar to look towards India to counter the dominating influence exerted by China.

In 1994, India and Myanmar signed an MoU on Maintenance and Tranquillity in border areas. Since then, India and Myanmar have been cooperating in the area of counter insurgency. Indian army chiefs regularly interact with their Myanmar counterparts. In 2006, both concluded an MoU on intelligence sharing and training, where India envisages training of Myanmar's military to boost their military capabilities. Since 2010, they have a mutual Legal Assistance Treaty and in 2012, established a Joint Working Group on terrorism. In 2014, they signed an MoU on border cooperation. India assists Myanmar in building Offshore Patrol Vehicles under Coordination Protocol (CORPAT). Recently, India also carried out a surgical strike on the Indian side of the border to shoot down insurgents operating in the region. The broad contours of our defence engagement include border training, intelligence sharing and the training of Myanmar forces.

EXTREMISM IN MYANMAR AND ROHINGYA ISSUE

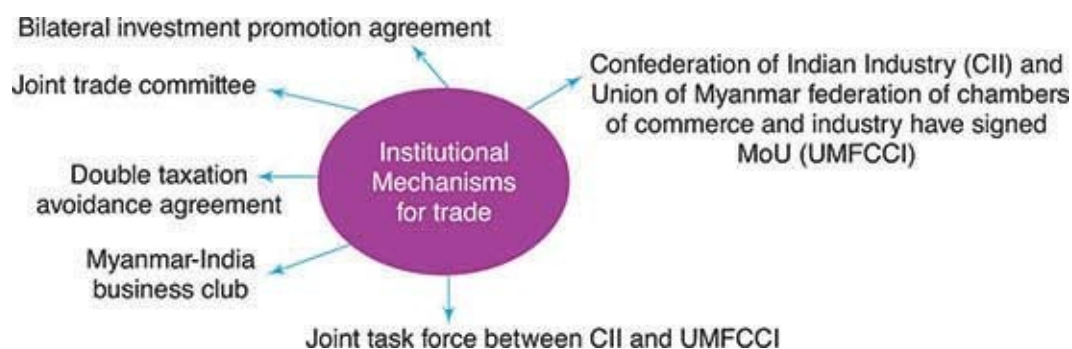
Since the 19th Century, people from various parts of India migrated to Myanmar. Over a period of time, they became prosperous and asserted their economic strength in the society. The local people of Myanmar were not happy and felt insecure. From 1920s to 1940s, there were violent revolts. During Ne Win's time, the non-Buddhist people were also targeted. Many of them left Myanmar during Ne Win's time.

From Bengal, a lot of Muslims were taken by the Britishers to Burma from 1823 onwards when the British occupied the Rakhine state of Myanmar. After the independence of Burma in 1948, these Muslims stayed back in Burma. Many of them are settled in South West Burma, which is known as the Rakhine area. The Rakhine area is in Arakans. From 'Rakhine' a word has originated for these Muslims in Myanmar's language and the word is Rohangs. These Muslims are therefore called Rohingyas. According to the 1982 Citizenship law of Myanmar, the Rohingyas were not recognized as an official ethnic

group and since then have become stateless in Myanmar. In the 1990s, a movement in Myanmar began, which came to be known as the 969 movement. The movement was a brain child of Kyaw Lwin. Under the 969 movement, the government used Lwin's ideas to win over people by preaching the good practices of Buddhism. In the 2000s, another movement called the 786 movement began. The origin of the 786 movement is in Arabic Abjad numerical system and is inspired from the opening passage of Quran. In Myanmar, 786 usually demarcates an area as belonging to Muslims. The Buddhist began to misinterpret the 786 movement and they began to think that this means that 786 movement aimed to dominate 21st century ($7 + 8 + 6 = 21$) as the Islamic century. It saw a rise in insecurity of Buddhists manifesting in riots in 2011 in the Sittwe–Rakhine region and the brain behind this ethnic violence was Ashin Wirathu. A widespread belief in the fact that Muslims want to dominate Myanmar spread like wildfire. The rise of the radical and rightist Ashin Wirathu has brought out the face of radical Buddhism. This has led to the mass exodus of Rohingyas to Indonesia and Thailand in 2015. Those who remain are ritually ghettoised and persecuted. India is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and thus is not mandated to accept refugees. But, on humanitarian grounds, India has accepted a few Rohingyas. India needs to develop an imaginative diplomacy for the Rohingyas, India needs to ask Myanmar to rehabilitate the Rohingyas as not rehabilitating them is detrimental to Indian security interests. If the Rohingyas get radicalized, they could pose a serious security threat for India, India is contemplating appointment of a special envoy to discuss Rohingya problem with Myanmar.

COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY

There has been steady gradual improvement in the trade ties between India and Myanmar. India imports beans, pulses and forest products from Myanmar while it exports steel and pharmaceutical products. Myanmar stands to be the second largest supplier of pulses to India. There is a rising cooperation in the field of IT and plantation products.



The overall quantum of Indian investment is rising in Myanmar. India has steadily increased investment in the oil and gas sectors. There has been a huge presence of Indian companies in Myanmar as well. Tata Motors has established a truck assembly plant in Magway. There is presence of other Indian firms in Myanmar as well.



At the level of hydrocarbons, India and Myanmar signed a MoU in 2006 on cooperation in the petroleum sector. Since then India's ONGC Videsh Limited and GAIL have been present in exploration and development activities. India has acquired stakes in Shwe development and production area. Jubilant Energy and Reliance are also working in shallow water blocks in Myanmar. Since 2016, the State Bank of India has been granted a commercial license for banking purposes in Myanmar. On 17th February 2017, the 5th India–Myanmar Joint Trade Committee Meeting was held in Myanmar and efforts were made to intensify the ongoing trade. The two countries announced a new bilateral trade target of 10 billion dollars to be achieved in the next five years. Under the India's Act East Policy, India and Myanmar have agreed to intensify trade through maritime level and border trade level. The two sides have decided to promote more trade through the Moreh–Tamu post in Manipur–Myanmar border area. The maritime trade is to be strengthened through Kaladan Multilateral Transport Project.

In the eighth India–ASEAN Delhi Dialogue, 2016, the two sides also agreed to cooperate on improving connectivity and bilateral trade. At the level of connectivity, the two sides decided to expedite the India–Myanmar–Thailand Highway construction. At the maritime level, the two sides in 2016 concluded a standard operating procedure for Joint Naval Portal. India has clarified that Myanmar is core to India's Act East Policy and that India is keen to improve connectivity and trade with Myanmar.



India–Myanmar Border Trade

The border trade is different from the trade that is done between countries through air, land or sea. In the trade at air, land or sea, there is involvement of customer clearances. Also, the trade through these three routes involves huge volumes. On the other hand, when it comes to the border trade, the people living on two sides of the international border prepare a list of commodities and undertake overland bilateral exchange. India and Myanmar signed a border trade agreement in 1994 which got operationalised in 1995. As per the agreement, the two sides will undertake border trade through designated check posts.



Around 1% of the India–Myanmar trade happens through the border. The present duty is 5% for the 40 identified select items traded at the border.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY RELATIONS

India and Myanmar have maintained substantive defence relations since 1990s. The security situation has been necessitated by India's North Eastern states sharing border with Myanmar. The important dimension of the defence relationship is that India has been an important arms supplier to Myanmar. India has supplied T-55 tanks, transport planes and naval crafts to Myanmar, to name just a few. In 2015, the first India–Myanmar Joint Consultative Commission Meeting was held. In the meeting, both sides decided to strengthen security cooperation to tackle rising terrorism and insurgency. The two sides decided to use bilateral Regional Border Committee mechanism to promote border cooperation. In the meeting, India reaffirmed its support to assist Myanmar in the modernisation of its defence forces. A new dimension under India's Act East Policy is to also assist naval modernisation of Myanmar. One of the key drivers of India-Myanmar defence cooperation has been the insurgency in North Eastern States. India, way back in 1950, had provided Myanmar with six Dakota aircrafts to aid in its fight against insurgency. There are still insurgent groups operating across the borders of the two countries. In 1994, India and Myanmar signed an agreement to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas and this facilitated the launch of operation Golden Bird in 1995. Another driver of defence cooperation has been drug smuggling. Myanmar is a part of the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Thailand and Laos) and has become an important transit country for illegal drug trafficking. In 2010, India and Myanmar established Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty on criminal matters which has emerged as the core legal instrument to address issues related to drug smuggling and gun running. There is active cooperation between the two countries at capacity building level. India has been offering military training to Myanmar.



The Inside Story of Operation Golden Bird

In 1995, in Mizoram along the India–Myanmar border, the 57 Mountain division of the Indian Army carried out the operation Golden Bird. Though it is stated that the operation was jointly carried out by India and Myanmar, in reality, the operation was carried out by the Indian army alone and Myanmar was not involved in the design of the operation. The operation was launched because Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) had provided information that a huge consignment of arms for North Eastern insurgents had reached Cox Bazar (Bangladesh) and was to be sent to insurgents in Manipur. The arms, as per intelligence, were meant for groups in Nagaland and the Isak-Muivah group in Manipur. On 31st March 1995, it was reported that a large number of insurgents had entered into Mizoram. Mizoram, being a peaceful state, had lesser presence of forces. Forces were deployed for counter

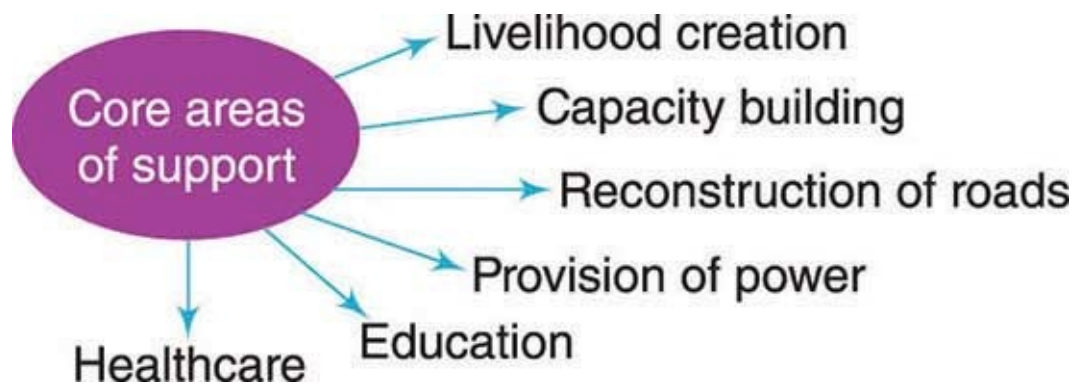
insurgency in the states of Manipur and Nagaland. In the initial phase of the operation, troops were air dropped into Mizoram from Manipur and Nagaland. Radio sets and other technological instruments were used to intercept the insurgents' messages. On 5th April 1995, the insurgents crossed over to Myanmar and started using porters to carry loads of material. The Indian troops began a hot pursuit of the insurgents. This led to the Indian troops capture an insurgent named Hathi Barvah. Hathi was trained by the Pakistani 151 near Karachi. Hathi provided valuable information about insurgent route, ammunition, and so forth on interrogation. In May 1995, after deployment of forces, the operations were carried out and finally by 21st May 1995, the operation was officially called off.

Another key driver of defence cooperation is maritime security. As India undertakes oil exploration in Myanmar, maritime cooperation has emerged as a new dimension. As Myanmar faces piracy and illegal fishing problems, India has been providing training to Myanmar's forces and especially navy.

Nagas have been living in the North East since time immemorial. In 1935, Myanmar was created as a separate state. It got decolonised in 1947. After the decolonisation of Myanmar, new boundaries were created with India. This led to a division between India and Myanmar and affected the Nagas, who became ethnic minorities on both sides. To resolve the issue, the governments of both countries decided to establish a free movement regime (FMR) which could allow Nagas greater interaction either side of the border. As per the FMR, the Nagas can travel 16 km across either side of the border without a visa. This FMR facilitated interaction between Konyaks, Khiamniungans and Yimchungar Nagas living in Eastern districts of Nagaland. Not only does regular movement happen due to the FMR but children from NSAZ come to the Indian side to study as well. In the recent times, the Myanmar side has started erecting a fence along the border. The locals believe that Myanmar is doing so in concurrence with Indian authorities. The Indian side has clarified that the fence is on the side of Myanmar and not India and a fence on the Indian side will be created only if locals approve. The creation of the fence has angered the locals as they feel this fence would restrict their movements. Security agencies have found that locals and Nagas moving across the borders do pose security threats as they have been found carrying drugs and smuggling arms at times.

RECENT BILATERAL VISITS

In January 2015, the Vice President of Myanmar, Dr Sai Mauk Kham, paid a visit to India. The two sides affirmed commitment to strengthen economic ties between the countries. This visit was followed by the visit of U Wunna Haung Lwin, the minister of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar, to India in June, 2015. In August 2016, the President of Myanmar, U Htin Kyaw, visited India. In October 2016, the State Counsellor of Myanmar, Aun San Suu Kyi, paid a state visit to India. She participated in the BRICS–BIMSTEC¹ outreach Summit in Goa on 16th October, 2016. During her visit, India affirmed its commitment to support the economic and social development of Myanmar. India has decided to support cooperation in identified areas.



Both sides identified new areas of cooperation which include construction of LPG terminals, railway cooperation and petroleum cooperation. The two sides decided to finalise a proposal for the establishment of varietal development and seed production centre on pulses. India has decided to support a pilot project on LED based lighting. In Myanmar, new areas of cooperation identified are police training and cyber security. India will now also provide training to diplomats of Myanmar and assist in diplomacy training. Multiple MoUs to establish insurance institutes, power sectors and undertake banking supervision, were signed.

ANALYSIS OF INDIAN PM'S VISIT TO MYANMAR

On 11th November 2014, the India PM visited Myanmar to take part in 12th India–ASEAN Summit where he unveiled the Act East Policy. A lot of measures to boost connectivity with Myanmar were announced. In 2016, a motor vehicle agreement was concluded for Thailand–Myanmar–India roadways. Trial runs have been undertaken from Imphal to Mandalay and on the Myanmar–Bangkok road. As of November 2016, the agreement to establish connectivity from Moreh to Mae Sot was due to be signed.



Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project

The detailed project report was prepared in 2003 and a framework was agreed upon in 2008. The project is expected to be operational for shipment from 2017. It was conceived as an idea to have multi modal transit transport for shipments from ports on India's east coast and North East through Myanmar. The project aimed to develop North East economy and integrate India's North East to South East Asia. Through this, North East would be open to sea connectivity. It is a combination of rail, road and river transport. In October 2015, the cabinet approved `2400 cores for the project. There are no land acquisition issues or environmental concerns, but security threats from insurgents and cost overrun are recurring issues. It will connect Kolkata to Sittwe by sea; from Sittwe to Paletwa by river transport and then a highway to Zorinpuri, Mizoram. The project will boost employment and will lower the food prices in the region but the intrusion into the region will create a threat to local heritage.

Analysis of Htin Kyaw's visit to India, August, 2016

During his visit, he went to both Agra and Bodh Gaya. India expressed interest to support the experience of diacritic institutions with Myanmar. There were discussions on border

and maritime security and discussions were also undertaken on important issues like agriculture, connectivity and industrial training. India has committed to upgrade the Yangon Children's Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital and provide modern medical equipments. India will help Myanmar in IT skills and vocational training. Myanmar has agreed to give license to the State Bank of India to expand operations in their country. Myanmar agreed to supply pulses to India through a special contract. Immigration facilities to promote people contacts at Tamu–Moreh and Rhi–Zowk hathar border were agreed upon. An MoU was signed concerning bridge construction, the Kalewa–Yagyi road, renewable energy and traditional medicines.

ANALYSIS OF THE PM VISIT TO MYANMAR—2017

The Indian PM visited Myanmar in September 2017. During the visit, the PM has committed support for overall development of Myanmar in multiple projects as below:-

1. Financial assistance for Kalaldan project.
2. Repair of Tamu-Kalewa road
3. Construction of Kalewa- Yargyi corridor.
4. Construction of Rhi-Tiddim road.

The Indian PM also announced various capacity building initiatives ranging from English language skill, industrial skill training and a program for cultural interaction. India announced developmental assistance for Rakhine State Development Program. In all, 11 MoU's were concluded which included agreements on India providing police training, IT training, skill training and health cooperation. India also signed a Maritime Security Agreement with Myanmar. Under the agreement, India and Myanmar will be sharing data related to non classified merchant ships with each other. India will also provide coastal surveillance system to Myanmar.

In September 2017, the Rohingya extremist group Harakah-al-Yaqin (HaY) started targeting military posts in the Rakhine state in Myanmar. According to R&AW, ISI of Pakistan has penetrated into the cadres of the HaY and uses these groups to create unrest in the region. R&AW has found that ISI used the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and HaY to mastermind the recent attacks on military posts in the Rakhine state st prior to the visit of Indian PM to Myanmar. The leader of ARSA is Hafiz Tohar who is an asset of the ISI. Tohar has created Aqa Mul Mujahedeen (AMM) which has been trained by the Lashkar group. Brigadier Ashfaq and Major Salamat of ISI been training ARSA and HaY in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. During the Indian PM visit to Myanmar, the two sides signed an Anti-Terror Pact and decided to broaden the bilateral security partnership. As the HaY and ARSA unleashed violence, Myanmar army retaliated by carrying out counter operations. These counter operations by the army of Myanmar led to exodus of the Rohingya Muslims to Bangladesh. There are around 10 Lakh Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and around 40,000 in India. The Indian government has decided to deport the Rohingya Muslims as they have immigrated to India illegally. These illegal immigrants, living majorly in Kashmir, are susceptible to recruitment by terrorist groups and thus constitute a security threat to India. The influx of Rohingya Muslims to India also disturbs the demographic pattern and social, political and cultural stability of the society. India is not a signatory to 1957 UN Refugee Convention and nor to the 1967 Protocol, but, the Indian government on case to case basis accepts asylum in India. If Indian government

permits a seeker with asylum in India, the person in concern is provided with a Long Term Visa (LTV). The LTV is renewed annually and allows a holder to work in private sector in India along with access to education and basic banking services. UN has urged India to follow customary law while trying to deport Rohingya. As in Myanmar, Rohingya Muslims are stateless, under the customary law, the principle of non-refoulement is applied where refugees cannot be returned forcibly to a place where there is a threat to their life or freedom. The Indian government has legal right to deport immigrants who may pose a security threat. Though selective targeting of Rohingya Muslims may be morally incorrect but places no legal limitations on the government.

FINAL ANALYSIS

Myanmar is the only South East Asian state bordering India. Historically, both were part of the colonial empire established by the British. From the Indian Foreign policy makers' point of view, Myanmar is a near-neighbour whom India considers to be well within its area of interest. India has been quite uncomfortable with rising Chinese forays into Myanmar. India certainly wants to delimit Chinese assertion in Myanmar as it constitutes Myanmar to be region of the Indian sphere of influence. India asserts this because it supported democracy in Myanmar since the 1980s. However, to lay down a foundation for political reform, India, since the beginning of 21st century, had to support the Military Junta. Burmese scholars believe that the reason India became unsuccessful in challenging rising Chinese influence in Myanmar was its support to the Junta. The scholars also believe that when India began to support the Junta, it began to lose goodwill amongst the Burmese population.

At present, India's influence is missing in the two camps of Myanmar—one camp that supports democracy and that which is supported by not only the ethnic minorities of Myanmar but also the USA, Japan and South Korea; while other camp is dominated by China and Tatmadaw or the Myanmar military. Though India has favoured the democracy camp, the views of the reformists hardly match with India. Drug trafficking across the borders is viewed by the reformists as a source of income, but perceived as major threat by India.

India and Burma gained independence simultaneously (within six months of each other), and initially, the two sides developed proximity when India proposed non-alignment. But gradually, as the military began to assume control in Myanmar, the two sides began to drift apart. The drift was aggravated by the issue of the Chettiyyar community in 1988. In 1988, the '8888 revolt' started in Burma. (It began on 8-8-1988 and is hence called 8888). The revolt was led by Aung San Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi fought for democracy and won the election in Myanmar, but the military junta rejected the polls and launched massive crackdown on the activists. India, in 1992, condemned the human rights violations in Myanmar by supporting the UN resolution.

In the 1990s, when the Look East policy was announced, India neglected Myanmar and prioritised engagement with the Asian tigers. In 1998, the Vajpayee government downplayed all support to the reformists, branding it as an international issue that could only be dealt with by Myanmar. It began to offer the arms deals to the Junta, and the support to the Junta continued subsequently by the UPA government. In 2007, in Myanmar, the democratic protests under the Saffron revolution were crack down by the

Junta. In 2010, India hosted Than Shwe for a state visit and offered monetary assistance to Myanmar. In 2011, during the visit of Thein Sein to India, India extended \$500 million line of credit to the country. Whenever a bilateral visit was undertaken, there were fresh talks about connectivity. However, this remained merely rhetorical. Since the British times, owing to logistical difficulties, the Indo–Myanmar region lacked road and rail infrastructure, and supported a tough terrain, inhabited by insurgents on both sides. Since 2011, the coming of Thein Sein government has initiated a policy of global engagement. This will be beneficial for India as the Chinese influence in Myanmar will gradually diminish as Myanmar searches for new friends. India, since 2011, has decided to take this new opportunity to rebuild ties. India is now establishing physical connectivity as part of its Act East policy. India now recognises that Myanmar is a bridge to South East Asia.



Since 2011, after the coming of Thein Sein to power, the West has improved its relationship with Myanmar. However, the Chinese continued to enhance their strategic presence in Myanmar and use its presence to increase their reach in the Indian Ocean. However by early 2000s, Myanmar realised that its engagement with China had become so deep that it had reached a dangerous level and Myanmar needed to break the ice with the West. Since the coming of Thein Sein, Myanmar began to emerge as new darling of the western states. As Myanmar decided to lessen its dependence on China, it began to open up to Singapore, India, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia.

The USA too has opened up to Myanmar, as it knows that a deeper engagement with Myanmar favours USA in its attempt to keep the rise of China in check. The Chinese, on the other hand, began to support the United DWA state army (UWSA). The UWSA has been getting arms and ammunition from China to fight the Myanmar government. The future depends on how Myanmar and the USA shall evolve and strengthen their relationship and whether USA will provide military and defence supplies to Myanmar to counter China. After the 1962 Sino–India conflict, the Chinese have supported Mizo and Naga rebels and has even provided them training to keep India under check. Till the rule of Mao lasted in China, the rebels received direct support from the Chinese state. India has, in 2015, concluded a peace deal with NSCN-IM group. In 2015, India resorted to a surgical strike on the Indian side of the Indo–Myanmar border and targeted the insurgent NSCN-K group. As things started to normalise between India and Myanmar, India decided to augment connectivity with Myanmar. The India–Myanmar–Thailand Highway shall be the next game changer.

¹. BRICS countries consist of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. BIMSTEC is the acronym used for the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.