

# India - Myanmar Political Relations from the Independence of India to the Present Time

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**Abstract – India and Myanmar are such countries which have been fast neighbors for a long time. India shares about 1643 km border with its north-eastern neighbor Myanmar. This very long border touches four out of seven north east states of India. Myanmar is thought to be a natural "Land Bridge" between South and Southeast Asian regions. India and Myanmar are closer to each other Physically, Culturally and historically but not politically. The basic thrust of the paper is in exploring progress on the political front having the launch of Look East Policy by India as a starting point and what it has in store for the future of these countries.**

**Keywords : Principal of Non-Interference, Non-traditional areas of security, Parliamentary Delegation, Democratic Reform Movements, IMRF, ULFA, NSCN, UNLF, PDF.**

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## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL AFFINITY:

India and Myanmar, two fast neighbors, share deep historical and cultural links. Both countries were under British India during the colonial period. After three Anglo-Burmese wars in the nineteenth century (1824-26, 1852-53 and 1885-86) the British integrated the whole Burmese territory to their empire in India and ruled the Burma province directly from Calcutta (and New Delhi after 1911).[1] After the independence of the India (1947) and Burma (1948), a close relationship that culminated in the signing of the 1951 Treaty of Friendship is cultivated. The first Prime Minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru and Myanmar's Prime U Nu shared common view on many issues regarding the conduct of international politics and pioneered the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). But the advent of military rule in Burma in 1962 with General Ne Win. General Ne Win's period (1962-1988) saw up's and downs in the bilateral relations. In 1967 India and Myanmar signed the Land Boundary Agreement.[2] But General Ne Win's Coup, changed diplomatic trend as the country opted for a self-isolation that lasted for almost three decades. The Burmese regime cut the links with all its neighbors, including India. As a matter of fact, the eastern border of India has long been the less dealt with by Indian strategists obsessed by the security on its western front against Pakistan. India has long ignored its Burmese neighbor. But the dramatic uprising that took place in Burma in 1988 and the arrival of a new junta in Rangoon through another coup d' etat in September 1988 made the Indian Government refocus its Burmese policy. India was starting new diplomatic era with the launch of new "Look East Policy" aimed at getting closer to the booming South-East Asia. Look

East Policy was fully in keeping with its liberal economic 'swing' in 1991. The rapprochement with the high-growth South East Asian countries was aimed at. It was enabling India to take advantage of this region's economic resources and facilitate its own growth.

In the main time, South-East Asia starts with Myanmar geographically. The need of the hour was that India would have thus to include this country in its relations with all other Asian countries instead of continuing to ignore it diplomatically, so as not to alienate its first potential port of entry to Asia. Gradually the inclusion of Myanmar in India's Eastern policy was seen as logical.[3]

So far as border of the present countries is concerned, India shares about 1643 Km border with its North-Eastern neighbor Myanmar. This border touches four out of seven north east states of India. Myanmar is considered a natural "Land Bridge" between South and Southeast Asian regions.[4] India and Myanmar are closer to each other Physically Culturally and historically but not politically. The basic essence of the paper is in exploring progress on the political front having the launch of Look East Policy by India as a starting point.[5]

In the beginning India was deeply disturbed by Myanmar's unfriendly gestures as a response to the looming threat from China and the dire security scenario in the sensitive North Eastern states. India "Walking up from its deep policy slumber" spewed its Myanmar policy to "unabashedly court" the military government in Yangon. Giving effect to the new

policy vis-a-vis yangon which came to be called as "constructive engagement" the sum essence of which was that India will extend moral support to Suu Kyi but "will not actively seek to help her cause following new Delhi's doctrine of non-interference in other countries internal affairs."

The government of India invited U Ba Swe Vice Foreign Minister, Government of Myanmar to visit India. But as early as 1992, U Ba Swe visited India in August 1992. His visit was reciprocated by two visits of India's Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit in March and August 1993. The one great result of these visits was that both sides agreed to cooperate in managing their common border against to drug trafficking, smuggling and insurgency.[6] It was only a year later in January 1994, was signed in New Delhi the first Border Trade Agreement between India and Myanmar. Implemented in April 1995, with the opening of a cross border point between Moreh (Manipur, India) and Tamu (Sagaing Division, Myanmar). This compromise enhanced and made official the bilateral border trade between two countries. In May 1994, the Chief of Staff of the India Army, General B.C. Joshi, visited Myanmar to meet his counterpart there, as well as the Chief of the Powerful Military Intelligence, Lt. General Khin Nyunt, who on his part visited New Delhi, for the first the same year.

But a major retreat took place in May 1955 when India voluntarily took one step back as far as its rapprochement with the Burmese Generals were concerned by indirectly reaffirming its support to the democratic reform movements in Myanmar. The Nehru Committee (which interestingly was chaired at the time by K.R. Narayan) conferred the prestigious Jawahar Lal Nehru Award for International understanding to Aung San Suu Kyi infuriating thus the Burmese government following the lines of the moralistic and idealist perspective of India diplomacy. Barely two months after she was awarded this prize, in July 1995, Myanmar suspended the Insurgency cooperation. As a result, Suu Kyi was released by the military Junta and could therefore move about freely. India expressed great pleasure at her release and what's more it considered itself almost fully accountable for this decision. In 1996, India declared the "Movement for democracy in Myanmar" an "Internal matter". The entry of Myanmar into the ASEAN club in 1997, the integration of Yangon in India's Look East Policy was quiet logical. In the opinion of Indian Officials, "Myanmar could be the first step India need to enter. South-East Asia have access to strategic foothold there". In the spirit of this Look-East Policy several institutional projects were set up in the region, with Myanmar being the geographical node of them the BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand-Economic Cooperation) the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and the Kunming Initiative. India chose to engage Myanmar and get closer to it through their regional organizations.

The nuclear tests of India in May 1998 were condemned all over the world. Sanctions were imposed on India by the U.S.A., EU and Japan. When the international community was reacting strongly against India, Myanmar chose not to comment. On may 6, 2002 the Indian government greeted the announcement of lifting restrictions on National League for Democracy Aung San Suu Kyi and reiterated that India consistently advocated reconciliation in Myanmar and more towards restoration of democracy. But the official statement also pronounced that "India will continue its policy of engagement and cooperation with Myanmar". This "constructive engagement policy" defined by India and the political thrust in Indo-Myanmarese relations were indeed confirmed by the first India ASEAN summit (2002).[7] Since then, several top level visits have taken place. Notable among them being those of senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in October 2004. The Vice President of India Bhairon Singh Shekhawat visited Myanmar in November, 2003 from India's side.

The trade relations became more profound when the Myanmarese Foreign Minister U Win Aung to pay a size day official visit to India and this was the first time that a Myanmarese Foreign Minister made an independent of the economic relation was on the agenda, especially energy cooperation and cross-border trade. Today, India is one of the leading countries which choose to engage the Junta rather than isolate it "Non interference in internal affairs" is now the keynote of the close India - Myanmar interaction. Many political thinkers observe that the new India approach is well founded given Myanmar's strategic importance to India. The growing frequency in top level visit between the two neighboring countries reached a high point with the visit to India of Senior General and Chairman of SPDC (State Peace and Development Council). Than Shwe from 25 to 29 October 2004. That Myanmar's No.1 was visiting India after twenty-five years marked the significance of the visit. The three agreements signed during the visit also showed the diversity of bilateral relationship. The agreement on cooperation in non-traditional areas of security called for close co-ordination and cooperation in dealing with insurgency, drug trafficking and organized crime. For India, in its northeast region, the issue of Indian insurgents operating from camps inside the Myanmar boundary was serious and co-operation of the Myanmar military to deal with this menace was vital. Significantly, soon after the visit of Than Shwe, the Myanmar armed forces started a series of attacks against the India insurgent group within Myanmar. Taking further notice of India's concern, Yangon has decided to beef up military on its northwest border with India.[8]

In March 2006 president APJ Abdul Kalam's visited Myanmar. This visit was fruitful as several agreements and MoUS were signed during this visit.

Senior General Maung Aye's second visit took place in April 2008. During the visit of Senior General Maung Aye to India, significant agreements were signed, especially the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project. In September 2007 Minister of Petroleum Murli Deora signed an agreement on energy exploration. Myanmar's military ruler General Than Shwe visited India in the last week of July 2010. This was a very important visit for both countries. He was welcomed with a ceremonial reception at Rashtrapati Bhawan in New Delhi on July 26, 2010. During his visit the General visited the Tata Motors plant at Jamshedpur. He also visited Sarnath near Varanasi. It may be recalled that Myanmar Automobile and Diesel Industries, a government of Myanmar enterprise, had inked a turnkey deal with the Tata Motors early last year for providing heavy duty trucks at Myanmar plant. That was the second visit of General than Shwe. President U Thein Sein paid a State visit to India on October 12 to 15-2011. The visit represented the first State visit from Myanmar to India following the swearing of a new Government in Myanmar in March 2011. The then President Thein Sein had a meeting with the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh which was followed by delegation level talks. President Thein Sein was accompanied by Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Hla Htay Win and 11 Union Ministers and 1 Union Deputy Minister and Senior officials. Two documents were signed, namely during the visit, MoU for the up gradation of the Yangon Children's Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital and the Programme of Cooperation in Science & Technology for the period of 2012-15.

The Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) led a high level parliamentary delegation to India from December 11 to 17, 2011. The visit was in response to a joint invitation extended by Shri M. Hamid Ansari, Vice President of India/ Chairman, Rajya Sabha and Smt. Meira Kumar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha. The objective of the visit was to share India's experience in parliamentary practices and procedures with the visiting Myanmar delegation. Myanmar Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin paid an official visit to India from January 22 to 26, 2012. He called on Prime Minister and held bilateral discussions with EAM during the visit. At the same time, he delivered a lecture at the Indian Council for World Affairs on the topic "Myanmar: A Country in Transition to Democracy".

Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh paid a state visit to Myanmar from May 27 to 29 2012. During the visit, several new initiatives were announced and signed 12 MoUs and agreements including extension of a new line of credit (LOC) for US\$500 million to Myanmar, support for setting up an Advance Centre for Agriculture Research and Education in Yezin, a Rice Bio-park in the integrated Demonstration Park in Nay Pyi Taw, and an Information Technology Institute in Mandalay. Apart from it, important agreements such as Air Service Agreement, Establishment of Joint Trade and Investment Forum, MoU on Border Areas

Development, and establishment of Border Haats and Cultural Exchange Programme were also signed.

The External Affairs Minister of India paid an official visit to Myanmar from 14 to 16 December 2012. During the visit, he called on the President and had detailed discussions with Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin. EAM and Vice President Dr. Sai Mauk Kham inaugurated the "International Conference on Buddhist Cultural Heritage" jointly organized by ICCR and Sitagu International Buddhist Academy. EAM also explained the Sarnath Style Buddha Statue donated by GOI to people of Myanmar and installed at the Shwedagon Pagoda and also inaugurated the Photo Exhibition on Buddhist Cultural Heritage organized by Embassy of India at Shwedagon Pagoda premises.

For defense cooperation Raksha Mantri led a high level delegation to Myanmar comprising of Defense Secretary, Vice Chief of Naval Staff and GOC Eastern Command from 21-22 January 2013. During the visit, RM called on President U Thein Sein and had detailed discussions for bilateral cooperation in defence with C-in-C Vice Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and Defense Minister Lt. Gen. Wai Lwin.

The chief issue corresponding to the political relations of India and Myanmar is that, India is a democratic country but on the other side Myanmar has got dictatorship done by army personnel's from a long time. On the other hand, India's foreign policy is based on support for democracy. For this India supported their democratic leaders. In 1995 Indian Government had awarded the Nehru Peace Prize to Aung Sun Suu Kyi, the leader of the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar which affected the political relations of both countries.

India also vehemently criticized the policies of the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) and its successor SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) regimes. This pragmatic step was meant to facilitate the handling of the ethno political problem along the India-Myanmar border and to counter the spread of Chinese influence through the northern border of Myanmar.[9]

The pivotal ethnic groups in Myanmar they were Chin, Shan, Mon, Arakan, Kayah, Kachin and primarily Kare. They were involved in armed separatist movements. Such type of ethnic diversities often cut across international borders and have an adverse impact on regional security. The counter insurgency operations of Myanmar's armed forces have been characteristically harsh, which have led to refugee exodus to India.

Together with the Indo-Myanmar Revolutionary front (IMRF), the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in Manipur, the People's Democratic front (PDF) of Tripura and the United Liberation Front of Asam

(ULFA) operated along the 1700 Km India-Myanmar rather than alienated it. The ethnic group utilizes the north Myanmar corridor to reach China for training and weapons. That also effected the India Myanmar relations.[10]

The enhancing impact of China on Myanmar and the increased presence on Indian ocean has resulted in negative vibes between two countries. Human Right issues are also vital. The army based dictatorship has resulted in Hannibal cruelties towards the citizens of Myanmar, criticism of military by UNO; and international community also affected political relations.

There is another menace i.e. narcotics that calls for a joint operation between India and Myanmar. Opium production in the 'golden Triangle' has registered a phenomenal increase following the curbs on drugs and opium production in Afghanistan by the Taliban regime. Increased drug trafficking has led to a rise in local consumption in north-east India. It is well known that all over the world drug trafficking, insurgent activity, and arms proliferation have a symbiotic relationship. The India-Myanmar border region has also become an arms bazaar for the criminal underworld such as the Nepalese Maoists, People's War Group (PWG) and ULFA. This is also affect also India-Myanmar relations.

In order to resolve these problems, General Than Shwe signed a memorandum of understanding with India for cooperation in non-traditional security issues such as against terrorism, arms smuggling, money laundering, drug trafficking, international economic violations and cyber crime. Exchange of enforcement agencies and joint research are envisaged as stronger cultural ties between the two countries. General Than Shwe said during his visit that "his country will not allow its soil to be used by North East insurgents against Indian interests." [11]

India is the largest market for Burmese exports, buying about US\$ 220 million worth of goods in 2000; India's exports to Myanmar stood at US\$75.36 million. India is Burma's 4th largest trading partner after Thailand, China and Singapore, and second largest export market after Thailand, absorbing 25 percent of its total exports. India is also the seventh most important source of Burma's imports. The governments of India and Myanmar had set a target of achieving \$1 billion and bilateral trade reached USD 1.3 billion by 2017. The Indian government has worked to extend air, land and sea routes to strengthen trade links with Myanmar and establish a gas pipeline. While the involvement of India's private sector has been low and growing at a slow pace, both governments are proceeding to enhance cooperation in agriculture, telecommunications, information technology, steel, oil, natural gas, hydrocarbons and food processing. The bilateral border trade agreement of 1994 provides for border trade to be carried out from three designated

border points, one each in Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland.

India and Myanmar have agreed to a 4-lane, 3200 km triangular highway connecting India, Myanmar and Thailand. The route, which is expected to have completed during 2016, runs from India's northeastern states into Myanmar, where over 1,600 km of roads were 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.

The first phase connecting Guwahati to Mandalay is set to complete by 2016. This will eventually be extended to Cambodia and Vietnam under Mekong-Ganga Cooperation within the wider framework of Asian Highway Network. This is aimed at creating a new economic zone ranging from Kolkata on the Bay of Bengal to Ho Chi Minh City on the South China Sea. As of Nov 2014, this project is likely to be completed and fully operational by 2016.

The Kaladan amulti-Model 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 LoshioLashio 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. During a 2017 visit to Nay Pyi Taw, Prime Minister Modi announced that India would offer gratis/no-cost visas to all Myanmar citizens visiting India. This is a good example of how good India's relations with Myanmar is.

India was hesitant in reacting to the 2007 Burmese anti-government protests that had drawn overwhelming international condemnation. India also declared that it had no intention of interfering in Burma's internal affairs and that the Burmese people would have to achieve democracy by themselves as it respects the sovereignty of Myanmar. This low-key response has been widely criticised both within India and abroad as weakening India's credentials as a leading democratic nation. In contrast to much of the international community, Prime Minister Modi declined to criticize Suu Kyi's handling of the 2016–17 Northern Rakhine State clashes or Myanmar's government's treatment of its Rohingya people.

India also announced plans to deport its Rohingya refugee population. Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijju described the refugees as "illegal immigrants", echoing the Myanmar government position. Although the Rohingya have fought deportation in the Indian courts (partly on humanitarian grounds), in September 2017 the Indian government responded that India did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention and most Rohingya

arrived in India before the August 2017 violence. Some Indian media have reported that the country's intelligence agencies suspect militant Royhinga leaders of conspiring with Pakistani terrorists and planning to incite violence in India.

## CONCLUSION:

With all the aforementioned opinions, we can say that there was stability in the relation between two countries in middle 90 decade but after 2000 bond between two got more stronger, mainly in 2004, after the visit of military ruler Than Shwe of Myanmar. After this in July 2010, he visited again and the trust between two countries established. And after the successful election on 7 November 2010, a bond of trust between the two has shown the ray of hope and bright future.

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