

Engaging with Myanmar: Critical Reflection on India's Foreign Policy

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Abstract: *The period from 1948 in which Myanmar got independence up to 1980s saw ups and downs in India-Myanmar bilateral relations. But from 1990s onwards India has been pursuing a new Myanmar Policy in order to meet its emerging geo-political-economic and strategic interests in the region. This article shows the expansion and diversification of their bilateral ties and finally assesses India's foreign policy toward Myanmar and argues that it is imperative for both the countries to ensure the sustenance of the hard earned mutually benefited relationship.*

Keywords: *India, Multifaceted engagement with Myanmar, Criticism, Necessity.*

I

India and Myanmar are close partners, bound up with geography and history. These bonds have been deepened and strengthened by cultural and spiritual ties for almost two millennia. Not only that, an ethnic closeness is also seen between the various ethnic groups in Myanmar and inhabitants of north-east India. And all these led to the movement of people and trade, creating a continuum of exchanges.

In modern times, after three Anglo-Burmese Wars(1824-26, 1852-53 and 1885-86), the British occupied the whole territory and thus Myanmar became the largest province of British India. So it was far more deeply

influenced by India, until its formal separation in 1937.¹ Moreover the struggle for India's independence took place at the same time as the struggle for Myanmar's independence. During this period the leaders of both countries shared ideas and thoughts on the freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi himself visited Myanmar several times and wrote in his autobiography how impressed he was by the freedom and energy of Myanmar women. Other great leaders of India such as Tilak and Subhas Bose were held for long times in jails in Myanmar. The Indian National Army also received a lot of support from the people of Myanmar. Likewise, the thought and action of Gandhi provided with ideas and inspirations to Myanmar's nationalist leaders like U Ottama and U Chit-Hlaing and nationalist parties also, specifically 'General Council of Burmese Associations'(GCBA)². They also drew their inspirations from Netaji Subhas Bose and the Indian National Army. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru admired General Aung San and pledged India's full support to Myanmar's freedom.

At last after a long British rule the independent 'Union of Burma'³ emerged on 4th January 1948. On that very day Nehru congratulated Burma and said:

"As in the past, so in the future, the people of India will stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Burma, and whether we have to share a good fortune or ill fortune, we shall share it together. This is a great and solemn day not only for Burma, but for India, and for the whole of Asia."⁴

When the new born independent country fell into trouble because of regional insurgencies, India provided considerable support to Myanmar in order to restrain insurgent activities. Thus in the early years following independence the two countries cultivated a close relationship that culminated in the signing of two kinds of compromises respectively:(i) a five year 'Treaty of Peace & Friendship' on 7th July 1951 and (ii) a 'Trade Agreement' later in the same year. The two premiers of India and Myanmar respectively Nehru and U Nu shared common views on many issues regarding the conduct of international politics such as Indonesian independence, Korean War etc. and pioneered the Non-Aligned Movement.⁵

But the advent of a military rule in Myanmar in 1962, with General Ne Win's coup, changed this diplomatic trend and this period (1962-1988) saw ups and downs in the bilateral relations. High level official visits continued and the two countries signed the Land Boundary Agreement(1967) and the Maritime Boundary Agreement(1986). Simultaneously Myanmar was sympathetic to India's stand on the Bangladesh issue and it was one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh, though for the sake of its own interests. All of these have been considered to be a positive step in improving bilateral relations. Be that as it may, during the same period, Ne Win's 'xenophobic policy'⁶ and nationalization programme of the 1960s, which was called 'Burmese way to Socialism'⁷ resulted in the eviction of thousands of people of Indian origin from Myanmar, causing frictions in the relationship. Moreover, General Ne Win's idea of cocooning Myanmar from the rest of the world further distanced India from its northeast neighbour.

Yet a major breakthrough occurred in 1987 when the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi paid a State visit to Myanmar, but the bilateral relation worsened when this country began to be shaken by a strong popular movement in 1988 after 26 years of military rule and subsequently on 8-8-88 the Tatmadaw (Army) brutally suppressed the movement for the restoration of democracy. Now the Indian Government refocused its Myanmar-Policy and dropped its neglected attitude towards it. New Delhi strongly denounced the bloody repression and stood against the new military junta(SLORC)⁸ that seized power on 18th September, 1988. In this period many students from Myanmar took refuge in Delhi and other parts of the country. A large campaign condemning the military activities in Myanmar was also launched by the state-controlled All India Radio.⁹ Together with the BBC, All India Radio had also a huge audience in Myanmar and enjoyed popularity among the regime's critics.¹⁰ Two years later, after the elections won by the National League for Democracy of Aung San Suu Kyi in May 1990, the Burmese military junta again opted for the violent alternative by refusing to implement the election-result and arresting most of the Members of Parliament newly elected. In those days, besides the official diplomatic positions condemning the junta and demanding a return to democracy, New Delhi did its best to open support to the pro-democracy movements. In this

way India wanted to prove its commitment to the restoration of democracy in Myanmar by following this idealist diplomacy guided by the Nehruvian principles.

However due to changing realities, India-Myanmar relations have been a major shift from 1990s onwards. India's policy makers have many reasons to focus on the strategic and economic benefits that Myanmar can offer India. Myanmar is a Southeast Asian country with which India shares a long international and maritime border. And geographically, the northern borders of Myanmar form a very crucial junction with Bangladesh, China and the sensitive north-eastern frontiers of India. India now wants assistance from Myanmar in its attempts to suppress military Naga and other ethnic insurgents in its northeast which used Myanmar's northwest as a refuge. Not only that Myanmar is an important country on the rim of the Bay of Bengal and its southeast coast is close enough to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India for developments in the area to affect India's economic and security interests in the Bay of Bengal. Further in the Indian context Southeast Asia begins with Myanmar and for this reason, New Delhi has to include its eastern neighbor in the emerging economic strategy. In addition, India wants access to Myanmar's growing reserves of natural resources. Another and may be the most sensitive reason, that can justify the realist policy of India is the "Chinese Threat". Since the International world has opted for an almost complete isolation of the country, Myanmar has desperately been looking for an ally, at least an economic partner. Taking advantage of the diplomatic and economic vacuum in Myanmar, China has built up a "Burmese strategy" thereby gaining a foothold in that country, much to the chagrin of India.¹¹ In this context in the early 1990s, the Congress Government led by P.V.Narasimha Rao, had to reassess its Myanmar policy and formulate the "Look East" policy, which constituted a fundamental shift in India's foreign policy.

On the other hand military junta's India policy has been largely based on its desire to diversify its external engagement. As an indication of this new foreign policy orientation, it rejoined the Non-Aligned Movement in September 1992. Because Myanmar was apprehensive about the possibility

of western sanctions over the violation of human rights it decided to relax its isolationist stance in the late 1990s.¹² It started by joining the region's most important grouping 'Association of Southeast Asian Nations'(ASEAN) in 1997 and other sub-regional groupings, such as the 'Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation' in December 1997, 'Mekong-Ganga Cooperation' in 2000 and the Asia-Europe Meeting(ASEM) summit process in 2004 and also applied for joining the 'South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation'(SAARC) in 2008.¹³ All these occurred when Myanmar was growing increasingly uncomfortable with its heavy dependence on China, which prompted military junta to reach out to other countries and in their eyes India was seen as a potential counterweight to China. Moreover, Myanmar's military government believed that its improving relation with India would boost its "international image and legitimacy".¹⁴

Now it is seen that New Delhi officially agreed not to interfere in the internal affairs of Myanmar and vice versa. India then considered Aung San Suu Kyi Issue as an internal affair of Myanmar. Not only that India was slow and hesitant in reacting to the 2007 Burmese anti-government protests that had drawn overwhelming international condemnation.¹⁵ In the aftermath of the 2007 uprising, Myanmar also strengthened its ties with its neighbours, particularly with India to counter the West's pressure. Meanwhile India's nuclear tests were conducted in May 1998. After that economic sanctions were imposed on India and the international community was strongly against India. But Myanmar chose not to comment.¹⁶

II

Political Cooperation

In this background in 1998, when Vajpayee was the Prime Minister of India, bilateral relations were given a new momentum. The first high-profile official visit was that of the Senior General Maung Aye, the Deputy Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council(SPDC) to India in January 2000. Since then, several top level visits have taken place, notably the visit of Than Shwe, Chairman of the SPDC in October 2004, during which Myanmar gave assurance to India that it would not 'allow its soil to be used by North

East insurgents against Indian interests¹⁷ and also expressed its support to India's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.¹⁸ The close and friendly relations between India and Myanmar have been more strengthened through the State visit of the President of Myanmar, accompanied by a number of cabinet ministers in October 2011. From the Indian side, Vice President Bhairon Singh Sekhawat visited Myanmar in November 2003. His visit was followed by that of President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in March 2006. And in the recent time Manomohan Singh's three-day state visit from May 27 to 29 in 2012, the first ever trip to Myanmar by an Indian prime minister in 25 years, was marked as a historic milestone in India-Myanmar ties. Apart from these, ministers and secretaries from both sides have exchanged visits periodically in the recent years. During these visits a number of agreements and MoUs were signed and meetings on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interests were held.

Economic Cooperation: Bilateral Trade

Geographical proximity between these two neighbours has been translated into a long-standing economic and commercial relation across the land and sea routes alike. Bilateral trade has been rapidly growing in the recent years. According to the Indian Commerce Ministry figures, the trade volume was US \$12.4 million in 1980-81, but it has been increasing steadily since the late 1990s. It was US \$ 994.45 million in 2007-08, which was 80 percent more than the bilateral trade volume in the period 1980-81. According to the latest figures available it reached US \$ 1870.20 million in 2011-12, growing by 39.75 percent from the previous year. Out of total trade between the two countries, India's export to Myanmar is just US \$ 545.38 million as against the import figure of US \$ 1,324.82 million.¹⁹ At the fourth meeting of 'Joint Trade Commission', which was held on the 28th September in 2011 between the two foreign ministers of the two countries respectively Anand Sharma and U. Win Myint, both countries set a target of doubling bilateral trade to US \$3 billion by 2015.²⁰ India is now Myanmar's 5th largest trading partner after Thailand, China, Hong Kong and Singapore. Not only that, India is the 7th most important source of that country's imports and also 4th largest export destination for Myanmar.²¹ Buffalo meat and pharmaceuticals accounted for 45% of India's total export to Myanmar.

Other major items that Myanmar imports from India are iron, steel, cement, machinery, mechanical appliances and their parts. On the other side, two items - pulses and wood products accounted for 97.5% of Myanmar's total exports to India.²² In fact the balance of trade has always been in favour of Myanmar and it is true that the total volume of trade can increase further if Indian businessmen are to invest more in Myanmar.

Border Trade

After the signing of the border trade agreement in 1994, two such border points - Moreh-Tamu in April 1995 and Zowkhatar-Rhi on 30 January, 2004 - opened. During the 3rd India-Myanmar Joint Trade Committee meeting held in October 2008, the two countries agreed to convert the existing border trade at Moreh in Manipur and Zowkhatar in Mizoram into normal trade and to expand the tradable list from the existing 22 items to 40 items.²³ Later on during the 4th meeting of Joint Trade Commission both the countries stressed the need for working on two additional border trade points - Pangsau Pass in Arunachal Pradesh and Avangkhang in Nagaland. Taking into account the needs of communities residing near the border, India and Myanmar have decided to set up border haats along the border and the MoU has been signed for this purpose.²⁴ Yet it is true that the volume of border trade i.e. US \$ 12.8 mn(2010-11)²⁵ has not been encouraging and that India's share among Myanmar's border trade partners is the lowest. One reason behind this factor is that Indian products are sparse in local Myanmar-markets because they are unable to compete with cheap Chinese and Thai goods. In this respect, Myanmar-India border trade cannot be expected to be a foundation for large growth in bilateral trade and investment.

Agricultural Cooperation

The two countries have agreed to enhance cooperation in agriculture. The President of Myanmar has thanked India for the supply of agricultural machinery that had been gifted to Myanmar under the US \$10 million grant assistance from India.²⁶ Under the MoU signed during the State visit of Manomohan Singh to Myanmar, the two countries decided to establish the Advanced Centre for Agricultural Research and Education as a Centre for Excellence, which would focus on crops of interest including rice, pulses

and oilseeds and promote overall food security. Furthermore, India is going to set up a Rice Bio Park within the Department of Agricultural Research, Yezin in Nay Pyi Taw in order to demonstrate available techniques of sustainable rice biomass utilization. In this context, the President of Myanmar has thanked the Indian Prime Minister for India's support to the construction of a modern cyclone-proof rice silo within the Model Integrated Farm at Nay Pyi Taw and has given importance to the fact that all of these institutions can play a vital role in reviving the country's agricultural sector, on which over 70% of the population is dependant.²⁷

Banking Sector

The establishment of a representative office of the United Bank of India in Yangon is the first step in facilitating business-friendly banking transactions between the two countries. In this sector, Myanmar has welcomed the proposals for the training of its officials by Indian banks and for cooperation in the Agriculture Banking sector. Considering the vast potential for promoting trade between India and Myanmar, both countries have agreed that the Reserve Bank of India would sign an MoU with the Central Bank of Myanmar on currency arrangements between them. Further, India and Myanmar have emphasized sharing of banking experiences and technical know-how from State Bank of India or any other bank mutually agreed.²⁸

Kaladan Multi Modal Project

The Agreement and Protocols of 2008 for the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit and Transport Project between New Delhi and Nay Pyi Taw have become a milestone in their mutually beneficial cross-border cooperation. This Project envisages a direct trade corridor between Indian Ports on the eastern seaboard and Sittwe Port in Myanmar and then through riverine transport and by road to Mizoram, thereby providing an alternate route for transport of goods to northeast India. The Union Minister of Commerce, Industry and Textiles Shri Anand Sharma said that the construction of the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project by 2013 would completely transform the trade between north-east India and the rest of the world.²⁹ And through this project, India not has gained an important foothold in Southeast Asia. It has been a concrete step which will give a push to its much publicized "Look East" policy.

Connectivity

Developing connectivity with Myanmar and thence extending trading activities to southeast Asia through the northeast is currently on the agenda of New Delhi. It is noted that almost the same idea was entertained by colonial British rulers of the 19th century, though it had not been materialized for some political and geographical factors.³⁰ However, such factors are not relevant in present times. So India and Myanmar have now emphasized the importance of enhancing connectivity between them. The two countries have welcomed the finalization of the site of the Land Customs Station at Zorinpui in Mizoram following the joint inspection by Indian and Myanmar delegations in April 2012. It is noteworthy that the project will enhance bilateral trade, people-to-people contact and contribute to the development of the people living in the 'land locked' northeastern region of India.³¹ Apart from the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project, India has agreed to cooperate in a number of road building projects such as upgradation and resurfacing of the 160 km. long Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo road, construction and upgradation of the Rhi-Tiddim road etc. Appreciating the importance of people to people contacts as in forging even closer ties, India and Myanmar have agreed on the need for expansion of air connectivity between them. In this context, the signing of the new Air Service agreement (May 2012)³² will transform business and cultural ties between the two countries. Not only that India and Myanmar have agreed to launch a trans-border bus service and also to examine the commencement of ferry services on the Kolkata-Yangon and Chennai-Yangon routes.

Natural Resources: Oil & Gas

Energy security has emerged as one of the important components of New Delhi's foreign policy towards Myanmar, as energy-deficient India is seeking energy resources globally to feed the requirements of its rapidly growing economy.³³ It is noticeable that Myanmar has an abundance of natural gas resources, estimated to be 89.722 TCF or 2.54 trillion cubic-meters reserves of offshore and onshore gas. Further India's known oil reserves in its northeast and the adjacent region of north and western Myanmar belong to the same geological terrain. In this context the energy cooperation was planned as early as 1993, although it did not materialize until 2002 when

two state-controlled Indian firms - Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited and Gas Authority of India Limited - attempted to help exploit natural gas resources in A-1 and A-3 offshore blocks in Sittwe area of Arakan state. A private Indian company 'Essar Oil Ltd' invested for oil exploration in two other Arakanese blocks - one offshore(Block A-2) and the other onshore(Block L) in May 2005.³⁴ Due to Bangladesh's intransigence, in this sector also India faced a major problem of bringing a pipeline from Myanmar to India via Bangladesh³⁵ and now has opted for an alternative route to bypass Bangladesh. There is no doubt that this forthcoming economic programme will strengthen the bilateral relations.

Power Sector

Recognizing the importance of the power sector as a major area of cooperation, India had undertaken the designing and construction work for the Sedawgyi hydroelectric project(25 MW) earlier and then Tamanthi project(1200 MW) was undertaken in 2004. In 2007 India's EXIM Bank signed an agreement to construct the Thathay Chaung hydropower project³⁶ and in 2008 the state-run corporation NHPC signed an MoU with Myanmar for developing hydel projects in the Chindwin River basin of which the 1200 MW Tamanthi multi-purpose project is the first venture.³⁷ Now the two countries have agreed to extend bilateral cooperation to generation of electricity from renewable energy sources, including solar and wind. India's growing interest and Myanmar's need for foreign investment in this sector indicate that power-sector is also a very much potential area of collaboration.

Multilateral Cooperation

Moreover India and Myanmar have been collaborating in multilateral cooperation also. It may be recalled that the idea of a 1360 kilometer trilateral highway from Moreh in India to Mae Sot in Thailand through Myanmar was conceived at the Trilateral Ministerial Meeting on Transport Linkages in Yangon in April 2002. During the India-Myanmar-Thailand Joint Task Force Meeting held in New Delhi on 10-11 September 2012, the three sides agreed to make all efforts to establish Trilateral connectivity by 2016.³⁸ The 3rd Ministerial meeting of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation(MGC) initiative held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on June 20,2003 discussed another

important possibility of a Trans-Asian Railway Link between India and Vietnam, passing through other countries including Myanmar.³⁹ All of these are expected to give India an opportunity to strengthen ties with all the Southeast Asian nations.

Naval & Military Cooperations

One of the important impulses for India to engage Myanmar is the issue of insurgency in northeast. India seeks Myanmar's support to bring the insurgency under control and eventually ensure peace in Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. Not only that both the countries face a number of maritime security challenges i.e. piracy, terrorism, illegal fishing, human smuggling etc. in the Bay of Bengal. During his state-visit to Myanmar in 2012, the Indian Prime Minister also highlighted the issue and said that both India and Myanmar needed to expand their security cooperation that would be vital in order to protect the maritime trade through the opening up sea route between Kolkata and Sittwe.⁴⁰ So in the naval sector, the cooperation is necessary to India for three reasons: gaining rights to berth and refuel in Myanmar ports, conducting joint naval operations and acquiring intelligence on the modern maritime reconnaissance and electronic intelligence system of the Chinese on Great Coco island, with which China can effectively monitor Indian military activities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the missile testing activity in Orissa. On the otherside, for Myanmar, drawing closer to the Indian Navy is the most desirable reason, because that navy clearly dominated the Bay of Bengal.

As early as 1995 India and Myanmar had conducted a joint military operation - Golden Bird - against insurgent groups. However Myanmar abandoned it after the Indian Government had awarded the Nehru Peace Prize to Suu Kyi. Later on enhanced regular exchange of high- ranking bilateral visits by military official from late 90s onwards contributed to a better understanding between the Indian and Burmese navies. Simultaneously from 2003 onwards Myanmar has participated in the biennial MILAN series of multinational naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy.⁴¹ Under technical and economic cooperation pacts, a large number of Myanmar military personnel are also receiving military training in India.⁴²

India has also begun sending arms shipments, which were at first limited primarily to counterinsurgency weaponry, but they soon expanded to include a wide range of equipment such as radar produced by India's state-owned Bharat Electronics, 105 mm light artillery guns and airborne surveillance radios. In this changed scenario during the state-visit of Myanmar's President in 2011, leaders of both the countries issued a joint statement in which they 'underscored the need to strengthen institutional mechanisms for sharing of intelligence to combat the menace of insurgency, arms smuggling and drug trafficking.'⁴³

Culture and People to People Exchanges

India and Myanmar are now trying to popularize their images by entering into a comprehensive Cultural Exchange Programme for the period 2012-2015 in order to promote cultural exchanges between the North Eastern States of India and bordering areas of Myanmar and also cooperation in the fields of art, archaeology, museology, sports, media etc. As the majority of the population of Myanmar are Buddhists and India is the home to many Buddhist centres, the Govt. of India has highlighted their common heritage by gifting Myanmar a 15 feet sand stone replica of the Sarnath Buddha installed in the precincts of the Shwedagon Pagoda. Moreover India has helped Myanmar to organize an International Conference on Buddhist Cultural Heritage in Yangon on December 15, 2012 in order to strengthen the deep and rich cultural bonds that the common link of Buddhism can provide.⁴⁴ Indeed India offers its assistance on the ongoing project for conservation and restoration of the world renowned Ananda Temple at Bagan by experts from the Archaeological Survey of India.⁴⁵ Both the countries agree to enhance the contacts between their think tanks and academic institutions and also urge their scholars to participate actively and exchange views in academic events being held in either country.⁴⁶

India's Assistance in Democratic Transition of Myanmar

Whereas Myanmar is entering a new phase in its nation building, India has welcomed the convening of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, Pyithu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw(National Parliament of Myanmar) and the elected assemblies in all the States and Regions in Myanmar. India is committed to

extending all possible assistance in further strengthening the democratic transition of its northeast neighbour. And it expresses readiness to share its own experience in evolving parliamentary rules, procedures and practices in Myanmar. In this context India was privileged to receive a high level parliamentary delegation led by Thura U. Shwe Mann, elected Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw (the Lower House of the Myanmar Parliament) in December 11-17, 2011.⁴⁷ Besides this training programmes are also being organized for Myanmarese Parliamentarians and Parliamentary staff.⁴⁸

Humanitarian Assistance

Cyclone 'Nargis' devastated Myanmar's Irrawaddy delta on 2 May 2008, killing thousands of people and rendering innumerable homeless. India was at the forefront of the countries to rush to aid Myanmar in this hour of crisis. It launched Operation Sahayata⁴⁹ under which two Indian Air Forces (IAF) and two Indian Navy, named INS Rana and Kripan supplied the first international relief material to help the cyclone-ravaged people of Myanmar. In fact, the relief was being provided without any conditions. Not only that, India provided financial assistance of US \$1 million, which included assistance in the reconstruction of one high school and six primary schools in Tarlay township, the area worst affected by the severe earthquake that struck northeastern part of Myanmar on 24th March 2011.⁵⁰ It was timely and catered to urgent requirements of the people of the affected area. Indeed such depoliticized humanitarian assistance offered by India has helped to improve its image within Myanmar's ruling class and also across the society.

Two high level state-visits during the last two years: Landmarks in the bilateral relations

The exchange of high level visits over the recent years, including the state visits of the President of Myanmar to India in October 2011 and the Prime Minister of India to Myanmar in May 2012, has further strengthened these multifaceted ties. A number of agreements were signed during Then Sein's visit, including a Memorandum of Understanding for the upgradation of the Yangon Children's Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital and also a programme of cooperation in science and technology for the period of 2012

- 2015.⁵¹ Apart from this, during Manmohan Singh's visit, India and Myanmar signed a dozen of pacts on a range of topics related to providing Myanmar with a US \$ 500 million line of credit, to be utilized in the infrastructure development projects in the fields of Agriculture and Irrigation, Rail Transportation, and Electric Power in Myanmar. These have also promoted bilateral cooperation and exchanges in the areas of security, border cooperation, trade and commerce, banking, science & information technology, culture among others⁵². All these would provide opportunity to exchange views on all matters of mutual interest with a view to building a positive momentum in India-Myanmar relations.

III

Now we can say that India is following a realistic policy towards Myanmar after rejecting traditional idealistic policy based on Nehru's views. Today New Delhi has been able to develop a relationship of friendship with the neighbouring military rulers. Realism has been considered a touchstone for India's foreign policy. Whatever the policy India adopts is questioned for different reasons by many, both within and outside the country. For instance, although the American President Barack Obama appreciated the Indian democracy in a speech he delivered in the Parliament of India on 8th November, 2010, he made some satirical comments on it and his aim was, obviously, Myanmar.⁵³ He raised the question why a democratic country like India should retain the relationship of friendship with Myanmar. Surprisingly, it was the same man who said just after a year that there was an improvement in the new democratic structure of Myanmar.⁵⁴ In fact he became the first sitting U.S. president to visit Myanmar on November 9 2012 with the hope of solidifying the stunning changes that have transformed this South-east Asian country and also encouraging additional progress towards a more democratic system.⁵⁵ It was not only Obama but also Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, chairperson of National League for Democracy of Myanmar during her visit to India in November 2012, said that she was

"saddened to feel that we had drawn away from India, or rather that India had drawn away from us, during our difficult days...".⁵⁶

Another person Shashi Tharoor, the Indian Minister of State for Human

Resource Development criticized India's engagement policy with a non-democratic military Myanmar in his recent published book, named 'Pax Indica: India and the World in the Twenty-first Century', though at last he also understood the reasons behind this realistic approach. Indian Nobel-laureate Amartya Sen made the same comment in other words. He severely criticized the Indian policy regarding Myanmar in a seminar held at John Hopkins University on 20 October, 2010 a couple of weeks before Obama had visited India. He is of the view that the friendly relationship of India with Myanmar proves the fact that India has excluded the moral aspect of politics and it is concerned only with 'real politic'. Dr. Sen has not only criticized the contemporary politics of India but also made a comparative study between earlier policy taken by India and the present one. He has put it:

"When our power to influence the world was zero, we spent our time lecturing the world on morality. And when we got a bit of power, although not as much as China, then we completely abdicated that responsibility."⁵⁷

In the context of Prof. Sen's remark, it may be said that morality is certainly essential for politics but moral guardianship should not be tolerated at all in the 21st Century World. Today's India is much concerned with bilateral and multi-lateral relationships with its neighbouring countries. And it is this 'real politic' that has increased India's reliability over the existing 'Indophobia'. Now we may cite Myanmar for instance. First, the Indo-Myanmar bilateral relations remain largely guided by geopolitical considerations and less by ideological values. Myanmar shares with four north-eastern Indian states a 1643 km long land border and with a coastline of 1930 km facing the Indian territories of the Andaman-Nicobar Islands. So, strategically India has to retain a friendly relationship with its north-eastern neighbor, Myanmar by hook or by crook.

Secondly, a serial reports of investigation have reached New Delhi regarding the fact that Indian Insurgent Groups(IIGs) have been using Myanmar territory for safe sanctuary. Manipur based insurgent groups like People's Liberation Army(PLA), United National Liberation Front(UNLF);

Naga insurgent group like National Socialist Council of Nagaland/ Khaplang(NSCN/K) and United Liberation Front of Assam(ULFA) etc. have their terrorist camps in Myanmar Naga Hills(MNH). At the same time, the Indian Government is quite sure of the fact that the military chief of ULFA, Mr. Paresh Barua is living incognito in Myanmar.⁵⁸ It is noted that the Government of India's strategy to counter the north-eastern insurgencies involves their military containment as well as the economic development of these parts of India. And in this context, there is growing realization in New Delhi that the development of north-east and the containment of the insurgencies there are directly related to the success of its 'Look East' policy.⁵⁹ So, diplomacy is a must for politics and it may apply to Myanmar also. It is quite impossible to pacify the continuous restlessness of north-eastern states of India without the help of Myanmar. As a result of regular National Level and Sectoral Level Meetings, Myanmar has shown willingness to act against these militant groups and has started some operations against IIGs in Myanmar territory in recent times.⁶⁰

Thirdly, the smuggling of arms and drugs has been going on in the north-east of India since the British era.⁶¹ And support from Myanmar is badly needed to day to stop this trafficking of drugs from south-east Asia.

Fourthly, Myanmar is perfectly situated to play the role of a natural bridge between the member countries of the ASEAN on the one hand and SAARC on the other. In many ways Myanmar is India's gateway to ASEAN and occupies a central place in its 'Look East' policy. As India's vision of becoming a developed nation by 2020⁶² leads to its further integration with the world economy, the opportunities for ASEAN for mutually beneficial economic cooperation is likely to multiply.⁶³ And the role of Myanmar may be very much significant for developing an economic and a commercial relationship between India and the countries of East and South-East Asia. In spite of this fact, the relation between India and Myanmar in the field of trade and commerce has not developed much.⁶⁴

Fifthly, it is Myanmar which is the easiest way of communication between India and China. Moreover, India is much worried for the important measures taken by Myanmar with the help of China to increase the power

of the navy in Great Coco Island which was presented by Nehru to Myanmar⁶⁵. The reason behind this concern is that this island is only 18 km away from Nicobar Island of India and from here China will be able to supervise not only the military activities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands with the modern technology but also the missile tests in Chandipur of Orissa. In these circumstances, it would be foolish for India to turn away from Myanmar.

Interestingly, a change is being noticeable in the internal affairs of Myanmar. The watershed event is the 2010 General Election that paved the way for democratization process in Myanmar. Military rule has come to an end. Thein Sein has ornamented the chair of President. After a couple of decades, democracy icon Suu Chi has got free from imprisonment. The new rulers of Myanmar have returned the rights of Suu Chi in contesting the parliamentary election and the opposition leadership, lifted certain restrictions on press freedom and parliamentary debate, initiated limited economic reforms, freed some political prisoners and promised to free the rest of them too. And, perhaps most prominently in terms of the international attention it attracted, they have suspended construction of a vast China-sponsored dam on the basis that it was "against the will of the people."⁶⁶ Most of the diplomats are of the view that the activities of these recent years are very important in the history of Myanmar after the military coup fifty years back. In this scenario during Manomohan Singh's state visit, India also makes its balanced stance clear. It is keen to do business with Myanmar and protect its internal security while supporting ongoing democratic reforms.⁶⁷ And it may be said that India will be able to retain this friendly relationship proactively with Myanmar if it continues to follow in the steps of democratic politics.

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