



India-Myanmar Relations

This editorial is based on [“The Road To Naypyidaw”](#) which was published in Indian Express on 24/12/2021. It talks about the significance of Myanmar for India, issues associated with the military coup in Myanmar and the corresponding suggestions.

For Prelims: India-Myanmar Relations, Rohingya Crisis, Significance of Myanmar for India, ASEAN.

For Mains: Significance of Myanmar for India, Coup in Myanmar and its implications for India, Act East policy, India’s “Neighborhood First” policy.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since February, 2021 when the [military seized control of the country in a coup](#) and detained [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) and other leaders of her National League for Democracy (NLD).

Being the world’s largest democracy, India shall feel concerned when democracy in such a proximity is threatened. However, **India also has vital interests in Myanmar that it would like to protect and enhance.**

While the West has made democracy the sole prism of its Myanmar policy, India doesn’t have that luxury.

Like most other immediate neighbours, India has been keen to push back against Myanmar military’s authoritarian tendencies. Its **multiple interests too suggest India to keep its channels of communication open with all stakeholders.**

India and Myanmar

▪ Significance of Myanmar for India:

- Myanmar is **geopolitically significant** to India as it **stands at the center of the India-Southeast Asia** geography.
- Myanmar is the **only Southeast Asian country that shares a land border with northeastern India.**
- Myanmar is the only country that sits at the **intersection of [India’s “Neighborhood First” policy](#) and its [“Act East” policy.](#)**
- As part of India’s [SAGAR Vision](#), India **developed the Sittwe port** in Myanmar’s Rakhine state.
 - The **port is meant to be India’s answer to the Chinese-fronted Kyaukpyu port**, which is intended to cement China’s geostrategic footprint in Rakhine.

▪ India’s Response towards Myanmar: India had been categorical from the very beginning that the gains made by Myanmar over the last decades on the path towards democracy should not be undermined.

- On Suu Kyi’s imprisonment for 2 years (sentenced recently), India also **expressed its deep concerns** as such developments accentuate differences.

- It **suggested all the sides take efforts to advance dialogues** for the sake of their nation's future.
- **Global Response to the Coup:** The **Western countries continue to condemn** and sanction.
 - The **US** has continued to use the **overused threat of ever more sanctions, though to little avail.**
 - Myanmar's army seems to have ceased bothering about the rhetoric from the West.
 - **China is investing and pulling Myanmar into its orbit.**
 - Countries like **Japan, South Korea and most ASEAN members** have all moved forward with **engaging the military junta in Myanmar.**
 - The **Cambodian** Prime Minister has also scheduled to visit Myanmar in January, 2022 and is **likely to set new terms of engagement.**

Challenges for India

- **China's Influence on Northeast Insurgency:** Ever since the coup, China's economic grip over Myanmar has become tighter with a special focus on projects critical for the [China-Myanmar Economic Corridor](#).
 - Moreover, the recent deadly attack on an Assam Rifles convoy near the Myanmar border was a reminder about the **proclivity of China for creating trouble in the Northeast.**
- **Rohingya Issue:** Aung San Suu Kyi's silence on the [Rohingya crisis in Myanmar](#) has only led to the plight of the hapless Rohingya take a backseat. This is **not in India's national security interest in the north-east.**
- **Porous Indo-Myanmar Border:** The 1643-km-long Indo-Myanmar border, which **facilitates cross-border movement of militants, illegal arms and drugs**, is extremely porous.
 - The border runs along hilly and inhospitable terrain and **provides cover to the activities of various Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs).**

Way Forward

- **Acknowledging the Military's Primacy:** The role of Myanmar's army would be key to the unfolding of any democratic transition there, so **India's active engagement would be needed with the military.**
 - Even as India continues to call for a restoration of the democratic process, it shall engage with the army in Myanmar to address Indian concerns as well. **Marginalising the army will only push it into China's arms.**
- **Cultural Diplomacy:** India's **cultural diplomacy through the lens of Buddhism can be leveraged** for strengthening its ties with Myanmar.
 - India's "[Buddhist Circuit](#)" initiative, which seeks to double foreign tourist arrivals by connecting ancient Buddhist heritage sites across different states in India, should resonate with Buddhist-majority Myanmar.
 - This could also **build up India's diplomatic reservoir of goodwill and trust** with Buddhist-majority countries such as Myanmar.
- **Resolving Rohingyas Issue:** The quicker the Rohingya issue is resolved, the easier **it will be for India to manage its relations with Myanmar and Bangladesh**, focusing instead more on bilateral and subregional economic cooperation.

Conclusion

- It is imperative that, like the other immediate neighbours of Myanmar, India too reaches out and shapes its own trajectory in Myanmar.
- The complexity of India's regional security and neighbourhood demands India to adopt a more nuanced position without losing its essential pragmatism in engaging with Myanmar.

Drishti Mains Question

"Myanmar's Military Coup has brought a tightrope walk for India; it has to back democracy in Myanmar while ensuring its security and developmental interests". Discuss.

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