

India-Myanmar relations



Recently BIMSTEC summit was held in India and a BRICS-BIMSTEC outreach was arranged strategically. India also offered 1.75 billion \$ assistance to Myanmar. This time the summit came at a time when China is aggressively engaging with its neighbors and in a way threatening India's dominance in this region.

India and Myanmar have traditionally had much in common, with cultural, historical, ethnic and religious ties, in addition to sharing a long geographical land border and maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal.

In many ways, relations with Myanmar are important, some of them are:

To tackle insurgency in North-East:

Myanmar is central to Northeast India's security as "a large number of cross-border ethnic groups and insurgents from Northeast India have military bases in Myanmar."

Last year, Indian troops reportedly crossed into Myanmar territory to target a National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Khaplang) military camp.

Myanmar has reiterated its resolve not to allow its territory to be used against India.

Act-East policy

Myanmar's importance lies in its geo-strategic location at the tri-junction of east, south-east and south Asia.

Myanmar is strategically important to India as it is the only ASEAN country that shares a border with India.

In geopolitical terms, New Delhi saw Myanmar as a buffer state with China.

Myanmar is a crucial link to Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM)

Energy security

Myanmar is on India's energy security radar on account of its "abundant oil and natural gas" reserves.

Oil and gas companies ONGC Videsh and GAIL are aggressively scouting for more exploratory blocks in Myanmar.

Trade and investment opportunities

The Myanmar economy is moving away from a centrally-planned superstructure to a market-led framework.

Myanmar — like the other CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) — represents a rapidly growing economy with rising consumption, strategic location and access, rich natural resources (oil, gas, teak, copper and gemstones), biodiversity and an industrious workforce with low wages. And it offers significant opportunities for trade in goods and services, investment and project exports.

Bilateral trade rose from US\$ 328 million in 1997-98 to US\$ 2.052 billion in 2015-16. Myanmar is the second largest supplier of beans and pulses to India.

India is presently the ninth largest investor with an approved investment of US\$ 730.649 million by 22 Indian companies. Most of India's investments have been in the oil and gas sector.

India's engineering sector is eyeing the Myanmar market to create a bigger presence for engineering exports.

Economic development of North-East

India is focusing on connectivity to integrate north-east region with Myanmar also with ASEAN

A flagship trilateral highway project along with Thailand was signed . This would help unlock India's north east potential also Kaladan multimodal project should be completed in due time

Regional cooperation

ASEAN: Myanmar is only ASEAN country which shares a land border with India.

BIMSTEC: Myanmar became a member of BIMSTEC in December 1997. Myanmar is a signatory to the BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement.

Mekong Ganga Cooperation: Myanmar is a member of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) since its inception in November 2000.

SAARC: Myanmar was given the status of observer in SAARC in August 2008.

Challenges in bilateral relations

- Rohingya Muslims are migrating to India , many of them are in distress condition , intelligence reports say that they may become future security concern for India
- Stagnated trade and economic engagement with Myanmar is an another issue where china started aggressive investment proposals
- Border management with Myanmar is a difficult task as its ability to guard its borders and to check militant activities near their borders seems feeble
- Given current social conditions reconciliation with all civilian groups may take some time military's role in government may offer some obstacles to civilian government and offer challenges in stable government

Way ahead

India should pursue its act east policy with open mindedness yet aware of china's engagement with this region. Asymmetric cooperation which is central to our act east policy should be reflected in our efforts. India should not averse to diversify its engagement with this Myanmar by bringing Japan and USA