

1. India - Myanmar Ties

Prelims Syllabus: India and Myanmar

Mains Syllabus: GS-II India and its Neighbourhood- Relations.

Context:

- Recently, India and Myanmar exchanged 10 agreements in fields ranging from infrastructure, energy, communication and health. The agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed and exchanged after talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Myanmar President U Win Myint.

Key Facts:

- The focus of many agreements was on development projects under India's assistance, particularly in the conflict-torn Rakhine state.
- The agreements included an MoU on 'Cooperation for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons; Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation and Reintegration of Victims of Trafficking'.
- An agreement regarding Indian Grant Assistance for Implementation of Quick Impact Projects (QIP) under Mekong-Ganga Cooperation mechanism was also signed between the two sides.
- India will carry out more development projects in the Rakhine province of Myanmar, which is considered the homeland of the Rohingya community.

India - Myanmar

- India shares a land border of over 1600 kms with Myanmar as well as a maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal.
- Four north-eastern states, viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, have a boundary with Myanmar.
- Both countries share a heritage of religious, linguistic and ethnic ties.
- Myanmar is the only ASEAN country adjoining India and, therefore, a gateway to SouthEast Asia.
- Myanmar is the only country that sits at the intersection of India's "Neighborhood First" policy and "Act East" policy.
- India is the fifth largest trading partner of Myanmar and the current bilateral trade stands at US \$ 1.7 billion.

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• Trade and Economy -

- ✓ A bilateral Trade Agreement was signed in 1970. Bilateral trade has been growing steadily.
- ✓ India is the fifth largest trading partner of Myanmar and the current bilateral trade stands at US \$ 1.7 billion.
- ✓ Agriculture sector dominates the trade, particularly the supply of beans & pulses to India and timber.
- ✓ India's major exports to Myanmar include sugar, pharmaceuticals.
- ✓ India is presently the eleventh largest investor in Myanmar.
- ✓ Most of India's investments have been in the oil & natural gas sector.

• Transport -

- ✓ Myanmar is potentially an important partner in the energy sector as future offshore gas finds can be piped to India.
- ✓ India is building the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport, to link Kolkata to Sittwe in Myanmar and then from Myanmar's Kaladan river to India's north-east.
- ✓ India, Myanmar, and Thailand are building the Asian Trilateral Highway, which will connect India to ASEAN.
- ✓ As part of its policy for the Indian Ocean called Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), central to which is "port-led development," India developed the Sittwe port in Myanmar's Rakhine state

• Development Cooperation -

- ✓ India has extended around \$2 billion as soft loans.
- ✓ India is extending assistance for border area development in Chin State and the Naga Self-Administered Zone by financing infrastructure.
- ✓ India is also providing assistance in setting up institutions for higher learning and research, namely Myanmar Institute of Information Technology, Advanced Centre for Agricultural Research and Education, etc.
- ✓ India helped in the setting up of infrastructure and socio-economic projects jointly with Myanmar in the Rakhine state to upgrade the livelihood of the people.

• Defence Cooperation -

- ✓ India-Myanmar Bilateral Army Exercise (IMBAX) is aimed at building and promoting closer relations with armies.
- ✓ Myanmar is a key partner in the fight to end insurgency in India's northeast.

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- **Culture -**

- ✓ India and Myanmar share cultural ties in terms of Buddhist heritage and shared history of colonialism.
- ✓ Building on this shared heritage, India is undertaking some key initiatives in the restoration of the Ananda Temple in Bagan and the repair and conservation of a large number of damaged pagodas.

- **Disaster Relief -**

- ✓ India has responded promptly and effectively in rendering assistance following natural calamities in Myanmar like Cyclone Mora (2017), Komen (2015), earthquake in Shan State (2010).
- ✓ India also offered to provide support in capacity building in disaster risk mitigation as well as in strengthening Myanmar's National Disaster Response Mechanism.

- **Indian Diaspora -**

- ✓ There are varying estimates of 1.5-2 million people of Indian origin living and working in various parts of Myanmar, since the times of colonial British rule.

- **Multilateral Partnership -**

- ✓ Myanmar is also a key component of India's strategy to bridge South and South-East Asia through BIMSTEC.
- ✓ Myanmar's membership of ASEAN, BIMSTEC and Mekong Ganga Cooperation has introduced a regional/sub-regional dimension to bilateral relations.
- ✓ Myanmar has been added to SAARC as an observer, which it formally acquired in 2008.

The Chinese Mileage:

- China has been instrumental in shielding Myanmar from international sanctions at the United Nations, in the Rohingya issue.
- China is also Myanmar's biggest trading partner and one of its largest sources of inward investment. China is making its presence in Myanmar through the construction of the Kyaukpyu port, as a part of its Belt and Road Initiative.
- China's increased presence in Myanmar could mean constraints on India that wishes to deepen cooperation with Myanmar.
- With Myanmar seemingly drawing closer to China under pressure from the West, Beijing could attempt to keep the country under its influence like it does in the case of Cambodia and Laos.

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- Chinese influence in the region might result in a huge setback for India whose investment in Myanmar is comparatively less.

Way Forward:

- Because of geopolitical considerations, India will need to perform a balancing act between Muslim-majority Bangladesh and Buddhist-majority Myanmar as far as the Rohingya issue is concerned.
- 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.
- Myanmar is an emerging consumer market of 60 million people who have demands for products ranging from personal care to beverages to smart phones. India should leverage these export opportunities.
- "Pauk Phaw", which literally means 'born together', a historical relation between China and Myanmar, is a case for concern for India.

