



## The dichotomy between upholding Principles and Foreign Policy: A Study of Indo-Myanmar Relations

Devarati Mandal

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, New Alipore College, Kolkata.

Email: [devarati.mandal@gmail.com](mailto:devarati.mandal@gmail.com) | ORCID ID [0009-0007-3122-3089](https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3122-3089)

### Abstract

The tapestry of international relations is often intertwined with principle and pragmatism, where states are compelled to steer through the intricacies of values, interest and strategic imperatives. The central paradox that emerges here is -while India, a steadfast proponent of democratic principles whose foreign policy is firmly rooted on the principle of upholding and strengthening democratic values and aspirations, compelled by security imperatives, has concurrently engaged with Myanmar- a nation governed by an authoritarian regime that has repeatedly nibbed the democratic struggles. Initially, India, cognizant of the imperative of upholding democratic ideals, extended support to the democratic struggle and provided sanctuaries along with financial aid to political activists from Myanmar. But eventually, in the post-cold-war scenario being mindful of its enduring strategic imperatives in the region, India, prudently cultivated relations with the military administrations of Myanmar as well. Discernibly, the overarching supremacy of the army has its bearings over the foreign policy outcome and heavily influenced the trajectories of Indo-Myanmar relations. Therefore, India's relationship with Myanmar has been characterized by its dual nature- over time, oscillating between periods of trust and suspicion. This transformative process is not only indicative of the potential for pragmatic engagement with regimes of varying political orientations but also emphasises the degree of instrumental role that security imperatives can play in shaping the contours of bilateral relations. Thus, the apparent incongruity in the ever-evolving dynamics between democratic ideals and engagement with authoritarian regimes, which is evident in Myanmar, demands further exploration.

**Keywords:** Myanmar, Democratic Transition, Realism, Security imperatives, Military Junta, counter-insurgency.

With a population of over 54 million people, Myanmar is a culturally rich country located in Southeast Asia. The nation's continued struggle for democracy is a narrative of resilience and determination. Myanmar's inconsistent socio-economic situation is characterised by abundance of natural resources in juxtaposition with widespread poverty and inequality that the country has been mired in for decades. With such striking imbalances Myanmar stands as one of the poorest nations in Southeast Asia. This volatility in Myanmar's socio-political space had spillover effects on India that exacerbated the security concerns of an already sensitive Northeastern region.

Myanmar is one such country that was apparently being indifferent to any global trend of transition towards 'Democracy'. Since the watershed year of 1988, when Myanmar

witnessed the foremost nationwide democracy uprising, had remained embroiled in a persistent state of political turmoil. The entire political history of Myanmar has been characterized by a relentless tug-of-war between entrenched military authoritarianism and the persistent aspirations of democratic factions, with the former consistently maintaining a position of dominance. Despite making strides towards being a young democracy, Myanmar slides back to the military rule in February 2021. This event accentuates the fragile nature of democratic progress in nations.

### **Myanmar in India's Geo-political Calculus**

Before delving into further exploration of India- Myanmar dynamics as they navigated through the complexities of the 21st century, it would undoubtedly be instrumental to have a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted components that designed the course of their diplomatic and strategic partnership. To start with, the secessionist seeking shelter in Burma, Chinese encroachment, India's increasingly growing interest for natural gas and energy security and the strategic location of Myanmar as the land bridge to ASEAN- all these combined forces had made New Delhi to dance on their tunes.

Situated at the crossroads of South and Southeast Asia, Myanmar occupies a pivotal geostrategic position of paramount significance. It functions as a buffer state strategically positioned between India and China, with its borders linking Bangladesh, China, Laos, and Thailand and the Northeastern states of India (Rieffel 2012: 212). Its geographical location serves as a bridge connecting the Indian subcontinent with mainland Southeast Asia, rendering it a crucial player in regional politics and geopolitics (Linter, Asia Times: 2007). Its southeastern coast is in close proximity to India's Nicobar archipelago along with the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman Sea, and the Strait of Malacca all converge around Myanmar, making it an indispensable gateway for maritime trade routes. Given its strategic location, Myanmar naturally emerges as a state likely to be contested for, by both India and China.

### **India's Engagement in Myanmar's Democratic Endeavour (1948-1990)**

Democratic ideas are not new-fangled to Burma. In the initial years, Myanmar embraced parliamentary democracy under the leadership of U Nu. Both the nations had a promising start where they forged a closer alliance, which was culminated with the ratification of the 1951 Treaty of Friendship. In those early days, when both the nations were navigating through the challenges of their newfound democracies, two overarching elements shaped the contours of their bilateral relationship. Firstly, the warm camaraderie between Prime Ministers Nehru and U Nu and secondly, the Indian diaspora residing in the country for generations; and lastly India, sought to guarantee the continuity of a friendly like-minded democratic regime in the vicinity of the newly independent nation. But unfortunately, this was short lived. Soon Burma's democratic system started waning again after a decade and political situation got further complicated when a military coup was staged; the civilian government was ousted; abolished the 1947 constitution; and democratic apparatus was ultimately dissolved in the year of 1962 (Asraf 2008:226). Then onwards Myanmar endured

more than five decades of military domination. Furthermore, the closer Sino-Burmese axis soured the relationship with Delhi and until 1988 there was virtually no diplomatic contact.

The dynamics further shifted with the struggle for democratisation- a movement spearheaded by students under the leadership of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi who established the National League for Democracy (NLD). This movement held promise for change and progress (Wanger 2009:17). In the course of political upheavals in Myanmar, New Delhi started playing a crucial role in curving out the course of it. Throughout 1980s to 1990s, India staunchly advocated for reinstating democracy in Myanmar and vehemently opposed military's brutal crackdown of the pro-democracy uprising and their subsequent seizure of power (Yhome 2009:1-2). This was apparent when India publicly expressed her displeasure and started providing refuge to the pro-democratic forces in the wake of the "8888 Movement". Reports indicated that India extended comprehensive financial, material, and logistical aid to the democratic factions opposing the military authorities (Muni 2009: 94). This proactive approach yielded positive results; in 1988, General Ne Win was compelled to relinquish power, and in 1990, the League of Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi secured a resounding victory in the general election (Seshadri 2022:3). This enhanced the "people-to-people" relationship, parallel to the radical scaling down of "government-to-government" ties (Trivedi 2017:151). Unfortunately, India's patronage to the democratic struggle proved to be untenable. Before the newly elected government could assume office, the military intervened, General Than Shwe eventually assumed power in 1992- ushering in two more decades of military rule.

### **Paradigm Shift in Policy in the Post Cold-War Period (1990-2009)**

Initially, India adopted a firm stance in support of the democratic movement. India being a compatriot granted asylum to a significant number of NLD activists (Wanger 2009:17). In July 1992, Myanmar's opposition group, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) constituted of the members of the 1990 elected parliament of Myanmar was authorized to open its office on Indian soil (Muni 2009:98). The democratic activists were allowed to operate for advocating democratic reforms in Myanmar, while they were in exile. However, India's support for democratic struggle in Myanmar could not be sustained for long. Such actions on part of India signifies the support extended to Myanmar's struggle for upholding democracy in the country. Explicably, these steps were not accepted on a good note- "Yangon regarded this as blatant interference in Myanmar's internal affairs" (Freedman 2017:94).

Since, early 1990s, there was indeed a paradigm shift in India's policy towards Myanmar. With the launch of India's "Look East" policy, New Delhi felt the necessity to initiate the process of constructive engagement with Myanmar, despite of the existence of military junta in power. This marked the beginning of departure from their long exercised foreign policy practise of extending support to the struggle for freedom and democracy; concurrently it marked the onset of a new kind of a bilateral relation that lasted for long.

Moreover, the persisting internal security challenges emanating from various ethnic- based militant insurgencies in its northeastern states had been a concern for India. Since the 1980s, militant organizations in Burma, such as the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), collaborated with United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), a separatist group in India (Wanger 2009: 17). Insurgent groups like the Nagas and ULFA were receiving tacit assistance

from the Burmese junta. They had operational freedom of functioning from the soil of Myanmar and also received steady supply of arms, ammunitions and narcotics from China, via Myanmar. The military Junta started forging strategic partnership with Pakistan and underwent for procuring arms from them as well (Khanna 2007: 185-186). Thus, India's intelligence service sought to establish connections with the militant networks in the region and engaged with the KIO to combat certain factions of Naga guerillas in India (Muni 2009: 60-63). During this precarious situation India found itself steering through a complex web of geopolitical regional dynamics. This perception emanated from a geopolitical reality wherein India found itself sandwiched between adversarial neighbours. Such a geopolitical conundrum demanded a carefully calibrated response from Indian policymakers. New Delhi adopted a stance characterized by pragmatism, while going against its normative principle.

Eventually, with the change of millennium, as fourth wave of democratization started creeping in the region, India also concurrently started shifting her focus towards human resource development and capacity-building, with the objective of facilitating steady and holistic political transformation within Myanmar. India actively engaged in capacity-building initiatives by sponsoring training programs for civil servants, military personnel and members of civil society (Seshadri 2022:5-6). The training courses conducted both in India and Myanmar served as fundamental pillars for a country's reformation system, which would contribute to the promotion of rule of law, effective governance, robust public administration, democratic principles, protection of human rights, active participation of government officials in decision- making processes, and enhanced transparency in information dissemination. During this period, India and Myanmar embarked on a series of bilateral agreements aimed at bolstering various facets of their relationship. Broadly India's policy stance during this phase was standing on four major pillars.

- Emphasising on enhancing the capabilities of state institutions through human capital development, with a particular focus on capacity building.
- While prioritization grassroot-level endeavours the focus would be on promoting civil society initiatives and undertaking additional developmental initiatives.
- Delivering training to both civilian and military personnel with an intention of forging a connection between democracy strengthening and development.
- Defining the bilateral relation based on the principle of effective collaboration even at the cost of engaging with authoritarian regimes.

The economic sphere also witnessed significant strides, as Indian entities such as ONGC and GAIL were accorded with permission to acquire a stake in the Shwe gas project, situated off Myanmar's coast (Bhatia 2015: 67-69). This development holds significant implications, particularly in the context of the gas pipeline project designed to transport natural gas from Myanmar's Arakan state to India's northeastern state of Assam (Bhatia 2015: 67-69). A notable event took place when General Than Shwe, the head of Myanmar's military government (the State Peace and Development Council), paid an official visit to India in October 2004 when both the countries entered into several pivotal agreements including one crucial declaration that laid the foundation and outlined the plans for enhanced cooperation in addressing non-traditional security challenges. Concurrently India also secured the rights to extract natural gas from the Bay of Bengal (Varadarajan, The Hindu: 2005). This was an



absolute divergence from India's stated principle when India opened its door for authoritarian heads while subverting her normative principle of supporting democratic ideals.

India's pioneering approach towards advancing democracy is exemplified by its provision of comprehensive training programs not only to civilians but also to military personnel, demonstrating a unique and innovative mechanism aimed at strengthening democratic institutions. Apart from engaging in joint military operations, India had actively contributed to the capacity-building efforts of Myanmar's defence officials (Lwin 2013:133- 134). After decades of dialogue by the Indian diplomats and determined engagements finally enabled India to inculcate a certain degree of trust in Myanmar Junta government, whereby after much interface they took part in the special courses offered by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), which included a dedicated program for Myanmar diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and a training course for mid-level military officials at the National Defence College (NDC) (Egreteau 2011: 471-472). To make it a successful venture India also offered scholarships to Myanmar military officers for enrolment at NDC. This collaboration involved the training of mid-level army personnel aged between 40 to 50 who are identified as potentially eminent leaders in the military hierarchy (Bhatia 2015: 98-101). These courses offered to them encompasses a wide spectrum of subjects- science and technology; economics, socio-political and international security studies. The NDC serves as an advocate for democratic transition, exemplifying democratic principles through its curriculum. Intriguingly, the syllabus extends beyond the scope of national security, delving into a broader outlook encompassing socio-political dynamics, domestic influence, economic development, environmental concerns, strategic neighbourhood considerations, and multilateralism with an emphasizes on critical areas such as India's Strategic Neighbourhood, Strategies and Structure for National Security and a thorough examination of global issues (Course Brief, NDC, 2022).

Realism and liberalism together, for instance, can generate powerful intuitions that blends both. Indo- Myanmar policy is also a reflection of the perfect blend of realist and liberal elements. India since the 1990s has consistently sought to engage with Myanmar both economically and militarily. Parallel to maximizing its economic interest, India curve out strategy to counter growing Chinese predominance and concurrently stirring progressively towards its normative objective. India's the then strategic approach reflected a pragmatic blend of realism and liberalism, where both 'interest' and 'interdependence' were merged perfectly.

The prevalent understanding had been that both political and developmental strategies could be adopted at multiple fronts. The political approach emphasizes democratisation as a dynamic process involving democratic actors contending with non-democratic forces for state authority. Conversely, the developmental approach perceives democratization as a gradual, incremental journey spanning for decade, characterized by the steady growth in progress. In case of India's policy towards Myanmar, the developmental approach took precedence. Though India strongly believed on principle that the developmental cooperation had the potential of being the most effective means to introduce more tangible democratic governance in Myanmar. By participating in grass-root level

projects, India was intending to contribute for the tangible improvement of living conditions and infrastructure in Myanmar, ultimately fostering an environment conducive for democratic growth (Lwin 2013:133-34). Such unique perspective underlined India's commitment not only to bolster political transformation in its pursuit of democracy but also endorse long-term sustainable development. Apparently, New Delhi distanced itself from the blatantly supporting any Burmese armed movement for establishing democracy. Instead preferred to denote the support or assistance as, what it called the "national reconciliation process and transition to metered democracy in Myanmar" (Routray 2011: 307- 308).

It was noticeable and there was some evidence that Indian policy towards Myanmar was shifting in the direction towards 'endorsing democratic transition' and was no more reluctant to use its voice in favour of expediting the transition process and upholding democratic values (Rajesh, Reuters 2007). Both at the domestic front in particular and international community in general, India had to face severe criticism for its inactiveness, when the military junta ruthlessly suppressed the anti-government demonstrations, in the context of Monk's uprising in September 2007 (Bagchi Times of India: 2007). There was surge of public opinion within the nation to take a more assertive stance and were advocating for a more robust engagement in support of the democratic opposition (Dikshit, The Hindu: 2008). Therefore, with the best interests in mind, the Indian government through continuous dialogue and engagement, strongly advised and persistently pressed the military regime to release of pro- democracy activists like Aung San Suu Kyi; disapproved the military crackdown and repeatedly reminded the military regime for prioritising the restoration of democratic system (The Economics Times: 2007). Persuaded by the country like India to expedite the democratic process, the Myanmar military regime announced the appointment of a Referendum Commission on February, 2008, which in due course avowed the referendum of the new constitution by May 2008 (Wagner 2009:18-19). In reality India navigated a delicate path between balancing international pressure with regional stability and emphasizing the importance of democratic principles while eschewing punitive sanctions.

### **India's Contribution in Myanmar's Democratic Endeavour (2010-2021)**

The transformation in Myanmar, stands out as an atypical instance of a carefully orchestrated transition, wherein the leadership executed measured strides toward democratization while upholding numerous authoritarian features of the preceding regime. They launched this transition as "discipline flourishing democracy" (Clapp 2015: 2). Though it was a significant step, but it's important to note that the proposed new governance structures were still falling short of meeting the standards of a genuine democracy. While this new administration initially expressed its intention to reform the constitutional provisions, failed to take concrete actions towards substantive restructuring (Turnell 2011:88), even after being in power for a substantial period of time.

The bilateral relations between India and Myanmar had witnessed a remarkable upswing, marked by significant diplomatic overtures and collaborative initiatives across diverse domains. At this stage of newly established democracy, India started sharing her

experiences about the parliamentary democracy and facilitated all possible assistance in the national reconciliation. The collaborative initiatives between India and Myanmar had transcended conventional boundaries to encompass sectors such as connectivity, power, trade, defence, culture, and people-to-people relations. Furthermore, India was steadfast for extending a substantial line of credit amounting to US\$ 500 million for developmental projects and there were ambitious plans for strategic economic cooperation and collaboration on maritime security. This were indicative of the depth of New Delhi's commitment of being the partner of Myanmar's sustained progress (Bhatia 2015: 122).

Soon after assuming office PM Modi being mindful of enhancing his 'Neighbourhood First' and geo-economics had given special attention to Myanmar's endeavour towards democratic transition. Indian officials continued being dedicated in assisting the process of political reform (Bhatia 2015: 19). While India had been cautioned in explicitly using the term "democracy promotion," its embassy dynamically affianced political and administrative reforms in Myanmar. The focus was particularly in rejuvenating Myanmar's struggling service- delivery system. Thus, assisting the nation in strengthening institutions was a priority while it was transitioning. The Modi government being mindful of the importance of geo-economics started providing substantial assistance in capacity-building and technical expertise for electoral processes, upgrading information technology and telecom networks; alongside extended infrastructural support and procedural assistance to the education and healthcare sectors. Remarkably, India stands among the selected few nations that had contributed over \$1 billion to fortify Myanmar's institutions and facilitate its developmental progress (News track, IDSA: 2016).

Significant strides had been made in the period between 2016-2020 to extend its support to the Yamethin Police Training Academy and at the Basic Technical Training School aimed at advancing technical training infrastructure (The Economic Times 2020); and thereby further contributing to capacity building in Myanmar's law enforcement sector. A strikingly important trilateral partnership between India, Myanmar, and Japan had been forged, focusing on the upliftment and development of the Rakhine province. This collaboration was initiated with the purpose to develop soft infrastructure for 15 schools (The Economic Times 2020), illustrating a concerted effort to enhance educational facilities and opportunities in the region. Till 2020 India had extended a financial aid amounting to approximately \$1.4 billion (Roy Chaudhury, 2020, Economic Times).

In an era characterized by economic interdependence, a trade-centred approach served not only to spur economic activities along the India-Myanmar border but also cultivated mutual benefits and connections among the people of the two nations. Additionally, this approach served to curtail illicit trade.

### **Democratic Back Sliding of Myanmar and the Changeover in India-Myanmar Dynamics**

In 2021, Myanmar witnessed a deeply troubling event as the military returned back, reasserted its dominance over the country and shattered hopes for democratic progress. On February 1st, a coup d'état abruptly halted Myanmar's fragile transition towards democracy. The elected government, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, was deposed, claiming



unsubstantiated allegations of electoral irregularities (Jeffrey 2021: Special Commentary). The coup marked a tragic regression in Myanmar's political trajectory. It brought to an end of a decade of cautiously implemented democratic reforms.

The sweeping victory of NLD and the mere formation of the government didn't confer the complete realization of democracy because the military continued to wield significant influence over the political landscape of the nation. Several ambassadorial positions remained under military control and entrenched bureaucrats with a junta-era mindset continue to hold their official positions. The inexperience and limited capacity of NLD was particularly glaring in matter of peace and reconciliation efforts and were responsible for its inability to tackle the situation more effectively. In the face of a rising tide of Buddhist nationalism and Islamophobia, Suu Kyi's administration was struggling to alleviate the suffering of the Rohingyas- the most persecuted minority group, with inadequate access to healthcare and education, in the country. The most severe test for the new government was ensuring the 'Rights' concerning liberty and citizenship of the minorities.

The return back of the military had not only affected the nation's political landscape but it had garnered larger impact over its neighbours in the region. If we look at from the aspect of security and national interest then undeniable that instability within Myanmar had posed challenges for India at multiple fronts. To begin with, it had prompted the longstanding threat of Chinese predominance in the region.

Clashes between Myanmar's military and the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) had intensified in the western and northwestern regions bordering India. The sudden shift in Myanmar's political landscape had not only disrupted a decade of limited democratic reforms but posed significant challenges to India's regional policies, particularly affected the 'Act East' initiative. Vital projects, instrumental to India's Act East policy, had been stalled. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, aimed at establishing a crucial trade route connecting the Northeastern states with Myanmar's Sittwe Port (Ambarkhane and Gathia 2022: 5) are now under regular air raids and attacks by the military; and completion of these projects is a formidable challenge.

The ongoing military actions in Myanmar since February 2021 have sever spill over repercussions in the Northeastern region. It resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis, leading to a staggering number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the influx of refugees from Myanmar into India's northeastern states particularly, Manipur and Mizoram. This influx included leaders of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), organizers of anti-coup pro- democratic forces, civil servants, defectors from the military and police, educators, and student activists (Yadav and Saha, India Today: 2023). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2023, the total number of IDPs has reached a distressing 1,827,000 of which substantial 53,500 individuals have sought shelter in India from the beleaguered region of Chin province to its bordering Manipur and Mizoram states (UNHCR Report 2023). The UNHCR estimates that over 40,150 individuals have sought refuge in Mizoram and 8,250 in Manipur (UNHCR, Myanmar Report 2023).

This influx had led to embroiling of tensions between district administrations of Mizoram- who had received refugees with open arms and New Delhi- who had mandated not to establish camps or offer assistance. The Indian government was concerned that accepting refugees would strain relations with Myanmar's military regime. The sudden influx of refugees from Myanmar posed substantial challenges to India, including security risks and added burdens on local populations as refugees embark on the arduous journey across India without proper access to essential resources like food and medicine. There was also a concern regarding the potential spread of infectious diseases and incapacity to provide proper medical infrastructure (Marjani, *The Diplomat*: 2023). Moreover, it has strained local resources and infrastructure, which not only heightened social tensions but also created vulnerabilities that has been exploited by various groups, making it a pressing nontraditional security concern for the Northeastern states. There have been documented cases of insurgents from Myanmar establishing operational bases in Mizoram, utilizing the region as a conduit for transporting weaponry and supplies to support their struggle against the military junta. This network extends through regions such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. The presence of robust ethnic affiliations across the border further facilitates the flow of narcotics, posing a substantial threat to India's overall national security framework.

Manipur, with its deep socio-ethnic links to ethnic communities in Myanmar, has experienced the brunt of this refugee influx, leading to sever ethnic conflict and complicated inter-community dynamics. The outpouring of Chin and Kuki refugees from Myanmar had ignited rigidities among the Meiteis and Nagas in the region. This area has a historical backdrop of ethnic conflicts, compounded by the existing divide between indigenous populations and non-local residents. The arrival of Myanmar refugees further exacerbates the already delicate social dynamics in the region, adding another layer of complexity to an already intricate situation (Marjani, *The Diplomat*: 2023).

The November 13, 2021 attacks by Manipuri Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) on Indian security forces marked as a crucial turning point because it had reinforced the fact that benefits of the counterinsurgency partnership have dwindled. This has been indicative of the fact, it's been high time for New Delhi to reassess the rationale of relationship with Myanmar's military junta. India's engagement with the military junta of Myanmar is underpinned by a strategic calculus aimed at offsetting the activities of certain Indian Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). This partnership built on the premise that Myanmar's military is a crucial ally in their joint counterinsurgency efforts and have the capacity to effectively manage cross-border threats emanating from insurgent elements has been proven fundamentally flawed. Recent developments had revealed the limitations of this approach.

Since the civilian government in Myanmar a significant reduction in insurgency activities in northeast India had been witnessed. It is the testament of combined efforts of the Indian government, pro-activeness of the civilian authority and various stakeholders in the region. The steady escalation of Indian Army's proactive engagements had led to the subsequent decline in recruitment by insurgent factions (Kushwaha 2023:171-172). The Indian Army has undertaken proactive measures to engage the youth of the northeast, offering a range of opportunities in education, skill development, and employment. The initiatives



aimed at engaging the youth coupled with the revocation of AFSPA; promoting community engagement; reduced instances of alleged human rights violations and successful implementation of reintegration initiatives have played a crucial role in diverting young individuals away from insurgent groups; have contributed to a positive shift towards personal and societal advancement; and have brought a change in psyche of the youth, which encouraged them to surrender and get reintegrated with the mainstream society (Philip, The Print:2022). Thus, India's reliance on the Tatmadaw may no longer be deemed essential or strategically advantageous in suppressing insurgency, given the significant success of internal efforts in mitigating violence and fostering stability in northeast India.

India's foreign policy stance of noninterference and its hesitancy to openly criticize the actions of the Tatmadaw in Myanmar stand in contrast to its global commitment to democratic values. India recent interactions with Myanmar's military leadership, contrast to coordinated efforts of the ASEAN countries, may unacceptably jeopardise India's strategy of fostering ties with the ASEAN through Myanmar.

It is an imperative that India recalibrate its approach and adopt a fresh slant that safeguards its security interests, foster regional stability, and continue to advance its economic objectives. A paradigm shift entails public engagement with the National Unity Government (NUG), Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), and People's Defence Forces (PDFs), as well as Myanmar EAOs active in India's borderlands, offers a promising path forward. On the contrary, should India persist in its strategy of offering military aid and backing to the Myanmar army in an attempt to curb China's influence, there is a significant risk of eroding any positive sentiment it may have held with the Myanmar public as well as in the realm of international community. This recalibrated strategy of engaging with pro-democracy forces and addressing humanitarian challenges will enable India to strengthen cross-border ethnic ties in its northeastern states; bolster its reputation among communities collaborating with anti-junta forces; can foster regional stability; forge robust relations with the NUG; lay the foundation for deeper people-to-people relations; and contribute to the emergence of a democratic and prosperous Myanmar. Moreover, it will safeguard infrastructure projects integral to the 'Act East' Policy and pave the way for inclusive democratic and economic initiatives within a federal democratic Myanmar.

New Delhi should actively advocate for a peaceful resolution among all parties involved, with the ultimate aim of quelling the unrest in Myanmar expeditiously. A secure and democratic government in Myanmar would ultimately serve India's interests in the long term; and India should not hesitate in striving towards this objective. It is almost a security imperative for India to collaborate with pro-democracy forces as it offers India an opportunity to play a more influential role in Myanmar's future; position India to counterbalance vis-à-vis China who has been the steadfast support for the military junta; and also aligns with its normative principle of upholding democratic values as envisaged by the global community.



## References

- Arnold, M. B. (2019, August 24), "Why GAD reform matters to Myanmar", East Asia Forum, Retrieved from <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/08/24/why-gad-reform-matters-to-myanmar/>
- Aung, S. Y. (2020, March 7), Flashpoints: Myanmar's Eight Most Hotly Contested Constitutional Amendment Proposals, The Irrawaddy.
- Ashraf, F. (2008), "India-Myanmar Relations", Strategic Studies, 28 (1): 223-233
- Abraham, I. (2014), How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics, California: Stanford University Press.
- \*Ambarkhane, S., & Gathia, S. V. (2022, May), "Over a Year Later, Myanmar's Military Coup Threatens India's National Security", United States Institute of Peace, Analysis and commentary, Retrieved from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/05/over-year-later-myanmars-military-coup-threatens-indias-national-security>.
- Bell, D. (2006), Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for East Asian Context. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Barany, Z. (2016), "Armed Forces and Democratization in Myanmar: Why the US Military Should Engage the Tatmadaw", Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/armed-forces-and-democratization-myanmar-why-us-military-should-engage-tatmadaw>
- Banerjee, S. (2022), "The Enduring Challenges to Democratic Transition in Myanmar", Observer Research Foundation, ORF Issue Brief: 541. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/enduring-challenges-to-democratic-transition-in-myanmar/>
- Barany, Z. (2016), "Armed Forces and Democratization in Myanmar: Why the US Military Should Engage the Tatmadaw" Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Special Report.
- Beech, H. (2017, September 25), What Happened to Myanmar's Human-Rights Icon?, The New York Times.
- Banerjee, S. (2022), "The democracy conundrum in Myanmar", Raisina Debate, Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-democracy-conundrum-in-myanmar/>
- Baaré, A., Shearer, D. and Uvin, P. (1999), The Limits and Scope for the Use of Development Assistance Incentives and Disincentives for Influencing Conflict Situations, Paris: OECD.
- Batabyal, A. (2006). Balancing China in Asia: A Realist Assessment of India's Look East Strategy, China Report, 42(2): 179-197.
- Bhat, V. (25 December 2019), How China has stepped up under-sea information-gathering in Bay of Bengal, The Print, Retrieved from: <https://theprint.in/defence/how-china-has-stepped-up-under-sea-information-gathering-in-bay-of-bengal/340335/>



- Bhatia, R. (2015), *India Myanmar Relations: Changing Contours*, New Delhi: Routledge. Bhattacharya, A. (2008), "Linking South East Asia and India: More Connectivity, Better Ties", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, IPCS Special Report No. 50.
- Bashar, I. (2015), "Myanmar: Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses", International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, 7 (1): 17-20.
- Bagchi, I. (2007, September 28), "US, EU Want India to Put Pressure on Myanmar", Times of India.
- Banerjee, S. (2022), "The Enduring Challenges to Democratic Transition in Myanmar", ORF, Issue Brief No. 541.
- BBC News. (2012, November 13), Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi begins visit to India. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-20302847>
- Basu Ray Chaudhury, A., & Basu, P. (2015). *Proximity To Connectivity: India And Its Eastern and Southeastern Neighbours*, In *India-Myanmar Connectivity: Possibilities and Challenges*, Kolkata: Observer Research Foundation.
- Barany, J. (2016 September 13), "Armed Forces and Democratization in Myanmar: Why the US Military Should Engage the Tatmadaw", Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/armed-forces-and-democratization-myanmar-why-us-military-should-engage-tatmadaw>
- Barany, J. (2016), *How Armies Respond to Revolutions and Why*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cribb, R. (1999), "Myanmar (Burma): History", In L. Daniel (Ed.), *The Far East and Australasia*, London: European publication.
- \*Clapp, P. (2015), "Myanmar: Anatomy of a Political Transition", US Institute of Peace, Special Report.
- Col. Hariharan, R. (retired) (2007), "India-Myanmar-China Relations", *Asian Tribune*, 7 (1). Cohen, Stephen P. (2001), *India: Emerging Power*, India: Oxford University Press.
- Clapp, P. (2015), "Myanmar: Anatomy of a Political Transition", US Institute of Peace, Special Report 369.
- Devi, K. S. (2014), "Myanmar under the Military Rule 1962-1988", *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(10): 46-50.
- Dikshit, S. (2008, February 12), "India Asks Myanmar to Expedite Reconciliation", *The Hindu*. Daniel, F. J. (2012, November 14), Suu Kyi asks India to stand by democracy in Myanmar, Reuters, Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/india-myanmar-suukyi/idINDEE8AD0CS20121114>
- Egreteau, R. (2003), *Wooing The Generals: India's New Burma Policy*, New Delhi: Centre De Sciences Humaines.
- Egreteau, R. (2011), "A passage to Burma? India, development, and democratization in Myanmar", *Contemporary Politics*, 17 (4): 467-486.



- Egreteau, R. (2016), *Caretaking Democratization: The Military and Political Change in Myanmar*, London: Hurst
- \*Embassy of India, Yangon. (2022), HRD Corporations. Retrieved from <https://www.embassyofindiayangon.gov.in/pages?id>
- Fink, C. (2009), *Living Silence in Burma: Surviving under Military Rule*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Gogoi, D. (2007), "Northeast India-Gateway to Southeast Asia", *South Asia Politics*, 6 (7): 14-25.
- Gogoi, D. (2019), *Making of India's Northeast Geopolitics of Borderland and Transnational Interactions*, London: Routledge (India)
- Ganguly, S., & Pardesi, M. S. (2009), "Explaining Sixty Years of India's Foreign Policy", *India Review*, 8 (1): 4-19.
- Ghoshal, D. (2021, March 3), *India treads gently on Myanmar despite escalating violence*, Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/india-treads-gently-myanmar-despite-escalating-violence-2021-03-03/>
- Ichihara, M., Sahoo, N., & Erewan, I. K. P. (2016 October 19), "Asian Support for Democracy in Myanmar", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/10/19/asian-support-for-democracy-in-myanmar-pub>.
- \*India-Myanmar joint statement issued during PM's state visit to Myanmar, (2017 September 6), Prime Minister's Office, Retrieved from [http://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news\\_updates/indiamyanmar-joint-statement-issued](http://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/indiamyanmar-joint-statement-issued).
- India Today. (2023, August 4), *Refugee camps, border issues: Understanding influx of illegal immigrants from Myanmar to Manipur*, Retrieved from <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/illegal-immigration-from-myanmar-to-manipur>.
- Jolliffe, K. (2019), "Democratising Myanmar's security sector: Enduring Legacies and a Long Road Ahead" *UK Aid: Safer world, Special report (e-book)*.
- Jaffrey, S. (2021, February 2), "End of Myanmar's Rocky Road to Democracy?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/02/02/end-of-myanmar-s-rocky-road-to-democracy>
- Kipgen, N. (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, India: Oxford University Press.
- Kundu, S. (2012), "Myanmar: Pangs of Democratic Transition", *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Special Report-130*.
- Kurlantzick, J. (2007 October 10), "Burma's Buddy – India's Craven Appeasement in Burma", *The New Republic* Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2007/10/02/burma-s-buddy-india-s-craven-appeasement-in-burma-pub-19634>.
- Kanwal, G. (2010), "A Strategic Perspective on India-Myanmar Relations", *CLAWS Journal*, 33(1): 134-149.



- Kundu, S. (2012), "Myanmar: Pangs of Democratic Transition", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Special Report 130.
- \*Kundu, S (ed). (2016), "Insight South East Asia: Looking Eastwards From New Delhi", Southeast Asia & Oceania Centre (IDSA), 5 (1), Event Report of Delhi Dialogue VIII Retrieved from [https://idsa.in/system/files/newsletters/ISA\\_5\\_1.pdf](https://idsa.in/system/files/newsletters/ISA_5_1.pdf)
- KoKo, N. (2019), "Democratisation in Myanmar: Glue or Gloss?", Political Change, Australian National University, 1(1): 35-46 Retrieved from [https://www.kas.de/c/document\\_library](https://www.kas.de/c/document_library)
- Kushwaha, B. (2023), "India's G20 Presidency and the Death of Democracy in Myanmar", Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, 6 (3): 166-173.
- Kumar, R. (2022, August 2), "India's Response to Sri Lanka and Myanmar Crises Is a Study in Contrast. It Shouldn't Be", Indian Express, Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-response-to-sri-lanka-and-myanmar>.
- Lintner, B. (2021 December 10), India's Dilemma Over Ties With Myanmar Military, The Irrawaddy, Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/indias-dilemma-over-ties-with-myanmar-military.html>
- Lwin, H. H. T. (2013), "India's Democratic Identity and Its Policy towards Myanmar from 1988 to 2010", Journal of ASEAN Studies, 1(2): 122-139.
- Lintner, B. (2015), Great Game East: China, India, and the Struggle for Asia's Most Volatile Frontier, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Maizland, L. (2022), "Myanmar's Troubled History: Coups, Military Rule, and Ethnic Conflict", Council on Foreign Relations, Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule-ethnic-conflict>
- Mujtaba, S.A. (2007 November 12), India-Myanmar Relations Predicament and Prospects, Indo-Burma News, Retrieved from [www.indoburmanews.net/archives/1/2007/november/india-myanmar-relations-predicament-and-prospects](http://www.indoburmanews.net/archives/1/2007/november/india-myanmar-relations-predicament-and-prospects)
- Mohan, CR. (2007), "India's Outdated Myanmar Policy: Time for a Change", RSIS Commentaries, Retrieved from [https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/10356/91775/1/RSIS\\_COMMENT\\_417.pdf](https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/10356/91775/1/RSIS_COMMENT_417.pdf)
- Marjani, N. (2023, April), India Faces a Two-Front Challenge From Post-Coup Myanmar, The Diplomat, Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2023/04/india-faces-a-two-front-challenge-from-post-coup-myanmar/>.
- \*MEA, India (2021 February 5), Lines of Credit for Development Projects, Retrieved from <https://www.mea.gov.in/Lines-of-Credit-for-Development-Projects.htm>.
- Philip, S. A. (2022, September 22), Peace in Northeast after Decades Allows Army to Finally Pull Out of Counter-insurgency Ops, The Print. Retrieved from <https://theprint.in/defence/peace-in-the-northeast-allows-army-to-hand-over-counter>



Rieffel, A. (2010), *Myanmar/Burma: Inside Challenges, Outside Interests*, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press.

Routray, BP. (2011), "India-Myanmar Relations: Triumph of Pragmatism", *Jindal Journal of International Affairs*, 1 (1): 299-321.

Rajesh, Y. P. (2007, October 2), India renews pressure on Myanmar, Reuters, Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-india-idUSSP29636320071002>

Roy Chaudhury, D. (2020), India to provide debt service relief to Myanmar under the G20 initiative, *Economic Times*, Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-to-provide-debt-servic>

Turnell, S. (2011), "Myanmar's Fifty-Year Authoritarian Trap", *Journal of International Affairs*, 65(1): 79-92.