

## General Studies – 2; Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations

### India-Myanmar Relations

#### 1) Introduction

- Myanmar is one of India's strategic neighbour and shares long border with north-eastern states of Nagaland and Manipur.
- India has "historical ties and traditional bonds of friendship and cooperation" with Myanmar
- Five Bs are the base of India-Myanmar relations – Buddhism, Business, Bollywood, Bharatnatyam and Burma teak.

#### 2) Economic Relations

- Bilateral trade between the two countries has, for long, remained at around \$2 billion.
- Chinese, Singaporean, Korean, Japanese, Thai and Vietnamese businesses have actively seized business opportunities in Myanmar.
- Pulses form the single largest item in Myanmar's limited export basket.
- Indian businesses could invest in the power, steel, automobiles and even textile sectors in Myanmar.

#### 3) Defence Relations

- India and Myanmar have been trying to strengthen their defense ties over the past few years.
- Over 200 Myanmar military officers have been trained in the medical, airforce and navy fields in India.
- Myanmar has acquired rocket launchers, night vision systems, radar and engineering equipment, including \$37.9 million worth of torpedoes, from India.

#### 4) Cultural Relations

- The 11th-century Ananda Temple in Myanmar was damaged during an earthquake last year and is being renovated with India's assistance.
- People to people ties are the strength of India-Myanmar relations
- **No other country has committed as much in grant-in-aid to Myanmar as India. These include:**
  - a. Kaladan multi-modal corridor
  - b. Repair of 69 bridges on the Tamu-Kalewa road
  - c. Construction of the 120-km Kalewa-Yargyi corridor
  - d. Rhi-Tiddim road in the Chin state bordering Mizoram.
- Unfortunately, the projects have not been completed in time. As a result, India has not got due credit.

#### 5) India's assistance in Capacity Building

- Capacity building in Myanmar with six centres imparting training in diverse subjects, from English language to industrial skills.
- Myanmar Institute of Information Technology set up in Mandalay with the collaboration of IIIT Bangalore has been a success with all its graduates finding ready employment.
- The Advanced Centre for Agriculture Research and Education set up in collaboration with India's ICAR is a fine example of pooling research efforts on pulses and oilseeds.

### 6) India's primary interests in Myanmar

- To build an economic and security relationship that prevent Myanmar from slipping into the orbit of China.
- Ensure the Myanmar military's cooperation in preventing Northeastern militants, most notably Naga insurgents, from using Myanmar as a safe haven.
- Support the country's transition into a full-fledged federal democracy.
- Ameliorate the plight of the Rohingyas as well as ensure the tense relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar do not spiral out of control.

### 7) Concerns / Challenges

- The Indian government is concerned about Rohingya immigrants in the country
- Around 40,000 Rohingyas are said to be staying illegally in India.
- Negotiations on the deportation of Rohingya to Myanmar are a point of contention.
- Lack of basic infrastructure and low trading volume at the Indian border.
- The India Intelligence Agency stated that the smuggling of light arms, drugs and counterfeit currencies have been spotted along the border.
- Beijing is investing in projects to improve the Sittwe–Kunming route.
- Momentum of the Belt and Road Initiative may end India's East Act Policy like Obama's pivot to Asia.
- Both sides share a long maritime boundary and land border, which has led to concerns around transnational issues.

### 8) Way Forward

- Strengthening existing cooperation in areas of security and counter-terrorism, trade and investment, infrastructure and energy, and culture
- Boosting cooperation in areas like training and capacity-building of Myanmar's military.
- Implementing the recommendations of Kofi Annan Advisory Commission report on Rohingya refugee issue.
- India can help in improving the socio-economic conditions in the Rakhine state and also create employment opportunities.
- The two countries must start negotiating for the smooth movement of goods and vehicles
- With Myanmar's government emphasising higher education and vocational training, more Indian-assisted institutions can be setup in the country.
- Border trade need to become more formalised with single-window clearances and easier currency arrangements.
- The border haats can energise exchange of local produce.
- Cross- border bus services can promote people-to-people connectivity.
- Cross-border trade in services can be boosted in sectors like medicine, diagnostics, education and training for which there is a large market.
- All this will mean that the Northeast will gain from the Act East policy.