

## India-Myanmar Relations: Triumph of Pragmatism

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*The article is an analysis of India-Myanmar foreign relations which are marked by both paranoia and bonhomie. Myanmar is strategically important for India, especially in achieving its objective of a Look-East Policy. India has to maintain a cordial relationship with Myanmar's non-democratic military junta to extend its influence in Southeast Asia and due to internal security concerns of its north-eastern states which are under continuous threat from various insurgent groups. This article discusses the pragmatic shift of India's stand on Myanmar where the growing presence of China in Myanmar and India's quest for energy are the major drivers. In economic terms, China is a major investor in Myanmar and its military relations with Myanmar are causes for concern in India. The article also discusses concerns raised about India's Myanmar policy, keeping in view widespread scepticism about its military junta.*

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### INTRODUCTION

How does India deal with a nation which is ranked 18<sup>th</sup> (in 2011) in the failed states index and is ruled by a military junta which demonstrates no signs of giving up? What sort of foreign policy does India adopt towards a country which links South Asia with Southeast Asia and hence, is critical for the fulfilment of its ambitious look east policy? How does India frame its security policy when a major chunk of the insurgents wreaking havoc in its north-eastern region enjoy safety of this neighbouring country? Does it deal with the military rulers who possibly hold the key to India's numerous problems and projects or it should it side with the thoroughly marginalised pro-democracy groups who have little hope of assuming control in that country?

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These are some of the questions that constantly agitated the minds of policy makers in New Delhi as they decided to affect a policy shift in India-Myanmar relations in the early 1990s. There has been no looking back since then. India made a choice for itself, preferring pragmatism over idealism, and stuck to it despite regime changes in New Delhi.

This paper is a critical analysis of India's Myanmar policy and its shift from an idealist position to one that is driven by pragmatism. Examining the drivers behind the policy change, the paper also attempts to foresee whether the policy, in its present form, is adequate for fulfilment of India's objectives in that country.

### IMPORTANCE OF MYANMAR

Myanmar's criticality for India has been variously defined, mostly referring to the "shared historical, ethnic, cultural and religious ties."<sup>1</sup> In real terms, both countries share a 1643 kilometre-long land border. A large population of Indian origin people, estimated to be in the range of 2.5 million, lives in Myanmar. Four of India's north-eastern states, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, are geographically contiguous to Myanmar. India also shares the strategic waters of Bay of Bengal, including the area of strategically important Andaman and Nicobar islands where the two closest Indian and Myanmar's islands are barely 30 kilometres apart. Myanmar's ports provide India the shortest approach route to several of India's north-eastern states. Since 1997, when Myanmar became a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), it also provides India with a welcome geographical contiguity with the Asia-Pacific region. Myanmar, being China's neighbour, also provides India a transit route to southern China.

### IDEALISM OR LACK OF VISION?

It would, thus, appear strange that in spite of such criticality, Myanmar assumed extremely low priority in Indian foreign policy, even while both India and Burma (Myanmar's old name) were close allies in the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) in the 1950s and several years preceding that. On the day of Burma's independence on 4 January 1948, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had referred to the shared future awaiting

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1 "Indo-Myanmar Relations", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, <http://mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50044503> (Accessed on 29 June 2011)

both countries. “As in the past, so in the future, the people of India will stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Burma, and whether we have to share good fortune or ill fortune, we shall share it together. This is a great and solemn day not only for Burma, but for India, and for the whole of Asia,”<sup>2</sup> he said.

The 1962 coup in Burma which heralded military rule brought about a complete disruption in this not so thriving bilateral relationship. The military junta fell out of India’s favour immediately after the coup, which catapulted General Ne Win to power. Ne Win’s isolationist ‘Burmese Road to Socialism’ policy that remained in vogue for the next 26 years, included nationalisation of industries, repression of minorities, and instituting a police state. In real terms, these meant a severe isolationism, expulsion of foreigners, discouragement of tourists and closing off the economy. Throughout the 1960s and ‘70s, a large number of ethnic Indians were expelled from Burma. As a result, ethnic Indians who formed the backbone of Burmese government and economy during the British rule, serving as soldiers, civil servants, merchants and moneylenders, were reduced to a negligible minority.

According to an estimate, on the morning of Burmese independence from the British, there were some 300,000-400,000 Indians living in independent Burma.<sup>3</sup> According to the spokesman of the Burma Displaced Persons Association, over 12,000 Indian concerns with assets worth Rupees 15 crores were affected. Authors detail the plight of the Indians affected by this nationalistic drive in Burma.

*“Many Indians were deprived of their means of livelihood. No compensation was paid to them at the time of nationalization. Many of them wanted to go back to India. But even this was not possible for them as they could not pay their passage and the Government of Burma did not provide even passage facilities to them. When allowed to leave Burma, they were not allowed to take anything with them. Such were the conditions of the Indians in Burma that the relations between Burma and India were brought nearly to a breaking point.”<sup>4</sup>*

By 1964, an estimated 100,000 such refugees had reached India from Burma. This policy of expulsion of Indians was certainly not palatable to

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2 Thin Thin Aung&Soe Myint, “India-Burma Relations”, [http://www.idea.int/asia\\_pacific/burma/upload/chap4.pdf](http://www.idea.int/asia_pacific/burma/upload/chap4.pdf) (Accessed on 22 June 2011)

3 Thin Thin Aung&Soe Myint, “India-Burma Relations”, [http://www.idea.int/asia\\_pacific/burma/upload/chap4.pdf](http://www.idea.int/asia_pacific/burma/upload/chap4.pdf) (Accessed on 20 June 2011)

4 *ibid.*

India. Although analysts believe that the Ne Win regime had “kept both India and China at arm’s length”, being “suspicious of the motives of two big neighbours”<sup>5</sup>, Myanmar’s neutral stand during the 1962 Chinese aggression on India was seen as a pro-Chinese tilt by New Delhi. As a result, stagnancy bordering on the margins of cordiality marked the Indo-Myanmar relations for next two decades. Routine visits by heads of government continued between both countries. Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri visited Myanmar in 1965. Both countries signed a boundary agreement in 1967. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi paid a visit to Rangoon in 1969. During her visit, General Ne Win made assurances that Myanmar would not allow any anti-Indian activities on its territory by any state or organisation. General Ne Win too paid three visits to India during this period.

India was largely neutral and disinterested in Myanmar during Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s tenure. A “commitment to democratic values” was prioritised ahead of “security concerns” in the Indian foreign policy agenda towards Myanmar.<sup>6</sup> Rajiv Gandhi continued the same policy of idealism, although he did visit Myanmar in 1987, marking the first visit of the country by an Indian Prime Minister in almost nineteen years. However, when the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) assumed power in Myanmar in 1988, India extended its moral support to the pro-democracy movement.<sup>7</sup>

The Indian Embassy in Rangoon was active in helping pro-democracy activists. Embassy officials were in touch with opposition groups like the All Burma Federation of Students’ Unions (ABFSU), Aung San Suu Kyi and U Nu during the uprising. When the Burmese student activists fled to the Indo-Burmese border, the Indian Embassy in Rangoon provided them financial assistance to go to India. The Government of India opened refugee camps for these students in the north-eastern states of Mizoram and Manipur, the entry points from Myanmar. A parliamentary panel in India was informed in 1989 by the then External Affairs Minister Narasimha Rao that no genuine Burmese refugees seeking shelter in India would be turned back. India in fact assumed the role of much more than a warm host to the fleeing Burmese tribes.

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5 John Cherian, “Coming closer”, *Frontline* (Chennai), vol.27, no.17, 24-27 August 2010.

6 Yogendra Singh, “India’s Myanmar Policy: A Dilemma between Realism and Idealism”, IPCS Special Report, no.37, March 2007, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/23192043/India-Burma-Relations-Indias-Mayanmar-Policy> (Accessed on 20 June 2011)

7 *ibid.*

Several reports indicate that India provided financial and material support to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Karen National Union (KNU) that had joined the opposition to the military regime. One of the KIA leaders admitted having been a party to such generosity. “Appreciate the fact that India has unambiguously supported the cause of democracy in Burma. Any committed democratic government in Rangoon is bound to take the country towards a genuine federation, which is our goal. To that extent, we welcome India’s stand”<sup>8</sup>, he said.

The Indian government, owing to domestic pressures, even risked sacrificing its thin linkages with the Burmese military rulers. On 10 November 1990, two Myanmarese students hijacked a Thai plane from Bangkok to Calcutta to draw the international attention to the situation back home. After the nine-hour hijacking drama, the two students gave themselves up to the Indian authorities. After three months in the Calcutta jail, both students were released on bail. Thirty-eight Members of Parliament (MPs) signed a petition requesting the then Prime Minister Chandrasekhar to give them political asylum in India, which was subsequently granted.

The All India Radio (AIR) carried anti-military broadcasts in Burmese language, souring further the relations between two countries.<sup>9</sup> In 1991, India, however, acceded to the requests of the Myanmar’s government to stop these broadcasts. Burmese government had formally complained that Than Than Nu, the daughter of U Nu, was using ‘abusive’ language attacking the government of Myanmar. India’s former Foreign Secretary, J. N. Dixit wrote, “Indo-Myanmar relations went into a negative spin in 1990, when the military authorities of Myanmar refused to accept the 1990 electoral verdict of the Burmese people in which Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy, emerged victorious.”<sup>10</sup>

In 1992, India partnered with the US and other Western countries to sponsor a United Nations resolution condemning the Burmese military junta for its violations of human rights. India earlier, however, had refused to join US, UK, Germany and Japan to formally present a protest to the military regime against not respecting the result of May 1990 elections.<sup>11</sup>

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8 Quoted in S D Muni, “India’s Foreign Policy: The Democracy Dimension”, (New Delhi: Foundation Books 2009), p.80.

9 Subhash Kapila, “India - Myanmar Strategic Partnership: Indian Imperatives”, South Asian Analysis Group, Paper No. 197, <http://www.southasiananalysis.org/\papers2\paper197.htm> ( Accessed on 18 June 2011)

10 J N Dixit, “Road to Mandalay”, *Telegraph*, 22 March 2006.

11 S D Muni, *India’s Foreign Policy: The Democracy Dimension*, (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2009), p.81.

It was clear that a cohesive policy towards Myanmar was not a priority of the government in New Delhi. Governments led by V. P. Singh and Chandrasekhar were so enmeshed in domestic political uncertainties and compulsions of electoral politics that Myanmar hardly figured in their scheme of things. India's Myanmar policy remained rooted in idealism, not by a policy of conscious decision, but largely by default.

The era of idealism, a curious mix of conscious decision and ignorance, in actual terms meant that India refused to get into business with the ruling military junta. It also meant, to the detriment and erosion of its stakes in that country, that India was seen as a promoter of the cause of democracy in Myanmar. While India was ill-placed to actually do much to ensure the restoration of democracy, it actively provided support to a large number of pro-democracy supporters in its own territory. India remained one of launch pads from where the pro-democracy student leaders mounted a mobilisation campaign through electronic and print media.

Apart from nurturing a false sense of satisfaction of supporting the 'just cause', this prolonged era of idealism fulfilled none of India's strategic objectives in Myanmar. In fact, it pushed the military junta to ignore several of India's concerns. It was also a time when the insurgents operating in India's north-eastern region took maximum advantage of the porous Indo-Myanmar border to set up and operate camps inside that country.

#### A PRAGMATIC SHIFT

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact year when India's Myanmar policy turned pragmatic, although broadly agree that by the early 1990s India was warming up to the idea of improving its relations with the de facto military rulers in that country. Former foreign secretary Late J.N. Dixit indicates that it was by 1992 that New Delhi had decided to break the deadlock and start with a policy of 'constructive engagement' with the military regime. He refers to the preliminary discussions held between the Government of India and the Myanmar foreign office between February and August 1992:

*"I was a participant in these discussions, which ultimately led to the visit of the vice-foreign minister of Myanmar, U. Baswa, to India between August 11 and 13, 1992. The Myanmar delegation made three points during this visit. Myanmar respects India's commitment to democracy and hopes India would be patient about the revival of democracy in Myanmar. Second, Myanmar acknowledged that security*

*and political concerns existed which are shared by both countries. Myanmar was therefore willing to cooperate with India in taking joint action to meet the security and strategic interests of both countries. The third point which Baswa made was that Myanmar will be willing to increase economic and technological cooperation with India. Another important anxiety of India was the increasing strategic linkages between Myanmar and China”.*<sup>12</sup>

These meetings had followed a conscious decision on the part of New Delhi to overhaul its policy towards Myanmar. India took a decision not to interfere anymore in the internal affairs of that country. The period between 1994 and 1996, as a result, witnessed an enhancement of economic cooperation between the two countries.

Myanmar's Deputy Foreign Minister U Nyunt Swe came for a six day visit to India in January 1994, during which he held a series of meetings and discussed wide-ranging issues to improve bilateral relations. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on 21 January 1994 to increase cooperation between civilian border authorities of the two countries and to prevent “illegal and insurgent activities”. Another agreement was signed to regularise and promote border trade to be conducted through Moreh in Manipur and Champhai in Mizoram corresponding to Tamu and Rhion the Myanmar side.

The relations between both the countries, however, had not normalised fully. The former Indian ambassador to Myanmar, Shyam Saran, says that as he took charge in Yangon in 1997, the ties were still frigid.<sup>13</sup> An author points out that it was only with the advent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in 1998 that a real transformation started gaining pace. Terming the then foreign minister Jaswant Singh as the “architect of realism” Marie Lall writes, “During this phase (which continues to date), there have been military to military dialogues and political rapprochement. The stakes have also included management of security situation in the North-east. Initiatives like BIMSTEC also took off during this period.”<sup>14</sup>

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12 J N Dixit, “Road to Mandalay”.

13 Shyam Saran, “The Virtue of Pragmatism”, *Times of India*, 7 August 2010.

14 Marie Lall, “India-Myanmar Relations – Geopolitics and Energy in Light of the New Balance of Power in Asia”, ISAS Working Paper, 2 January 2008, <http://www.isasnus.org/events/workingpapers/28.pdf> ( Accessed on 20 June 2011)

In July 1999, the Indian and Myanmar home ministries held a meeting in New Delhi to identify means to strengthen cooperation on issues like cross-border terrorism and setting up better communication links. India agreed to organise training for Myanmar's anti-narcotics officials. In November 2000, General Maung Aye, the second-most prominent leader of Myanmar's military junta, brought a high-powered delegation including Deputy Prime Minister Lt. Gen. Tin Hla, ministers for foreign affairs, finance, commerce, power science and technology and industry to New Delhi. India's home minister, L.K. Advani, used the occasion to announce a real warming up of ties between the two countries and said that Myanmar was assisting India by destroying camps of Naga militants in their territory. Mr. Advani further confirmed that the Myanmar Army had already destroyed five camps belonging to the insurgents earlier that year.<sup>15</sup>

The first decade of the 21st century witnessed growing strategic engagement between India and Myanmar. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, relations with Myanmar have become truly multi-faceted, "with cooperation in a range of developmental and other projects in the areas of roads, power, hydro-carbon, oil refinery, transmission lines, telecommunications and information technology."<sup>16</sup>

In October 2004, General Than Shwe, leading a delegation of eight cabinet ministers for six days talk, visited Delhi and both sides signed an agreement on security, cultural exchanges and hydro-electric power. In March 2006, President Abdul Kalam visited Myanmar to sign an agreement on cooperation in remote-sensing technology and to sign two MoUs on cooperation in the petroleum sector and in Buddhist studies. Besides these three accords of cooperation, India agreed to extend more than US\$37 million in loans to Myanmar. Further visits in the course of 2006 focused largely on the troubled border and defence talks and also discuss arms sales. On 23 April 2007, an 18-member Myanmar Army delegation, led by Brigadier-General Tin Maung Ohn visited Kolkata, for the 30th biannual liaison meeting of army officials from both countries. Issues relating to cross-border insurgency, arms smuggling and border management were discussed.

A clear realisation had dawned upon New Delhi that India's national interest is best served by a strong and stable Myanmar that observes strict neutrality between India and China and also cooperates with India in the common fight against insurgencies raging in the border areas of both the countries.

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15 "Burma Pledges to destroy Naga Rebel Bases", *Asian Age*, 18 November 2000.

16 "Why India needs Myanmar on its side", 26 July 2010, <http://news.rediff.com/column/2010/jul/26/why-india-needs-myanmar-on-its-side.htm> (Accessed on 20 June 2011).

## THE REMNANTS OF IDEALISM

It has been a reluctant ride for the policy makers in New Delhi from an era of idealism to the realm of realpolitik. The policy shift has been decried by the Myanmar's pro-democracy activists who accuse India of surrendering its ideals. An editorial in pro-democracy forum *Irrawaddy* commented in August 2010, "New Delhi wants to play a prominent role in the international community, even lobbying for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. But India's ability to assume an international leadership role depends – or at least should depend – on its ability to have a positive influence on the world. But we believe that India's influence on Burma is far from positive."<sup>17</sup> In its more recent edition, *Irrawaddy* has even accused India and China of trying to "exploit and control Burma."<sup>18</sup>

In addition, many within India decry the strategic shift as unnecessary. For example, an author writes,

*"Under Suu Kyi, the Myanmar people have been emulating the non-violent methods of Gandhiji. We will be betraying the memories of Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nebru and other freedom-fighters if we fail to support a Gandhi-inspired movement in Myanmar and instead support a military Junta, which rules the country in its interests and not in the interests of the people."*<sup>19</sup>

He further adds,

*"The strategic path need not exclude the ethical and vice versa. A mix of ethical and strategic parameters should govern our policy-making. Presently, the ethical parameters hardly have any influence in the policy-making on Myanmar. This position has to change and ethical parameters should play an important role. Suu Kyi and her supporters are trying to prove that Gandhism has still got relevance and can work in restoring to their people their dignity and freedoms. We should not prove them wrong by continuing with our present policies."*<sup>20</sup>

The notable opponents to India's policy of pragmatism in Myanmar includes Nobel laureate Amartya Sen who spoke against India's Myanmar

17 "New Delhi's Shame", Editorial, *Irrawaddy*, vol.18, no.8, August 2010, [http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=19194](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=19194) (Accessed on 18 June 2011)

18 Wai Moe, "China and India Warm to Burma", 28 April 2011, [http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=21205](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=21205) (Accessed on 20 June 2011)

19 B Raman, "India should not prove Gandhi wrong & irrelevant in Myanmar", 9 December 2007, <http://dts-presentations.blogspot.com/2009/06/india-should-not-prove-gandhi-wrong.html>(Accessed on 20 June 2011)

20 *ibid.*

policy in the presence of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh during a public meeting. “I do not agree with your policy on Burma. In a democratic country like India, I can say this to the Prime Minister,” he said.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, there are others who prescribe a nuanced middle path. For example, an editorial in *The Hindu* said,

*There are strong trade-cum-strategic arguments in favour of engaging the military regime in neighbouring Myanmar, but these should not be allowed to cloud or side-line India's principled policy of supporting the democratic forces in that country. Engagement is not endorsement; apologists for the trade-led policy...Let India engage the junta in Myanmar but let us also simultaneously pile pressure on the regime to return the country to the democratic path. Let us reiterate at every possible forum that a ruthless dictatorship in Myanmar is a major destabilising force in a region strategically important for this country.*<sup>22</sup>

### INDIA'S MYANMAR POLICY: THE FIVE DRIVERS

Essentially four considerations have been instrumental in the redrafting of India's Myanmar policy. Each of these drivers has been so vital to India's national interest that they have forced the country to overlook the concerns of pro-democracy groups in that country.

#### *A. Power Centres won't change in Myanmar*

To begin with, there is a realisation in New Delhi's policy circles that the military would remain the *de facto* power centre in Myanmar for foreseeable future. Hence, it is prudent to do business with the actual rulers, than courting the pro-democracy lobby who are in no position to address India's concerns. There is also a firm belief that the regime of embargo imposed by the West on Myanmar has not managed to weaken the military's hold on power. As a result, neither the plea of pro-democracy activists nor the American requests to play a balancing act figure prominently in the Indian policy making process.

General Than Shwe's India visit in July 2010 had coincided with the Obama administration's renewal of sanctions against Myanmar. A day before Than Shwe arrived in India, Philip Crowley, US State Department spokesman urged India “to send a clear message to Burma that it needs

21 “Amartya Sen ticks off PM on Myanmar policy”, *Times of India*, 4 August 2010.

22 Editorial, *The Hindu*, 18 November 1997.

to change its course.” He said, “Others who have relationships with Burma share a responsibility to communicate directly and forcefully to Burma about its responsibilities, whether they’re protecting the region against the risk of proliferation or telling Burma directly that it should more constructively engage its opposition and other ethnic groups within Burma.”<sup>23</sup>

Subsequently, the Obama administration has decided to support the creation of a UN inquiry into alleged war crimes by Myanmar’s military rulers.<sup>24</sup> Such policies of retribution, however, have been challenged by many. David I. Steinberg, a professor of Asian studies at Georgetown University and the author of ‘Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know’, commented,

*“Imposing additional sanctions on Burma’s regime or forming still more commissions will only salve our consciences. Neither will help the Burmese people, persuade the government to loosen its grip on the population, or even assist the United States in meeting its strategic or humanitarian objectives. In fact, such moves would hinder negotiations and relations with a new government that, even if far from a model for governance, would probably give the Burmese more political voice and freedom than they have had in half a century.”*<sup>25</sup>

The Indian government has preferred to stay away from the US-led condemnation against the military junta for its human rights violations and crackdown on the NLD members. At the government level, India, along with China and ASEAN countries, was silent when the rest of the world condemned the Burmese government for blocking Aung San Suu Kyi outside Yangon and later putting her under house arrest. India was in the minority group of nations that voted against the decision of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to take action against the regime for failing to curb forced labour in the country. Tint Swe, a member of Myanmar’s government-in-exile, subsequently said that such resolutions are ineffective tools against Myanmar’s military leadership. “The people of Burma are not excited by news from the UN. As long as power is in the hands of the military junta, UN bodies will have to go through the annual rituals.”<sup>26</sup>

23 Narayan Lakshman, “India should tell Myanmar to change course: US”, *Hindu*, 24 July 2010.

24 “US supports UN Myanmar war crimes inquiry”, 17 August 2010, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iWDIfK9BBfbaQ99GyO1mG8nylbJQ> ( Accessed on 18 June 2011)

25 David I. Steinberg, “Is Burma on the verge of transformation?”, *The Washington Post*, 21 August 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/20/AR2010082005021.html> ( Accessed on 20 June 2011)

26 “Useless UN and ILO rituals bring no change, Burmese dissidents says”, 24 November 2009, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Useless-UN-and-ILO-rituals-bring-no-change,-Burmese-dissidents-says-16944.html> ( Accessed on 20 June 2011)

India's assessment that nothing would change dramatically in Myanmar in the November 2010 elections has further been vindicated. The military continues to rule the country through the proxy civilian government.

### *B. Growing Presence of China in Myanmar*

A former Indian ambassador to Myanmar argues, "Over the years, New Delhi has faced two kinds of criticism on its Myanmar policy. Realists argued that its pro-democracy stance had driven Myanmar into "China's lap." Later, they maintained that the engagement was moving too slowly."<sup>27</sup> Authors like Renaud Egretteau argue that India's rapprochement with Myanmar has to be understood in the light of India's worry of being encircled by China. "The fact that the dragon had filled the diplomatic vacuum by intensifying its relationship with Myanmar since the late 1980s was not lost on India."<sup>28</sup>

India fears that the Chinese influence in Myanmar is spreading by the day. Although the Chinese government has always denied that it has any military ambitions in Myanmar, the American and Indian agencies have claimed that the Chinese are building monitoring facilities at Myanmar's ports near the strategic Straits of Malacca as part of their so-called "string of pearls" strategy to encircle India.

In 1949, Burma was one of the first countries to recognise the People's Republic of China. But relations between both countries soured in the 1960s following anti-Chinese riots in Rangoon. The military regime under General Ne Win had maintained a policy of equidistance from both India and China. The Myanmar's elite have always been suspicious of the motives of the two big neighbours. But following a crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in 1988, when the West imposed broad sanctions on Myanmar, China stepped into the void, providing aid and weapons and ramping up trade. Northern Myanmar was opened up to Chinese trade in a big way by the mid-1990s.<sup>29</sup>

China is said to have invested more than \$1 billion in Myanmar, primarily in the mining sector, and is the Myanmar's fourth largest foreign investor. Bilateral trade grew by more than one-quarter in 2008 to about \$2.63 billion. Chinese firms are heavily involved in logging in Myanmar. Myanmar gives China access to the Indian Ocean, not only for imports of oil and gas

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27 Rajiv Bhatia, "Crafting a richer India-Myanmar partnership", *Hindu*, 10 August 2010.

28 "Realism in India-Myanmar Relations", *Financial Express*, 15 September 2003, <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/realism-in-indiamyanmar-relations/89520/> (Accessed on 20 June 2011)

29 John Cherian, "Coming closer", *Frontline* (Chennai), vol.27, no.17, 24-27 August 2010.

and exports from landlocked south-western Chinese provinces, but also potentially for military bases or listening posts.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Myanmar has been a major recipient of Chinese economic assistance over the past decade, generally provided in the form of grants, interest-free loans, concessional loans or debt relief. According to the International Crisis Group,

*“Chinese economic assistance and cooperation programs are usually tied to Chinese state-owned enterprises, and are therefore often indistinguishable from state commercial investments. This makes it impossible to account for the full extent of China’s economic assistance and investments in Myanmar. Nor do the official figures reflect the reality of economic relationship between the two countries; Chinese investments are grossly underestimated by Myanmar’s official figures and, to a lesser extent, Chinese official figures.”*<sup>31</sup>

Beginning November 2009, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has started construction of a large-scale crude oil port in Kyaukpyu, in western Myanmar. The port is part of a larger, multibillion-dollar project designed to carry oil and natural gas across Myanmar into southern China. When finished, it will enable China to take deliveries of oil from the Middle East and Africa without sending it through the Strait of Malacca, a congested shipping lane that some Chinese leaders fear could be blocked by pirates or foreign powers. A related pipeline will also allow China to unlock large natural-gas reserves off Myanmar’s western coast. The project underscores Myanmar’s growing commercial ties with China. It is also expected to generate billions of dollars in revenue for Myanmar’s military regime, enhancing its ability to fund operations without heeding pleas by Western governments to implement democratic changes.

The Myanmar government, at the end of the 1980s, turned to China to help fulfil its plan of enlarging and modernising its armed forces, and China obliged. Over the years, this close military cooperation with China has been cemented. Currently being a largest supplier of weapons to Myanmar, China also provides the Myanmar Army with training in the technical use of weapons and weapon systems. Goods bought from China over the years have included armoured personnel carriers, tanks, fighter aircraft, radar systems, ammunition, surface-to-air missiles and short-range air to-

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30 “Five facts about China-Myanmar relations”, *Reuters*, 1 June 2010, <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-48959920100601> ( Accessed on 20 June 2011)

31 “China’s Myanmar Dilemma”, International Crisis Group, Asia Report No.177, 14 September 2009, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/north-east-asia/china/177-chinas-myanmar-dilemma.aspx> ( Accessed on 20 June 2011)

air missile systems. Much of the weaponry, such as an August 2008 batch of 200 military trucks, were observed crossing into Myanmar through Ruili on the China-Myanmar border.<sup>32</sup> When opposition and ethnic groups have questioned Chinese officials about arms sales, they replied that China only provides major military equipment, not small arms: “the heavy weapons that cannot kill your people”.<sup>33</sup>

In recent times, the Myanmar Army and Navy have received supply of M-11 rocket components, artillery guns, communication equipment, electric lighting and signal equipment and speedboats from China. In fact, the Myanmar navy resembles PLA navy in many respects. China is assisting the Myanmar Air Force in the up-gradation of its communication set up and also training and generation of new edition of aviation and border maps. China is also assisting in undertaking a maritime survey of its territory. Media reports in late August 2010 indicated that two Chinese warships arrived at Myanmar’s Yangon port on a ‘friendly visit’, marking the first such port call since 1988. An unnamed Chinese diplomat told, “These two navy destroyers arrived at Yangon’s Thilawa port on Sunday to promote relations between the two militaries.”<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, China has acted for a number of years as a protective shield for Myanmar in the United Nations Security Council by vetoing resolutions against the military junta. In September 2009, China blocked the inclusion of Myanmar on the agenda of UN Security Council.

### *C. Quest for Energy*

India currently ranks as the world’s eleventh largest energy producer, accounting for about 2.4 per cent of the world’s total annual energy production, and also as the world’s sixth largest energy consumer, accounting for about 3.3 per cent of the world’s total annual energy consumption. Despite its large annual energy production, India is a net energy importer, mostly due to the large imbalance between oil production and consumption. Myanmar’s oil and gas reserves are of critical interest to India’s future energy requirement. Myanmar has oil reserves of around

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32 “200 military trucks, were observed crossing into Myanmar through Ruili”, 27 August 2008, <http://myanmarnews.blogspot.com/2008/08/200-more-military-trucks-delivered-from.html> ( Accessed on 18 June 2011)

33 “China’s Myanmar Dilemma”, International Crisis Group, Asia Report No.177, 14 September 2009, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/north-east-asia/china/177-chinas-myanmar-dilemma.aspx> ( Accessed on 18 June 2011)

34 “Chinese warships pay visit to Myanmar”, 30 August 2010, <http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/news/341623.pay-visit-myanmar.html> ( Accessed on 20 June 2011)

600 million barrels and total gas reserves of 88 trillion cubic feet (TCF). Despite protests from the West, Indian companies like the overseas arm of India's Oil and Natural Gas Commission – ONGC Videsh Ltd, Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL), ESSAR et. al – have made investments in the oil and energy sector of Myanmar. OVL and GAIL together hold 30 per cent stake along with Daewoo's 60 per cent and Korea Gas' 10 per cent of offshore Block A-1 gas field.

It was during the 2001 visit of the then external affairs minister Jaswant Singh to Myanmar that India started seriously thinking about bringing gas from Myanmar. The February 2003 visit of Myanmar's General U Win Aung to India further boosted this cooperation in the hydrocarbon, power and energy sectors, particularly in the exploration of Myanmar's onshore oil and gas reserves.

However, in spite of the involvement of OVL and GAIL in exploration activities in the offshore A1 and A3 natural gas fields along the Rakhine coast, India vis-à-vis China has suffered a number of setbacks in getting gas from Myanmar. In 2008, Myanmar withdrew India's status as preferential buyer and instead declared its intent to sell them to China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) for 30 years beginning 2013. Starting October 2009, the CNPC started building a crude oil port in Myanmar to cut out the long detour oil cargoes take through the congested and strategically vulnerable Malacca strait. Earlier, in a similar move in December 2005, Myanmar had declined gas supply to the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India pipeline. Instead, it had signed an agreement with Hong Kong-listed Petrochina, under which Myanmar's Ministry of Energy agreed to sell 6.5 TCF from A-1 block (Rakhine coastline) reserve through an overland pipeline to Kunming (China) for 30 years.<sup>35</sup> This had made the proposed tri-nation Myanmar-Bangladesh-India pipeline project redundant. However, India has little option but to stay engaged in Myanmar.

#### *D. North-Eastern Insurgency*

For decades, majority of the seven states in India's north-eastern region have witnessed emergence and growth of insurgency movements with demands ranging from independence, autonomy, tribal rights etc. Estimates indicate that the number of such groups could be as high as 130. While a number of these insurgencies have ended, many still continue

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35 Anand Kumar, "Myanmar-Petrochina Agreement: A Setback to India's Quest for Energy Security", South Asia Analysis Group, Paper no. 1681, 19 January 2006, <http://www.southasianalysis.org/%5Cpapers17%5Cpaper1681.html> (Accessed on 20 June 2011)

impacting on the security situation of the region. They have constantly challenged India's nation building project in this part of the country and have remained hurdles in the processes of development. The remoteness of the north-eastern region and years of neglect and apathy by the central government in New Delhi have led to a feeling of alienation in the psyche of people of this region. This constantly feeds these armed movements.

In the last two decades, the policy of the Indian government has gone through a process of transformation. Huge amounts of developmental funds have been made available for the region. However, the insurgency movements continue to act as spoilers, resulting in a cycle of underdevelopment and alienation.

Myanmar, contiguous to Mizoram, where insurgency ended in the 1980s and also to Nagaland and Manipur where insurgency is still continuing, has served these armed groups in a variety of ways. Since the beginning of these armed insurrections, ethnic ties and tribal linkages between the people on either side of border has facilitated their movements and finding of safe haven and camps in those areas. Narratives on the insurgency movements, both by Indian as well as foreign scholars, detailed such activities.

There are several accounts detailing the journeys undertaken by the Mizo, Naga and Manipuri rebels, starting in the 1960s to China through Myanmar seeking assistance and arms. Some groups travel through the Nepal-China border as well. There also have been instances when groups like the PLA in Manipur had their cadres trained in China. Between 1966, when the first 'Naga Army' batch reached China for training through Myanmar's territory to 1980, China had trained several batches of Naga and Mizo rebels and a few dozen Manipuri rebel leaders.<sup>36</sup> Such official Chinese support to these rebels is believed to have ended. However, China continues to be a place for procurement of weapons on payment by the many of these rebels.

The majority of these armed groups established their camps in Myanmar in the mid-1970s. These facilities principally served three purposes - (a) as a shelter after East Pakistan (Bangladesh) was lost as a safe base area, (b) a crucial link zone through which rebels could go to China for training and weapons procurement, and (c) a safe training and regrouping zone. Much of these purposes still remain valid, even while changes have occurred in the nature and kind of support these groups generate in foreign locations.

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36 Subir Bhaumik, "Guns, drugs and rebels", *Seminar* (New Delhi), no. 550, June 2005, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2005/550/550%20subir%20bhaumik.htm#top> (Accessed on 22 June 2011)

At the instance of India, Myanmar has conducted on and off military operations against the north-eastern rebels since the 1980s. Writers like Bertil Linter in his seminal book 'Land of Jade' details first-hand experience of a military raid on a Naga rebel camp. However, once the soldiers have gone back from these areas, the rebels reclaimed their facilities.

There also have been occasions when the Myanmar used the rebels as a bargaining chip against India. The Operation Golden Bird conducted jointly by the Myanmar and Indian army in April-May 1995 had netted more than 200 rebels belonging to several separatist groups from Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. But suddenly, Myanmar pulled out of the joint operation, allowing the trapped rebel column to escape. Analysts link this with India's 1993 decision to award Aung San Syu Kyi with the Jawaharlal Nehru Peace Prize. Again in November 2001, the Myanmar Army raided four Manipuri rebel bases, rounded up 192 rebels and seized more than 1600 weapons. Surprisingly, all these rebels including the chief of UNLF Rajkumar Meghen were released.

Indian Army sources believe that, currently, there are approximately 40 to 50 camps of Northeast-based insurgent groups in Myanmar. Out of these 25 to 30 are identified as bigger camps or of established nature.<sup>37</sup> The long presence of the insurgents in Myanmar has provided them with a vital sense of security. In the event of any long-term military operation in states like Manipur, the insurgents have the option of moving into their safe bases in Myanmar. As the counter-insurgency operations have intensified in Manipur, these bases have served as the training centres for fresh recruits. Moreover, it is in these camps that the insurgents amass weapons procured from a variety of sources in Southeast Asia and possibly China.

Of late, reports indicating a tactical level of understanding between the insurgents and the lower rung cadres of the Myanmar's military have emerged. These reports based on intelligence inputs point at the bonhomie between the insurgents and the military personnel, largely sustained by regular gifts and money. In return, the insurgents are warned against impending operations by the forces thereby allowing them to vacate camps long before the men in uniform arrive. In return for the regular protection money, certain army officers are providing logistic support to these insurgents, including medical facilities. They are also assisted to get contract jobs and carry out their business activities. Reports also indicate

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37 Oken Jeet Sandham, "Myanmar based militant activities on rise on Indian side", 26 April 2010, <http://www.e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=11..260410.apr10> (Accessed on 20 June 2011)

that the Myanmar Army is also using the services of insurgents to keep track and also carry out occasional attacks on Myanmarese rebels, some of whom have found refuge on the Indian side.

Southeast Asia has long served as the arms bazaar for north-eastern insurgents. Arms into the northeast have either come through Myanmar or through Bangladesh. However, there are indications that after a series of seizures in Chittagong and other parts of Bangladesh, Myanmar has emerged as sole route for weapons into the northeast. Camps in Myanmar allow these rebels to stockpile these weapons and transfer them at appropriate time into India. The Naga rebels have traded with the surplus weapons by selling them to smaller outfits in the northeast.

The north-eastern insurgents have also indulged in smuggling of drugs from Myanmar. While outfits like the UNLF in Manipur have an anti-substance abuse policy, groups like the NSCN have freely indulged in such trade. The easy availability of such drugs have made youth in states like Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland vulnerable to a host of problems including AIDS. It is estimated that Manipur's share in the estimated 3.5 million AIDS/ HIV cases in India is over 11 per cent. The Myanmar's drug lords are also encouraging tribal farmers, and in some cases the insurgents to plant poppy. Unless these new plantations are destroyed and gainful agricultural alternatives provided to the farmers, the India-Myanmar border will soon be dotted with poppy fields feeding the processing plants in western Myanmar.

Past instances of Myanmar's decisions to loosen the stranglehold on insurgents notwithstanding, there are also reasons to believe that the Myanmar's authorities lack capacity to carry out sustained operations against these insurgents. Moreover, there seems to be no inherent interest on their part to hold on to these areas once the insurgents are dislodged. This has been articulated to the Indian authorities and New Delhi consequently has initiated measures to enhance the counter-terrorism capacities of the Myanmar Army, just not in terms of equipping them with sophisticated weapons and other communication devices, but also improving infrastructure along the border areas.

In order to secure Myanmar's cooperation and to strengthen its control over territories where the north-eastern rebels are camping, India has supplied military hardware to that country. On 21 May 2010, responding to the Myanmar's demands for road building machinery, Indian Army handed over heavy machineries and other necessary spare parts to their Myanmar's

counterparts at Moreh.<sup>38</sup> India hopes that the building of roads and other constructions in the remote and inaccessible areas would augment the control of army over those areas. On 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> May 2010 a joint Indo-Myanmar mega medical, dental and veterinary camp was conducted jointly by officials of Myanmar and India along Indo-Myanmar border. Approximately two thousand locals on both sides of the border benefited from the services of general physicians, specialist doctors, dentist and veterinary doctors of the Indian Army and Assam Rifles as well as medical staff from Myanmar.<sup>39</sup>

### E. *Looking East*

India's Look East Policy (LEP), launched in the early 1990s, was meant, at a fundamental level, to "reconnect and reach out in the civilisational space" India shares with its near neighbours in Southeast Asia, and "catalyse the sharing of capacities and opportunities to improve the economic well-being of peoples of the region."<sup>40</sup> Renaud Egretreau argues that shift in India's Myanmar policy was part of its LEP, which in line with its economic reforms hoped for a rapprochement with the economically successful South East Asian states.<sup>41</sup> The LEP, launched under the P. V. Narasimha Rao-led Congress government to connect the Indian economy with the flourishing economy of neighbouring Southeast Asia, necessitated that India mends its fences with Myanmar. The broad objectives of the LEP during the 1990s were three-fold – to institutionalise linkages with ASEAN and its affiliates; to strengthen bilateral relationships with member states of ASEAN; and to carve a suitable place for itself to prevent Southeast Asia falling under the influence of any one major power.<sup>42</sup>

The LEP continued to receive serious attention during the NDA regime as well. The then Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh made two visits to Myanmar in 2001 and 2002: the first visit was to inaugurate the India-Myanmar Friendship Road, and the second to start talks on building the ambitious Trans-Asia highway project. Myanmar was crucial to the Indian government in view of BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar,

38 Asem Lalit, "Road equipment given to Myanmar", *Imphal Free Press*, 22 May 2010.

39 "Indo Myanmar mega medical anfraternisation dental & vet. Camp", *Imphal Free Press*, 7 May 2010.

40 "Address by Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao on 'Key Priorities for India's Foreign Policy' at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 27 June 2011, <http://www.meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=190017787> (Accessed on 28 June 2011).

41 Marie Lall, "Indo-Myanmar Relations in the Era of Pipeline Diplomacy", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol.28, no.3, 2006, pp.424-46.

42 G V C Naidu, "Wither the Look East Policy: India and Southeast Asia", *Strategic Analysis*, vol.28, no.2, April-June 2004, p.332.

Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) and the Kunming Initiative, an effort involving India, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

In addition, bilateral trade between the two countries has expanded considerably from US\$ 12.4 million in 1980-81 to US\$ 1207.56 million in 2009-10. India imports mostly agricultural items (beans, pulses, and forest based products) and exports primary and semi-finished steel and pharmaceuticals. There is also marginal trade at the border trading posts at Tamu-Moreh (Manipur) and Rhi-Zowkhatar (Mizoram). In fact, the first Border Trade Agreement between India and Myanmar was signed in January 1994. As per the agreement, border trade was to be conducted through Moreh in Manipur and Tamu in Myanmar and Champhai in Mizoram and Rhion the Myanmar side. Trade started officially on 12 April 1995. Several bottlenecks, however, continue to mar any effective border trade at these points till date.

#### EXPORT OF DEMOCRACY

It is thus fair to assume that strategic considerations guided India to refrain from promoting democracy in its neighbourhood. While many would interpret this step to be a conscious decision, it is also based on the realisation that public pressure on the military junta is unlikely to yield results. The years of sanctions by the United States and the European Union are largely perceived to have failed in goading the Myanmar's junta to accommodate the pro-democracy camp. On the other hand, it has made the de facto rulers of that country more rigid and un-amenable to change. As former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, who also served as India's ambassador to Myanmar points out, "The enduring hostility that the regime has faced from the US and its Western allies has also engendered a sense of siege and sometimes even paranoia among the generals. Suu Kyi has unfortunately become, in their eyes, an instrument in the hands of West to force a regime change."<sup>43</sup>

It is, thus, natural that the military would view any move to court Suu Kyi as an attempt of dethroning the establishment. The Indian stand was made fairly clear by the then External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee in 2006. He said that India cannot "export democracy" to neighbouring countries and that India had to deal with governments "as they exist".<sup>44</sup> It has remained unchanged since then.

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<sup>43</sup> Shyam Saran, "The Virtue of Pragmatism", *Times of India*, 7 August 2010.

<sup>44</sup> John Cherian, "Coming closer", op.cit.

India does share its sympathy with the NLD (now disbanded) and Suu Kyi. As Shyam Saran notes, “As a democracy, India would welcome the establishment of inclusive and broad-based multiparty democracy in Myanmar.”<sup>45</sup> However, this desire cannot hold India’s long term and strategic interests in the country to ransom. As a result, India still urges that Aung San Suu Kyi should be allowed to play a constructive political role in the country. The then Indian Foreign Secretary, Nirupama Rao, called on Suu Kyi during her visit to Myanmar in June 2011.<sup>46</sup> But the visit remained a mere courtesy call and not a political one.

### CURRENT LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

A certain degree of warmth between India and Myanmar is clearly perceptible. Between 2000 and June 2011, twelve high profile visits have taken place between the two countries. These include visits by Vice Senior General Maung Aye, Vice-Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council of the Union of Myanmar in April 2008, Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of the SPDC in July 2010, M. Hamid Ansari, Vice President of India in February 2009 and S.M. Krishna, External Affairs Minister in December 2010 and June 2011.

During the June 2011 visit, both sides signed a US\$60 million project for construction of an 80-kilometre road linking Rhi with Riddim in Myanmar’s mountainous Chin province. India pledged \$10 million towards capacity building in Myanmar besides setting up an agricultural research centre. In the health sector, India agreed to provide sophisticated medical equipment to a children’s hospital in Yangon and has announced plans to build a state-of-the-art general hospital in Sittwe. As a part of its efforts to reach out to the masses on issues involving human security, India has donated 10 disaster-proof silos - four in the Yangon region and seven in the Irrawaddy region - to store grain.<sup>47</sup>

In January 2010, both countries held Home Secretary level talks in Nay Pyi Taw. Myanmar assured India of possible support for apprehending insurgent leaders like Paresh Barua and others belonging to a number of north-eastern groups like NSCN-IM and separatist groups of Tripura.<sup>48</sup> In April 2010, both countries held joint secretary level talks in Tawang in

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45 Shyam Saran, “The Virtue of Pragmatism”, op.cit.

46 Snehes Alex Philips, “Nirupama Rao Meets Aung Suu Kyi”, 22 June 2011, <http://news.outlookindia.com/item.aspx?725695>(Accessed on 25 June 2011).

47 Sudha Ramachandran, “India hedges its bets in Myanmar”, 28 June 2011, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/MF28Df03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/MF28Df03.html) (Accessed on 29 June 2011).

48 Rahul Mishra, “Elections in Myanmar”, 19 August 2010, [http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/ElectionsinMyanmar\\_rmishra\\_190810](http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/ElectionsinMyanmar_rmishra_190810) (Accessed on 20 June 2011)

Arunachal Pradesh. The symbolism of Myanmar attending the Tawang meet was not lost as China disputes the territory as its own.

Earlier, the five day goodwill visit by Senior General Than Shwe in July 2010 had resulted in both the countries inking five pacts, including one in the field of security for close cooperation between armies of the two countries in tackling the pernicious problem of terrorism.<sup>49</sup> The pacts included a treaty on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, a MoU on Indian grant for small developmental projects, agreement on cooperation in the field of science and technology and MoU on Indian assistance in restoring the Ananda temple in Bagan, a renowned Buddhist shrine and a major tourist site in central Myanmar. Both countries also agreed to cooperate in the fields of information, science and technology. India will give \$60 million as grant for the construction of a road linking India's north-eastern region to Myanmar and another grant of \$10 million to buy agricultural machinery.

Sources from India's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) have indicated that the mutual legal assistance agreement will help India

*“Combat transnational organized crimes, trans-border terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, counterfeit currency, smuggling of arms and explosives. Under the provisions of the treaty, Indian insurgents caught in Myanmar can be handed over to India. The treaty has enabling provisions that will help both countries expediting criminal investigations, judicial proceedings, gathering evidences and assisting each other during investigations.”*<sup>50</sup>

It would also pave the way for examining witnesses in each other's countries, including in jails. The pact also has a 'cost compensation' clause allowing Myanmar to seek expenses incurred on special investigations carried out by it on India's request.<sup>51</sup>

## A PEEK INTO THE FUTURE

Voices in India continue to ask for a moderation in India's policy of engaging with Myanmar's military rulers. While some argue that ideals must be put ahead of interests, the others maintain that India's new policy

49 “India, Myanmar sign on the dotted line, boost ties”, 27 July 2010, <http://news.rediff.com/report/2010/jul/27/india-myanmar-sign-on-the-dotted-line-boost-ties.htm> ( Accessed on 20 June 2011)

50 Elizabeth Roche, “Myanmar pact to help India contain North-East militancy”, 1 August 2010, <http://www.livemint.com/2010/08/01234856/Myanmar-pact-to-help-India-con.html> ( Accessed on 20 June 2011)

51 Jayanth Jacob & Manish Tiwari, “India, Myanmar pact to help curb NE insurgents”, *Hindustan Times*, 8 July 2010.

has benefited Myanmar's military junta more than it has helped India's cause. Neither has India been able to contain China, nor has the military junta been able to eradicate the problem of north-eastern insurgency. The United States too has continued to mount pressure on India and China to play a constructive role in negotiating the challenge posed by Myanmar. For the moment, however, New Delhi appears to have decided to stay on course.

A few factors, however, could bring about some alteration in India's Myanmar policy. Myanmar's reported yearning for nuclear weapons might coerce Indian policy makers to rethink on their strategy. External Affairs Minister S. M. Krishna ambiguously stated in the Parliament on 26 August 2010 that "The government is trying to gather information about such peripheral activities. We monitor such activities closely as we are concerned about security of the country (India)."<sup>52</sup> Similarly, continuous failure in fulfilling its energy requirements in Myanmar vis-à-vis China too might push New Delhi to reorient its strategy. In addition, Myanmar's cooperation in tackling the insurgents too would be a test case. A lot would, thus, depend on Myanmar's response to India's gestures. Whether it chooses to nurture a tactical ally in India is something we need to watch out for.

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52 "India 'monitoring' Myanmar", *Straits Times*, 26 August 2010, [http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Asia/Story/STIStory\\_571362.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Asia/Story/STIStory_571362.html) ( Accessed on 20 June 2011)