

**POLITICAL REFORMS IN MYANMAR: A STUDY OF ITS
IMPLICATIONS ON INDIA-MYANMAR RELATIONS**

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**POLITICAL REFORMS IN MYANMAR: A STUDY OF ITS IMPLICATIONS
ON INDIA-MYANMAR RELATIONS**

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Submitted

**In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Political Reforms in Myanmar: A Study of Its Implications on India-Myanmar Relations” submitted by Jonathan Zodintluanga for the award of the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY is a research work, done under my supervision and guidance. The thesis submitted by his has not formed the basis for the award to the scholar for any degree or any other similar title and it has not yet been submitted as a thesis or dissertation in any University. I certify that the thesis represents the objective study and independent work of the scholar.

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Declaration of the Candidate

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I, Jonathan Zodintluanga, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

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Table of Contents

Certificate.....	i
Declaration of the Candidate	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures.....	ix
List of Appendices	ix
List of Abbreviations	xi
Chapter-1: Introduction	1
1.1. Political Reforms in Myanmar	2
1.2. Structure of Government in Myanmar	7
1.2.1. The Union Legislative	8
1.2.2. Pyithu Hluttaw	9
1.2.3. Amyotha Hluttaw	10
1.2.4. The Union Executive.....	11
1.2.5. Judiciary	12
1.2.6. Supreme Court.....	12
1.2.7. High Courts	13
1.2.8. District Courts and Township Courts	15
1.2.9. Courts-Martial	15
1.2.10. Constitutional Tribunal of the Union	16
1.2.11. The Union Election Commission (UEC).....	16
1.3. Implications of reforms on India-Myanmar Relations.	17
1.4. Statement of the Problem	21
1.5. Review of Literature.....	23
1.6. Objectives of the Study	33
1.7. Research Questions	33
1.8. Methodology	33

1.9. Scope of the Study.....	34
1.10. Limitation of the Study.....	35
1.11. Chapterization	36
Chapter-2: Political Developments in Myanmar	38
2.1. Political Developments in Pre-independence Era	39
2.1.1. Panglong Agreement (1947).....	41
2.2. Era of Independence	44
2.2.1. Period of Democracy, Caretaker Government and Elections.....	48
2.3. Period of the Military Rule.....	53
2.3.1. Reasons Behind the Military Coup in 1962	55
2.3.2. Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) Era.....	56
2.4. People’s Uprising in 1988 (8888)	58
2.4.1. The Aftermath and Formation of National League for Democracy (NLD) .	59
2.4.2. 1990 General Election	64
2.5. Period of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)	66
2.6. Period of State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)	69
2.6.1. Saffron Revolution	71
2.7. Reasons for Continuous Military Rule	72
2.8. Adoption of the 2008 Constitution.....	73
2.9. The 2010 Elections	74
2.10. The 2015 Elections	75
2.11. Rohingya Crisis	76
2.12. The 2020 Elections.	77
2.13. Military Coup in 2021	78
Chapter-3: History of India-Myanmar Relations	81
3.1. India-Myanmar Relations during British Colonial Era	82
3.2. Political Relations during the Nationalist Movement	85
3.3. Cultural Relations.....	91

3.4. Economic Relations.....	92
3.5. General Principles of Foreign Policy of India and Myanmar.....	99
3.5.1. Indian Foreign Policy	100
3.5.1.1 Panchsheel	101
3.5.1.2 Non-Alignment.....	102
3.5.1.3 Anti-Imperialism, Anti-Racism and Anti-Colonialism	104
3.5.1.4 Strengthening of UN.....	104
3.5.2. Myanmar's Foreign Policy	105
3.5.2.1 Non-Alignment.....	106
3.5.2.2 Isolationism	107
3.5.2.3 Neutralism	108
3.5.2.4 Panchsheel	109
3.6. India-Myanmar Relations during the Post-Colonial Period	110
3.6.1. Political Relations.....	112
3.6.2. Economic Relations.....	117
3.6.3. Defence and Strategic Relations.....	122
3.7. India-Myanmar Strategic Relations.....	123
Chapter-4: Political Reforms in Myanmar.....	131
4.1. The 2010 General Elections	131
4.2. Initiation of Reforms in Myanmar.....	133
4.2.1. Parliament.....	135
4.2.2. National Human Rights Commission.....	138
4.2.3. Release of Prisoners (Amnesty)	141
4.2.4. Media Censorship Ease	146
4.3. Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD	147
4.4. Political Changes in 2012.....	151
4.4.1. The 2012 By-Elections	153
4.4.2. Additional Amnesty	155
4.5. Violence in Kachin State (2012)	158
4.6. Violence in Rakhine State (2012)	159

4.7. The 2015 General Elections	161
4.8. National Reconciliation/Peace Process	169
4.9. Rohingya Crisis	175
4.10. The 2020 General Elections.	177
4.11. The Military Coup in 2021	177

Chapter-5: Implications of Political Reforms in Myanmar on India-Myanmar

Relations..... 182

5.1. Myanmar's Improvement in International Relations	183
5.2. Importance of Myanmar for India	186
5.3. Improvement of Relations between India and Myanmar	187
5.3.1 Exchange of High-Level Visits	189
5.4. Major Indian Projects in Myanmar	195
5.4.1. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project.....	197
5.4.2. Rihkhawdar-Tedim-Falam Road Project.....	199
5.4.3. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway	202
5.4.4. The Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo Road Project	204
5.4.5. Proposed Imphal-Mandalay Bus Service	205
5.5. Commercial and Economic Relations	207
5.6. Border Trade.....	215
5.7. Cultural Relations.....	218
5.8. Indian Investment in Myanmar	220
5.9. Defence Cooperation	224
5.10. Insurgency in Northeast.....	225
5.11. Drug Smuggling	227
5.12. Defence Capacity Building	228
5.13. Maritime Security.....	230
5.14. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)	230
5.15. Geopolitical and Geostrategic Consideration	231

Chapter-6: Summary and Conclusion	235
Bibliography	305
Brief Bio-Data of the Candidate	319
Particulars of the Candidate	320

List of Tables

<i>Table 1: Principal Exports of India to Burma</i>	<i>95</i>
<i>Table 2: India Major Imports from Burma</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Table 3: Burma's Trade Balance with India</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>Table 4: India's Trade with Myanmar (1947-1948 – 1961-1962).....</i>	<i>120</i>
<i>Table 5: India- Myanmar Bilateral Trade 2006-12 (US\$ million).....</i>	<i>207</i>
<i>Table 6: India- Myanmar Bilateral Trade 2013-18 (US\$ million).....</i>	<i>209</i>
<i>Table 7: India's Top 5 Exports to Myanmar (Value in US\$ million)</i>	<i>214</i>
<i>Table 8: India's Top 5 Imports from Myanmar (in US\$ million)</i>	<i>215</i>

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: Myanmar's Foreign Trade (US\$ billion).....</i>	<i>211</i>
<i>Figure 2: India's Trade with Myanmar (US\$ billion)</i>	<i>212</i>
<i>Figure 3: Sector-wise FDI Inflows to Myanmar from India.....</i>	<i>221</i>
<i>Figure 4: Foreign Investment in Myanmar (by sector)</i>	<i>222</i>

List of Appendices

<i>Appendix 1: Memorandum of Understanding between ICMR, India and DMR, Myanmar</i>	<i>272</i>
<i>Appendix 2: Panglong Agreement, 1947</i>	<i>277</i>
<i>Appendix 3: Memorandum of Understanding between Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Govt. of India and Ministry of Electricity and Energy, Govt. of Myanmar.</i>	<i>280</i>

<i>Appendix 4: Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of Myanmar on Visa Exemption for Official and Diplomatic Passport Holders.</i>	<i>284</i>
<i>Appendix 5: Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India and the Ministry of Education, Govt. of Myanmar.</i>	<i>287</i>
<i>Appendix 6: Memorandum of Understanding between Govt. of India and Govt. of Myanmar on cooperation in the field of Agriculture and Allied Sectors.</i>	<i>289</i>
<i>Appendix 7: The Gazette of India on Memorandum of Understanding between Govt of India and Govt. of Myanmar for import of toor and urad.</i>	<i>292</i>
<i>Appendix 8: Barter Trade with Myanmar under the Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement.</i>	<i>294</i>
<i>Appendix 9: Some pictures taken during research field work.</i>	<i>299</i>

List of Abbreviations

AA	Acetic Anhydride
AA	Arakan Army
ABSDF	All Burma Students' Democratic Front
ACARE	Advance Centre for Agriculture Research and Education
ADSL	Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line
AEP	Act-East Policy
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
AI	Amnesty International
AICC	All India Congress Committee
AICHR	ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
ALA	Arakan Liberation Army
ANP	Arakan National Party
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asia Nations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCIM	Bangladesh China India and Myanmar

BCP	Burma Communist Party
BIA	Burma Independence Army
BIMSTEC	Economic Corridor and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BIPA	Bilateral Investment Promotion Agreement
BIPPA	Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BNA	Burma National Army
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
BTA	Border Trade Agreement
CEP	Cultural Exchange Programme
CII	Confederation of Indian Industry
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CNF	Chin National Front
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CSO	Central Statistical Organization
DAB	Democratic Alliance for Burma
DTAA	Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement

DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organizations
EAS	East Asia Summit
EC	European Community
ENC	Ethnic Nationalities Council
EU	European Union
EUEOM	European Union Election Observation Missions
FICCI	Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
GAIL	Gas Authority of India Limited
GCBA	General Council for Burmese Association
GOI	Government of India
GOM	Government of Myanmar
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
IAI	Initiative for ASEAN Integration
ICC	Indian Chamber of Commerce
ICCR	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
IDSAs	Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses
ILO	International Labour Organization

IMCEITS	India-Myanmar Centre for Enhancement of Information Technology Skills
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INC	Indian National Congress
IPR	Indo-Pacific Region
IT	Information Technology
ITC	Industrial Training Centre
JTC	Joint Trade Committee
KKO	Klo Htoo baw Karen Organization
KMMTTP	Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project
KNDO	Karen National Defence Organization
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	Karen National Union
LCS	Land Custom Station
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LEP	Look East Policy
LOC	Line of Credit

MCF	Myanmar Computer Federation
MDONER	Department of Northeastern Region
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MEC	Myanmar Economic Corporation
MGC	Mekong Ganga Cooperation
MIBC	Myanmar - India Business Club
MICELT	Myanmar-India Centre for English Language Training
MIEDC	Myanmar-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre
MLAT	Mutual Legal Assistant Treaty
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MNDO	Mon National Defence Organization
MoEP-1	Ministry of Electric Power-1
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPC	Myanmar Peace Center
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NDF	National Democratic Front

NDSC	National Defence and Security Council
NDTV	New Delhi Television Limited
NEC	North Eastern Council
NER	Northeast Region
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
NSCN-K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Khaplang
NTS	Non-Traditional Security
NUG	National Unity Government
NUP	National Unity Party
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer
ONGC	Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd
OVL	ONGC Videsh Ltd
PC	Peace Council
PDF	People's Defence Force
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PNLA	Pa-O National Liberation Army
PoW	Prisoners of War

PVO	People's Volunteer Organization
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RC	Revolutionary Council
RIS	Research and Information System for Developing Countries
RITES	Rail India Technical and Economic Service
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAC	State Administration Council
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SNDP	Shan Nationalities Democracy Party
SNLD	Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SSA-N	Shan State Army-North
SSA-S	Shan State Army- South
UEC	Union Election Commission
UK	United Kingdom
UMEH	Union of Myanmar Economic Holding Ltd.

UMFCCI	Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry
UN	United Nations
UNCHR	United Nations Commission on Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNO	United Nations Organization
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
VOA	Voice of America
WHO	World Health Organization
YMBA	Young Men's Buddhist Association
YMBA	Young Men's Business Association
YMBA	Young Myanmar Buddhist Association

Chapter-1

Introduction

This introductory chapter includes the introduction of the research discussing various themes and sub-themes of the research area. It discusses a brief profile of Myanmar as well as the structure of government which is normally employed in the country. It also discusses in brief the political reforms taking place in Myanmar. It also discusses in brief the relations between India and Myanmar and the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on their relations. It further discusses the statement of the problem, review of literature, objectives of the study, scope of the study, limitation of the study as well as chapterization of the thesis.

Myanmar (formerly Burma), officially known as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is the one of the biggest country within South East Asia. It is a multi-ethnic State containing more than 100 ethnic groups. The majority of the population followed Buddhism as their religion although other religions such as Islam, Christianity and Hinduism are also prevalent in Myanmar. Myanmar is situated in Southeast Asia and is surrounded on the north and north-east by China, on the east and south-east by Laos and Thailand, on the south by the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal and on the west by Bangladesh and India. It is located between latitudes 09° 32'N and 28° 31'N and longitudes 92° 10'E and 101° 11'E.¹

There are seven regions, seven states and one Union Territory in Myanmar. The seven areas includes Ayeyarwady region, Bago region, Magway region,

¹ Basic Facts About Myanmar. <http://www.myanmar-embassy-tokyo.net/about.htm>. (Retrieved 21/10/2020).

Mandalay region, Sagaing region, Tanintharyi region, Yangon region; while the seven states are Chin state, Kachin state, Kayah state, Kayin state, Shan state, Mon state, and Rakhine state.² Nay Pyi Taw is the capital and the sole Union Territory in the nation. Myanmar had enacted three Constitutions in 1948, 1974 and 2008 since its independence on January 4, 1948 from the British. The country started off with a parliamentary democracy in 1948 and lasted until 1962. The country was placed under a military administration for over five decades from 1962 onwards.

1.1. Political Reforms in Myanmar

Political reforms in Myanmar have been under way since the military regime adopted the new Constitution for Myanmar in 2008. The adoption of the new Constitution was followed by the General Elections in 2010 that clearly marked the beginning of political reforms in Myanmar. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) backed by the military claimed a resounding victory in the first elections for 20 years in the country. A week after the elections, Aung San Suu Kyi, a democratic symbol and leader of the pro-democratic movement was freed from house arrest. The nominal civilian government was formally established on 30th March, 2011 with Thein Sein as the President thereby, formally dissolving the military government.

With the establishment of a new government in Myanmar, general amnesty was granted to more than 2000 prisoners including 220 political prisoners.³ New labour laws were initiated permitting the formation of labour unions and granting the

² Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar: Ministry of Information. (2008). Constitution of the Republic of Myanmar 2008. Myanmar: Printing and Publishing Enterprise. p. 13.

³ N. Kipgen. (2016). *Myanmar: A Political History*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 81-84

people of the right to strike. President Thein Sein also signed a law permitting the expression of the people's basic right such as the right to peacefully demonstrate grievances in the country. National Human Rights Commission was further established on 5th September, 2011⁴.

For the By-Elections of Parliament in 2012, the National League for Democracy (NLD) party was re-registered as a political party which was earlier declared an illegal party by the government. The government further reached an agreement with the rebels of the Shan ethnic group and ordered the military to stop operations against Kachin ethnic rebels. In January 2012, a ceasefire agreement was also made with the rebels of the Karen ethnic group⁵. April 2012 Parliamentary By-Elections marked a landmark victory for the NLD winning the election with an absolute majority, winning 43 out of 45 seats. ⁶

The new government further agreed to relax press censorship with the announcement of permitting the establishment of privately owned newspapers from April 2013.⁷ In early 2014, the government of Myanmar finally abolished the 25 years ban on public gathering of more than 5 people in the country.⁸ It also finalized a landmark agreement to open its telecom network, opening up its door to foreign investments. In July 2015, the date for the first open general election in the country since 1990 was announced.⁹

⁴ Ibid. p. 80.

⁵ Ibid. p. 135-136.

⁶ Ibid. p. 124-125.

⁷ Ibid. p. 85-86.

⁸ Ibid. p. 85-86.

⁹ N. Kipgen. (2016). Decoding Myanmar's 2015 Election. *Asian Affairs*. 47(2). p. 215

The general elections were held on 8th November, 2015. In these general elections, the NLD won by an overwhelming victory by securing more than 85% seats resulting in the formation of the civilian government under the leadership of the NLD.¹⁰ The elected members to the parliament convened its first meeting on 1st of February, 2016. Htin Kyaw, the nominated member of the NLD was elected as the President of Myanmar on 15th March, 2016 who was later replaced by Win Myint on 28th March, 2018.

The victory of the NLD followed by the election of Htin Kyaw as the President affirmed civilian rule in the country. Myint Swe, the military appointed member to the parliament was also elected as the First Vice-President. Henry Van Thio, the nominated member of the NLD was also elected as the Second Vice-President. NLD's leader Aung San Suu Kyi assumed the newly created role of a State Counsellor on the 6th of April, 2016. The role of the State Counsellor was similar to that of the Prime Minister. Accordingly, civilian government was set up in coalition with the military nominated members under the leadership of the NLD. This was a significant landmark in the history of Myanmar since the military coup in 1962.

The military coup of 1962 in Myanmar witnessed the overthrow of U Nu's civilian government by the military under the leadership of General Ne Win. The main reason for this coup can be attributed to the fact that many of the top military personnel were politically active owing to the instability caused by various ethnic

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 220.

rebels.¹¹ This resulted in their active interference in the affairs of the government. Consequent to their active political involvement, the military had been ruling the country directly or indirectly until the recent establishment of a civilian government in 2016 under the leadership of the NLD.

However, the recent political reforms in Myanmar may not necessarily lead the country to a full-fledged democracy. There exists a stumbling block in the transition of the system, the main reason being the military adopted the constitution of 2008. The military government at that time adopted the new Constitution to ensure the creation of a ‘genuine, discipline, multi-party democratic system’ in the country.¹² Provisions for the country to become a full-fledged democracy were never incorporated. In fact, the military through the provisions of the Constitution ‘prevent and restrict’ the country from becoming a full-fledged democracy.

Under the 2008 Constitution, the official name of the country ‘Union of Myanmar’ was changed to the ‘Republic Union of Myanmar’.¹³ It assigned the military 25 per cent of all seats in both houses of the legislature. It contained a provision that required a majority of more than 75 per cent to approve any constitutional amendment. Thus, constitutional amendment was not possible without the consent of the military. The military had been granted the responsibility for the preservation of the sovereignty and integrity of the country. They were also responsible for safeguarding the Constitution.

¹¹ Kyi, Aung San Suu. (1991). *Freedom From Fear: And Other Writings*. London: Penguin Books Ltd. p. 56

¹² Op cit, Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. (2008). p. 3.

¹³ Ibid. p. 1.

It also continued to give the military control of three key ministries in the government, these are: (i) Border affairs (ii) Defence (iii) Home affairs. It further granted the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services the right to take over and exercise sovereign power in case of state emergency when the life and property of the people are endangered.¹⁴ Thus, the Commander-in-Chief could override the role of the President and the Executives of the State in case of threat to integration of the Union, national solidarity and loss of sovereign power. It also enabled the Defence Services i.e. military personnel to participate in the national political leadership role of the State.

It also prohibited anyone with a foreign spouse or child from becoming the President of the country which is considered as a move to check Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming the President under section 59 (f) of the constitution.¹⁵ The right to secede which was earlier included in the Panglong Agreement of 1947 was denied and hence, contained provisions that denied minorities in the country the right to secede or withdraw from the country. It also restored multi-party system within a controlled democratic model which granted the military a major role in safeguarding their interests. It contained the provisions for conducting General Elections in the country which were subsequently held in 2010, 2015 and 2020.

General Elections were again held on 8th November, 2020. In the 2020 general election, the NLD won 920 of the total 1,117 seats, which was boosted by 61 seats from their success in the 2015 election. The biggest opposition party, the USDP

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 11.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 19

gained 71 seats, down 46 from the 2015 election when it won 117 seats.¹⁶ The election outcome delivered a solid mandate to the NLD to rule for another five years. On the other side, the USDP accused the NLD of participating in electoral fraud including buying of votes, and called for fresh elections in collaboration with the military.

All the scepticism and controversy regarding the provisions of the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar proved right when the military once again seized a coup and took over the country on 1st February, 2021. Following a complaint from its proxy party i.e. the USDP, with regards to the 2020 general elections results, the military eventually seized power in a coup, citing large-scale electoral fraud which gives a major setback to the democratic reforms process in the country.

1.2. Structure of Government in Myanmar

According to the provisions of the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar, the Union Government is comprised of the President, Vice Presidents, Ministers of the Union, and the Attorney General of the Union¹⁷. Myanmar is an independent sovereign nation known as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. It is a home to multi-national races where sovereignty is obtained from the population. The Union operates in a ‘genuine, disciplined multi-party democratic system’.¹⁸ In fact, Myanmar maintains a sort of democratic administration where the military enjoys reservation in every legislature i.e. 25 per cent of seats is reserved for the military.

¹⁶ N. Kipgen. (2021). The 2020 Myanmar Election and the 2021 Coup: Deepening Democracy or Widening Division?. *Asian Affairs*. 52 (1). p. 2-3.

¹⁷ Op cit, Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. (2008). p. 75.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 3.

This type of political system was employed according to the Constitution of Myanmar 2008 till the military took over the country on February 2021.

1.2.1. The Union Legislative

The legislative power of the Union is vested in the Union Legislature known as the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw comprises of two chambers notably People's Assembly, known as the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and Nationalities Assembly known as Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House).¹⁹ The period of the Pyithu Hluttaw is five years from the day of its commencement, and the term of the Amyotha Hluttaw ends on the day of the expiry of the Pyithu Hluttaw. The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw is headed by the Head and Deputy Head known as the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw.

The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw serve as the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw for two and a half years i.e. 30 months from the day of its beginning. The Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw will concurrently serve as the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw for the remaining period.²⁰ In short, each Speaker and Deputy Speaker of both Hluttaws serve as the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw for 30 months each.

The Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw supervises the sessions of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. He may invite the President if he is intimated of the President's desire to address the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. He may also invite organisations or

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 39.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 28.

persons representing any of the Union level organisations formed under the Constitution to attend the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw sessions. He may convene the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw regular session at least once a year. He may also convene a special session or an emergency session if necessary or upon the request of the President.

A Bill initiated either in the Pyithu Hluttaw or the Amyotha Hluttaw is approved by both Hluttaws, it is deemed that the Bill is approved by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. If there is a disagreement between the Pyithu Hluttaw and the Amyotha Hluttaw concerning a Bill, the Bill is discussed and resolved in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. The legislative power is vested in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to other matters that are not listed in the Legislative List of the Union, regions or states, and self-administered division leading body or self-administered zone leading body. It also enjoys the right to enact laws for the entire or any part of the Union related to matters prescribed in Schedule One of the Union Legislative List. The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw may also enact the required laws for the Union Territories as it deemed necessary.

1.2.2. Pyithu Hluttaw

Pyithu Hluttaw (People's Assembly) is the Lower House of the Union Legislative Assembly of Myanmar (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw). The Constitution of Myanmar provides for the formation of the Pyithu Hluttaw under Section 109. The maximum strength of the Pyithu Hluttaw is 440. Out of the total strength, 330 seats are for the civilians and not more than 110 seats are reserved for the Defense Services personnel who are nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense

Services. In other words, the Pyithu Hluttaw shall consist of not more than 330 elected representatives who represent the existing 325 townships in the country.²¹

These elected representatives are elected on the basis of township and population. Each township can send one representative each. The Constitution also stipulates that if there are more than 330 townships, then the newly formed township will be merged with an appropriate township. The Pyithu Hluttaw is presided by the Speaker elected from among themselves. In the absence of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker may perform his duties temporarily. The tenure of the Pyithu Hluttaw is five years from the day of its first session.²²

1.2.3. Amyotha Hluttaw

Amyotha Hluttaw (Nationalities Assembly) is the Upper House of the Union Legislative Assembly of Myanmar. According to Section 141 of the Constitution of Myanmar, the Amyotha Hluttaw consists of elected and nominated representatives. The total strength is 224, out of which 168 are elected and 56 are nominated from the Defense Services personnel. The Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services nominated four representatives in each region and state.²³ The elected representatives cannot exceed the strength of 168. The seven states and seven regions have an equal representation and can send 12 representatives from each region or state.

The Amyotha Hluttaw is also presided by the Speaker, and the Deputy Speaker may perform his duties during his absence. The Speaker and Deputy Speaker are also elected from among the representatives. The term of the Amyotha

²¹ Ibid. p. 39.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. p. 52.

Hluttaw expires on the day of the expiry of the Pyithu Hluttaw.²⁴ The elections to both the Hluttaws are held simultaneously. In case of certain matters to be studied by both Pyithu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw, the speakers of both the Hluttaws may coordinate to form a Joint Committee comprising of an equal number of representatives from both the Hluttaws.²⁵

1.2.4. The Union Executive

The President is the Executive head of the Union Government. Both the President and the two Vice-Presidents represent the Union Government. The executive power of the Union is allocated among the Union, regions and states. Section 59 (a) through (g) of the Constitution 2008 enumerates the qualifications of the President. Section 59 (f) clearly stipulates that the President himself, or one of his parents, one of his children, or his spouse must not owe allegiance to a foreign country.²⁶ This part practically ruled out the possibility of Aung San Suu Kyi to become the President.

The Constitution of Myanmar has vested the President of Myanmar with enormous powers and functions. According to Section 16 of the Constitution of Myanmar, the President is the head of the Union Government as well as the head of the State. However, some powers such as defence, security and border administration of the Union Government, states and regional government and even Union Territory and Self-Administered Areas have been left in the hands of the Defence Services

²⁴ Ibid. p. 55.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 42.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 19.

personnel appointed by the Commander-in-Chief.²⁷ In Myanmar, the Commander-in-Chief is a military-personnel appointed by the President. In case of national emergency, the President of Myanmar may transfer the legislative, executive and judicial powers to the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services.²⁸

1.2.5. Judiciary

The Constitution establishes various courts in Myanmar according to Section 293. There is one Supreme Court of the Union which is the highest court of the country. High Courts are also established in states and regions. Besides the Supreme Court and High Courts, there also exist District Courts, Township Courts, Courts of the self-administered zone and self-administered division, Courts-Martial and Constitutional Tribunal of the Union.²⁹

1.2.6. Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of Myanmar enjoys original jurisdiction and is the court of final appeal. The Chief Justice is the head of the Supreme Court. He is appointed by the President upon the approval of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. He is assisted by several other judges. The number of the judges may range from a minimum of seven to eleven. The Chief Justice and other judges are appointed by the President with the approval of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. In practice, the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw has no right to refuse the persons nominated by the President for the appointment of the Chief Justice and judges of the Supreme Court of the Union unless it can be proved that the persons concerned do not possess the prescribed qualification.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 5.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 168.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 125.

The Supreme Court of the Union decides matters related to bilateral treaties concluded by the Union. It resolves the disputes between the Union and state or region governments, among the regions and states, between the region and state, and between the Union Territory and the region or state government. It also decides other matters as prescribed by law, except the Constitutional disputes. The judgements of the Supreme Court are considered final and conclusive.³⁰

The judgements of the Supreme Court cannot be challenged and have no right of appeal in the lower courts. However, the Supreme Court of the Union also enjoys appellate jurisdiction. It decides judgements that have been passed by the High Courts, District Courts or any other lower courts in the states or regions. Besides the original and appellate jurisdiction, the Supreme Court has the power to issue six writs, namely Writ of Habeas Corpus, Writ of Mandamus, Writ of Prohibition, Writ of Quo Warranto and Writ of Certiorari.³¹

1.2.7. High Courts

The Constitution of Myanmar provides for the High Courts to be established in the regions and states (Section 305). The High Courts are established in every state and region, except for Mandalay region. According to Section 307 (a) of the Constitution, High Courts may be shared between the region and Union territory for the purpose of judicial administration. At present, the High court of Mandalay region is shared between Mandalay region and the Union territory of Nay Pyi Taw.³² There are 14 High Courts in Myanmar. The head of the High court is called the Chief

³⁰ Ibid. p. 125f.

³¹ Ibid. p. 126.

³² Ibid. p. 133.

Justice of the High Court of the region or the Chief Justice of the High Court of the state.³³

The High Courts of the region or state enjoy jurisdictions of adjudicating on original case, revision case, appeal case and matters prescribed by any law. The High Court of the region or state may adjudicate on cases by a judge or a bench consisting of more than one judge as determined by the Chief Justice of the region or state. The High Courts do not take original criminal cases unless there is a special reason. The High Court of the region or state has the jurisdiction to adjudicate on a case transferred to it by its own decision within its jurisdiction of the state or region. The High Court can also adjudicate on transfer of a case from any court to any other court within its jurisdiction.³⁴

The High Courts of the region or state consist of Chief Justice and other judges, the number may range from a minimum of three to seven. The Chief Justice of the High Court and the other judges are nominated by the President in coordination with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Union and the Chief Minister of the region or state concerned. The nominated persons are sent to the concerned region or state hluttaw for approval. Upon the approval of the concerned hluttaw, the President appoint the persons as the Chief Justice and judges of the High Court of the region or state.³⁵

There are several lower courts that exist under the supervision of the High Court of the region or the High Court of the state. There are District Courts and

³³ Ibid. p. 126

³⁴ The Supreme Court of the Union, Myanmar. www.unionsupremecourt.gov.mm. Region and State High Courts. (Retrieved 12/05/2022).

³⁵ Op cit, Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. (2008). p. 126.

Township Courts within the Union Territory, as well as within the states and regions where there are no self-administered areas. A region or a state having self-administered areas consists of Court of Self-Administered Zone or Court of Self-Administered Division and Township Courts. Apart from these lower Courts, other Courts may also be constituted by law.

1.2.8. District Courts and Township Courts

The District Courts, Courts of the self-administered division and Courts of the self-administered zone enjoy jurisdictions relating to original criminal cases, original civil cases, appeal cases, revision cases, or other matters that are prescribed by law. The jurisdiction of the Township Courts includes original criminal cases, original civil cases or any other matters prescribed by law. The High Court of the concerned region or state supervises the appointment of the Judges of the District Courts, Courts of the Self-Administered areas and the Township Courts.³⁶

1.2.9. Courts-Martial

The Constitution permits the military for a Courts-Martial. The Courts-Martial is the Court for trying members of the Defence Services for crimes committed against military law. The Courts - Martial is constituted under Article 293 (b) and adjudicates Defence Services personnel only.³⁷ The military personnel cannot be tried in a civilian court if they violate civilian laws. The power of the Courts-Martial is not affected by the Supreme Court.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 141.

³⁷ Ibid.

1.2.10. Constitutional Tribunal of the Union

There is a Constitutional Tribunal of the Union of Myanmar according to Section 320 of the Constitution. It consists of nine members including the Chairperson. The list of nine persons is submitted by the President to be approved by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. The nine members are chosen by the President, Speakers of the Amyotha Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw. The duty of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union is to interpret the provisions of the Constitution. It investigates the validity of the law promulgated by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, region hluttaw, the state hluttaw, and the Self-Administered Division and Self-Administered Zone Leading Body.³⁸

The Constitutional Tribunal of the Union decides constitutional disputes between the Union and a region, between the Union and a state, between a region and state, among the states and among the regions, between a region or a state and a self-administered area and among the self-administered areas. It also decides disputes arising out of the rights and duties of the Union and a region, a state or a self-administered area in implementing the Union Law. The disputes and matters of the Union Territory are also decided by the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union upon the request of the President.³⁹

1.2.11. The Union Election Commission (UEC)

The Union Election Commission (UEC) was established by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in March 2010. It was constituted in compliance with the provisions of Section 443 of the Constitution and Section 3 of the Union

³⁸ Ibid. p. 142.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 143

Election Commission Law 2010.⁴⁰ The Commission consists of 17 members appointed by the government in power. The major role of the UEC is to conduct free and fair elections. It controls the electoral process and act as a judge as well as jury in situations relating the elections.⁴¹ The decision of the UEC is final and decisive. There is no provision for resort to any other institution or different authority.⁴²The members of the UEC are generally appointed by the government in power.

1.3. Implications of reforms on India-Myanmar Relations.

Political reforms and transition in Myanmar have certain implications in its foreign relation with other countries. Myanmar's military regime was often criticized of its isolationist policy, denial of democracy and violations of human rights. So, many countries imposed certain political and economic sanctions towards Myanmar. However with significant reforms of recent, many countries now take keen interest in maintaining diplomatic and economic relations with Myanmar. Its rich natural resources and geo-strategic location makes it more appealing for countries to establish good relations with Myanmar. Hence, countries like the United States (USA), the European Union (EU), China and India are highly interested in maintaining better relations with the country.

India being an immediate neighbour of Myanmar closely monitors the political changes in Myanmar. The international community often pressure India to involve itself in Myanmar's internal affair. Myanmar on its part is often criticized on

⁴⁰ Burma News International. (2011). *Hobson's choice: Burma's 2010 Election*. Thailand: Burma News International. p.23.

⁴¹ Burma Fund UN Office. (2011). *Burma's 2010 Elections: A Comprehensive Report*. New York: Burma Fund UN Office. p. 9.

⁴² T.M.M. Than. (2011). *Myanmar's 2010 Elections: Continuity and Change*. Southeast Asian Affairs: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. p. 192.

grounds of its brutal actions against protesters in the country. It is also highly condemned for denying democratic movement, violation of human rights, suppressing minority rebels and isolating its economy. India has been highly expected to act to provide solutions to ameliorate the situation in Myanmar.

Besides, insurgents in Northeast India often operate in India-Myanmar borders and frequently use Myanmar for shelter and training. The growing influence of China in India's neighbouring regions including Myanmar poses serious threat to India's hegemony and security. All these factors put immense pressure on India with regards to its relations with Myanmar. Hence, the recent political reforms in Myanmar naturally put India at ease to a considerable extent. India, being a functioning democracy is naturally inclined to support democratic reforms taking place in Myanmar. Hence, India promptly responds to Myanmar's democratic reforms by trying to provide aid and assistance in the nation-building process.

India has made a commitment to co-operate with the government of Myanmar to provide assistance in the area of Border Area Development Programme (BADP). It also provided assistance to Myanmar in health, tourism, infrastructural development education and Information Technology (IT) services. This action on the part of India is intended to strengthen the socio-economic development process in Myanmar. India continuously gives Myanmar financial assistance and grants in structuring its infrastructural projects which covers vital areas of railways and roads in Myanmar.

Aiding programme for Myanmar has also been initiated by India to enhance the development of social infrastructure which includes provisions of scholarship for

Burmese students in India. In quick succession, India had promptly and effectively assisted Myanmar in humanitarian relief operations following natural disasters in Myanmar like - cyclone Nargis (2008), earthquake at Shan State (2010) and cyclone Komen (2015). Exchanges at the highest political levels have expanded with greater emphasis attached by both countries for greater engagement.

Moreover, the two countries share a close history with regards to kinship, culture, language, religion, historical perception and political experiences. Myanmar has even been a province of British India during the British colonial rule. A significant number of Indian communities are still residing in Myanmar till date. Moreover, they share international boundary of 1,643 kilometers⁴³ in length passing through four northeast states in India. This makes it imperative for both countries to maintain cordial relations.

India's Look East/Act East Policy has been based on the consenting co-operation from Myanmar's government. A flagship project for India known as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP) was initiated from December 2010. It aims to enhance the Look East/Act East Policy of India. This project aims to link Kolkata and other East Indian ports through coastal shipping to Sittwe on the Arakan coast in Myanmar thereby enhancing connection through the Kaladan River and route to Mizoram on the Indian side. Hence, political reforms in Myanmar have considerably enhanced the implementation of this project.

⁴³ Ministry of DONER, Government of India, Act East Policy vis-à-vis NER, International Border. Stable URL: <http://www.mdoner.gov.in/node/202> (Retrieved 17/04/2017)

There has also been several high level visits between the two countries since reform started in Myanmar. The last Prime Minister of India to visit Myanmar was Rajiv Gandhi back then in 1987. The then India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh finally visited Myanmar on May 27-29 in 2012. His visit projected India as a serious partner for Myanmar. It also helped recognize that Myanmar could become an effective partner for India. The current Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi also visited Myanmar from November 11-13 in 2014 to attend the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and 9th East Asia Summit.

India's External Affairs Minister, Shusma Swaraj visited Myanmar in August 2016. Meanwhile, Htin Kyaw, the newly elected President of Myanmar visited India in August 2016. Myanmar's State Counsellor and Foreign Minister, Aung San Suu Kyi also, visited India in October 2016, to attend the BIMSTEC Retreat and BRICS summit. India's Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan also visited Myanmar in February 2017 with the intention of strengthening hydrocarbon relations between India and Myanmar. Recently, Aung San Suu Kyi visited India on 25th and 26th January, 2018 to attend the 25th ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit and the 69th India's Republic Day celebration as chief guests along with other ASEAN countries leaders.

More high level visits and cooperation are likely to take place between India and Myanmar owing to the recent reforms that took place in Myanmar. All these recent visitations and cooperation show positive signs of improvement in their relation. India-Myanmar relations tend to improve in the wake of the recent reforms and transitions in Myanmar.

1.4. Statement of the Problem

Political reforms taking place in Myanmar has been subjected to a lot of controversy. The Constitution of Myanmar drafted and adopted by the military in 2008 restricted the country from becoming a full-fledged democracy⁴⁴. The military though remarked that the new Constitution had been adopted to ensure the creation of a ‘genuine, discipline, multi-party democracy’ in the country. The Constitutional provisions have restricted and limited the powers of the new civilian government. Even though the regimes in Myanmar have been democratized to a considerable extend, the prospects of becoming a full-fledged democracy is still in doubt. Thus, when it comes to real power, the military is still in control to a very large extend.

The lingering presence of military elements in the governance of the country poses a serious threat to the civilian government in Myanmar. In November 2014, Aung San Suu Kyi even remarks that reforms in the country have ‘stalled’⁴⁵. The Constitution of Myanmar provides 25 per cent reservation of seats for the military. It further contains provision that require more than 75 per cent to make any constitutional amendment. In June 2015, Myanmar’s Parliament voted to do away with the military’s veto power over constitutional change but failed, giving a hard blow to peoples hope for full-fledged democracy.⁴⁶ Hence, the prospect of the country to become a full-fledged democracy is nearly impossible at the moment.

⁴⁴ Malik, Preet. (2016). *My Myanmar Years: A Diplomat’s Account of India’s Relations with the Region*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. p.131-132.

⁴⁵ BBC NEWS. (2015). *Timeline: Reforms in Myanmar*. Stable URL: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16546688>. (Retrieved 30/03/2017)

⁴⁶ BBC NEWS. (2015). Myanmar Parliament Votes to Keep Military Veto. June 25. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33269213>. (Retrieved 30/03/2017).

India-Myanmar relations in the wake of Myanmar's political reforms tend to change the nature of their relations. India being the largest democratic nation is inclined to support the democratic nature of reforms in Myanmar. Their relation has started to improve positively in the wake of Myanmar's political reforms. As such, India constantly provides financial aid and material support to Myanmar. Accordingly, exchanges at the highest political levels between the two have expanded marked by several high level visits by both countries' political leaders. Thus, Myanmar's political reforms have certain level of implications on their relations. How far will the implications of the reforms have a bearing on their relations is yet to be seen.

The military recently staged a coup and overthrow the civilian government in February 2021, soon after the 2020 general elections in Myanmar. This inevitably will revert back the reforms process taking place in Myanmar. Likewise, the nature of relations between India and Myanmar might be affected to a considerable extent. A thorough and extensive study ought to be carried out to examine the causes, process and nature of the political reforms in Myanmar so as to understand the problems and prospects. Accordingly, the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on their relation need proper analysis to provide an insight to the problems and prospects.

1.5. Review of Literature

A series of reforms process have taken place in Myanmar since 2010. India-Myanmar relations tend to improve in the wake of Myanmar's democratic reforms. The prospect of India-Myanmar in the future is yet to be seen. Hence, various books and scholarly works concerning political reforms in Myanmar and on India-Myanmar relations are found for review. But at the same time, books and articles containing specific description of the reforms period in Myanmar as well as the post-reforms period of India-Myanmar relations are quite limited. Name of the books and articles reviewed are italicized to make it easily identifiable. All the reviewed literatures with regard to books are organized in chronological order of the publication year followed by a chronological order of reviewed articles with respect to their publication year.

'Freedom from fear and other writing' (1991) by Aung San Suu Kyi depicts the life and experience of her life in Myanmar who was repeatedly placed under house arrested by the ruling military junta. This collection of writings reflects Aung San Suu Kyi's greatest hopes and fears for her people and her concern about the need for international co-operation. The book gives a poignant reminiscences as well as independent assessments of her role in politics in the country.

'India Burma Relation' (1992) by B. Pakem discusses the foreign policy of relationship between India and Myanmar as partners in the non-aligned movement until Myanmar's withdrawal during the eighties and their complementary economic relationship. It also discussed the boundary problem between them taking into consideration the problem of trans-border tribes of the respective countries. The book

significantly highlights the problems of the people of Indian origin in Myanmar which has been tactfully handled by both countries. It also depicts the spirit of cordial relationship existing between the two countries despite nominal shift in all aspects of relationship under different political regimes.

'*Letters from Burma*' (1997) written by Aung San Suu Kyi describes a vivid, poignant yet fundamentally optimistic picture of her native land i.e. Myanmar. In this book, she evokes the country's seasons and scenery, customs and festivities and celebrates the courageous army officers, academics and actors who have supported the National League for Democracy, often at their own personal risk setting out a comprehensive programme for economic reform. The book reveals an important insight into the impact of the political decisions on ordinary people's lives in Myanmar.

Shelby Tucker's '*Burma: The Curse of Independence*' (2001) traces the political development of Myanmar from the occupations by the British and Japanese and eventual independence in 1942, through the army coup of 1962 led by General Ne Win which established an authoritarian state, to the pro-democracy movement of the late 1980s. He further examines Burma's drug trade; scrutinizes Burma's civil rights record; examines the role of the Nationalist leader Aung Sung; the impact of Aung Sung's assassination and the subsequent power struggles in the country. The book is very significant in the sense that it provides a better understanding of the political development in Myanmar and helps in realizing the social conditions of the people of Myanmar under the military junta.

'A History of Modern Burma' (2008) written by Michael Charney discusses the general history of modern Burma (Myanmar) in over five decades and as such traces the highs and lows of Burma's history. He presents a thorough overview of Burmese history with a primary focus on the unfolding of events since independence in 1948. The book greatly helps in understanding the underlying political division between lowland and highland Burma (Myanmar) and examines the historical as well as the existing forces that have made the country what it is today.

'The River of Lost Footsteps: A Personal History of Burma' (2008) Thant Myint-U narrates the colourful histories of Burmese dynastic empires from ancient times to the 18th century and further describes how the Burmese kingdom of Ava lost a series of border wars with the British East India Company in the 19th century which culminates in a treaty that marked the beginning of Burma's loss of independence.

He further interweaves his own family's history and writes extensively about his maternal grandfather U Thant, who rose from a humble origin to later become secretary-general of the U.N. in the 1960s. The book provides an important insight on how imperialism, war and invasion have shaped and turned Burma's (Myanmar) history and provides a sound opinion that economic and diplomatic sanctions as well as isolationist policy of the western countries towards Myanmar has in fact, worsened the conditions of the people of Myanmar.

'Indo-Myanmar Cross-Border Trade: A Passage to Asian Prosperity or a Dead End' (2010) by Madhurjya Prasad Bezbaruah probes into the prospects of Indo-Myanmar border trade with special reference to the economy and society in the

troubled territories of Northeast India and Myanmar and further comes up with a number of alternative scenarios. The book provides important information regarding Indo-Myanmar border trade which helps us to identify the critical areas for intervention in order to realize the best case scenario.

'In Where China Meets India: Burma And The New Crossroads of Asia' (2011) Thant Myint-U explores the new strategic centrality and importance of Burma, the country of his ancestry, where Asia's two rising giant powers - China and India - appear to be vying for supremacy. He further discusses about the country's recent and dramatic moves towards democracy. The book gives a pictorial description across the fast-changing Asian frontier thereby providing a masterful account of the region's long and rich history and its sudden significance for the rest of the world.

'India's Foreign Policy in a Changing World Politics' (2011) by Tej Prakash is another interesting book on India's foreign policy which takes into account of all the twists and turns, the contradictions and the currents and counter-current in international politics and recommends that Indian foreign policy should be sensitive to the duality or the plurality of the developing international scenario. It acknowledges the primacy of the economic struggle in the world today and discusses it in detail in relation to India's foreign policy. The book provides an analysis and information on India's relations with principle countries and regions of concern to it and gives an important insight into India's security dilemmas and its relations with other countries.

Peter Popham's *'The Lady and The Peacock: The Life of Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma'* (2011) is another interesting book which tackles on the controversy surrounding Suu Kyi's decision to sacrifice her husband and family for her political commitment to a nation. He suggests that her decision to remain in Myanmar and forfeit a comfortable life with her husband and children was moral, rather than political.

The book explores Aung San Suu Kyi's formative years from her childhood in Rangoon to schooling in Delhi and her time in Oxford as a student and later as a housewife while offering a coherent analysis of Myanmar's history. It significantly highlights Aung San Suu Kyi's qualities of her moral authority which gives an important insight to her non-violent approach which has not only influenced the Burmese society but also has helped to shape non-violent resistance globally.

David I. Steinberg's *'Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know'* (2013) discusses in length the dramatic changes in Myanmar over the past two years including the establishment of a human rights commission, the release of political prisoners, and reforms in health and education besides highlighting the history, geography, culture, and internal politics of the country. The book significantly highlights the events after the 2010 elections in Myanmar and helps in understanding the positive attitudes of the society towards change in the country.

'Blood, Dreams and Gold: The Changing Face of Burma' (2015) by Richard Cockett, depicts the enlightening history of Myanmar from the colonial era and explains how Burma (Myanmar) has descended into decades of civil war and authoritarian government. The book highlights a vivid account of life under one of

the most brutal regimes in the world and helps in understanding why the regime has started to reform and why these reforms may not go as far as many people had hoped.

'Democracy Movement in Myanmar: Problems and Challenges' (2015) by Nehginpao Kipgen provides an in-depth analysis of Myanmar's political history since independence. The book greatly helps in understanding on how different political actors in Myanmar played differing roles in the country's transition from one form of government to another. It also helps to understand the complexity of Myanmar's problems and challenges in domestic politics as well as international relations.

'India-Myanmar Relations: Changing Contours' (2015) by Rajiv Bhatia provides a comprehensive evaluation of India's multi-faceted relations with Myanmar and unravels the mysteries of the complex polity of Myanmar as it undergoes transition through democratic process after long military rule. He further traces the trajectory of India–Myanmar associations from ancient times to the present day in the backdrop of the regions' geopolitics. An in-depth analysis of 'India–Myanmar–China Triangle' brings out the strategic stakes involved. The book provides a valuable insight towards *the multi-dimensional nature of the Indo-Myanmar relationship especially during the transition period in Myanmar while offering a rich narrative on the shared history of the two countries.*

'Myanmar: A Political History' (2016) by Nehginpao Kipgen examines the politico-historical antecedents of contemporary Myanmar from colonial rule to the establishment of its first civilian government; the subsequent fall into military

dictatorship and the transition from authoritarian regime to a democratic government. The book helps in understanding the historical knowledge of Myanmar as to how different political actors played differing roles in the country's transition across governments.

In '*Understanding Reform in Myanmar: People and Society in the Wake of Military Rule*' (2016) Marie Lall seeks to uncover and explain the recent political and economic reforms implemented in post-military Myanmar thereby focusing on key turning-points in the current transformation programme, particularly those affecting education, NGOs and social justice. She maps the main reform priorities and explains how they are interconnected and what has been achieved in the first tentative steps towards democratization. The book gives an insight on how the civil society actors are deliberately working to bring reforms in the country, how much reforms have been taking place and the remaining challenges ahead for the country.

Renaud Egretreau's '*Caretaking Democratization: The Military and Political Change in Myanmar*' (2016) examines the political landscape that took shape in Myanmar after the 2010 elections and the subsequent transition from direct military rule to a quasi-civilian 'hybrid' regime. He further examines the reasons behind the on-going political transition, as well as the role of the Burmese armed forces in that process which he draws from an in-depth interviews with Burmese political actors, party leaders, parliamentarians and retired army officers. The book provides a close understanding of the theoretical literature on military regimes and their transitions and greatly helps in analysing the balance of power between the military and other key political actors in the post 2010 period.

'My Myanmar Years: A Diplomat's Account of India's Relations with the Region' (2016) by Preet Malik is an interesting book written on account of his experiences as India's ambassador to Myanmar during 1990–92. He deals in detail the geostrategic importance and relevance of Myanmar to India's Look East Policy. It provides an important first-hand account of Myanmar's political turbulence and India's changing policies under three different governments' thereby providing valuable insight into the nature of India-Myanmar relations.

'Transition From Authoritarianism to Democracy: A Comparative Study of Indonesia And Myanmar' (2018) by Sonu Trivedi provides a comparative study of transition from authoritarianism to democracy in Indonesia and Myanmar. The book is very useful in knowing the similarities as well as differences about the politics of military rule and democratic transition in these two countries of Southeast Asia.

'The Hidden History of Burma' (2019) by Thant Myint-U gives an insightful account of Burma's rocky road to democracy over the past fifteen years. It examines how Burma has been a fragile stage for the most pressing issues the world faces today, from exploding inequality, the rise of ethno-nationalism and the impact of social media, to climate change and the emergence of China as a global power. The book provides a good assessment on how the people of Myanmar constantly suffered due to the short-sighted decision of the military junta while offering significant criticism the failures of Aung San Suu Kyi's government.

'India-Myanmar Relations: A Strategic Perspective' (2021) by Ashok Kumar gives an analysis of the multi-faceted relations between India and Myanmar from a strategic perspective. The book gives an important insight on India-Myanmar

relations amidst the political transition in Myanmar with the increasing global collaboration and geopolitical competition arising in the sub-regions in the Bay of Bengal, South China Sea and the Mekong River Basin.

A distinctive article '*India and Myanmar: Tangled Ties*' written by M. G. G. Pillai in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (Feb. 6, 1993) discusses the involvement of the United Kingdom and India in the governance of Myanmar since Britain's annexation of Myanmar in 1885. In the article, he openly remarks that New Delhi (India) is reluctant to shake off her once imperialist presence in Myanmar which he feels is hampering or clouding the bilateral ties between the two countries.

Thus, in the article, the writer significantly highlighted the pros and cons of the relationship between India and Myanmar from the historical cause to the ongoing problems and prospects existing between the two countries and helps us in realizing that India still regards Myanmar as a country within its sphere of her influence and as such tries to maintain a cordial and friendly relationship with the country although certain factors often clouded the bilateral ties between the two countries.

Another interesting article is '*Political Transition in Myanmar: A New Model for Democratization*' written by Ashley South in *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (August 2004). In the article, she basically examines the social and political transition in Myanmar arguing that the tentative re-emergence of civil society networks within and between ethnic nationality and minority communities over the past decade is one of the most significant phenomena in the history of Myanmar. The article gives a proper analysis of the challenges faced by the country's ethnic

nationalist leaders and communities while suggesting the roles that the foreign aid can play in supporting the re-emergence of civil society in Myanmar.

The article written by Kyaw Yin Hlaing '*Understanding Recent Political Changes in Myanmar*' in Contemporary Southeast Asia (August 2012) is another remarkable work regarding the political change taking place in Myanmar. The article highlights the fact that since the new government took power in 2011, the citizens of Myanmar have enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than at any time since the military seized power in 1962. It further explains how the recent political changes in Myanmar have come about. The article helps in understanding the recent political changes in Myanmar as it urges to pay attention to the shifts in the internal power structure of the government and helps in realizing that the recent changes do not indicate that Myanmar would become a full-fledged democracy any time.

The article written by Nehginpao Kipgen '*Decoding Myanmar's 2015 Election*' in Asian Affairs (May 2016) is an interesting article where he discusses the process and outcome of the 2015 general election in Myanmar. The article provides valuable insight on how election can play a vital role in democratization of a state and helps in understanding the unfolding political situation in Myanmar and to perceive on the problems and prospects of the country.

Another article '*The 2020 Myanmar Election and the 2021 Coup: Deepening Democracy or Widening Division?*' written by Nehginpao Kipgen in Asian Affairs (February 2021) is a very interesting article where he highlighted the 2020 general election along with the recent military coup in Myanmar. The paper helps in analysing the electoral process and its outcome and provides an idea whether

the election led to the deepening of democracy or the widening of division in the country's democratization process.

1.6. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are stated as under:

- 1) To study the political developments in Myanmar since the period of Military rule.
- 2) To examine the process of political reforms in Myanmar.
- 3) To analyse the political relations between India and Myanmar.
- 4) To study the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on India-Myanmar relations.

1.7. Research Questions

- 1) How did the military rule influence the political developments that took place in Myanmar?
- 2) How did India maintain its relations with Myanmar during the military rule?
- 3) What are the factors responsible for implementing the political reforms in Myanmar?
- 4) What are the problems and prospects of political reforms in Myanmar?
- 5) What are the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on India-Myanmar relations?

1.8. Methodology

The study is of descriptive as well as analytical in nature. Data and information are classified into 'primary' and 'secondary'. Descriptive, analytical

and historical methods is employed to study the political developments and history of Myanmar. The primary data is collected through interview and observation methods. The secondary data mainly consisted of published and unpublished books, journals' articles, newspapers, pamphlets and so on. Television programs, online sources, social networking sites and other media related sources are also used to collect the requisite data.

Information is taken from the specific government officials or ex-officials, government reports and documents mainly from the official websites. The opinions and views of India-Myanmar relation specialists, academicians and experts, think-tank groups, universities and other institutions from India and Myanmar are also taken. Interview method of data collection is mainly used to collect the first-hand information and data. Observation method is also employed to collect data from certain events and situations.

1.9. Scope of the Study

Scope of the study starts from Myanmar's political developments with analysis on the period of British period. It also includes the study of political developments happening during the period of the military rule since 1962. It further discusses the political developments after the adoption of the new Constitution of Myanmar in 2008 and the subsequent reforms taking place in Myanmar marked by the general election in 2010. The study thus, analyses the political reforms taken place since 2010 in Myanmar. This study further examines the causes, process and nature of the recent political reforms in Myanmar so as to identify the problems and prospects of the reforms. This study also explores the historical relations between

India and Myanmar since pre-independence era till the period of recent political reforms in Myanmar. The study further evaluates the on-going relations between India and Myanmar thereby examining the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on India-Myanmar relations.

1.10. Limitation of the Study

The study initially attempt to focus on the nature, problems and prospects of the political reforms process in Myanmar but the military coup from February 2021 gives a major setback to the reforms process. And as such, the prospects of political reforms in Myanmar is in state of halt. The study also tries to examine the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on India-Myanmar relations which in a way is affected by the military coup in 2021. Thus, the study faces some limitations as the core of the study lies heavily on the political reforms in Myanmar. As the study mainly focuses on the political reforms in Myanmar and its implications on India-Myanmar relations, relevant issues such as Rohingya crisis and the current political turmoil in Myanmar are not discuss in depth although it is mention in brief.

The global pandemic caused by Covid-19 also creates constraints for the scholar as it was complicated to visit Myanmar to get the first-hand information. The military coup in February 2021 which causes political turmoil in Myanmar also makes it difficult to visit Myanmar for research field work even after the end of the pandemic.

1.11. Chapterization

Chapter I- Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the study and includes the research problem, importance of the study, scope of the study, review of literature, research objectives, research questions and methodology.

Chapter II- Political Developments in Myanmar during Military Rule

This chapter deals with the study of political developments since the British era. It mainly focuses on the period of the military regimes and the political upheavals during this period.

Chapter III- History of India-Myanmar Relations

This chapter focuses on the historical relations between India and Myanmar starting from pre-independence era with special analysis from the independence era till the period of Myanmar's reforms. It contains a brief analysis of the nature and status of India-Myanmar relations till the period of political reforms in Myanmar.

Chapter IV- Political Reforms in Myanmar

This chapter studies the causes, process and nature of the recent political reforms in Myanmar. It further analyses the role of the National League for Democracy and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi. It also assesses and examines the process, problems and prospects of the political reforms in Myanmar.

Chapter V- Implications of Political Reforms in Myanmar on India- Myanmar Relations

This chapter contains the detailed study of the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on India-Myanmar relations. It further analyses the changes, problems and prospects of the relations corresponding to the political reforms in Myanmar.

Chapter VI- Summary and Conclusion

This chapter covers the summary and conclusion of all the chapters besides the major findings of the study. It also consist of the suggestions given by the scholar on account of the studies.

Chapter-2

Political Developments in Myanmar

This chapter contains the various periods of political developments in Myanmar. It discusses a brief historical account of pre-independence era followed by the periods of independence and parliamentary democracy. It also describes the long period of the military regime accompanied by various issues and events happening during this period. It further highlights the period after the adoption of the new constitution in 2008 followed by various political changes till the recent military coup in 2021. Thus, this chapter contains an analysis of the political developments occurring since the dawn of the independence era till the recent military coup in Myanmar.

After being invaded three times by the British, Myanmar was eventually conquered on 1 January, 1886.¹ Before the British colonialism, the areas of ethnic minorities (Frontier Areas) were not part of mainland Burma. For example, the Shans were controlled by their own sawbwas (princes) while the Chins, Kachins and others were ruled by their own distinct chiefs. The conquest of Burmese monarchy in 1886 provided the British not only the kingdom but also the Frontier Areas.² During the colonial era, the British administration managed central Burma (mainland Burma) and the Frontier Areas separately.

Even before the colonial period, the kingdoms of central Burma exercised only nominal sovereignty over the Frontier Areas. The colonial administration maintained

¹ F. S. V. Donnison. (1953). *Public Administration in Burma: A Study of Development during the British Connexion*. Great Britain: University Press Glasgow. p.28.

² Ibid. p.32.

that the Frontier Areas were less developed both politically and economically and thus, needed special treatment. While the Burmans lost their monarchy in 1885, the Frontier people were able to preserve their traditional political institutions and social norms.

2.1. Political Developments in Pre-independence Era

Christian missionaries were active inside the Frontier Areas, who then constructed the written languages of the Frontier people using Roman alphabet rather than Pali script followed by the majority Burmans. Due to religious differences, minorities such as the Chin, Kachin and Naga, who are mostly Christians, harboured a sense of distinct identity from the predominantly Buddhist Burmans. During World War II, the Burmans, notably the Burma Independence Army (BIA) commanded by Aung San originally allied with the Japanese in anticipation of early independence.

The Frontier inhabitants, despite the obstacles were typically loyal to the British. The Frontier people were also apprehensive that the majority Burmans would not heed to their interests following the country's independence from the British.³The beginning of Second World War in 1939 was a turning point for independence movement against the British colonial rule in Burma. National politicians urged the people not to support British war efforts unless Burma was promised independence at the end of the war. The British government arrested many nationalists.

³ J. Bray. (1992). Ethnic Minorities and the Future of Burma. *The World Today*. 48(8-9): 144-7. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40396422> (Retrieved 23/03/2018).

A group of young men left the country secretly to receive military training in Japan. They came to be known as ‘Thirty Comrades’. The Burmese people hoped that the Japanese would help them win back their independence. The Burma Independence Army (BIA) was organized with the Thirty Comrades as the nucleus. In 1941, the BIA marched into Burma with the Japanese forces and as a result of it, the British were driven out of the country.⁴

The Japanese then, governed Burma under military rule until August 1943, when the country was granted independence under Japanese protection. However, on 27 March, 1945, the Burmese Army revolted against the Japanese forces and joined the British Army to fight against the Japanese rule in Burma.⁵ However, this was not the end of Burma’s struggle for independence. The Burmese did not want the British to come back as their rulers.

The strongest opponent of the British rule was the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL), a nationalist party led by Aung San, who left the army to engage in independence politics. The British gradually had to give in the demands of the AFPFL, which won the popular support of the country. The British, while agreeing to Burmese demands for independence, insisted that the people along the Frontiers Areas should be allowed to decide their own future for themselves.

When the British left Burma, there were incidences where the Burman soldiers killed Karen villagers and the Karen villagers retaliated by killing the

⁴ Suu Kyi. (1991). *Freedom From Fear: And Other Writings*. London: Penguin Books Ltd. p. 54.

⁵ Human Rights Documentation Unit, National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). (2003). *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2002-03*. p.8.
<https://www.burmalibrary.org/en/category/burma-human-rights-yearbooks-1994-2008> (Retrieved 17/04/2018)

Burmans. After the Allied powers defeated the Japanese forces during World War II, the Burman soldiers shifted their support to the Allied forces but the animosity between the Burmans and the Karens had remained. The participation of soldiers from the ethnic minority groups in suppressing the Burmans who rebelled against the British colonial rule increased the animosity between the Burmans and the minority groups.

Some Burman leaders also considered themselves superior to ethnic minorities and thus, did not like to give in to their demands.⁶ During the height of violence between the Burmese Army and the Karen people in the 1930s, the official death toll of Karens in Myaungmya district alone in the outlying areas of the delta was reported to be over 1800 and 400 villages were destroyed.⁷ Thus, it can be said that even before the period of independence, there exist a kind of animosity between the mainland Burman people and the people of the Frontier areas.

2.1.1. Panglong Agreement (1947)

To form the Union of Burma, 23 representatives from the Frontier Areas and mainland Burma, represented by Aung San as head of the interim Burmese government signed an agreement in Panglong (in Shan States) on 12 February, 1947.⁸ This historic event came to be known as ‘Panglong Agreement’. The agreement was for establishing a unified country and was not aimed at putting an end to the traditional autonomy or self-rule of the Frontier Areas. Prior to this, in March

⁶ C. Fink. (2001). *Living Silence: Burma under Military Rule*. New York: Zed Books. p. 22.

⁷ M. Smith. (1994). *Ethnic Conflicts in Burma: Development, Democracy and Human Rights*. Stableyard, London: Anti-Slavery International. p. 62.

⁸ N. Kipgen. (2016). *Myanmar: A Political History*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 15

1946, a meeting was convened at Panglong in Shan State to discuss the possible formation of a unified Burma.

Representatives from colonial British, mainland Burma (ethnic Burmans) and the Frontier Areas (ethnic minorities) attended the meeting which became a precursor to the 1947 Panglong Agreement. Although the representatives were there to discuss the possible formation of the union, the Frontier leaders were suspicious about the motives of the Burman leaders.⁹ In an attempts to persuade the Frontier leaders to join the Union of Burma, ethnic Burman leaders proposed the idea of granting autonomy, which basically means that the Burmans would not interfere among others, in the customs and religious practices of the Frontier Areas. Despite the proposition, leaders of the Chin, Kachin and Shan refused to take part in forming the Union of Burma and instead discussed the idea of establishing a 'Frontier Areas of Federation'.¹⁰

The year 1947 was a crucial year for the ethnic minorities because they were to decide on their future whether to join the Union of Burma or not. Some Frontier leaders were ready to trust the Burman leaders but some others were still reluctant to do so, fearing that they may lose their identity, culture and freedom to the majority. Most Frontier leaders had a lingering fear about possible domination by the Burmans. Despite suspicion and anxiety, some Frontier leaders like the Chins, the Kachins and the Shans decided to participate at the Panglong conference.

⁹ Ibid. p. 35.

¹⁰ M. Sadan. 2008. *A Guide to Colonial Sources on Burma: Ethnic & Minority Histories of Burma in the India Office Records, British Library*. Bangkok: Orchid Press. p. 388.

When these Frontier leaders were invited to write the constitution of the Union of Burma, they were still uncertain about their future.¹¹The ethnic Burmans leadership was fully aware that without the cooperation of the Frontier Areas, there would not be a unified Burma. In order to prove their sincerity about the future of the Frontier people, the Burman leadership had to persuade both the leadership of the Frontier Areas and the British administration. There were doubts in the minds of the Frontier leaders and the British as to whether or not the Burmans would treat all ethnic nationalities equally in the post-independence era.

To clarify the lingering concerns, Aung San gave an assurance that every ethnic group within the Union of Burma would receive equal treatment. Such reassuring remarks from a prominent Burman leader persuaded the representatives from the Chin Hills, the Kachin Hills and the Shan States to cooperate with the interim Burmese government.¹² Subsequently, 23 representatives from the Frontier Areas (three from the Chin Hills, six from the Kachin Hills and 13 from the Shan States) and mainland Burma, represented by Aung San, signed the Panglong Agreement on 12 February, 1947. The Karens also attended the conference as observers.

The agreement to form the Union of Burma was a significant achievement and a great success for the lobbying team of the Burman leadership. However, this historic agreement was not meant to end the traditional self-rule of the Frontier

¹¹ J. Silverstein. (1998). The Evolution and Saliency of Burma's National Political Culture. In Rotberg (ed.) *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. p. 21

¹² Op cit, N. Kipgen. p. 35

people.¹³The expectation of the Panglong conference was that the Chins, the Kachins and the Shans would attain freedom faster by cooperating with the interim Burmese government.¹⁴

However, the spirit of 1947 Panglong Agreement is yet to be fulfilled. Even after more than 70 years of independence, minority groups continue to fight for autonomy/federalism. Ethnic minorities utilise various sorts of campaigns, such as military resistance, or nonviolent measures, such as lobbying the international community, to continue their activities. They have set up various advocacy networks to connect with one another and with the worldwide community. The Kuki International Forum, the Chin Human Rights Organization, the Kachin Women's Association Thailand, the Karen Human Rights Group, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland, the Shan Women's Action Network, and the Ethnic Nationalities Council are among these groups.

2.2. Era of Independence

On July 19, 1947, five months after signing the historic agreement i.e. the Panglong Agreement, General Aung San and the majority of his cabinet colleagues were killed. U Saw, a political rival, was convicted and executed the following year. Burma was then granted independence by the British on January 4, 1948. U Nu, the most senior member of the AFPFL remaining after the assassinations, became the

¹³ M. Smith. (1999). *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc. p. 79.

¹⁴ Universities Historical Research Centre and Innwa Publishing House. (1999). *The 1947 Constitution and the Nationalities*. Vol. 1. Yangon, Myanmar: University Press. p.270
<https://www.worldcat.org/title/67150532> (Retrieved 12/08/2019)

first Prime Minister. When U Nu became Prime Minister in 1948, general election was scheduled to be held within 18 months.

But his government was soon disrupted by insurrections from different groups like the Burma Communist Party (BCP- White Flag communists), the Communist Party of Burma (CPB-Red Flag communists), the White Band People's Volunteer Organization (PVO), the Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO), the Mon National Defence Organization (MNDO) and the Mujahids (Muslims of Pakistan and Burmese origin), all rebelled against the government.

These insurgents made two different demands – the communist groups fought for the absolute replacement of the democratic government, while the ethnic minorities demanded autonomy or federalism. In short, the minorities demanded greater autonomy while the communists fought to win total power. By the spring of 1949, insurgents controlled most of the countryside and even parts of the capital, Rangoon (now, Yangon) were at times in rebels' hands.¹⁵

During the process of negotiation for Burma's independence in England, no representatives from the Frontier Areas were included in the Burmese delegation. Many ethnic minorities doubted the motive of the ethnic Burmans and therefore, did not sign the Panglong Agreement. Autonomy was the primary objective why the leaders of the Chins, the Kachins and the Shans agreed to cooperate with the interim Burmese government to form the Union of Burma.

¹⁵ C.S. Liang. (1990). Burma's Foreign Relations: Neutralism in Theory and Practice. New York: Praeger Publishers. p. 19.

The Burman nationalists, particularly the military leaders, saw the minorities' demand for political autonomy/federalism as an attempt to disintegrate the union. The 1947 Constitution, in fact, had a clause on secession rights for ethnic minorities.¹⁶ Greater responsibility and representation of their own affairs was something the minorities demanded from the Union government. The continued ethnic minorities' armed struggle is considered to be amongst the longest movements in the world.

During the first decade of independence, the civilian government led by U Nu made a sincere efforts to implement the Panglong Agreement and the 1947 Constitution of Burma. Initially, the U Nu government did not interfere (or interfered very little) in the internal affairs of the local government. For example, each year during Independence Day and Union Day Celebrations, representatives from the states were transported to Rangoon at the expense of the central government.

Different ethnic groups used to dress in their traditional attire and performed cultural dances in these important occasions. The union government leaders occasionally visited the states and participated in locally organized functions. When union leaders were visiting the states, they wore local dresses and followed their customs during their stay.

Moreover, the local governments were given some amount of control over their education system. They were allowed to teach in their own dialects up to the fourth grade in schools. The freedom to use their own languages to teach the younger students gave them the opportunity to simultaneously learn their own culture and that

¹⁶ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 51.

of the majority Burman culture. This was an indication that the Union of Burma had a diverse culture yet maintained unity. However, this unity in diversity was threatened by a presidential proclamation of the transfer of the Shan state's power to the army from 1952 to 1954.¹⁷

Unity in diversity was further devastated by unequal treatments meted out to ethnic minorities on the issue of the state as well as by the introduction of nationalized policies. The Karens, who formed the majority group in the Frontier Areas and the largest minority in Burma were unhappy with the size of the state demarcated for them. The Burmans were reluctant to give up the territories they jointly occupied with the Karens. The Karens protested that the size of the state allotted to them was enough only for a fraction of their population.

The greater threat to unity in diversity emerged when the policy of mandatory use of the Burmese language in educational institutions and government offices were promulgated. Subsequently, all students were required to learn the Burmese language along with English in middle schools, high schools and universities. Burmese was the only language permitted inside the Parliament for bringing up any agenda for formal discussion. The costume of ethnic Burmans used in Rangoon and Mandalay was informally adopted as the pattern for the national dress. Temporary residents or visitors wearing the traditional clothing of their birthplace on days other than holidays are viewed as rustics.¹⁸ A serious threat to unity in diversity developed when Buddhism was made the official state religion in 1961 by U Nu's government.

¹⁷ J. Silverstein. (1959). *The Federal Dilemma in Burma*. Far Eastern Survey, p. 101. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3024026> (Retrieved 12/08/2019).

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 102-105.

All these gradual but deliberate changes were difficult for the non-Burman ethnic groups to accept for a number of reasons. To begin with, these changes were against the spirit of the Panglong Agreement which promised autonomy for each ethnic group. In addition to, the non-Burman groups considered the changes as a mischievous Burmanization¹⁹ policy of the majority. Another pertinent point is that by adopting these new policies, the non-Burman groups were concerned that they would lose their culture, language and tradition. Fourthly, since not all the non-Burman groups were Buddhists, making of Buddhism as a state religion was considered as against freedom of religion and a threat to the survival of their own religion.

2.2.1. Period of Democracy, Caretaker Government and Elections

Myanmar had experienced parliamentary democracy from 1948 to 1958 amidst tensions and ethnic unrest. In the years following independence, the civilian government underwent a tumultuous period. Due to a split within the ruling AFPFL into the clean (led by U Nu and Thakin Tin) and Stable (led Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein) factions in 1958, Prime Minister U Nu invited Ne Win, head of the army to form a caretaker government and hold a new election.

During the caretaker military government from September 1958 to February 1960, Ne Win managed to earn the trust of many by appointing a number of civilians to his cabinet and by holding elections in 1960. This gesture gave the impression that he was not only a good soldier, but also had the qualities of an effective

¹⁹ It is considered as an assimilation policy implemented since 1948 by the successive Myanmar governments to assimilate the non-Burman ethnic groups into ethnic Burman group.

administrator.²⁰ During this brief period, Ne Win also implemented two major decisions. An agreement was reached for the Shan Sawbwas and Karenni (Kayah) Saophalongs to abandon their feudal rights on 21 April, 1959 and a boundary agreement was signed with China in January 1960.

The boundary agreement gave away some parts of the Wa national area in Shan state. The people of Shan state, especially the Sawbwas, were unhappy with the Rangoon government for giving away parts of their territory to China. The discontented Shan Sawbwas then intensified their demand for federalism, which was rejected by the Ne Win government.

The Shan Sawbwas then, threatened to secede from the Union of Burma, as stated in the 1947 Constitution i.e. the Shans have the right to secede from the Union of Burma after 10 years of independence.²¹ Not all the states enjoyed the same constitutional rights. Although the 1947 Constitution provided that every state has the right of secession unless otherwise expressly stated, the Kachin and the Karen states were denied the right. The Shan and Karenni (Kayah) states were required to wait for 10 years until 4 January, 1958. The right of secession did not apply to the Chin Special Division since it was not a full-fledged state yet.²²

Elections were held in the country in 1947, 1951, 1956 and 1960. The first three elections were won by the AFPFL as a single unified party. The AFPFL in fact, was formerly a resistance organization spearheading the fight for Burma's

²⁰ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 49.

²¹ S.L Maung. (1989). *Burma, Nationalism and Ideology: An analysis of Society, Culture and Politics*. Dhaka: The University Press Limited. p. 37-38.

²² J. Silverstein. (1997). *Burma: Military Rule and Politics of Stagnation*. New York: Cornell University Press. p. 59.

independence from the British and was led by General Aung San. With the assassination of Aung San on 19 July, 1947, the AFPFL leadership was taken over by U Nu. The split of the AFPFL into two factions in 1958 paved the way for the 1960 general elections that was decisively won by U Nu 'clean' or Pyidaungsu (Union) faction. The other AFPFL group was called 'Stable' faction and was backed by the military.²³

With the break-up of the AFPFL into two factions, the 1960 general elections were held under the caretaker military government. About 72 per cent of Rangoon residents voted for the Clean faction and 22 per cent voted for the Stable faction. The Clean faction and its allies secured 168 seats in the Parliament, while the Stable faction and its allies won 45 seats. Despite a landslide victory, the U Nu led government was not able to win the loyalty of majority of the ethnic minorities.

The government could not guarantee equal distribution of national resources to ethnic minorities and the Burmans.²⁴ Such a lack of political maturity often leads to divisions between the government and the general public. In such circumstances, some see the actions of the government as incompetent while others interpret it as a social injustice. When the same political institution operates differently within diverse ethnic groups of a country, it can lead to social unrest and political instability.²⁵

²³ M. Callahan. (1998). On Time Warps and Warped Time: Lessons from Burma Democratic Era. In Rotberg (ed.) *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic future*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. p. 51

²⁴ Ibid. p. 59

²⁵ J. Lambert. (1967). *Latin America: Social Structure and Political Institutions*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. p. 111-113.

Prime Minister U Nu played an important role in the landslide victory of his Clean faction. Although he was not very popular among the intellectuals and the military, he had earned the respect of many among the general public because of his religious beliefs and the ordinary citizen character he possessed. In a predominant Buddhist society, his announcement of Buddhism as the state religion before the elections gave him an advantage over his rival candidates.

Among other practices, U Nu served as a Buddhist monk for six weeks, offered alms to the monks, sought the advice of important Buddhist leaders and organized the Buddhist Synod during 1954 to 1956. Such large scale Buddhists gatherings were believed to have been convened only by important monarchs. His main political rivals like Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein from the Stable faction tried to emulate him by emphasizing religious values but their sudden change of heart failed to persuade the general public.²⁶

Not long after the election victory of U Nu's Clean faction which was renamed as the Union Party, internal conflicts developed over the issue of membership of the executive committee. Leaders of the Union Party's constituent organizations such as the All Burma Peasant Organization, Federation of Trade Organization and Union Labour Organization, were barred from holding positions in the executive committee. The simmering tension among the party leaders resulted in the formation of 'Thakins' and 'U-Bos'. The Thakins were leaders of the constituent organizations and the U-Bos were those who supported U Nu's policy of party-based individual membership.

²⁶ R. Butwell and F. Mehden. (1960). The 1960 Election in Burma. In *Pacific Affairs*. Vol. 33 (2). p. 153. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i328369> (Retrieved 15/09/19)

In December 1960, U Nu announced that he would step down from the party leadership but would remain as the Prime Minister. There was an indication that the Union Party was heading towards a split along the same lines as the AFPFL a couple of years earlier. Moreover, U Nu was apparently not supportive of continuing the National Defence College that was established during the Ne Win caretaker military government. U Nu was also against the creation of a central military intelligence organization. Both these programmes were supported by the military. A year earlier, the prime minister removed the police from army's control and authorized the police institution to conduct its own training.²⁷

For a government to function responsibly, it is essential to have a system that can effectively connect leaders with the general public.²⁸ The bureaucratic structure needs to clearly define the proper communication channel within the leadership by creating certain norms and regulations. Prior experience or expertise helps people who are in decision-making positions. Experiences can provide the skills necessary for public leaders to perform their duties efficiently.

In order to have a government that is accountable to the public, the leadership needs to be able to listen to the general public and incorporate the feedback into policies and in delivering public services. It can also be argued that experiences do not matter if leaders pursue failed policies or when a few powerful individuals dictate policies.²⁹ In authoritarian regimes like Burma, experiences or expertise do not really

²⁷ F. Trager. (1963). The Failure of U Nu and the Return of the Armed Forces in Burma. In *The Review of Politics*. Vol. 25 (3). p. 312-313.

²⁸ Ricci and Fitch. (1990). Ending Military Regimes in Argentina: 1966-73 and 1976-83. In Louis W. Goodman et al. (eds.) *The Military and Democracy: The Future of Civil-Military Relations in Latin America*. Massachusetts: Lexington Books. p. 56.

²⁹ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 45.

matter when it comes to policy decision making because all major policies are decided by military dictators. The entire bureaucratic structure is directly or indirectly controlled by the military.

During the period of parliamentary democracy, the government could not establish sufficient connection with the general public, especially with ethnic minorities. The problem was found not only in the border areas but also in regions where communication services and transport system were available. There were limited skilled administrators, tools and resources for U Nu to run his government effectively. The civilian government was in many instances, unable to exercise much influence beyond Rangoon.

The insurgents often threatened even Rangoon. The Rangoon government was unable to sufficiently provide for the needs of the citizens, a gap between citizens and the leadership made civilian government unstable.³⁰ When a weak civilian administration was hampered by insurgency challenges, the volatile situation in the country further deteriorated.

2.3. Period of the Military Rule

Ne Win's caretaker government lasted for 16 months and U Nu returned to power after winning a landslide victory in the 1960 elections. At some point, the armed ethnic groups during this period felt that negotiating with the government was pointless and therefore demanded political dialogue based on federalism. With his comeback, the prime minister realized that a strong and stable union government cannot be established without addressing the problems of the minorities.

³⁰ Op cit, M. Callhan. (1998). p. 59.

In an attempt to amicably resolve the minorities' grievances, the prime minister planned to convene a meeting after an immense pressure from the federal movement groups. Before U Nu could announce his recommendation for peace initiatives, General Ne Win seized power on 2 March, 1962, taking advantage of the political instability in the country.³¹ Brigadier Aung Gyi, General Ne Win's colleague justified the coup by making a statement that the military had prevented the country from disintegrating.

Ne Win further declared that parliamentary democracy had not worked for Burma.³² Insurgency problems also gave the military an excuse to say that the civilian government was incapable of providing stability to the country. According to Josef Silverstein, one of the reasons for the failure of democracy was due to the inability of the national leaders to solve the minority problems.

While many trusted U Nu to be able to lead the country, the people in the plains and those from the hills did not trust each other. There was fear and anxiety among the minorities that Burmanization would eventually lead to the loss of their culture and identity. On the other hand, there was also fear within the military that secession of the minority areas would leave the country nearly indefensible.³³ Thus, there was internal apprehension about the leadership of the country among the general masses and accordingly, the military stepped in to power.

³¹ Human Rights Documentation Unit, National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). (2000). *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 1999-2000*. p.8. <https://www.burmalibrary.org/en/category/burma-human-rights-yearbooks-1994-2008> (Retrieved 17/04/2018)

³² Op cit, C. Fink. (2001). p. 29

³³ Op cit, J. Silverstein. (1997). p. 31

2.3.1. Reasons Behind the Military Coup in 1962

According to Aung San Suu Kyi, on gaining independence, the need to keep the rebels in check made the army strong and many of the top men in the army had been politicians which inclined them to interfere in the government of the country.³⁴ According to Shwe Lu Maung, Ne Win felt that the Union of Burma had not only become a factionalized and ultranationalist state but also had veered away from the path of socialism, which the late Aung San had always stood throughout the independence struggle. As a patriotic soldier, Ne Win thought that it was his duty to take over the responsibility of the government.³⁵

Meanwhile, Nehginpao Kipgen argued that although other factors may have contributed to the circumstances, the ethnic minorities' demand for political autonomy/federalism was the primary reason for the military's intervention.³⁶ Ananda Rajah also argued that suppressing ethnic unrest and preventing the country from disintegration were given as the justification for the military coup.³⁷ Insurgency problems caused by ethnic unrest gave the military an excuse to say that the civilian government was incapable of providing stability and control to the country.

Onwumechili on the other hand asserted that military coup are not necessarily selfless services, but are used as a means to acquire power by leaders who are not confident about winning if they run for elections.³⁸ These leaders often use

³⁴ Op cit, Suu Kyi. (1991). p. 56

³⁵ Op cit, S.L Maung. (1989). p.40.

³⁶ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). P. 51.

³⁷ A. Rajah. (1998). Ethnicity and Civil War in Burma: Where is the Rationality?. Robert I. Rotberg (ed.). *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future*. Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press. p. 135.

³⁸ C. Onwumechilli. (1998). *African Democratisation and Military Coups*. Westport: Praeger Publishers. p. 40.

incompetence as an excuse for justifying their actions. Once in power, it is difficult to replace them with a civilian government as long as there is cohesive structure within the military hierarchy. Prior to the military coup, the Burmans accused the Shans of plotting to split the Union of Burma with the help of imperialists and capitalists. The Burmans interpreted federalism as tantamount to secessionism. On the other hand, the federalists (ethnic minorities) labelled the Burmans as chauvinist and colonists, who were attempting to build a unitary government against the spirit of Panglong Agreement.³⁹

After the Union Day (the day Panglong Agreement was signed) celebration on 12 February, 1962, ethnic minorities (Kachin, the Karen, the Mon, the Arakan and the Chin) gathered in Rangoon to finalize the constitution of the proposed federal Union of Burma. The timing was convenient for the military to carry out the coup while the federalists were busy discussing then federal union constitution in one location.⁴⁰ Thus, it can be argued that not only one factor but numerous factors and circumstances led to the military coup in 1962. The primary reason among these was the ethnic problems of the minorities in the frontier areas which was not dealt properly by the government at that time. Subsequently, the period of the military regime began in 1962 which lasted continuously for more than five decades.

2.3.2. Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) Era

Following the military coup, Ne Win dissolved the Parliament and banned all political parties and related activities. This marked the end of parliamentary democracy and the beginning of military dictatorship in Burma, under the leadership

³⁹ Op Cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 50.

⁴⁰ Op cit, S.L Maung. (1989). p. 39.

of ethnic Burmans. A new government called Revolutionary Council, with Ne Win as its Chairman was formed. Burma then, under army rule became a socialist republic guided by the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), which was formed in July 1962. No other political party is permitted as well as related political activities.

They introduced the 'Burmese Way to socialism' in the country. This and other measures limiting the political liberties of the people are aimed at creating a stable government and a united country.⁴¹ Under the BSPP government, between 1963 and 1965, all banks, industries and large shops were nationalized and 100 kyat and 50 kyat currency notes were demonetized with the intention of removing wealth from foreign business people.⁴²

The government further demonetized 25, 53 and 75 kyat currency notes on 5 September, 1987. The sudden demonetization immensely affected the entire nation. About 60-80 per cent of all money in circulation became worthless. Demonstrations of university students turned violent. Currency demonetization announcement came at a time when the students had to pay their fees. In response to the violent situation, the authorities had to close down all the universities throughout the country, though they were reopened two months later and exams were conducted immediately.⁴³ After a few days, the government clarified that the sudden demonetization of currency notes was targeted at insurgents and black marketers.

⁴¹ Op cit, Suu Kyi. (1991). p. 56.

⁴² Op cit, C. Fink. (2001). p. 32.

⁴³ B. Lintner. (1994). *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*. Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus Co. Ltd.

2.4. People's Uprising in 1988 (8888)

The leadership of General Ne Win was immensely affected when the United Nations (UN) reduced the economic status of Burma to a 'Least developed Country' in 1987. The Burmese people began to lose their confidence in Ne Win's leadership which served as an impetus for Ne Win to lose his cultural and political base.⁴⁴ The '8888' democracy uprising started with a small incident. The reason why it is called 8888 is that the gruesome massacre began on 8 August, 1988, in which an unknown number of demonstrators estimated to be in thousands, were killed. The whole episode started in a local tea shop where a scuffle broke out between local youths and the students of Rangoon Institute of Technology.

One of the local youths was the son of a local leader of the People's Council of BSPP, the party which was in control of the military government. When the students marched down to protest the incident at the People's Council office, they were confronted by about a 5000-strong riot police unit and soldiers armed with clubs and G-3 rifles. When infuriated students hurled stones towards the policemen, the riot police retaliated with live bullets. Several students were hit and severely injured.⁴⁵ Thousands of students organized protests in Rangoon and other cities across the country. Teachers, monks, children, professionals and trade unionists also joined in large numbers.

Following continued massive pro-democracy demonstrations, Ne Win loyalists and supporters in the army violently suppressed the uprising. The worst single day of massacre happened in 8 August, 1988, when soldiers fired upon

⁴⁴ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 147.

⁴⁵ Op cit, B. Lintner. (1994). p. 275.

unarmed protesters, leaving hundred dead. The killing continued for days and thousands mostly, students were killed. Hundreds of demonstrators were arrested and thousands more fled to the neighbouring countries.⁴⁶ On 8 August, 1988, at 8:08 A.M. local time, people from different walks of life took to the streets and marched towards the city centre. The confrontation between demonstrators and troops lasted for days until it was halted on 13 August when the government announced that the military leader, Sein Lwin had resigned.

Numerous eyewitnesses during the 8 to 13 August period confirmed that the troops clashed with and killed fleeing demonstrators and fired indiscriminately at onlookers and into houses. Death probably numbered over two thousand but actual numbers can never be known. In many cases as soon as they finished firing, troops carted off victims for surreptitious mass disposal in order to mask the extent of the carnage.⁴⁷ Subsequently, Ne Win resigned from the BSPP chairmanship on 14 July, 1988. Two fundamental reasons for the public outburst were due to Ne Win's manipulating with cultural traditions or sanctions and the bursting of the economic bubble under the mounting pressure of inflation and economic stagnation.⁴⁸ Massive demonstrations by the people finally brought down the BSPP government.

2.4.1. The Aftermath and Formation of National League for Democracy (NLD)

As a result of the gruesome massacre and subsequent events, thousands of people belonging to different ethnic groups fled the country to take refuge in

⁴⁶ A. Ghosh. (2001). 54 University Avenue, Yangon. In *Kenyon Review*. Vol. 23(2). p. 160-161.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 278.

⁴⁸ M. Maung. (1990). The Burma Road from the Union of Burma to Myanmar. In *Asian Survey*. Vol. 30 (6). p.152

neighbouring countries such as India, Thailand and Bangladesh. One of the main reasons behind the unsuccessful uprising of 8888 was that the newly emerged leaders could not agree among themselves on how to take the next steps.⁴⁹ This marked the end of the 1988 Uprising. Though the uprising failed but the old socialist state was formally abolished. The Ne Win era ended but the military stepped in to form a new party called the 'State Law and Order Restoration Council' (SLORC), similar to the former BSPP.

General Saw Maung, Chairman of the SLORC who ordered the crackdown, claimed to have saved the country from disintegration.⁵⁰ The army then, through a junta named the SLORC took control of the country. In 1989, the new military regime changed the country's name from the Union of Burma to the Union of Myanmar, and the capital, Rangoon, was renamed Yangon. Many believed that the man who called the shots from behind the scene was still Ne Win.⁵¹ Two Burmese native historians even suggested that Ne Win himself triggered the uproar.⁵² The SLORC government announced that it would hold general elections to re-establish a democratic society. This initiative taken by the military was considered as an effort of the government to gain legitimacy by letting the world know that they were working towards democracy.⁵³

⁴⁹ T. Myint-U. (2019). *The Hidden History of Burma*. New Delhi: Juggernaut Books. p. 39

⁵⁰ M. Smith. (2007). *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*. Washington D.C.: East-West Center. p. 38.

⁵¹ R. Mcg. Thomas Jr. (1997). Saw Maung is Dead at 68; Led a Brutal Burmese Coup. In *The New York Times*. 27 July, 1997. <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/27/world/saw-maung-is-dead-at-68-led-a-brutal-burmese-coup.html>. (Retrieved 08/09/2020)

⁵² M. Aung-Thwin and T. Myint-U. (1992). The Burmese Ways to Socialism. In *Third World Quarterly*. Vol. 13(1). p. 74.

⁵³ S.K.M. Tun. (2011). A Comparative Study of State-led Development in Myanmar (1998-2010) and Suharto's Indonesia: An Approach from the Developmental State Theory. In *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*. Vol. 30 (1). p. 82.

With the resignation of Ne Win and the collapse of the BSPP government, there were high hopes in the minds of many that democracy would prevail.⁵⁴ Since no other political parties were officially allowed to function during the BSPP government, there was no civilian political party to form an interim government. With the downfall of the BSPP government, several civil society groups began to re-emerge. Actors, artists, civil servants, lawyers and housewives formed several unions and joined the protests against the military regime. Even people who had worked for the BSPP government and several unions and joined the protests against the military regime.

Even people who had worked for the BSPP government and several other military establishments for years resigned and joined the civilian movement. Different independent newspapers, magazines and pamphlets were introduced. The media outlets did not only cover the ongoing political unrest but also provided fresh ideas on how to move forward with the country's democratization process. Since the soldier were confined to their barracks, maintaining law and order became a major problem. The Buddhist monks stepped forward to provide security and simultaneously encouraged encourage the public to protest the evil spirits of the country, indirectly referring to the military government.⁵⁵

There was leadership crisis in the aftermath of the fall of the BSPP government. Although there were several civil society groups and professional unions at the local level, there was no recognized national organization to lead a new government. Students led the protests, but were not in a position to form a

⁵⁴ Op Cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 148.

⁵⁵ Op cit, C. Fink. (2001). p. 58-60.

government on their own. In addition, there were differences of opinion among veteran politicians themselves. During those uncertain days, the former Prime Minister U Nu announced on 9 September, 1988 that he had formed a government.

However, most people no longer had faith in his leadership and disapproved of his cabinet appointees, many of whom were his family members or old friends. Meanwhile, rumours spread that the military was regrouping to stage another coup.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, in attempts to continue freedom struggle and with the ultimate goal of removing military dictatorship, armed organizations were formed including the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF). Meanwhile, in Rangoon, a political party named the National League for Democracy (NLD) was formed with Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of assassinated Burmese independence hero Aung San. The membership was believed to achieve 1-3 million members in 1990.

Aung San Suu Kyi was assisted by several prominent figures such as Aung Gyi, a military General during Ne Win's reign, who once criticized the government stand on human right issues and was the chief of NLD. In addition, NLD is joined by a famous figure named Tin U, who once held the post of Myanmar's Minister of Defence. He then joined NLD in 1988 to oppose against the military government implementation in Myanmar. Among NLD's objective was to demand human rights and implementation of a democratic system following the resolution by the United Nations as well as justice for the minority groups.

On 11 September, 1988, the military announced that it would hold a multiparty election, thus abandoning its earlier announcement of holding a

⁵⁶ Op Cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 149.

referendum first on whether the people like a one-party or multiparty system. An imminent coup increased the sense of urgency in the students and veteran politicians who had campaigned to end the military dictatorship. Sensing the urgency, student representatives and veterans politicians visited foreign embassies in Rangoon to seek their opinions on forming an interim government. After receiving some positive feedback from the embassies, they convened a meeting 13-14 September, 1988.⁵⁷

Five politicians including U Nu and Aung San Suu Kyi and the student community represented by Moe The Zun attended the meeting where the student leader urged for the politicians to set aside their differences and form an interim government within 48 hours. Former Prime Minister U Nu insisted that everyone should support his government, which other attending leaders were unwilling to do. Some of the leaders wanted to wait and see if the military would fulfil its promise of holding a multiparty election.

As a result, the meeting ended without reaching an agreement. The student leaders continued their mobilizations for forming an interim civilian government by holding meetings with different professional unions and leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi. While the students were putting together different sets of ideas and plans, the military saw the absence of any formidable civilian government. Taking advantage of the prevalent situation, the military staged another coup on 18 September, 1988, 38 days after the worst massacre.⁵⁸ Although the masses were able to effectively criticise the military dictatorship and protest against it, they were unable to remove the military from power.

⁵⁷ Op Cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 150.

⁵⁸ Op cit, C. Fink. (2001). p. 60-62.

2.4.2. 1990 General Election

After almost two years of the 8888 massacre, the military junta (SLORC) held an election on 27 May, 1990. The election was considered as generally free and fair, except for polling areas disrupted by fighting. The other issues concerned thousands of refugees inside and outside the country who were unable to vote.⁵⁹ There was a massive voter turnout on the day of the election.

The NLD then won 392 out of the 485 seats it contested in the 492 member assembly seats. The mandate was a clear indication of the support for Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, who campaigned for the NLD. She had been placed under house arrest since July 1989 as the junta feared that she might soon lead another uprising after the 1988 Uprising. The military-backed National Unity party (NUP), a reconstituted name of the BSPP managed to secure only 10 seats.

Though the military leaders were disappointed with the election result, they had to carefully tread so as not to provoke a backlash from its own rank and file, who had largely voted for NLD.⁶⁰ After a landslide victory in the 1990 election, the NLD met on 28 July, 1990 at Gandhi Hall in Yangon's Kyautada Township and adopted a resolution calling for the SLORC to step down and transfer power to the democratically elected party.

The NLD also called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. The demands, however, did not deter the military generals who were determined to hold on to power. The denial of power to the democratically elected

⁵⁹ M. Fredholm. (1993). *Burma : Ethnicity and Insurgency*. Westport CT: Praeger Publishers. p. 70.

⁶⁰ B. Lintner. (1999). *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*. Chiangmai: Silworm Books. p. 382.

representatives heightened the simmering political tension. Several elected members were arrested while some others left for the Thai-Burma border to form a government in exile. Thus, a government-in-exile, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) was established on December 18, 1990.⁶¹

As the military (SLORC) denied NLD's victory in the election of 1990, they further accused Aung San Suu Kyi as a traitor.⁶² Because of this event numerous senior leaders of NLD were arrested, including 2000 civilians and democrats throughout May to December 1990. In 1991, more than 25 parliamentarians was arrested and imprisoned falsely accused of threatening Myanmar national security.⁶³

The military even hunt down government opponents who especially forced minority groups to escape to border areas like Thailand, Cambodia and Malaysia. Following this incident, the refugees founded the Democratic Alliance for Burma (DAB) and established interim government to challenge the SLORC. DAB together with Suu Kyi have been fighting to claim democracy in military occupied Myanmar ever since. The denial of transfer of power by the military to the elected civilian leaders after the 1990 election further loses its legitimacy among the general masses.

⁶¹ <http://www.ncgub.net/> (Retrieved 28/11/2020).

⁶² M.F. Keling et al. (2010). A Historical Approach to Myanmar's Democratic Process. In *Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*. Vol. 1 (2). p. 132-143. <http://dcac.du.ac.in/documents/E-Resource/2020/Metrial/17Awadhesh2.pdf>. (Retrieved 17/08/2021)

⁶³ Chee Soon J. (1998). *To Be Free: Stories From Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism And Separatism*. London: I.B Tourris Publishers.

2.5. Period of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)

After the elections, the SLORC began to consolidate its position within the Burmese political setting and two steps were taken towards this: first, the military regime took several repressive measures against the NLD thereby ensuring that the opposition could not resist the onslaught of the SLORC in the political arena. Second, the SLORC believed that repression of the NLD would also influence the various dissident groups into a state of pacification, which would then allow the SLORC to legitimize its own position.⁶⁴

Meanwhile the struggle for democracy in Myanmar received support from foreign countries such as the United States of America (USA), the United Nations (UN) and Southeast Asia countries.⁶⁵ To preserve the military power, the government imposed house detention and jail sentence on Suu Kyi to prevent her to give a talk and organize political campaigns.

Even though Suu Kyi's struggle is supported by the international community, she was sentenced to 6 years of house arrest. Following Myanmar crisis and arrest of several Myanmar nationalists, the internal politics in Myanmar had invited tremendous attention of the international community. For instance, in 1989, the American criticized Myanmar's military government policies and they sent humanitarian aid to the country.

⁶⁴ S. Sundararaman. *From SLORC to SPDC: Political Continuity Versus Economic Change in Myanmar*. <http://www.idsa-india.org/an-jan10.html>. (Retrieved 23/01/2021).

⁶⁵ A. Acharya (2001). *Constructing A Security Community In Southeast Asia*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 108-115.

The European Community (EC) imposed military sanctions (arms embargo) against the government beginning on July 29, 1991.⁶⁶ The United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) sent a fact-finding mission to Myanmar (Burma) on October 22-26, 1991. The United Nations (UN) General Assembly approved a resolution on December 17, 1991, which expressed concern about human rights abuses in Burma.⁶⁷

The UNCHR condemned the SLORC on March 4, 1992. General Saw Maung then, resigned as chairman of the SLORC and prime minister on April 23, 1992, and General Than Shwe was appointed as chairman of the SLORC and prime minister. The U.S. government also imposed military sanctions (arms embargo) against the government on June 16, 1993.⁶⁸

The UN General Assembly condemned the government of Myanmar for human rights abuses on December 3, 1993.⁶⁹ While on the other hand, the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) took the stand not to alienate Myanmar, due to ASEAN's policy not to interfere with the members internal affairs.⁷⁰ ASEAN received significant opposition from international organization such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) which urged ASEAN to reject Myanmar participation in ASEAN.

⁶⁶ Stockholm International Peace research Institute. (2017). *EU Arms Embargo on Myanmar*. https://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/eu_arms_embargoes/myanmar. (Retrieved 12/05/2018).

⁶⁷ UNHCR. (1994). *Human Rights Watch World Report 1994- Burma (Myanmar)*. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/467fca831d.html>. (Retrieved 08/02/2018).

⁶⁸ M.F. Martin. (2012). U.S Sanctions on Burma. *Congressional Research Service*. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R41336.pdf>. (Retrieved 21/04/2019).

⁶⁹ University of Central Arkansas. (2021). <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/asiapacific-region/burmamyanmar-1948-present/>. (Retrieved 09/05/2021)

⁷⁰ Op cit, M.F. Keling et al. (2010). p. 132-143

Myanmar's entry as a member into ASEAN on 23 July, 1997 had caused various doubts and challenged the non-intervention principle of ASEAN.⁷¹ Heavy pressures imposed on ASEAN by the international human rights and western power so that ASEAN rejects Myanmar's entry as member an ASEAN member. But, Myanmar was still accepted as a member and Thailand was the first country to tie formal relationship with Myanmar after the 1990 crisis.

Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest on July 10, 1995. The Japanese government lifted economic sanctions against the government in 1995.⁷² The European Union (EU) appealed for peaceful negotiations on May 7, 1996. The SLORC ordered the arrest of 260 NLD members on May 21-25, 1996, including several members-elect of the parliament in the 1990 elections.⁷³ On May 24, 1996, Amnesty International (AI) condemned the SLORC for the arrests of NLD members. Several pro-democracy activists were convicted and sentenced to prison on August 31, 1996. The SLORC arrested and detained around 110 pro-democracy activists in September 1996. On September 27, 1996, Amnesty International (AI) again condemned the SLORC for the arrest of pro-democracy activists. European Union (EU) foreign ministers confirmed military sanctions (arms embargo) and imposed economic sanctions (suspension of economic assistance) against Myanmar on October 28, 1996.⁷⁴

⁷¹ R. Ramcharan. (2000). ASEAN and Non-Interference: A Principle Maintained. Vol. 22(1). p. 60-88. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25798479>. (Retrieved 14/02/2019).

⁷² Op cit, University of Central Arkansas. (2021).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

At least three individuals were killed in inter-religious violence (Buddhist and Muslim) in Mandalay on March 16, 1997.⁷⁵ The government declared a state-of-emergency on May 20, 1997. The U.S. government imposed economic sanctions (investment ban) against the government on May 21, 1997.⁷⁶ On May 21, 1997, Amnesty International (AI) condemned the SLORC for the recent arrests of some 50 members of the NLD.⁷⁷ Thus, the international community at large especially the western countries keep a close eye on the internal politics of Myanmar including human rights abuses and as such reacted negatively or positively according to the steps taken by the military government in Myanmar.

2.6. Period of State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)

To restore confidence and people's belief on SLORC, Myanmar's military government changed the name of SLORC to State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) on November 18, 1997. However, the SPDC still failed to achieve majority of people's support.⁷⁸ Aung San Suu Kyi was again detained by the government on September 22, 2000, but she was released on May 6, 2002. Suu Kyi's release in 2002 in a way ignited the spirit of the people to revolt and demand democracy implementation in Myanmar.

In May 2002, international community once again gave pressure on the UN to interfere in Myanmar's affair. Meanwhile, Aung San Suu Kyi was again arrested and imprisoned on May 31, 2003, and she was placed under house arrest in September 2003. The international community pressured and criticized Myanmar's military

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. M.F. Keling et al. (2010). p, 132-143

administration and prompted the military government to take positive approaches to decrease international pressure.

This situation influenced Myanmar's Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt to employ a more positive approach especially in implementing a democratic system that protects human right in Myanmar. His appointment as Prime Minister in 2003 paved the way to the prospect of democracy by rebuilding the international community, UN and ASEAN confidence through his presentation of a 'Roadmap to Democracy' or 'Democracy Plan' on August 30, 2003. The Seven Step Roadmap to Democracy are:⁷⁹

1. Reconvening of the National Convention that had been adjourned since 1996;
2. After the successful holding of the National Convention, implement step-by-step the process necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic system;
3. Drafting of a new constitution in accordance with basic principles and detailed basic principles laid down by the National Convention;
4. Adoption of the constitution through national referendum;
5. Holding of free and fair elections for Pyithu Hluttaws (legislative bodies) according to the new constitution;
6. Convening of Hluttaws attended by Hluttaw members in accordance with the new constitution; and,

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch. (2008). Chronology of Burma's Constitutional Process. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/burma0508/burma0508chronology.pdf>. (Retrieved 12/08/2018)

7. Building a modern, developed, and democratic nation by the state leaders elected by the Hluttaw; and the government and other central organs formed by the Hluttaw.

Khin Nyunt promised to usher the country toward a new constitution and free elections, but his rule was cut short by allegations of corruption. In late 2004, he was placed under house arrest. His resignation jeopardized the government's capability to continue the implementation of the 'Democracy Plan'. General Soe Win was then, designated as Prime Minister to replace General Khin Nyut and emphasized that the implementation process follows the 'Democracy Plan'.

However the process towards 'Democracy Plan' has been considered as slow and required to go through certain stages. Former Prime Minister, Khin Nyunt was later convicted of corruption and bribery, and he was sentenced to 44 years in prison on July 22, 2005.⁸⁰ In 2005, the military government moved the administrative capital from Yangon to a city it built in central Myanmar 'Nay Pyi Taw'.

2.6.1. Saffron Revolution

In May 25, 2007, the military government extends Aung San Suu Kyi's term of house arrest for another year. In 22 September, 2007, the so called 'Saffron Revolution' which was a widespread anti-government protests, sparked by fuel price hikes and named after the saffron-coloured robes worn by participating

⁸⁰ Council on Foreign Relations. (2021). Myanmar Troubled History: Coups, Military Rule and Ethnic Conflict. <https://www.cfr.org/background/yanmar-history-coup-military-rule-ethnic-conflict-rohingya>. (Retrieved 21/06/2021).

Buddhist monks had broken out. Hundreds of Buddhist monks and their lay supporters march down University Avenue to Aung San Suu Kyi's house.⁸¹

They line up outside the gate and chant the 'metta sutta' (loving kindness) as Suu Kyi stands by her gate to receive these blessings.⁸² The monks march off without incident, leading ever larger marches in Rangoon until the government violently cracks down on their protests on September 26.⁸³ Though the Saffron Revolution did not succeed in over-throwing the military regime, it infuses a sense of courage and confidence in fighting their demand. As a result, the military recognizes the desire of freedom of the general masses and as such, take concrete measures for the adoption of a new constitution.

2.7. Reasons for Continuous Military Rule

Guilmartin lists 'technology, strategy, cohesiveness, and logistics' as critical components for a successful military operation in his article.⁸⁴ A cohesive organization brings military troops together for a single goal, something they would not do otherwise. Even when faced with violence or death threats, allegiance to the organization takes precedence over personal preferences. Individuals become accountable participants of a strong institution as a result of the military's cohesion. The military may avoid the threat of factionalism by remaining together. Despite apparent internal disputes among the Burmese military junta's lower-ranking officials, there existed an established coherent structure.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ J.F. Guilmartin. (1997). Light Troops in Classical Armies: An Overview of Roles, Functions, and Factors affecting Combat Effectiveness. James C. Bradford (ed.). *The Military and Conflict between Cultures: Soldiers at the interface*. Texas: A&M University Press. p. 17-48.

This cohesion was mostly the result of entrenched oppressive leadership and severe regulations that made it impossible for unhappy personnel to openly express their dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the cohesion of military institutions has been difficult to penetrate in the absence of alternative robust institutions, such as civil societies or elected democratic organizations. Burma's military hierarchy has traditionally been a highly guarded institution. The military illegally seized power, but has subsequently sought legitimacy, support, and collaboration from the international world.

2.8. Adoption of the 2008 Constitution

In April 2008, the government published a proposed new constitution, which allocates a quarter of seats in parliament to the military and bans opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from holding office. The process of democratization begins with a controversial constitutional referendum that took place only two days after Cyclone Nargis swept across the Irrawaddy Delta leaving tens of thousands dead. The military drafted constitution was overwhelmingly approved (by 92.4 per cent of the 22 million voters with alleged voter turnout of 99 per cent) on May 10 in the first phase of a two stage referendum amid Cylone Nargis. Meanwhile, in May 28, 2008, Aung San Suu Kyi's detention order under the 1975 State Protection Act was further extended until May 27, 2009 by the military government.

The new charter paved the way for multi-party elections in 2010 that would end five decades of military rule while guaranteeing the military, 25 per cent of seats in parliament. However, the constitution does not contain any special provisions

which could be beneficial for the ethnic minorities nor it contains a provision for a federal system which has been demanded for a long time by the minorities.

2.9. The 2010 Elections

A general election was held in Myanmar on November 7, 2010, in accordance with the new constitution which was approved in a referendum held in May, 2008. The general election was the fifth step of the seven step ‘roadmap to democracy’ proposed by the SPDC in 2003; the sixth and the seventh steps being the convening of Myanmar’s parliament and establishment of democracy in the country. Aung San Suu Kyi’s party, the NLD boycotted the election.

The 2010 election was the first held since 1990, when the NLD won a multi-party election which was rejected by the military. 37 political parties contested seats in the bicameral national parliament and 14 regional assemblies. A total of 498 seats in both houses of the parliament were up for grabs in this election. A 224 member House of Nationalities has 168 elected candidates and 65 nominated members by the military chief, while the 440 member House of Representatives has 330 elected civilians and 110 military representatives.⁸⁵

The main military-backed party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), claims resounding victory in the first election held for 20 years in the country. After the 2010 election, a civilian-led government was formed under the USDP. In 13 November, 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest. When President Thein Sein took office in March 2011, he launched a series of

⁸⁵ T. Wilson. (2010). The Significance of Myanmar’s 2010 Election. New Mandala. December 15. <https://www.newmandala.org/the-significance-of-myanmar%E2%80%99s-2010-election/>.

political reforms, including the release of hundreds of political prisoners, easing of restrictions on the media and civilian political activity and implementing economic policies to encourage foreign investment.

Suu Kyi and her party NLD were allowed to resume political activities, who were earlier banned in 2010 from taking part in elections by the government. This subsequently resulted in winning of the 2012 by-elections by the NLD. The 2010 election in Myanmar is one of the most significant event in the history of Myanmar as it paves the way for the process of political reforms. It was the first time since 1990 that general elections were held in the country. It was considered as the first concrete steps taken by the military government towards the path of democracy in the country.

2.10. The 2015 Elections

In 2015, Myanmar held its first nationwide, multiparty general elections. Suu Kyi's NLD party won a landslide victory.⁸⁶ New lawmakers elected Htin Kyaw, a long-time confidant of Suu Kyi, as the country's president. But the real power was in the hands of Suu Kyi, who was appointed to the newly created position of state counsellor and became the de facto head of the civilian government as the constitution barred Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming president.

However, the military still retained control over domestic security, most aspects of foreign relations, and many other matters related to domestic policy. Indeed, the 2008 Constitution includes several provisions to protect the

⁸⁶ International Crisis Group. (2015). The Myanmar Elections: Results and Implications. Asia Briefing No. 147, 9 December. Brussels. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/myanmar-elections-results-and-implications>. (Retrieved 14/12/2021).

military's dominance, such as reserving 25 per cent parliamentary seats for the military.

The year 2015 marked a transition to a military-civilian hybrid government, with the NLD triumphing in general elections in November 2015. National politics took a broadly positive turn with regard to democratization and liberalization, but there were still fears that reforms might be reversed.⁸⁷ In the past, the military had attempted to improve Myanmar's image by releasing political prisoners, allowing elections, and increasing liberties.

However, whenever the military felt threatened by the NLD and civilian support for democracy, authoritarian rule seemed to strengthen. Since 2011, reforms have been much more substantive, but barriers remain. In addition to giving the military one-quarter of parliamentary seats, the undemocratic 2008 constitution gives the military control of three powerful ministries: defence, home affairs, and border affairs. But the 2015 general election in Myanmar is one of the most significant events in Myanmar as it was the first open general election since 1990 and the military readily transfer its power to the NLD government.

2.11. Rohingya Crisis

Alleged discriminatory policies of Myanmar's government since the late 1970s have compelled hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya to flee their homes in the predominantly Buddhist country.⁸⁸ Most have crossed by land into Bangladesh, while others have taken to the sea to reach Indonesia, Malaysia, and

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Op cit, Council on Foreign Relations. (2021).

Thailand. In 2016 and 2017, the military and local security forces mounted a brutal campaign against the Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority mostly resided in the Arakan region in Myanmar, allegedly killing thousands of people and razing hundreds of villages. Rights groups and UN officials suspect that the military committed genocide against the Rohingya.⁸⁹

In 2019, Gambia filed the first international lawsuit against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice, accusing the country of violating the UN Genocide Convention. Both Suu Kyi's government and the military have denied that ethnic cleansing is taking place, and Suu Kyi defended the military at a tribunal in the International Court of Justice at The Hague. Most Rohingyas have sought refuge in the neighbouring country Bangladesh, where resources and land to protect refugees are somewhat limited. Bangladesh has continued to insist that Rohingya refugees be repatriated back to Myanmar.⁹⁰ The Rohingya crisis in Myanmar has attracted various attention from the international community and in a way gives Myanmar and its government a negative image as various countries and international organizations publicly condemned the brutal actions taken towards the Rohingyas.

2.12. The 2020 Elections.

In the 2020 general election, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 920 of the total 1,117 seats, which was upped by 61 seats from its win in the 2015 election. The main opposition party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party

⁸⁹ BBC. (2020). Myanmar Rohingya: What you need to know about the crisis, 23 January. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>. (Retrieved 21/04/22).

⁹⁰ Op cit, Council on Foreign Relations. (2021).

(USDP), won 71 seats, down 46 from the 2015 election when it won 117 seats.⁹¹ The election result gave a strong mandate to the NLD for another five years. On the other hand, the USDP accused the NLD of engaging in electoral fraud including the buying of votes, and called for fresh elections in coordination with the military.

Following a complaint from its proxy party, the USDP, the military initially said it would conduct an investigation in 218 townships where the military personnel and their family members cast their votes, which it expanded to 314 townships in all states and regions across the country; ethnic parties also alleged that the NLD government made certain pre-poll decisions that disadvantaged the ethnic minorities.⁹² This ultimately led to the declaration of a state of emergency rule (the military coup) on 1 February 2021.⁹³ Thus, the democratic reforms process in Myanmar has taken a major setback which will have a dreadful impact on the political developments among the general masses.

2.13. Military Coup in 2021

In February 2021, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and other military leaders staged a coup. The move came after the military's proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) suffered a major blow in the 2020 general elections. The NLD claims a resounding victory in the elections taking more votes than it did in 2015. The USDP demands a rerun of the election and calls for

⁹¹ N. Kipgen. (2021). The 2020 Myanmar Election and the 2021 Coup: Deepening Democracy or Widening Division?. Asian Affairs. Vol. 52 (1). February. p. 5.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349518282_THE_2020_MYANMAR_ELECTION_AND_THE_2021_COUP_DEEPENING_DEMOCRACY_OR_WIDENING_DIVISION. (Retrieved 21/08/2022).

⁹² Ibid. p. 5-6.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 12

military help to ensure fairness, alleging irregularities which the Election Commission denied it.⁹⁴

The military regime officially, called the State Administration Council (SAC) then, declared a ‘State of Emergency’ for one year and further detained and charged de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi with corruption and other crimes.⁹⁵ Massive protests erupted nationwide in the weeks after the coup. Tens of thousands of people, including health workers, bankers, and teachers, joined what was originally a peaceful civil disobedience movement, refusing to go to work until the elected government returned to power.

Eventually, ousted NLD lawmakers, protest leaders, and activists from several minority groups established a parallel government known as the National Unity Government (NUG). It aims to bring together the disparate groups opposed to the junta, foster greater unity among ethnic groups, create an agenda for a post-junta Myanmar, and cultivate support from foreign governments. In September, the NUG declared war on the junta and formed an armed division known as the People’s Defence Force (PDF). In August 2022, Gen Min Aung Hlaing declared the extension of emergency in the country for another one year which marked the extension of military regime in the country⁹⁶.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 12-13.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 12

⁹⁶ The Indian Express. (2022). Myanmar leader announces extension of state of emergency, 2 August. <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/myanmar-leader-announces-extension-of-state-of-emergency-8064517/>. (Retrieved 12/08/2022).

Hence, Myanmar has encountered various phases of political developments since independence period till today. A majority of the period in Myanmar since independence has been under the military rule and as such the influence of the military on the people has been immense. Although the people of Myanmar have experienced democracy in the past and in recent period, but the elements of the military has a stronghold in the politics of Myanmar even during democracy period. Thus, it can be said that the political developments experienced in Myanmar has been shaped and moulded by the military to a large extend. But having already tasted democracy, the people of Myanmar in general were craving for freedom under the aegis of democracy. Besides this, the ethnic minorities in the country have been demanding and striving for self-autonomy under a federal system which is in line with the Panglong Agreement of 1947.

Chapter-3

History of India-Myanmar Relations

The previous chapter discusses in brief the political developments taking place in Myanmar since the dawn of independence till the recent military coup in Myanmar. This chapter on the other hand discusses the historical relations between two immediate neighbour i.e. India and Myanmar. It further describes the nature and status of their relations from the colonial period till the period where Myanmar experience political reforms. India and Myanmar (Burma) are two significant countries that are located in South Asia and South East Asia, respectively. These two nations have a variety of connections spanning geography, colonial, political, history, religion, and culture.

They are considered to be near neighbours. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram are the four Indian states that are located on each side of the 1,643-kilometer-long border that separates India and Myanmar.¹ In addition, India and Myanmar share the strategic waterways of the Bay of Bengal, which includes the strategically significant region of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The distance between the two islands that are closest to each other in Indian and Myanmar is just around 30 kilometers.

Both India and Myanmar have historical parallels, and India's profound impact on Myanmar can be traced back to the country's earliest recorded history. By

¹ L. Langpok and S. Singh. (2007). Dynamics of India-Myanmar Relations and the Manipur Equation. *World Focus*, (24), p. 239.

the seventh century, India was responsible for bringing Buddhism and Hinduism to Myanmar. During the years 1857-1947 and 1886-1948, respectively, India and Myanmar were both subject to the imperial authority of the British government. The similar understanding that resulted from the affiliation of the two nations when they were both under to British control allowed them to work together throughout their joint fight for independence.

Following Myanmar's independence from British India, the nationalist movements that were fighting against British imperialism received support from each other's respective struggle leaders. The friendly relationship between the leaders of India and Myanmar, Nehru and U Nu respectively, was essential in the development of cooperative ties between the two countries.²

3.1. India-Myanmar Relations during British Colonial Era

During the years 1857 to 1947 and 1886 to 1948, respectively, the territory that is now known as India and Myanmar were both occupied by the British Empire. When the Konbaung Dynasty of Myanmar decided to expand into the Arakan region of the state of Assam, which was located in close proximity to the British colony in India, conflict broke out between Myanmar and the British. This close interaction resulted in the first Anglo-Burmese War, which took place between 1824 and 1826 and was won by the British with the assistance of the Siamese³

As a result of the British victory, Myanmar was forced to cede Assam and

² Prasad, Bibhu (2011). India's Myanmar Policy: Rational Change. V.R. Raghavan (ed.) *Internal Conflicts in Myanmar Transnational Consequences*. New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt. Ltd. p. 127-128.

³ V.N. Khanna and L. Arora (2008). *Foreign Policy of India*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing Pvt. Ltd. p.36.

other northern provinces. The British desired the teak woods in southern Myanmar as well as a section between Calcutta and Singapore, which led to the escalation of tensions that resulted in the Second Anglo-Burmese War, which began in 1852.

Even though they prevailed in the Second Anglo-Burmese War as well, the British were not content with their victory because they want access to the teak, oil, and rubies that were located in northern Myanmar. This served as the impetus for them to launch the third Anglo-Burmese War in the year 1885. The acts of the British government were justified by the assertion that the last independent King of Myanmar, Thibaw, was a dictator and that he was plotting to give France greater control in the kingdom.

This was how the British administration justified their activities.⁴ Therefore, in 1885, after three battles during which they gained control of different portions of the nation, the British eventually seized all of Myanmar, rechristened it Burma, and declared it a colony of British India. Lord Dufferin, who was serving as the viceroy of British India at the time, made an official declaration of the annexation of Burma on January 1, 1886.⁵

Following the British conquest and annexation of Burma, a number of administrative actions were carried out with the goal of bringing peace to the newly acquired kingdom. In 1887, Charles Crosthwaite, who was serving as Commissioner of Burma at the time, came to the conclusion that the ancient method of local

⁴ Ibid. p. 79.

⁵ F. S. V. Donnison. (1953). *Public Administration in Burma: A Study of Development during the British Connexion*. Great Britain: University Press Glasgow. p.28.

administration in Burma should be replaced with a new one that was based on the Indian pattern.

As a result, a system of administration by district was instituted, with each area being supervised by a different British Deputy Commissioner.⁶ As a direct consequence of this, a significant number of Indians from Lower Burma and India who were seen to be compliant with the British way of administration were incorporated into the service sector.

The position of executive leader of the province was elevated to that of Lieutenant Governor in the year 1897. He was given a legislative council, of which he would serve as President, along with nine other members, of whom four would be officials and five would be non-officials. The Morley Minto Reforms of 1909 resulted in a reorganization of the legislative council, although the position of President was maintained by the Lieutenant Governor during that time. In 1915, the membership of the legislatures was increased even more, reaching a total of thirty people, of whom only two were elected.

Therefore, during the time period following the annexation, the council remained almost exclusively a vehicle for British official and mercantile opinion, while throughout the country, the administration of the districts was directed by British officials who ruled their charges with a paternal authority. Burma had through a lot of social, political, and economic upheaval when it was under British colonial

⁶ S. Ganguly. (2010). *India's foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p.2.

administration.⁷ The Burmese did not adopt a purely passive stance towards the overall development, despite the fact that these shifts mostly benefitted British interests. British India's economic exploitation of Burma and its promotion of western notions of governance and politics drove the Burmese people to speak out against the foreign rule, which was the beginning of Burmese nationalism.

3.2. Political Relations during the Nationalist Movement

Relations between India and Myanmar (Burma) were fairly tight throughout the time of the nationalist movement in both countries because Burmese nationalism was heavily inspired by the national movement in India. It was India that provided as a source of inspiration for the millions of Burmese people who eventually rose up against the colonial tyranny of the British. Indian nationalists set the pace for changes on the different stages in Burma and displayed techniques of political activity aimed at winning independence from British colonial control. This was done in an effort to achieve freedom from British domination. Political agitations of the kind that moved to Burma from India included the use of strategies such as the boycott, the hartal, and the legislative walk out.

The nationalist movements in both countries came to the realization that they needed to work together to achieve liberation from their shared British imperialists. This led to an increase in mutual understanding and cooperation between the two nations. The nationalist movements of both nations became closer together in their fight against this shared foe, which helped deepen the bonds of collaboration

⁷ Furnivall, J. S. (1953). Burma: Past and Present. *Far Eastern Survey*. Vol. 22 (3). p.23. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i351459>. (Retrieved 09/05/2018).

between them. However, anti-foreignism was a significant component of Burmese nationalism, and it was not just aimed against the British but also towards immigrants from India at various periods. This was a key aspect of Burmese nationalism.

The animosity that the Burmese people feel toward Indians is the result of a number of factors, including the presence of a large population of Indians in Burma, their economic position, their transient nature, the appearance of exploitative nature of the Indian money lenders, and the growth of aggressive nationalism in Burma. The people of India and Burma worked together in spite of the animosity that existed between their two countries against Indians. Indian nationalist leaders gave the advice to Indian settlers in Burma that they should work along with the local Burmese population.

Even though India was a major source of inspiration for Burmese nationalism, it was fundamentally an indigenous force. The Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), which was established in 1908 by a group of young Burmese, is credited with being the first example of overtly nationalist sentiment in Burma. Similar goals were pursued by other socio-religious organization in India throughout the 19th century, such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Ramkrishna Mission, and the Theosophical Society.⁸

These goals are also shared by the Young Men's Business Association (YMBA). The Young Myanmar Buddhist Association (YMBA) and the General Council for Burmese Association (GCBA), which is an association of Burmese

⁸ Asia Yearbook. (1980). Far Eastern Economic Review. Hong Kong, p.148.

people, became increasingly active in bringing political consciousness to the Burmese national struggle.

In the 1920s, India and Burma initiated the Non-Cooperation Movement in an effort to achieve full independence from the colonial control of the British Empire. This was referred to as 'Purna Swaraj.' Employees of the British Irrawaddy Flotilla were the ones who planned and executed the strikes that took place in Burma during the Non-Cooperation Movement.⁹ Company employees, together with those of the railroad, tramway, port, and mill, to make public their political ambitions.

In the sake of patriotism, even students in elementary schools and universities participated in the strike. The Indian National Congress maintained a presence in Burma via a local chapter, the majority of whose members were comprised of the local Indian settlers. However, a number of notable Burmese nationalists were also members of the provincial Committee of the Indian National Congress and attended its sessions. These meetings took place in Burma.

The Indian liberation fight was picking up steam during the beginning of the 1930s, which coincided with the beginning of the national movement in Burma. Emerging at this time was the next generation of youthful leaders, who dubbed themselves as Thakins. In order to ramp up the nationalist movement, these Thakins established the Dobama Asiayone, also known as the 'We Barman's' association. The leaders of this group were Thakin, Aung San, and U Nu. These Thakins desired

⁹ B. Prasad. (1976). *Indo-Burmese Relations 1937-1947: A Study in Contradiction*. Calcutta: Modern Review: Calcutta. P. 273.

to proclaim their right to equality with the ruling class of those who were not Thakins.¹⁰

They were not ideologically unified with one another and also lacked clarity on their ideologies, but they were all on the same page with regard to one thing: their insatiable need for liberty. Therefore, the most significant political problem that Burma faced between the years 1930 and 1935 was determining whether or not the nation should be split from Indian Territory and, if so, how it should be done and under what conditions. When the Act of India and Burma was approved by the British Parliament in 1935, the problem was at last put to rest once and for all. On April 1, 1937, a new constitution that had been enshrined in the Government of Burma Act of 1935 went into effect. As a result, Burma was able to become an independent nation, and all of her administrative relations with India were severed.¹¹

After the country of Burma was split off from India, relations between the two countries continued to be characterized by goodwill and mutual understanding. India kicked out the endeavour when Jawaharlal Nehru travelled to Burma two months after the country had officially split from it. He visited with a number of senior Burmese officials in order to make his case for further collaboration and the maintenance of a cordial atmosphere between Indians and Burmese.¹²

In March of 1940, the Burmese leader Aung San was in charge of a Thakins

¹⁰ N. Choudhary. (2000). *Burma's Foreign Policy: Continuity and Change*. V. Grover. (ed.). *Myanmar Government and Politics*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd. p.420.

¹¹ J. L. Christian. (1942). *Modern Burma: A Survey of its Political and Economic Development for details about the frontier problem between India and Burma*. California: University of California. p. 34.

¹² C.L Keeton. (1974). *King Thebaw and the Ecological Rape of Burma*. Delhi: Manohar Book Service. p. 6-7.

delegation that attended the Ramgarh session of the Indian National Congress. On April 7, 1940, the team travelled to Ahmedabad where they had meetings with prominent Congress leaders like as Gandhiji and Pundit Nehru. Aung San, when addressing a gathering of students, was quoted as saying, 'If Mahatma Gandhi's efforts in non-violence succeed, it would provide a new light to the world and we are watching it sympathetically'.¹³

During the time when Japan occupied Burma, a noteworthy event that took place was the establishment of a liaison between Subhash Chandra Bose (also known as Netaji) and a number of notable Burmese leaders. The revolutionary leadership shown by Subhas Chandra Bose had an impression on the Burmese leader Ba Maw, who as a result endeavored to keep in constant contact with Bose.

After having announced the foundation of the Government of the Free Sovereign State of Azad Hind in Singapore in October 1943, its headquarters were moved to Rangoon in January 1944.²⁶ This was done by Netaji, who had previously made the announcement. There were a significant number of people of Japanese and Indian descent residing in Burma who enlisted in the Army of Netaji. The Indo-Burmese relationship was undoubtedly influenced as a direct result of this.¹⁴

During the decisive days of the Second World War, India did not lose sight of the needs of the countries that were immediately to her east and south. When the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) issued a call in 1942 for people to participate in

¹³ J.S Furnivall. (1949). Twilight in Burma: Reconquest and Crisis. *Pacific Affairs*. Vol. 22(1), p. 18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2752357>. (Retrieved 12/05/2018).

¹⁴ A.D. Moscotti. (1974). *British Policy and the Nationalist Movement in Burma: 1917- 1937*. Hawaii: University Press of Hawaii. p.20. <https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article-abstract/80/5/1337/74372>. (Retrieved 16/03/2018).

the Quit India Movement, it did not limit its aspirations for independence to the territory of India alone. Instead, it fought for independence throughout the whole of Asia, including Burma.¹⁵

It was not just those from India who backed the Burmese independence movement; Burmese nationalists also had similar feelings of sympathy for the independence movement in India. Aung San voiced his strong concern for India on July 24, 1946, saying the following, “Our approach towards India in Burma is one of the fullest collaboration and charity. We stand for more than just having cordial connections with our surrounding communities. We want to be more than just good neighbours; we want to be good brothers as well.....we stand for instant mutual understanding and concerted action, wherever and whenever practicable, beginning right now for our shared interest and for the independence of India, Burma, and in fact all of Asia. We are committed to upholding these, and we have the utmost faith in the Indian national leaders in India.”¹⁶

India and Burma won their freedom from British rule on August 15, 1947, and January 4, 1948, respectively, thanks in large part to the fact that the leaders of their respective independence movements maintained cordial relationships, which contributed to a mutual understanding of one another’s plights and fostered friendly relations. Therefore, the attainment of independence by both nations signaled the conclusion of a period of resistance to the colonial authority of the British imperialists on the part of nationalist movements that were distinct from one another

¹⁵ B. Prasad. (1976). Indo-Burmese Relations 1937-1947: A Study in Contradiction. *The Modern Review*. Vol.140 (5). Calcutta: The Modern Review Office. p.273.

¹⁶ U.M. Singh. (1979). *Burma and India 1948-1962*. New Delhi:Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. p.17.

but had a same goal.

3.3. Cultural Relations

Since ancient times, India and Myanmar have maintained strong links in the realms of culture and religion. Some historians believe that the first settlers from India arrived in Burma in the fifth century. Some of the early Indian settlers arrived in Burma by an overland path that passed through Assam and into Upper Burma, whereas the majority of the Indian settlers arrived in Lower Burma via a maritime route that originated in South India.¹⁷ The process of Indianisation¹⁸ of South East Asia, which began in the earliest periods, included the cultural influence that India had on Burma. This Indianisation was an integral component of the process. As the pre-Christian period progressed, India and Burma began engaging in a process of cultural integration with one another.

By the seventh century, Burma had converted to Buddhism and accepted the Indian form of administration, at the same time as commerce between the two nations had been established.¹⁹ Buddhists from India were instrumental in establishing a cultural connection between their country and Burma. Buddhism has left an indelible effect on Burmese society as a result of its compassionate spirit, empathetic attitude, logical viewpoint, and progressive character. The religious practices of the Burmese were also influenced by India at the time. Buddhism and

¹⁷ R.C. Majumdar. (1955). *Ancient Indian Colonization in South East Asia*. Baroda: University of Baroda Press. p. 60-61. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44141314>. (Retrieved 21/05/2018).

¹⁸ It generally refers to the spread of Indian languages, culture, tradition, values, diaspora, cuisines, economic reach and religion.

¹⁹ K. K. Moorthy. (1962), Indians in Burma: Problems and Prospects. *The Economic Weekly*, 27 October. Vol. 14 (43). p.93. https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/1962_14/43/indians_in_burmaproblems_and_prospects.pdf. (Retrieved 21/06/2019).

Hinduism were both brought to Burma by Indian traders and settlers. The majority of the Indian immigrants adhered to the Hindu faith yet, their practice of Hinduism embraced Buddhist principles ever since the reign of King Asoka.

The ancient kingdom of Pegu in Burma was once known as Ussa, which derives its name from Orissa²⁰. Prior to that, it was known as Sri Ksetra, which is the holy name of Puri. This demonstrates the profound impact that Hindu culture has had on Burmese history. There is evidence of Hindu influence in many different fields, including architecture, sculpture, dancing, musical instruments, and literature and language. The Burmese writings known as Dhammasattha, which are based on the Hindu code of Manu and incorporate the fundamental principles of Burmese Buddhist law give the most fascinating insight into the influence of Indian culture on Burma.²¹ These texts date back to the 1st century AD. One might claim that the impact of Indian culture can be observed in every aspect of Burmese life when one considers all of the things that have been discussed above. As a result, the cultural relationship between India and Burma has been a highly essential aspect of both nations.

3.4. Economic Relations

Another aspect that contributed to the establishment of their tight friendship was the economic connection that existed between India and Burma. Both nations' economies have a common heritage, which may be traced back to the colonial period. Both nations suffered from a lack of development and were used as colonial

²⁰ Op cit, R.C. Majumdar. (1955). p. 61

²¹ N.R. Chakravarti. (1971). *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of An Immigrant Community*. London: Oxford University Press. p. 6.

outposts. During the time of colonial rule, two key economic forces, namely immigration and commerce, played a crucial part in the development of economic connections between India and Myanmar.

As a direct consequence of Indian immigration to Burma, economic ties between India and Burma have undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years. In 1826, the English East India Company became the first organization to facilitate the immigration of Indian people into Burma. The majority of them choose to make their homes in metropolitan regions. As a result of Burma's incorporation as a province of British India, the country's population increased by the tens of thousands. There is no question that some of them were trailblazers who were the first to cultivate the land. During those times, the typical Indian was more hardworking than the ordinary Burmese person.²²

The rise of Burmese commerce under the influence of the British led to an increase in the need for labour from one year to the next. As a direct result of this, an increasing number of Indian labourers moved to Burma. During the time that Burma was under British colonial rule, a large number of Indians, including Parsees from Bombay, Chettiyars and Chulia Muslims from Madras, Kokka Muslims from Malyalam, Khojas, Boras, and Memons from Gujrat, and Hindu jewelers and goldsmiths from northern India, controlled the country's economic and commercial life up until 1940. In particular, this was the case in the jewelry and the importance of trade to the economies of both India and Myanmar cannot be overstated.

²² B.N. Ganguli. (1956), *India's Economic Relations with the Far Eastern and Pacific Countries in the Present Century*. Calcutta: Orient Longsman. p. 31-33.
<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/India%27s-Economic-Relations-with-the-Far-Eastern-and-Condcliffe/ec8c7ec9c34015de5c02aa9a6b397f556bd740b6>. (Retrieved 23/05/2019).

As India and Burma had trading connections on land as well as trading channels on sea, the commercial interaction between these two nations can be traced all the way back to ancient times²³. Before the country's independence, India was Burma's most important commercial partner. Because India is Burma's closest neighbour, it was able to supply Burma's demands for jute, tobacco, textiles, and betelnuts, among other things. In addition to capital commodities such as iron, steel, and coal, consumer goods such as hardware, medications and medicines, and other such things were also included in the exports to Burma.

The tables 1 and 2 provide information that may be used to know about the kind, value, and volume of commerce that took place between India and Burma during the years 1909-1924.

²³ K.L. Khurana. (2011). *The Twentieth Century World*. Agra: Lakshmi Narain Agrawal Publications. p.223.

Table 1: Principal Exports of India to Burma

Articles	Average Quantity(<i>thousands</i>)			Average Value (<i>Lakhs of Rs.</i>)		
	1909-14	1914-19	1919-24	1909-14	1914-19	1919-24
Coal(tons)	413	342	370	51	65	109
Cotton twist and yarn(lbs.)	10,395	12,635	15,944	56	97	235
Cotton piece goods (yds.)	9,859	8,570	8,649	14	22	37
Jute bags (No.)	38,948	39,822	40,123	119	166	188
Betalnuts (Cwt.)	311	279	294	60	56	64
Fruits & vegetables	-	-	-	31	19	36
Tobacco(lbs.)	21,160	16,432	6,687	58	43	51
Pulses(tons)	14	12	15	20	20	36
Wheat flour(tons)	16	12	18	29	27	52
Iron & steel(tons)	1	30	-	1	-	3
Cigarettes(lbs.)	83	-	262	1	-	10
Groundnut oils(gallons)	1,227	750	1,167	23	14	28
Tea(lbs.)	997	1,279	1,952	7	9	13
Butter(lbs.)	423	-	525	4	-	7
Ghee(Cwt.)	39	30	31	25	22	34
Boots & shoes pairs	43	-	210	1	-	8

Source: B.N.Ganguly, India's Economic Relations with the Far Eastern and Pacific Countries in the Present Century (1956)

Table 2: India Major Imports from Burma

Articles	Average Quantity (thousands)			Average Value (lakhs of Rs.)		
	1909-14	1914-19	1919-24	1909-14	1914-19	1919-24
Rice in husk(tons)	214	168	93	154	112	86
Rice not in husk(tons)	383	806	709	418	796	1093
Pulses (tons)	19	19	46	17	19	64
Grams(tons)	5	1	15	5	1	8
Fresh vegetables(value)	-	-	-	1	1	19
Kerosene(Gallons)	95,570	110,821	119,290	332	372	410
Lubricating(Gallons)	-	2,967	2,160	-	21	21
Benzine & Petrol(Gallons)	4,215	14,371	14,371	-	6	201
Other Mineral Oils(Gallons)	1,572	5,199	4,280	11	34	17
Candles (lbs.)	4,409	5,455	6,237	12	15	18
Stick lac(Cwt.)	-	-	-	3	6	43
Tin(Cwt.)	1	2	3	2	3	5
Teakwood(tons)	128	110	166	117	182	239
Other timber(value)	-	-	-	18	14	28

Source: B.N.Ganguly, India's Economic Relations with the Far Eastern and Pacific Countries in the Present Century (1956).

An examination of the commerce that took place between the years 1909 and 1924 reveals a complementary pattern in the business dealings that took place between the two countries. The Great Depression of the 1930s had a negative impact on the commerce that took place between India and Burma. India and Burma both increased the volume of their exports and the effect commodities they had in order to combat the deflation that was occurring in their respective economies.

In these years, India started importing a huge number of rice and mineral oil from Burma, and it also started exporting a large quantity of cotton items to Burma.²⁴ Free commerce was allowed to take place between India and Burma as a result of the India and Burma (Trade Regulation) Order 1937, which came into effect on April 1, 1937, the day that Burma was officially declared independent from India. Even yet, this order ensured that Burma's commerce with India remained open and fair for a few more years after it was issued. The figure for trade that is shown in Table 3 will provide insight on the progress toward equilibrium in Burma's trade with India.

²⁴ T.T. Thien. (1963). *India and South East Asia: 1947-1960*. p. 175.

Table 3: Burma's Trade Balance with India

	1938-39	1939-40	1940-41	1941-42	Percentage of Total Trade			
					1938-39	1939-40	1940-41	1941-42
Exports to India (Including re-exports)	3635	3306	2958	2206	38	41	34	31
Exports to other foreign countries(incl.re- exports)	2215	2199	2685	2828	32	27	31	39
Imports from India	1118	1399	1853	1317	16	18	22	18
Import from other foreign countries	960	1117	1103	812	14	14	13	11
Total foreign trade	6928	8021	8499	7063	100	100	100	100
Balance of trade With India	+1517	+1907	+1005	+889				
Balance of trade With other foreign countries	+1255	+1082	+1582	+1916				
Total balance of trade	+2772	+2989	+2587	+2806				

Source: Reserve Bank of India. (1942). Report on Currency and Finance, 1941-42.

(https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/AnnualReport/PDFs/9032020AR_1942.PDF)

Burmese nationalists felt that the Trade Regulation Order of 1937 did not adequately protect their interests. On March 31, 1940, the government of Burma sent a notice to India expressing its desire to open subsequent negotiations for a new trade agreement. Finally, on April 3, 1941, a new trade agreement between India and Burma was signed after the government of Burma gave notice expressing its desire to open subsequent negotiations.

This signaled the end of the open commerce that had existed between the two nations and heralded the beginning of a policy of reciprocal preferential treatment. However, the Second World War caused a disruption in the commercial activity that took place between India and Burma. Following the country's attainment of its independence, a new pattern evolved in the commercial interactions that took place between India and Burma.²⁵

3.5. General Principles of Foreign Policy of India and Myanmar

Through the formulation and execution of its domestic policies, a state may realize some of the national goals that it has set for itself. On the other hand, due to the fact that it is connected with other states, it is vital to develop policies that would convince other states to respond positively. In order to accomplish such goals, a state has to cultivate diplomatic ties with other governments and collaborate with other states to find shared answers to common problems and execute those solutions cooperatively.

²⁵ Op cit, T.T. Thien. (1963). p. 176.

One definition of a state's foreign policy is the method in which it manages its international ties in an organized and consistent fashion. In order to properly analyze the foreign policy of a state, one must first get familiar with the core strategies and goals that underpin the policy. In light of this, any investigation into the nature of the ties that bind two or more countries must begin with an awareness of each country's overall approach to international affairs. Likewise, this is the case with connection between India and Myanmar.

3.5.1. Indian Foreign Policy

Foreign policy may be defined as the overarching ideals, interests, and goals that a nation seeks to advance in its dealings with other nations. Every nation that is independent and sovereign have its own foreign policy. The priorities of the government's foreign policy are constantly shifting in response to the dynamic nature of the global environment. The history, culture, geography, and economics of India all have a role in influencing the country's approach to international affairs.

The nation's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, is credited with giving the country's foreign policy its definitive structure.²⁶ The maintenance of national interests, the realization of international peace, the promotion of disarmament, the attainment of independence for Afro-Asian states, and the cultivation of positive ties with India's neighbours have been significant focuses of India's foreign policy. The following are some of the guiding concepts in Indian Foreign Policy:

²⁶ Op cit, S. Ganguly. (2010). p. 21

3.5.1.1 Panchsheel

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who served as prime minister of India, was a prominent advocate for international harmony. He realized the connection between maintaining world peace and ensuring humanity's continued existence. After seeing the devastation that was brought about by the world wars, he came to the conclusion that in order for a country to advance, there must first be an extended period of calm. When formulating his plans, he attached a high priority to preserving international tranquilly.

India encouraged peaceful and amicable ties with nations all over the globe, especially with the major powers and the countries that were geographically adjacent to India. On April 28, 1954, India proposed that in order to manage bilateral relations, both parties should adhere to five guiding principles that came to be known as Panchsheel.²⁷ The following are included in it:

- Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- Mutual non-aggression.
- Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
- Equality and mutual benefit
- Peaceful co-existence.

²⁷ Ibid. 20

3.5.1.2 Non-Alignment

It is widely acknowledged that India's non-alignment stance is the single most significant aspect of its foreign policy. The policy of non-alignment, which consisted of refraining from joining any military coalition established by the United States and the Soviet Union in the years following World War II, was implemented with the intention of preserving the nation's right to exercise its own discretion over its relations with other nations. The position of non-alignment was in no way synonymous with neutrality, non-involvement, or isolationism. It was a dynamic idea that included not committing to any one military bloc and adopting an independent stance on foreign matters based on the relative merits of each situation.

The Non-Aligned Movement could not have been established without India's significant contribution (NAM). The idea of NAM was developed by a methodical progression of steps.²⁸ In 1947, Nehru was the one who made the initiative to call for the Asian Relations Conference to be held in New Delhi. In later years, at 1955, a meeting was organized in Bandung, Indonesia, with the participation of 29 countries from Asia and Africa.

This was the first event of its type, and all who attended made a solemn oath to cooperate with one another in the pursuit of colonial emancipation, peace, culture, economic, and political harmony. From Bandung to Belgrade in 1961, the location of the first NAM conference, was a natural process to project an alternative to the politics of the Cold War blocs and the assertion of newly independent nations of their independent and sovereign rights. This summit was held in Belgrade.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 31

Nehru had developed a unique friendship with President Tito of Yugoslavia and President Nasser of Egypt, both of whom were leaders of non-aligned states. The non-aligned movement is generally seen as having these three persons as its founding fathers. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was an organization that consisted of newly independent governments that were adamant about not accepting the authority of their previous colonial overlords and who made the decision to act independently regarding matters of global significance. An anti-imperialist strategy is the non-aligned movement's approach. The Non-Aligned Movement gave all of its member nations, irrespective of their size or significance, the chance to take part in the process of decision-making and politics at the international level. In 1983, the seventh NAM summit was held in India's capital city of New Delhi.

Given that the NAM was an offshoot of the Cold War, several academics have questioned whether or not it is still relevant after the end of the cold war and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, even in the current situation, the NAM has an important role to play in terms of the changing global environment brought on by the emergence of new threats to international peace and security. The NAM has the potential to serve as a check on the supremacy of the United States.

There are a number of economic concerns that drive a wedge between the industrialized (North) and developing (South) worlds. The NAM continues to be an extremely important venue for developing countries and industrialized nations to engage in fruitful conversation with one another. In addition to this, the NAM has the potential to become an effective tool for South-South collaboration.

Even after the conclusion of the Cold War, India has not stopped being an engaged participant in the Non-Aligned Movement. In conclusion, the developing nations that are together under the NAM forum have a responsibility to fight for the reform of the United Nations and transform it so that it meets the requirements of the 21st century.

3.5.1.3 Anti-Imperialism, Anti-Racism and Anti-Colonialism

Colonialism and racism have never been accepted in India's government. Whenever there was an instance of injustice, India was the first country to speak out. In 1947, for example, India spoke out in support of Indonesia's nationality and the fight against Dutch colonialism. India also spoke out against South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia and the infamous apartheid policy that was practiced in that country. India was a strong proponent of the United Nations admitting Communist China as a member state.²⁹

3.5.1.4 Strengthening of UN

India has always seen the United Nations (UN) as a forum through which peaceful transitions in international affairs might take place. India has traditionally relied on the United Nations to actively engage other nations in the process of mediating their disagreements via dialogue or negotiations. In addition, India has urged for a more active role for the United Nations in the development efforts of countries in the Third World.

India has urged on the countries of the third world to present a unified face at

²⁹ Ibid. p. 28.

the United Nations. In point of fact, the United Nations has been a significant contributor to the maintenance of international peace and security via its work in the decolonization process, its humanitarian and development aid, and its peacekeeping operations.

The end of the Cold War in 1990 brought about substantial changes on the worldwide landscape, which in turn brought about new policy difficulties for the different governments in the developing world, including India. After the conclusion of the Cold War, another difficulty for our nation's foreign policy is to maintain and cultivate existing connections while also seeking out new ones.

New endeavours, such as increasing economic and security cooperation with the United States, are being taken on by India's foreign policy as of late. At long last, India is coming to terms with the ever-increasing significance of the economic dimensions of foreign policy. As a result, it is attempting to establish a new foundation for its ties with the Neighbouring nations in South Asia, as well as with China and the countries in South East Asia.³⁰

3.5.2. Myanmar's Foreign Policy

Myanmar's foreign policy is essentially the product of the country's interpretation of the global and regional strategic environment in which it operates. The following are basic elements of Myanmar's foreign policy:

³⁰ Ibid. p. 36.

3.5.2.1 Non-Alignment

Since it gained its independence in 1948, Myanmar has adhered to the idea of non-alignment as the cornerstone of its approach to foreign policy.³¹ The core tenet of this strategy is an open and cordial relationship with each and every nation, the categorical denial of any kind of conditional or contingent foreign economic aid, and the categorical refusal to affiliate with any existing political coalition.

The actual course of their foreign relations was determined not only by the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist attitude of their national leaders, but also by their domestic ideology of economic nationalism. Both of these factors played a role in shaping the course of their international interactions. Over the course of many years, the domestic economic requirements and policies were, on several occasions, put in a secondary position to the primary concern of preserving a neutralist foreign policy.³²

The newly independent nation of Myanmar began its foreign policy with the sincerest attempt at non-alignment that could be found anywhere in Asia. The non-alignment of Myanmar was primarily driven by two factors: (a) Myanmar's wish to stay independent from any kind of direct or indirect foreign influence, and (b) the necessity for economic growth. The conflict had a negative impact on Myanmar's potential economic output, and once it gained its independence, Myanmar's first priority should have been to restructure its economy.³³

³¹ Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in Brazil. Foreign Policy of Myanmar. https://myanmarbsb.org/_site/foreign-policy-of-myanmar/. (Retrieved 15/05/2019).

³² Ibid.

³³ John Bray. (1995). *Burma: The Politics of Constructive Engagement*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs. p.40.

Even though Myanmar was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, the country did not hesitate to resign from the organization when it became apparent to Rangoon that the movement was moving closer and closer to the Soviet viewpoint on several issues pertaining to the international community. The chairman of the Myanmar's delegation, Brigadier General Myint Moun, made this statement at the Havana Summit Conference in September 1979: "the ideas of the movement are not identifiable anymore; they are not only dim, they are dying."³⁴

He went on to say that "we cannot allow ourselves to be thus exploited," which he concluded with.³⁵ Despite the fact that it is no longer an active participant in the non-aligned movement, Myanmar continues to adhere to the non-alignment doctrine that serves as the foundation of its foreign policy.

3.5.2.2 Isolationism

Myanmar has a long history of being a country that practices isolationism. Buddhism and the country's geographical location were the primary factors that contributed to the country's long-standing policy of seclusion from the rest of the world. When General Ne Win returned to power in 1962, otherworldliness was once again brought back to the forefront.

The new administration focused more on local issues and endeavored to maintain a strict neutrality in international events, going so far as to isolate itself as a result of its stance. Myanmar's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement came to an end, despite the fact that the country's overall foreign policy did not undergo any

³⁴ Ibid. p. 54.

³⁵ Ibid.

significant shifts during this time. During the years 1962-1972, Myanmar's relations with other nations were distinguished by an inwardly focused kind of a new stance. This would become clear from the ensuing conversations that took place.

3.5.2.3 Neutralism

Myanmar's foreign policy has always been characterized by a strong emphasis on neutrality.³⁶ The idea, inasmuch as it was used in Myanmar throughout the course of the year, served to shield the nation against invasion by external forces, which would have resulted in its fragmentation and political subjugation. The pursuit of 'true neutralism' in an ever-changing environment brought Myanmar international renown over the course of many years.

When it came to formulating Myanmar's neutralist approach to its foreign policy, the personality component was a significant contributor. It was during the first few years following independence that U Nu fully specified and developed its neutrality. Neutrality was predicated on great freedom of action in expansion of their political and economic contacts with many nations across the globe. On the other hand, during his trip to the United States in July 1955, U Nu made the following statement, "Nations who choose not to engage in military blocs are often referred to as neutrals in our nation. If what I'm getting from other people is accurate, the term neutral has taken on a specific connotation that is not very positive".³⁷

It would seem that the name conjures up an image of an ostrich with its head

³⁶ Op cit, Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in Brazil.

³⁷ J. Barrington. (1958). The Concept of Neutralism: What Lies Behind Burma's Foreign Policy. The Atlantic. February Issue. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1958/02/the-concept-of-neutralism/306834/>. (Retrieved 19/06/2019).

buried in the sand, an unfavorable attitude toward international affairs, and an unwillingness to acknowledge the truth.”³⁸ U Nu went on to clarify, saying, “This is not a negative approach towards foreign issues. Instead, it is a constructive idea since it is a strategy for pursuing peace and goodwill with all nations.”³⁹ This makes it a positive notion. It is a strategy that seeks to actively identify new paths of collaboration via discussion and compromise.

3.5.2.4 Panchsheel

Another essential component of Myanmar’s foreign policy is included inside Panchsheel. In 1954, during the visit of the Chinese Premier Chou En Lai to India, the governments of India, China, and Myanmar unanimously agreed on five principles of peaceful coexistence. Therefore, on June 28, 1954, China and India and on June 29, 1954, Myanmar and China signed agreements to adhere to these five principles of peaceful coexistence in Delhi and Yangon, respectively. These agreements took place in Delhi and Yangon.⁴⁰

In topics pertaining to global affairs and problems on the international stage, Myanmar initially has behaved in the following manner in accordance with the principles and objectives of the United Nations and on the basis of the principles of peaceful co-existence⁴¹:

³⁸ D. Steinberg. (1990). International Rivalries in Burma: The Rise of Economic Competition. *Asian Survey*, July. Vol.30 (6). p. 601.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Op cit, Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in Brazil.

⁴¹ Ibid.

- Consistently supporting disarmament;
- Opposing arms race, production and sales;
- Supporting national liberation movements;
- Supporting decolonization;
- Opposing aggression of imperialists;
- Opposing colonialism, apartheid and racial discrimination;
- Supporting efforts to ensure world peace; and
- Opposing aggressive imperialistic wars.

3.6. India-Myanmar Relations during the Post-Colonial Period

The Second World War which began in 1939, lasted for a considerable amount of time until 1945, and was the single most catastrophic event in the annals of world history. It had a significant impact on the state of world politics at the time. Following the conclusion of the Second World War, the colonial empire that had been maintained by European nations in Asia was dismantled. Many nations and countries, including India, Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, Egypt, and others, were given their independence after having been under British authority. Following the conclusion of this conflict, India achieved the status of being one of the world's leading nations.⁴² Following the conclusion of the Second World War, the departure of European troops from Asia resulted in significant changes to the political

⁴² B. Pakem. (1992). India-Burma Relations. New Delhi. Omsons Publications. p. 21.

geography of Asia.

The character and scope of international relations have undergone profound transformations since the end of the Second World War. In the framework of the relationship between power and influence, a significant shift had taken place. As a direct result of this conflict, the leadership of the globe shifted from England to the United States of America and Russia. Previously, England had held this position. The whole continent of Europe was split along ideological lines that were in direct opposition to one another, those being those of the United States and Russia. The nations of Western Europe and other nations such as Pakistan, Egypt, Arabia, and Africa were affected by the United States of America, while Russia exerted its influence on the countries of Eastern Europe and brought them inside its sphere of influence.

The equilibrium of power altered as a result, moving towards the territory of Russia and the United States. A great number of nations all over the globe were linked to these power blocs and were obligated to shape their policies in accordance with the directives of their respective leaders. These two competing countries had such a high level of strength that no country or combination of nations could stand up to them. Nevertheless, they both endeavored to expand their spheres of influence in as many places as possible. It led to friction, which eventually led to war.

The aftermath of the Second World War was so damaging that it opened people's minds in many different nations. They came to the conclusion that the conflict was not the most effective way to resolve the issue. As a result of this, following the end of the Second World War, the nations were once again became

aware of the significance and need of mutual cooperation.

They came to the conclusion that the only way to resolve their differences was via amicable discourse, with the end goal being the permanent elimination of the threat of war and the establishment of global peace. This single concept served as the foundation for the establishment of the United Nations Organization (UNO) in the year 1945. The upkeep of international peace and security, the cultivation of amicable relationships, and the promotion of international collaboration were its primary objectives.

3.6.1. Political Relations

The post-colonial period of India's ties with Myanmar is marked by its share of highs and lows all the way up to the early years of the 1990s. Relations between India and Myanmar may be broken down into three distinct periods: 1948–1962, 1962–1992, and 1992-2010.

In the beginning, between the years 1948 and 1962, India and Myanmar maintained cordial ties with one another. U Nu, the first Prime Minister of Myanmar, was good friends with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, and often sought Nehru's advice on matters relating to the countries' respective efforts toward mutual cooperation. Nehru always placed a strong premium on the preservation of the Indo-Burmese relationship despite the fact that any future disagreements may be very insignificant.

In a message delivered to the Friends of Burma Society in December 1949, Nehru stated, "it is inevitable that India and Burma should co-operate each other for

mutual advantages and we must not forget this fact even though we might have occasional differences but we cannot change our history and geography.”⁴³ Nehru’s comments were made in reference to the fact that India and Burma were bound to have some sort of relationship with one another.

Since 1950, Indo-Burmese ties have become so relaxed that the Burmese Prime Ministers and other members of the Burmese Government are welcomed in Delhi whenever they feel the need to address their concerns with Nehru and the Indian Government. This has been the case since 1950. The signing of a treaty of friendship between India and Myanmar on July 7, 1951, was the event that had the most impact on the growth of the Indo-Burmese relationship. The formalization of their already cordial relationship via the signing of the treaty was a significant step toward the consolidation and expansion of these aims.

Sao Hkun Hkio, who was the Burmese Foreign Minister at the time, and M.A. Rauf, who was the first Indian Ambassador to Burma, signed the pact in Rangoon on July 7, 1951. The treaty was to take force in Burma for a period of five years. Speaking on the occasion of the signing of the treaty, M.A. Rauf said that the treaty was only a gesture and symbol of the immense goodwill that already existed between India and Burma.⁴⁴ This was mentioned by Rauf at the occasion of the signing of the treaty.

Not only did India and Burma collaborate with one another on a bilateral basis, but they also maintained a cordial attitude toward one another on a regional

⁴³ N. K. Jha and G.K. Jha. (2012). India Myanmar Relations: Balancing Morality, Military and Market. *World Focus*. Vol.10 (4). p.55.

⁴⁴ Op cit, L. Langpok and S. Singh. (2007). p. 239.

level. During the years immediately after the country's declaration of independence, they made genuine efforts to guarantee the peace and security of the area. In this sense, the year 1954 marked the beginning of friendly relations between India, Burma, and China. These three countries were previously at odds with one another.

The preamble to an agreement between India and China that was signed on April 28, 1954 in New Delhi included the initial formulation of the five principles of peaceful co-existence, which came to be known as Panchsheel. The Panchsheel agreement was also signed by Myanmar and China on June 29, 1954 in Yangon.⁴⁵ This was done in order to make the Panchsheel the cornerstone of lasting ties with India and Myanmar and to reaffirm commitment to five principles of peaceful co-existence.

The Indo-Burmese relationship is not restricted to the confines of only bilateral or regional concerns. Together, they had a significant impact on the political landscape of the globe. Non-alignment was the doctrine that both India and Myanmar adhered to at a period when the globe was roughly split in half between two major superpowers. Their objective was to continue to expand the membership of the non-aligned bloc in the hopes of achieving the dual goals of reducing global tension and preserving international tranquility.

Both India and Myanmar credit their strong confidence in the United Nations as an organization to the fact that it serves as a vehicle for safeguarding peace throughout the world. As a result, the cordial relationship that Nehru and U Nu maintained at the highest levels helped to guarantee that Indians were not subjected

⁴⁵ Op cit, S. Ganguly. (2010). p. 25.

to any severe forms of injustice. The issue of Indian citizenship, immigration, and compensation were all topics that were addressed by both Prime Ministers.⁴⁶

Myanmar entered a period of full political isolation during the second phase, which lasted from 1962 until 1992 and was led by General Ne Win and his Revolutionary Council. During this time, India's strategy toward Myanmar consisted on keeping either an active or close engagement with the country. India did not back General Ne Win's strategy of political persecution and limitation of Indians, as well as the deportation of around 100,000 Indians.⁴⁷

This policy exacerbated the gap between India and Myanmar and was not supported by India. Alterations in interpersonal connections were also observable at this period. In accordance with General Ne Win's Burmese Road to Socialism and Enterprises Nationalization Law, around 300,000 Indians were deported, despite the fact that the majority of them had lived in Myanmar their whole lives and had never left the country before.⁴⁸ Discussions on the matter took place between the heads of state of India and Myanmar, but little progress was made in resolving the impasse.

Overall, diplomatic ties remained friendly but were primarily limited to formal exchanges. During her time in office, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had a number of talks with General Ne Win. The journey to Myanmar that was made by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1987 was an honest attempt to breathe new life into the relationship; yet, it was overshadowed by the chaotic events that rocked the

⁴⁶ Op cit, B. Prasad. (2011). p. 128.

⁴⁷ Op cit, B. Pakem. (1992). p. 136.

⁴⁸ Op cit, V.N. Khanna and L. Arora, Lipakshi. (2008). p. 36.

nation to its very foundations.⁴⁹ However, India did not begin to take an active interest in the affairs of Myanmar until 1988, when a widespread rebellion occurred in that nation.⁵⁰

The effects of the democratic movement that had place in Myanmar in 1988 were felt immediately in India as a consequence from the event. India is the only country among Myanmar's immediate neighbours to have publicly adhered to a well-defined stance on its support for the democratic movement. This remained the case during the whole conflict. A petition for Aung San Suu Kyi's release was sent by Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which was in power at the time. In order to show support for the democratic forces, All India Radio's Burmese Service thereafter began broadcasting a programme in September 1989 titled 'Voice of Burmese People.'⁵¹

This was done in an effort to communicate directly with the people of Burma. When it was found that the Indian embassy had been engaged in the 8888 revolt and had provided safe passage to the students of Myanmar as well as assured them of political sanctuary, the relationship between the two nations took its last breath and reached its lowest level. At that point in time, New Delhi was of the opinion that a democratic administration in Myanmar would be more amenable to India's national security interest. This was one of their primary concerns.⁵²

The viewpoint held by the Government of India regarding the SLORC

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 42.

⁵⁰ R. Bhatia. (2016). *India-Myanmar Relations: Changing Contours*. New Delhi: Routledge. p. 18.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 76

⁵² Op cit, B. Prasad. (2011). p. 68.

government underwent a slow but steady adjustment towards the beginning of the 1990s. The policy of supporting the democracy movement and sidelining the military regime at the expense of the national interest was met with strong opposition from within the government by a number of officials working in military intelligence and external affairs ministry. These officials expressed their opposition by voicing strong protests.⁵³ The evolving geopolitical, economic, and security considerations necessitated a shift in India's position, which was previously held.

3.6.2. Economic Relations

Following their respective countries' independence, India and Myanmar were both confronted with significant economic challenges. The division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan resulted in a significant reduction in the amount of India's land that was suitable for agriculture. It compelled India to rely on foreign supplies of food grains like rice, as well as on industrial raw materials like jute and cotton. She was unable to produce these resources on her own.

During the years, the efforts of Myanmar to revitalize its agricultural output and commerce with the rest of the world were thwarted first by the war, and then by the internal turmoil of insurgency that followed it. As a direct consequence of this, there were a lot of obstacles in the way of India and Myanmar getting back to their usual economic relationship. However, cordial emotions between them helped to a rapid restart of mutual commercial connections as well as to the steady expansion of trade and economic partnership that benefited both parties.

⁵³ Ibid.

On September 20, 1951, a new long-term Trade Agreement was signed between India and Myanmar in order to speed up commercial relations between the two countries. Both the Indian Ambassador M.A. Rauf and the Burmese Commerce Minister U Kyaw Myint were present for the signing of this agreement. It was supposed to last for a period of five years and feature various barter arrangements that were divided up into three parts.⁵⁴

The first part of the agreement stipulated that India would receive an export of 240,000 tons of rice from Myanmar. This would take place in exchange for certain stated quotas of four specific Indian commodities. These commodities included cotton yarn, groundnut oil, gunny bags, and galvanized iron sheets. The second part of this arrangement included the sale of 350,000 tons, which were to be delivered on a government-to-government basis and at a price that was to be determined by mutual agreement in advance for each half year.⁵⁵ This portion of the deal was to take place at an agreed upon price. The third component of the agreement was a key declaration that said that Export and import facilities given by one nation to the other should not be less advantageous than those applied to any other country in the Soft Currency Area.⁵⁶

By the end of December 1955, the commercial pact that had been in place since 1951 had run its course. The Burmese Minister for Food and Commerce Development, U Raschid, made two trips to India in 1956 in order to ensure that trade went in both directions. During these trips, he met with India's Minister for

⁵⁴ Op cit, N. Choudhary. (2000). p. 42

⁵⁵ Op cit, B. Pakem. (1992). p. 56.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 57.

Food and Agriculture, and their conversations resulted in the signing of a contract for the supply of rice on May 23, 1956, which was to last for the next five years. As part of this deal, India committed to buying two million tons of rice from Myanmar. Myanmar will provide the rice. An examination of the table shown in Table 4 will assist in gaining a deeper comprehension of the commercial exchanges that took place between India and Myanmar during the years 1948-1962.

Table 4: India's Trade with Myanmar (1947-1948 – 1961-1962).

Year	Exports	Imports	Balance of Trade
1947-48	1193	1249	(-)56
1948-49	997	2625	(-)1628
1949-50	1393	1497	(-)104
1950-51	2200	1880	(+)320
1951-52	1955	2348	(-)393
1952-53	2219	2647	(-)428
1953-54	2089	1755	(+)334
1954-55	1608	5737	(-)4129
1955-56	1240	958	(+)282
1956-57	1123	939	(+)184
1957-58	1099	1335	(-)236
1958-59	779	4363	(-)3584
1959-60	1234	2048	(-)814
1960-61	652	1365	(-)713
1961-62	528	1064	(-)536

Source: (a) Accounts Relating to the Foreign [Sea, Air and Land] Trade and Navigation of India, 1947-56 (Calcutta, Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics). (b) Monthly Statistics of the Foreign Trade of India, 1957-62 (Calcutta, Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics).

It is possible to draw the conclusion, based on an examination of these numbers, that the balance of commerce between India and Myanmar had been much tilted in favour of the latter nation than it had been in the former. When China took over from India as Myanmar's top importer of rice in the 1960s, economic ties between the two countries began to deteriorate and haven't fully recovered since. Despite the fact that an agreement to encourage commerce between India and Myanmar was signed on December 24, 1962 in Rangoon, there was not much of an improvement in economic links between the two nations until 1968–1969.

In 1962, Myanmar saw a shift in the leadership of its government. General Ne Win took over for U Nu in that role. Ne Win was responsible for the introduction of a number of new economic initiatives that were designed to enhance the economic condition of the people. Ne Win's approach to overseas commerce gave priority to Indo-commercial Myanmar's interests and accorded them a high level of focus and attention. General Ne Win's trip to India from the 15th to the 22nd of January 1970, which he took at the request of Indian President V.V. Giri, provided the impetus for a commercial expansion between India and Myanmar.⁵⁷ Ne Win also had a meeting with the Indian Minister for External Affairs and Foreign Trade in addition to his conversation with the Prime Minister of India. Discussion topics included economic cooperation on a regional level as well as bilateral economic relations.⁵⁸

A new payment agreement between India and Myanmar was signed on August 17, 1974.⁵⁹ As a result of this deal, Myanmar was able to purchase 7.5 crores

⁵⁷ Op cit, B. Pakem. (1992). p. 74.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 77.

of rupees' worth of goods from India, including cotton textiles, medicinal items, electrical goods, and hardware. It was agreed that India will purchase goods such as urea and mineral ores from Myanmar. In the month of October 1979, India initiated a project with a budget of 2.17 crores rupees with the goal of establishing 21 pilot projects in Myanmar. These projects ranged from plants for menthol, calcium carbide, glue, and gelatin to electro-chemical metallurgy, orange juice, and Ferro-tungsten. The projects were to be carried out in Myanmar. In 1987, the total value of goods exchanged in both directions was around 36 crores.⁶⁰

3.6.3. Defence and Strategic Relations

The level of defence cooperation that exists between India and Myanmar is an essential component of the two countries' diplomatic ties. At World War II, Myanmar was home to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army. This was during the time when both countries were fighting for their freedom. Indian historian Sardar K.M. Panikkar first brought attention to the strategic relevance of Myanmar to India in the year 1944. He said that the defence of Burma is, in reality, the defence of India, and that it is India's principal responsibility to ensure that its boundaries are not violated. He also stated that the defence of Burma is the defence of India. When it comes to the matter of safeguarding Burma, India cannot be said to have an excessively high responsibility for any of the possible options.⁶¹

The significant Indian military aid that was given to Rangoon as a result of the acute internal security concerns that Burma was facing in the early following of

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.80.

⁶¹ Op cit, N. Choudhary. (2000). p. 68.

its independence was prompted by this scenario. In addition to supplying Burma with six Dakota transport aircraft, the help provided by India was vital for preventing Rangoon from falling into insurgent hands. The exchange of information and the occasional combined action against rebel groups that are operating along the border regions against both nations have been the primary focuses of the military cooperation between India and Myanmar. Nearly 1,643 kilometers of India's border with Myanmar are located along the states of Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh.⁶²

This lengthy border is India's longest international boundary. When India possesses intelligence on the Indian rebel groups that sometimes establish up bases within Burma, the Burmese government has been more or less accommodating, although this is by no means always the case. Members of the Burmese armed forces were sent to India for military instruction beginning in 1951 and continuing into the early 1960s at the behest of the Burmese government. Therefore, in the sphere of defence and security, India and Myanmar have recognized the need of establishing a strong security framework for land borders in order to confront the current insurgencies and avoid instability in adjacent areas.

3.7. India-Myanmar Strategic Relations

Developments in the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR), the ASEAN region, and the sub-region in which Myanmar was situated would undoubtedly have a significant impact on the course that the relationship would take in the years to come. In the last several years, the wider region that stretches from India to Japan and Australia has

⁶² P. Malik. (2016). *My Myanmar Years*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. p. 143.

experienced substantial changes in the dynamics between the United States and China. The phenomenal rise of China's economy, military might, political influence, activism, and aggressiveness overseas has prompted many governments to reevaluate their strategic calculations and policy assumptions. This was due to China's rising status as a global superpower.

Each player on the regional stage, including China and the United States, claimed to be promoting security and development for everyone, but simultaneously each actor suffered from insecurity and experienced fear over the behaviour of the other actors.⁶³ Analysts would continue to interpret and monitor the action-reaction cycle of nations, both large and small, in order to determine whether or not IPR would head towards an era of peace and prosperity, tension and cold war, confrontation and conflict, or some combination of all of these possibilities.

The shifting power dynamics between India and China in Myanmar were also significant in this context. In turn, these scenarios would have an effect on ASEAN, not just moulding its future strength and cohesion but also its ambitious mission of community building and fostering integration of its newest members, the CLMV nations-Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. Therefore, the regional viewpoint would continue to be very important to whatever transpired in Myanmar in the years to come, regardless of what occurred there. It's geopolitical and geo-economics significance has been clearly recognized for some time by both its immediate neighbours and also by other parties in the area. This recognition had been in place for some time.

⁶³ Op cit, S. Ganguly. (2010). p. 62.

India changed its stance towards Myanmar after 1991 for various reasons. India was concerned about the growing triangular relationship between China, Pakistan, and Myanmar because the growing strategic linkages between Myanmar and China were detrimental to India's interests. Additionally, the fact that China and Pakistan were forming an alliance on the western front was a source of worry for India. The government of India had a strong conviction that Pakistan was supplying Myanmar with conventional weapons that Myanmar's military personnel were receiving training in Pakistan, and that China was providing support in the form of arms and training to India's ethnic insurgents in the states of Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur.⁶⁴

A further consideration in India's policy change relates to the nation's Northeast area. India was forced to shift its strategy toward the SLORC administration from one of confrontation to one of continual engagement as the threat posed by the proliferation of armed insurgency and trafficking in India's Northeast territory compelled the country to make the shift. It was crucial for India to improve its ties with Myanmar since that country served as a land bridge between the northeastern portion of India and the nations of ASEAN. The development of the North East area was a highly significant subject for India on a variety of fronts, including the political, the economic, and the social.

As a result, India's Northeast region maintained its focus on Myanmar not just as a territory of security concern but also as a place of economic development interest. The government of India has implemented two of the most pragmatic

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 92.

initiatives, including the 'Look East Policy' (LEP) and a positive engagement with Myanmar. Both of these policies were enacted in 1991. The LEP was begun by Prime Minister P.V. Narsimha Rao, which is what brought the ties between India and Myanmar into the spotlight. In light of the fact that Myanmar continued to represent a potential threat to India's national security, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao changed India's stance toward that country and took steps to mend broken ties in order to foster new opportunities for cooperation.

In terms of its strategy toward Myanmar, sufficient national consensus had been established up by this point. As a result, it was a reasonable assumption to make that the policy would remain in place. But there were still a lot of unanswered concerns, such as how meticulously it would be carried out, whether or not it would be supported by sufficient political will and adequate financial muscle, and whether or not it would include the North East to the greatest extent feasible. The two nations' political ties have been steadily on the mend, and their economic cooperation has been making major headway in tandem with these developments. The advancement of India and Myanmar's relationship was also greatly aided by economic ties between the two countries. Myanmar served as a connection point between the markets of India and Southeast Asia.

Since the year 2000, Indian goods, mainly pharmaceuticals, have been making their way into the markets of Myanmar. Since 1997-1998, the value of bilateral commerce has climbed from US\$ 273.23 million to US\$ 995.37 million, and investment has also expanded during this time period.⁶⁵ As India started

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 115.

acknowledging Myanmar's military dictatorship, potential for India and Myanmar to forge a strong political partnership consolidated to a large extent.

It was in the year 2000 that Myanmar's Vice-Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, General Maung Aye, paid a visit, and this is when Myanmar's strategic significance was further recognized. During this visit, both nations spoke about problems relating to similar security concerns.⁶⁶ They found that they had a great interest in conducting counter-insurgency operations in India's Northeast, and they made the decision to speed up their collaboration. Along with Kashmir, the Northeastern region of India is often considered to be the most volatile part of the Indian Union. The Sikkimese refer to themselves as the seven sisters and one brother. The area in which they live is the zone of operation for thirty-six main and smaller insurgent organizations that are actively engaged in the creation of insurgency, smuggling, and other illegal activities.

It is evident from the facts that the history of India-Myanmar relations has seen many ups and downs. After the end of British rule, Myanmar opted for a policy of harmonious relations with India and the two countries signed a treaty of friendship in 1951. A definite warmth in Indo-Myanmar ties was particularly apparent during the period of Jawaharlal Nehru and U Nu. The two leaders had a shared understanding on various global and regional issues. However, in 1962, when Ne Win came to power after a military coup in Myanmar, India-Myanmar relations came under strain due to the anti-Indian policies of the military regime.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 122.

Ne Win's policy of a 'Burmese way to Socialism' hurt the interests of the people of Indian origin in Myanmar and Myanmar's neutral stand in 1962 during the Chinese attack against India was seen as a pro-Chinese act by India. As India's image as a regional counterbalance to China diminished after the 1962 conflict, Myanmar foreign policy calculations also inclined more towards China rather than India. Nevertheless, despite these serious setbacks, India was never completely sidelined, because Myanmar also wanted to avoid being identified too closely with China.

During the regime of Ne Win, the nature of the India-Myanmar relationship was stagnant but cordial on the whole. A sequence of high level official exchanges continued as Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri visited Myanmar in 1965, the two countries signed a boundary agreement in 1967, and Indira Gandhi paid a visit in 1969. During her visit, Ne Win made assurances that Myanmar would not allow any anti-Indian activities on its territory by any state or organization. Ne Win also visited India in 1980.

However, during Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi's tenure, India was largely neutral and disinterested in Myanmar, because a 'commitment to democratic values' was prioritized ahead of 'security concerns' in the Indian foreign policy agenda towards Myanmar. When the SLORC assumed power in Myanmar in 1988, India under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi extended its moral support to the pro-democracy movement and offered refuge to the people of Myanmar who migrated to India to flee military suppression.

A paradigm shift in India's policy towards Myanmar was seen during the 1990s when India decided to court the junta. This shift in India's policy was propelled by certain factors. First, owing to Myanmar's isolation from the rest of the world, Chinese influence in Myanmar was increasing. India was concerned about this relative gain of China in Myanmar because it potentially paved the way for a possible encirclement of India by China through three pro-Chinese regimes in the neighbourhood - Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Second, in order to counter the emerging non-traditional security threats in northeast India, coordination with Myanmar was essential. Third, India started its 'Look East' policy in 1991, intended to increase engagement with ASEAN, and Myanmar was the only ASEAN member which shared a border with India. Thus, Myanmar was seen as a gateway to ASEAN by Indian policymakers.

Due to these changing dynamics, India accordingly adopted a new pragmatic policy in relation with Myanmar. Nonetheless, India's decision to honour Aung San Suu Kyi with the Jawaharlal Nehru award indicated that idealism still abounded in India's foreign policy. The Congress-led government that followed has continued the policy of engaging with the existing military regime. India now, seems to have accepted that the restoration of democracy in Myanmar is an internal matter and India has no role in it.

A sign of the growing India-Myanmar relationship can be seen in two path-breaking visits between leaders of the two countries. The first was by the Chairman of the SPDC, General Than Shwe to India in 2004 - the first head of state level visit from Myanmar in 24 years. Indian President A P J Abdul Kalam paid a return visit to

Myanmar in 2006 - the first by an Indian President to Myanmar and the first head of government level visit to Myanmar after 1987.

The positive momentum of increasing visits and interactions between the two countries has been a contributing element that has helped to build the cordial and close ties that exist between Myanmar and India. These frequent visits and exchanges of visitors have proven to be effective tools for further developing and strengthening the multifaceted relationship between the two countries in the areas of security, trade, and economic cooperation, as well as in the social interactions that take place between the two nations.

Chapter-4

Political Reforms in Myanmar

This chapter discusses the political reforms taking place in Myanmar. It consist of an analysis of the political reforms thereby examining the nature, process, problems and prospects of the reforms. As Myanmar has been placed under the military administration since 1962, it is very significant that political reforms in the form of democratic reforms happened in the country. The term political reforms can have various connotations. Political reform can denote improving the laws and constitutions in accordance with expectations of the public. According to Enaam Abdullah Mohamad, “Political reform is a process of radical and partial modification and development in the form of governance or social relations in the state within the framework of the existing political system, and by the means available”.¹ Ibn Taymiyya views political reform as a peaceful pressure on political power for its legitimate responsibilities.²

4.1. The 2010 General Elections

On November 7, 2010, the general elections were held in Myanmar after an interval of twenty years. This was the second elections held under the present military government. In the last general elections in 1990, the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory by capturing more than 80 percent of all seats.

¹ E.A. Mohamed. (2020). The impact of Political Reform on the Stability on the State of Kuwait since 2010. *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Science*. Vol. 2 (2). p. 104.

² F.A. El Hosini. (2016). *The role of political and legal reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. Cairo University. p. 22. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/2632-279X.htm>. (Retrieved 07/05/2020).

In contrast, the National Unity Party (NUP), the renamed one from the former ruling Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP), suffered a crushing defeat, winning merely 2 percent of the seats despite a virtual backing of the military government at that time. After the 1990 elections, the military government refused to hand over power, claiming that a new constitution would need to be written prior to convening a parliament. The new constitution had been discussed for more than fourteen years, and was approved in May 2008.

The 2010 general elections were held based on the 2008 Constitution. The NLD, however, decided on March 29, 2010 to boycott the elections on the grounds that the 2008 Constitution was considered undemocratic. The military government nonetheless took steady steps in preparation for the elections, closing candidate registration on August 30 and finalizing a review by the Union Election Commission (UEC) on September 10.³

Following an undeclared campaigning period, the elections were held on November 7, Sunday. The UEC announced all election results by November 18, with the military government-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) winning a ‘resounding victory’ as many had predicted.⁴ Thus, a nominal civilian government was formally established on 30th March, 2011 with Thein Sein as the President thereby, formally dissolving the military government.

³ Kudo Toshiro. (2011). Results of the 2010 Elections in Myanmar: An Analysis. IDE-JETRO. January. <https://www.ide.go.jp/English/Research/Region/Asia/20110104.html>. (Retrieved 12/02/2016).

⁴ Ibid.

4.2. Initiation of Reforms in Myanmar

The year 2011 witnessed series of democratic reforms in Myanmar. On 31 January, elected legislators gathered in Nay Pyi Taw, the country's capital and on 30 March, the national Parliament was formally opened with the election of president and two vice presidents. The official declaration statement was signed by the SPDC Chairman and military chief Than Shwe. The political transition marked the end of successive governments in military uniform. The country's new leadership led by former military generals in civilian clothes since, now rules the country under the aegis of the USDP⁵.

The democratic reforms can be analysed under two achievements – domestic and international. On the domestic front, a new civilian government was formed; thousands of prisoners were released; the government and the NLD reconciled; and the government amended the 2008 Constitution for the NLD to re-register as a legal political party. The government reached cease-fire agreements with a number of ethnic minority armed groups; a National Human Rights Commission was formed; and media censorship was eased. After taking office in March 2011, the government of Myanmar under Thein Sein leadership signed a ceasefire agreements with 10 armed ethnic groups:⁶

- (i) Arakan Liberation Army (ALA)
- (ii) Chin national Front (CNF)
- (iii) Klo Htoo Baw Karen Organization (KKO)

⁵ The USDP is a successor to the former Myanmar government's mass organization, the USDA. The Union Election Commission registered USDP as a political party on 2 June, 2010.

⁶ N. Kipgen. (2016). *Myanmar: A Political History*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 135-136.

- (iv) Karenni National Progressive party (KNPP)
- (v) Karen National Union (KNU)
- (vi) KNU Karen National Union (KNU)/Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Peace Council (PC)
- (vii) National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K)
- (viii) Pa-O National Liberation Army (PNLA)
- (ix) Shan State Army- South (SSA-S), and
- (x) Shan State Army-North (SSA-N).

On the international front, Myanmar was awarded the 2014 ASEAN chairmanship and its relations with the Western nations has improved significantly. During the US Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton's visit to the country at the end of November, both President Thein Sein and Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament, Thura Shwe Mann asserted that the democratic reforms in Myanmar are real and historic. Shwe Mann told Clinton that 'we are history makers ... we will continue our work – reform is irreversible'.⁷ Indonesian Foreign Minister, Marty Natalegwa, the rotating chair of ASEAN had previously made similar comment after meeting the leaders of Myanmar government in Nay Pyi Taw on 30 October, when he said, 'I wish to believe and I get the sense that they are meant to be irreversible ... I did not get any indication that the process will stop'.⁸

⁷ L. Jagan. (2011). Burma's Mann Meets Clinton. Radio Free Asia, 2 December. <http://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/clinton-12022011165135.html>. (Retrieved 27/07/2021).

⁸ J. Szep. (2011). Myanmar Reforms Irreversible, says Indonesia. Reuters, 31 October. <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/10/31/idINIndia-60210420111031>. (Retrieved 27/07/2021).

According to Herz,⁹ the most difficult choice during transition from dictatorial regime to democracy is the dilemma ‘between policies of at least temporary discrimination, in order to eliminate the danger (from right or left) of restoration of dictatorship and freedom for all groups and factions to organize and operate’. Bernhard¹⁰ argues that civil society is necessary for a successful democratic transition. Modernization theory, however, links regime type or regime change to the level of socio-economic status such as per capita income, education, urbanization and mass media. According to modernization theorists, low level of socio-economic factors are conducive to authoritarianism and its higher levels are conducive to democracy.¹¹

4.2.1. Parliament

On January 31, 2011, a national Parliament of both House of Representatives or Pyithu Hluttaw (lower house) and House of Nationalities or Amyotha Hluttaw (upper house) was convened in Nay Pyi Taw. It was the first of its kind since the military coup in 1962. The military-backed USDP, having won the 2010 general elections in a landslide dominated the Parliament. The USDP won 883 out of 1154 seats in the entire national Parliament, and the seven state and the seven regional assemblies, which is 76.52 per cent. The closest ethnic minority rival, Shan National Democratic Party won 57 seats which is 4.49 per cent.¹² In addition to the

⁹ J.H. Herz. (1978). On Reestablishing Democracy after the Downfall of Authoritarian or Dictatorial Regimes. *Comparative Politics*. Vol. 10 (4). p. 561.

¹⁰ M. Bernhard. (1993). Civil Society and Democratic Transition in East Europe. *Political Quarterly*. Vol. 108 (2). p. 307-326. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2152014?origin=crossref>. (Retrieved 24/09/2020).

¹¹ M.J. Gasiorowski. (1995). Economic Crisis and Political Regime Change: An Event History Analysis. *American Political Science Review*. Vol. 89(4). p. 882-897.

¹² Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma. (2010). 2010 Election Watch. <http://www.altsean.org/Research/2010/Key%20Facts/results/Overall.php>. (Retrieved 22/02/2017).

overwhelming electoral victory, the 2008 Constitution reserved 25 per cent of the Parliament seats for the military.

Powers of the legislators was limited. For example, any amendment to the constitution has to be approved by more than 75 per cent of the parliamentarians, which means that no constitution amendment can be made without the support of the military or its civilian representatives. The Parliament neither can reject national budgetary bills nor block the president appointees unless they are deemed unconstitutional. Some allege that the 2008 Constitution and the Parliament were meticulously designed in a way to entrench the role of military in the new government¹³.

The first session of the national Parliament, convened on January 31, 2011 elected Thura Shwe Mann, a former military general and the third-ranking leader under the then SDPC government as Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Parliament also elected Khin Aung Myint, former Culture Minister under SPDC government as Speaker of the House of Nationalities, who also served as Speaker of the Joint Session of the Parliament. Speakers for all state and regional assemblies were filled by members of the USDP. The 2008 Constitution officially became effective on the same day as the joint session of both houses of the Parliament on 31 January.

On February 4, 2011, the Presidential Electoral College, formed by members from both the house of the Parliament elected Thein Sein as the President.

¹³ Reuters. (2011). FACTBOX-Myanmar's New Political Structure, 31 January. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-54526820110131>. (Retrieved 23/05/2018).

Tin Aung Myint Oo as Vice President 1 and Sai Mauk Kham as Vice President 2 for a five-year term of office. Thein Sein was Prime Minister and Tin Aung Myint Oo was secretary 1 in the SPDC government. While Thein Sein and Tin Aung Myint Oo are ethnic Burmans, Sai Mauk Khan is an ethnic Shan, the largest minority group in the country. They are all members of the USDP. After his appointment, the president designated 34 ministries with 30 cabinet ministers.

The status of a cabinet is equivalent to major general (Maj Gen) rank in the army and a deputy minister is equivalent to brigadier general. All security-related ministerial portfolios such as defence, home affairs and border affairs were given to members of the USDP. The National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) is the most powerful executive branch of the government as enshrined in the 2008 Constitution. The body was constituted by different units of the government as under¹⁴:

- President (Thein Sein), Chair
- Vice President 1 (Tin Aung Myint Oo)
- Vice President 2 (Sai Mauk Kham)
- Lower House Speaker (Shwe Mann)
- Upper House Speaker (Khin Aung Myint)
- Commander-in-Chief
- Deputy Commander-in-Chief
- Minister for Defence (Lieutenant General [Lt Gen] Ko Ko)
- Minister for Foreign Affairs (Wunna Maung Lwin)

¹⁴ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 79.

- Minister for Home Affairs (Maj Gen Hla Win)
- Minister for Border Affairs (Maj Gen Thein Htay)

Although the president heads this supreme council, the ultimate power lies in the hands of the military. Out of the 11 posts, the army commander-in-chief had direct or indirect control over six of them and appoints one of the vice presidents, besides the ministers of defence, home and border affairs. This power structure was meticulously embedded in the 2008 constitution in order to give the military the ultimate authority concerning national security. This means that even if the president, vice president and speakers of both houses of the Parliament are elected from representatives of other political parties, the military still has control of the government.¹⁵

4.2.2. National Human Rights Commission

The problem of human rights has been one of the major issues in Myanmar politics. The UN expressed concerns about the systematic rights violations across the country, especially in the territories of ethnic minorities. After denying entry visa for over a year since his last visit to the country in February 2010, the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar, Tomas Ojea Quintana, was invited by the Myanmar government in August to assess human rights situation in the country. It was the first time in more than a year that the human rights envoy was given permission to visit the notorious Insein Prison near Yangon, where most political prisoners were held. At the end of his visit, Quintana reiterated his call for the

¹⁵ International Crisis Group. (2011). Myanmar's Post-election Landscape, 7 March. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/myanmar-s-post-election-landscape>. (Retrieved 14/07/2018).

establishment of an international commission of inquiry into suspected crimes against humanity and war crimes – a proposal which the US and 15 other nations supported. The Myanmar government was extremely nervous about the materialization of such commission.¹⁶

After years of pressure from the UN and Western democracies, the Myanmar government formed a human rights body called ‘Myanmar National Human Rights Commission’ on September 5, 2011. The rights body was formed with a view to promoting and safeguarding the fundamental rights of all citizens regardless of race or creed. Members of the rights body comprise of former government officials, diplomats, academics, doctors and lawyers.¹⁷ While the Myanmar government it as an incremental step towards democratization, many rights activists construed the commission as another additional organ of the military-backed government.

Since its formation, the rights body has taken some symbolic steps. In a statement released on November 27, 2011, it welcomed the proposed visit of the US secretary of state to Myanmar in more than 50 years, by stating that the country is at a critical juncture in its efforts to build a democratic society by enhancing national unity, economic prosperity and the promotion of human rights for its people. The

¹⁶ BBC. (2011). Burma’s Aung Sets up Human Rights Commission, 6 September. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-14807362>. (Retrieved 21/07/2018).

¹⁷ W. Zeldin. (2011). Burma: New Human Rights Commission. Library of Congress, 9 September. <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2011-09-09/burma-new-human-rights-commission/>. (Retrieved 18/08/2018).

support and encouragement by the international community would certainly contribute to this process and must be welcomed.¹⁸

The rights commission also welcomed the decision of the 19th ASEAN Summit to award Myanmar its 2014 chair. The rights body considered the award of 2014 ASEAN chair as a recognition by the international community of the Government of Myanmar's concrete steps in implementing its policy of good governance, rule of law and respects for human rights in the process of building a democratic society. The body expressed optimism that such recognition would contribute to the promotion of greater political, security, economic and sociocultural cooperation among the member states.¹⁹

In an open letter published in the state-run 'The New light of Myanmar' newspaper on October 11, 2011, the rights commission urged President Thein Sein to release political prisoners. The letter stated that the body humbly requests the President, as a reflection of his magnanimity to grant amnesty to those prisoners and release them from the prisons.²⁰ The open letter was sent days after the government announced that the president would grant amnesty to thousands of prisoners. Although many were sceptical about the impartiality and credibility of the government-backed Human Rights Commission, such open appeal from the newly formed rights body gave some hope and optimism.

¹⁸ Xinhua. (2011). Myanmar Human Rights Commission Welcomes Clinton's First Myanmar Visit, 27 November. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-11/27/c_131272233.htm. (Retrieved 12/08/2018).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ J. Allchin. (2011). Burma Rights Body urges Prisoner Release. Democratic Voice of Burma, 11 October. <http://www.dvb.no/news/burma-rights-body-urges-prisoner-release/18065>. (Retrieved 14/08/2018).

4.2.3. Release of Prisoners (Amnesty)

In his maiden address to the 66th UN General Assembly on 27 September, 2011, Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin said that President Thein Sein had granted amnesty on 16 May, 2011 and 20,000 inmates had been released by the end of July. The minister said the president, in exercising the mandate vested upon him by the constitution would further grant amnesty at an appropriate time. The minister added that the government has embarked on a series of reforms towards building a democratic nation that will bring economic development, thereby improving the living conditions of the people of Myanmar. Lwin added that the steps taken by the government are concrete, visible and irreversible and that the government is committed to ensuring that the democratic process is incremental, systematic and dynamic despite several challenges. The minister sought support, encouragement and understanding of the international community.²¹

Following the foreign minister's speech at the UN General Assembly, the government of Myanmar announced via radio and television programmes on 11 October, 2011 that the president was granting amnesty to more than 6,300 prisoners. The announcement, however, did not specify how many political prisoners were included in the list. The USDP-led government, consisting of mostly former army generals, claimed to have liberalized its traditional hard-liner policies and to have started to open up to the international community. The release of political detainees

²¹ UN. (2011). Statement by Wunna Maung Lwin, Minister for Foreign Affairs at the 66th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 27 September. <https://gadebate.un.org/en/66/myanmar>. (Retrieved 29/08/2018).

was one fundamental demand of the US government and other Western democracies as a condition to normalize relations with Myanmar.²²

Organizations and governments around the world welcomed the amnesty initiative taken by the Thein Sein government but remained concerned by the continued detention of an estimated over 1,000 political prisoners. In a statement released to the media on 13 October, 2011, two days after the amnesty was announced, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights situation in Myanmar expressed his concern and the need for freeing political prisoners. Tomas Ojea Quintana said, ‘ These are individuals who have been imprisoned for exercising their fundamental rights or whose fair trial or due process rights have been denied and stressed that their release would be an important step for the democratic transition ...’. While expressing the UN’s willingness for a constructive engagement with the Myanmar government, Quintana emphasized the need for improving human rights situation and advancing the efforts of national reconciliation.²³

Among the thousands of prisoners released as part of the amnesty programme, only 220 political prisoners were included. The US government, while welcoming the amnesty, said that the steps were inadequate for a democratically transitioning nation. The newly appointed special envoy for Myanmar, Derek J. Mitchell, on 17 October, 2011 said, ‘ ... political prisoners – any political prisoners – there are too many political prisoners – and that what we’re looking for is a release

²² A.A. Win. (2011). Myanmar Gives Amnesty to some 6,300 Prisoners. *The Washington Times*, 11 October. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/oct/11/myanmar-gives-amnesty-6300-prisoners/>. (Retrieved 21/09/2018).

²³ UN. (2011). United Nations Experts Welcomes Prisoners’ Release in Myanmar and urges Government to Free those still Jailed, 13 October. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/2011/10/myanmar-un-expert-welcomes-prisoners-release-and-urges-government-free-those-still-jailed>. (Retrieved 21/09/2018).

of all political prisoners without condition to really send the signal of genuine commitment to democracy in the country'. The position of the US government was that if the Myanmar government has a genuine desire for a democratic change, it must release all political prisoners who want a democratic change and the release must be unconditional.²⁴

The position of the US government was that if the Myanmar government has a genuine desire for a democratic change, it must release all political prisoners who want a democratic change and the release must be unconditional.²⁵ The US position was shared by the EU, which demanded the release of all political prisoners as a sign of real democratic reform in the country. While welcoming the amnesty programme announced by President Thein Sein, the EU High Representatives for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, said that the unconditional release of all political prisoners was a priority of the EU.

The EU Parliament President, Jerzy Buzek, reiterated the necessity of releasing all political prisoners and added that '... the International Committee of the Red Cross should be ensured unhindered access to prisons'. Buzek said that for Myanmar to attain a peaceful democratic transition and national reconciliation, it must engage in an open and inclusive process of internal dialogue.²⁶ The leading international human rights body, Amnesty International, questioned the rationale for holding political prisoners and urged the Myanmar government to release all of them.

²⁴ US Department of State. (2011). Briefing on Burma by Derek Mitchell, Social Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma, 17 October. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2011/10/175572.htm>. (Retrieved 23/09/2018).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ I. Delibasic. (2011). EU Welcomes Release of Political Prisoners in Myanmar. *New Europe*, 13 October. <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/eu-welcomes-release-political-prisoners-myanmar/>. (Retrieved 25/09/2018).

The rights body's researcher on Myanmar, Benjamin Zawacki, said that if the Myanmar authorities are serious about demonstrating their commitment towards reforms, the release of some political prisoners must be only the first step towards a release of all political prisoners as soon as possible.

Amnesty International said if the Myanmar authority sees any internationally recognizable offence committed by the political prisoners, they should be given a prompt, fair and public trial. Otherwise, they should be released unconditionally and without any delay.²⁷ Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD leader who was a political prisoner for years, urged the government to deliver more reforms to ensure rapid progress towards democracy. In a speech on 11 November, 2011, on the one-year anniversary of her release from house arrest, Suu Kyi said that the release of all political prisoners, reconciliation with armed ethnic groups and establishment of an independent judiciary are necessary for Myanmar to have a democratic society.

Suu Kyi said, "An issue of great importance to all of us who are working for democracy in Burma is that of political prisoners. Some had been released over the last year, but there are still many who remain in prison". Suu Kyi asked for Western sanctions to remain until the Myanmar government takes steps that benefit the ordinary citizens of the country.²⁸

In a high-level visit to the country, the British government's International Development Secretary, Andrew Mitchell, on 15 November, 2011 demanded the release of all political prisoners. Mitchell was the first senior official from the British

²⁷ Amnesty International. (2011). Myanmar: Government must go further with Prisoner Release, 12 October. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pre01/522/2011/en/>. (Retrieved 17/09/2018).

²⁸ Radio Free Asia. (2011). Suu Kyi Demand More Changes, 14 November. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/reforms-11142011162801.html>. (Retrieved 14/09/2018).

government to meet the top leadership in the new Myanmar government, including resident Thein Sein. The visiting leader suggested that his country was ready to open the door to a whole new world, including the lifting of sanctions and increasing financial aid, if the Myanmar government released all the political prisoners and allowed Aung San Suu Kyi to participate freely in the upcoming 2012 by-elections. Britain was a member of the EU, which had imposed sanctions on mining and gems, and travel bans on targeted leaders and their family members.²⁹

On 13 November, 2011, there were reports from Nay Pyi Taw that the government was preparing to release more prisoners under a new amnesty programme, which was expected to include political prisoners. The amnesty was planned to coincide with the start of the 19th ASEAN Summit in which President Thein Sein would join other heads of states where he would formally seek ASEAN's rotating chair for 2014.³⁰

However, the plan was aborted at a last minute crucial meeting of the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC). No detailed explanation was given for the decision.³¹ In his speech marking the opening of a parliamentary legal affairs office in Yangon on 9 December, 2011, the Lower House Speaker, Shwe Mann, hinted the possibility of another amnesty without giving any specific date.³² On 22 December, 2011, Aung Min, Railway Minister and the government's peace

²⁹ D. McElroy. (2011). Britain Demands Release of Burmese Political Prisoners. *The Telegraph*, 15 November.

³⁰ A.H. Tun. (2011). Myanmar to Free More Political Prisoners soon. Reuters, 13 November. <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-myanmar-prisoners-idUKTRE79I2C620111019>. (Retrieved 24/09/2018).

³¹ A. France-Presse. (2011). Burma Delays Prisoner Amnesty. *Democratic Voice of Burma*, 14 November. <http://www.dvb.no/news/burma-delays-prisoner-amnesty/18723>. (Retrieved 27/09/2018).

³² *Democratic Voice of Burma*. (2011). Prisoner Amnesty soon: Shwe Mann. <http://www.dvb.no/news/prisoner-amnesty-shwe-mann/19182>. (Retrieved 25/09/2018).

negotiator with armed ethnic groups, also hinted at the release of political prisoners whether on Independence Day or Union Day in 2012.³³

4.2.4. Media Censorship Ease

The tight control of media outlets had been an effective way to silence the views of the opposition groups and to advance the government propaganda. As part of the government's democratic reforms, censorship of some publications was eased in the second week of June, 2011. The authorities announced that sports journals, entertainment magazines, fairy tales and the winning lottery numbers would no longer need to have prior approval from the Ministry of Information for publication, but titles of the stories would continue to be scrutinized before they went on sale.

Strict censorship remained enforced for publications containing articles, on news, religion and education, to novels, history books, calendars and poems. At a meeting on 8 June, 2011, the authorities told the publishers that they would soon be granted complete freedom in writing and publishing if they cooperate with the guidelines of the government's Press Scrutiny and Registration Division.³⁴

In another round of censorship relaxation announced by the authorities on 9 December, 2011, a total of 54 journals, magazines and books including business publications would no longer have to submit their contents to the censorship board before publication. However, censorship on news reports was not lifted.

³³ K. Chan. (2011). Minister Hints Political Prisoners Released on Jan. 4 and Feb. 12. Mizzima, 22 December. <http://www.mizzima.com/nes/inside-burma/630-minister-hints-political-prisoners-released-on-ja-4.html>. (Retrieved 24/09/2018).

³⁴ The Strait Times. (2011). Myanmar eases Strict Censorship for Some, 11 June.

Though no timeline was specified, the authorities indicated that restrictions on film and video would soon be relaxed.³⁵ The authorities, on 15 September, 2011, lifted Theban on some foreign websites and news organizations including Reuters, Bangkok Post, The Strait Times, some other regional newspapers and the Myanmar-language service of VOA, BBC and the DVB. The government also unblocked the online video portal YouTube. Media relaxation was announced a day after the US Special envoy to Myanmar, Derek Mitchell ended his visit to the country which coincided with the UN International Day of democracy.³⁶

4.3. Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD

Despite Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest in November 2010, the NLD did not engage in active politics as the party was legally disbanded by the 2008 Constitution. The government took over nine months before a door to political reconciliation was opened. To the surprise of many observers, President Thein Sein invited Suu Kyi to Nay Pyi Taw on 19 August, 2011. The meeting between Thein Sein and Suu Kyi was the result of rounds of meetings between the Labour Minister, Aung Kyi and Suu Kyi.³⁷ The 19 August meeting was the harbinger of improved relations between the government and the opposition.

In a step towards regrouping and revitalizing the party, more than 100 NLD youth members met at the party headquarters in Yangon on 1 June, 2011. It was the

³⁵ A. France-Presse. (2011). Burma Eases Censorship, but the News still Suffers. Jakarta Globe, 11 December. <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/international/burma-eases-censorship-but-the-news-still-suffers/484079>. (Retrieved 28/09/2018).

³⁶ A.H. Tun. (2011). Myanmar Lifts Bans on Foreign News Websites. Reuters, 15 September. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-media/myanmar-lifts-bans-on-foreign-news-websites-idUSTRE78E2QJ20110915>. (Retrieved 29/09/2018).

³⁷ Reuters. (2011). Aung San Suu Kyi Meets Burma's President Thein Sein. *The Guardian*, 19 August. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-suukyi-president-idUSTRE7711RN20110819>. (Retrieved 12/10/2018).

first of its kind of event organized in the aftermath of the release of the party General Secretary, Aung San Suu Kyi. The meeting served as a forum for the younger generation to discuss the party's activities across the country amidst numerous restrictions imposed on the party, its leadership and supporters and how to move forward with party agendas.³⁸

In an apparent political thaw, the government announced its willingness to work with NLD, the party it had declared illegal after it failed to register for the November 2010 general elections. In a conciliatory tone, the government's Information Minister, Kyaw Hsan, said on 12 August, 2011" In view of national reconciliation, the government is delicately and carefully handling the issue of the NLD, which has no legal right to exist, offering it opportunities to serve the national interest in cohesion ... If the NLD wants to get involved in politics, it should set up a legal party through formal procedures. Anyhow, the government is doing its best to invite NLD to its national reconciliation process."³⁹

After her release from house arrest, the NLD general secretary tested the limits of her freedom by making a trip outside of Yangon, to the ancient city of Bagan, with her younger son, Kim Aris (Htein Lin), on a private pilgrimage in the beginning of July. Since it was not a political trip, the NLD leadership urged its members and supporters in advance to stay away from rallying, fearing a repeat of the 2003 incident in which Suu Kyi's motorcade was attacked and 70 of her

³⁸ S.Z. Hseng. 2011. NLD holds First Youth Conference since Suu Kyi's Release. *The Irrawaddy*, 1 June. https://www2.irrawaddy.com/article.php?art_id=21408. (Retrieved 12/10/2018).

³⁹ BBC. (2011). Burma Government Offers Suu Kyi's NLD reconciliation, 12 August. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-14496464>. (Retrieved 12/10/2018).

supporters killed. Since no conditions were set in her latest release, she could travel without any restrictions.

However, in February, the government accused her of provocative acts that could lead to a tragic end for her and the NLD. Prior to her trip in Bagan, the authorities warned of chaos and riots if Suu Kyi attempted to rally political supporters. The government went further, stating that it would not be responsible for the safety of Suu Kyi, which was criticized by the US, Britain and Australian governments, who said that such a statement contradicts the government's reconciliation programme.⁴⁰

Despite apprehensions, the private trip was largely peaceful. Suu Kyi and her NLD party further wanted to test the limits of political freedom and tolerance of the authorities. Subsequently, Suu Kyi and some NLD leaders made the first political trip to Bago and Thanatpin, country-side towns north of Yangon on 14 August, 2011. Thousands of well-wishers and party supporters greeted Suu Kyi and her entourage by standing along the roadside.

Suu Kyi inaugurated libraries in Bago and made a 10-minute political speech in Thanatpin, where she urged for unity and sought the support for her defunct political party. She asked the people to persevere in the difficult circumstances and said, "I know the people want and I am trying my best to fulfil the wishes of the people ... However, I don't want to give false hope". The visit took place in the same

⁴⁰ Reuters. (2011). Myanmar's Suu Kyi Keeps Low Profile on Upcountry Trip, 5 July. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-suukyi/myanmars-suu-kyi-keeps-low-profile-on-upcountry-trip-idUSTRE7641AG20110705>. (Retrieved 13/10/2018).

week in which the government invited Suu Kyi and the NLD leadership to re-register the party.⁴¹

With the government officially inviting the NLD to re-register and enter the national politics legally, 100 leaders of the party met at its headquarters to deliberate on the issue on 18 August, 2011. After a detailed discussion and exchange of views with different participants, the NLD leadership unanimously decided to re-register its party. After the meeting, the party released a general statement stating:” We unanimously decide that the National League for Democracy (NLD) will register according to party registration laws and we will take part in the coming by-elections”. The party decided to field candidates in all the 48 seats left vacant in the Parliament with the appointment of the government ministers.⁴²

This decision was a significant move towards meeting the government’s efforts for political reconciliation. With the party’s resolution, the NLD abandoned its earlier position of denouncing the results of the 2010 general elections. The party had boycotted the 2010 elections primarily on the grounds that a former political prisoner can neither contest in the elections nor a party of such a member be allowed to register.⁴³

After entrenching its position and sensing no perceived political threat from the NLD and Suu Kyi, the government agreed to remove the clause in the 2008 Constitution that bans political prisoners from becoming a political party member

⁴¹ Associated Press. (2011). Aung San Suu Kyi Greeted by Thousands on Trip Out of Rangoon. *The Guardian*, 14 August. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/14/aung-san-suu-kyi-trip>. (Retrieved 11/10/2018).

⁴² BBC. (2011). Suu Kyi’s NLD Democracy Party to Rejoin Burma Politics, 18 November. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-15787605>. (Retrieved 12/10/2018).

⁴³ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 88.

and contesting in elections. The NLD's decision to re-register its party was greatly influenced by Aung San Suu Kyi, who said, "I stand for the re-registration of the NLD party. I would like to work effectively towards amending the constitution. So we have to do what we need to do."⁴⁴ On 13 December, 2011, the country's Election Commission approved the application for the re-registration of NLD as a legal political party.⁴⁵ On 23 December, 2011, Suu Kyi, accompanied by other party leaders officially re-registered the NLD party at the office of the Union Election Commission in Nay Pyi Taw. The government announced on 30 December that the by-elections would be held on 1 April, 2012.⁴⁶

4.4. Political Changes in 2012

In his address to the 67th UN General Assembly in New York on 27 September, 2012, President Thein Sein said the democratic reforms process in Myanmar is moving forward through tangible irreversible steps.⁴⁷ Myanmar entered the year 2012 with hopes of continued democratic reforms that began with the 2010 general elections.⁴⁸ The Myanmar opposition groups and the international community particularly, the Western democracies demanded that the Thein Sein government:

- i) Release political prisoners unconditionally.
- ii) Expedite peace initiatives with armed ethnic groups

⁴⁴ Op cit, BBC. (2011). 18 November.

⁴⁵ VOA. (2011). *Burma Recognizes Suu Kyi's NLD Party*. December 13. <https://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2011/12/13/burma-recognizes-suu-kyis-nld-party/>. (Retrieved 15/10/2018).

⁴⁶ Associated Press. (2011). Burma By-election Set for April to Contest 48 Parliamentary Seats. *The Guardian*, 30 December. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/30/burma-elections-aung-san-suu-kyi>. (Retrieved 20/10/2018).

⁴⁷ Mizzima. (2012). Text of Thein Sein's UN Speech, 28 September. <http://mizzimaenglish.blogspot.com/2012/09/text-of-thein-seins-un-speech.html>. (Retrieved 20/10/2018).

⁴⁸ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 123.

- iii) Hold free and fair by-elections.

On the other hand, the government wanted to demonstrate to the world that the USDP was committed to pursuing its seven-step road towards democracy that the SLORC, the then military government had announced on 20 August, 2003. The seven-step road map were:⁴⁹

- i) Reconvening of the National Convention that has been adjourned since 1996
- ii) After the successful holding of the National Convention, step-by-step implementation of the process necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic system
- iii) Drafting of a new constitution in accordance with basic principles and detailed basic principles laid down by the National Convention
- iv) Adoption of the constitution through national referendum
- v) Holding of free and fair elections for Pyithu Hluttaws (legislative bodies) according to the new constitution
- vi) Convening of Hluttaws attended by Hluttaw members in accordance with the new constitution
- vii) Building a modern, developed and democratic nation by state leaders elected by the Hluttaw and the government and other central organs formed by the Hluttaw.

The fledgling democracy experienced different facets of politics from peaceful transition to devastating violence. The year 2012 began with the

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 135.

government signing a ceasefire agreement with the longest-existing armed ethnic group, the KNU/KNLA, on 12 January, after 60 years of armed conflict.⁵⁰ Despite having secured ceasefire agreements with majority of the armed ethnic groups, violence continued between the KIO/KIA and the Myanmar Army. Deadly violence also erupted in Rakhine state between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists. Though the Myanmar government received appreciation and growing support from the international community over its democratic reforms, it also received criticisms for its inability to stop violence in Kachin and Rakhine states.⁵¹

4.4.1. The 2012 By-Elections

The by-elections were significant for a number of reasons. First, the government wanted to improve its legitimacy and credibility through the elections. Second, the NLD, which boycotted the 2010 general elections participated in the electoral process. Third, holding of free and fair elections was one important benchmark for the Western nations to review their sanctions policy. The elections were initially announced for 48 vacant seats – 46 in the national Parliament and two in the regional assemblies. However, on 23 March, the Union Election Commission cancelled elections for three constituencies in Kachin state for security reasons. A total of 17 political parties contested in the elections, including the military-backed USDP. The NLD, which boycotted the 2010 general elections also participated.

On 2 April, 2012, a day after the by-elections, the Union Election Commission confirmed the NLD overwhelming victory. On the side-lines of the 20th

⁵⁰ BBC. (2012). Burma Government Signs Ceasefire with Karen Rebels, 12 January. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16523691>. (Retrieved 29/10/2018).

⁵¹ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 124.

ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 3 April, 2012, President Thein Sein said that the elections were conducted in a very successful manner.⁵² It was the first official acknowledgement of the election results by a top government official.

Before the by-elections, the position of NLD was that the results of 2010 general elections were unrepresentative of the people of Myanmar. The NLD accused the government of manipulating the electoral process by suppressing the aspirations of the general public. Until the day of the election, NLD was still sceptical whether the military would allow free and fair elections. During the election campaigns, the NLD and other smaller political parties alleged that government officials and the USDP members attempted to disrupt their activities. Despite alleged disturbances, the NLD, led by its party chairperson, Aung San Suu Kyi, toured different constituencies across the country and filled candidates in all the 45 constituencies.⁵³

Amidst NLD's initial allegation of ballots tampering, elections were by and large free and peaceful. The NLD lodge a formal complaint to the Union Election Commission concerning 10 townships: Pale, Mawlamyine, Myanaung, Magwe, Taungdwingyi, Kawhmu, Mingalar Taung Nyunt, Mayangone, Dagon Seikkan and Kalaw, but later withdrew it.⁵⁴ Except for the disqualified candidate in north-west Saigaing Region, NLD won in 43 out of the 45 seats it contested. One seat each was

⁵² J. Gomez and S. Cheang. (2012). Myanmar Leader Praises Elections as Successful. Associated Press, 3 April. <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-myanmar-leader-praises-elections-as-successful-2012apr03-story.html>. (Retrieved 12/02/2019).

⁵³ M.F. Martin. (2012). Burma's April Parliamentary By-elections. Congressional Research Service Report, 28 March. p. 1-10. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42438.pdf>. (Retrieved 12/02/2019).

⁵⁴ S. Lwin. (2012). NLD Backs away from WaxedBallot Claim. Myanmar Times, 14 May. <https://www.burmalibrary.org/en/the-myanmar-times-may-14-20-2012-volume-32-no-626>. (Retrieved 20/02/2019).

won by the ruling USDP and the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP). The USDP candidate won the seat where NLD candidate was disqualified. The SNDP won one seat from the Shan state. The participation of the NLD and other political parties associated with ethnic minorities boosted the government's claim for legitimacy and credibility of its rule.

The acceptance of the by-election results by the Thein Sein government, NLD and other political parties was essential for the Western nations to review their diplomatic relations with Myanmar that had been placed under sanctions. The election results were welcomed by the international community. Subsequently, the US and the EU announced that they would review their sanctions policy. The Obama administration of the US said it would soon nominate a US ambassador to Myanmar and invited the Myanmar Foreign Minister, Wunna Maung Lwin to visit Washington for bilateral talks.⁵⁵

4.4.2. Additional Amnesty

The release of prisoners was one of the major demands by both the Myanmar opposition groups and the international community. It was a benchmark for the Western democracies especially, the US and the EU, to review their diplomatic relations with Myanmar. The Myanmar government strategically manipulated the issue of political prisoners in its efforts to improve relations with the Western

⁵⁵ C.S. Kuppaswamy. (2012). Myanmar By-elections: An Analysis. *Eurasia Review*, 7 April. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/07042012-myanmar-by-elections-an-analysis/>. (Retrieved 25/02/2019).

nations.⁵⁶ The USDP government meticulously carried out the different phases of prisoners' release.

Timing was important for the Myanmar government. Two days before the country's 64th anniversary of Independence Day on 4 January, 2012, President Thein Sein issued an order commuting the death sentences of 33 prisoners to life imprisonment and reduced the terms of other 38,931 prisoners. Under the amnesty programme, the government release 6,656 prisoners across the country. However, only 34 of them were political prisoners, which was about 0.5 per cent of the total released.⁵⁷

Most were criminals or prisoners guilty of other minor offences. The small percentage release of political prisoners was strongly condemned by rights groups and the international community particularly, the Western nations. To marks the anniversary of the country's Union Day, President Thein Sein ordered amnesty on 12 January, 2012, releasing 651 prisoners under Section 401 (1) of the Criminal Procedure Code. Among the release included some high-profile political dissidents, whose release had been demanded for long by the Myanmar opposition and the Western nations.

Prominent student leaders from the 1988 democracy uprising such as Min Ko Naing, KO KO Gyi, Phyoone Cho, Kyaw Min Yu (Jimmy), Htay Kywe, Nilar Thein, Mya Aye and Ant Bwe Kyaw, were among those released. Ethnic Shan leaders – Hkun Htun Oo and Sai Nyunt Lwin – who were arrested in 2005 on charge

⁵⁶ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2016). p. 128.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

of high treason, inciting disaffection towards the military government and attempting to disintegrate the Union of Myanmar, were also released. Hkun Htun Oo and Sai Nyunt Lwin, Chairman and General Secretary of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) were sentenced to 93 years and 85 years prison sentences respectively.

Other high-profile political prisoners included U Gambira, a Buddhist monk who led the 2007 Saffron Revolution and Kyaw Win, an elected legislative member in the 1990 general elections. Journalists Sein Win Maung, Thant Zin Aung and Zaw Thet Htwe, 13 DVB video journalists and blogger Nay Phone Latt were also released. The former Prime Minister and Military Intelligence Chief, Khin Nyunt and other 200 former intelligence officials were also released.⁵⁸

The release of prominent political prisoners was a significant step in the democratic reforms process, which US President Obama described as a substantial step forward for democratic reform.⁵⁹ The release of political prisoners convinced the US government to confirm its decision to exchange ambassadors between the two nations. The US-Myanmar diplomatic representation was downgraded to chargé

⁵⁸ Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma. (2012). A Month-in-Review of Events in Burma. No. 61, January. <http://www.altsean.org/Docs/PDF%20Format/Burma%20Bulletin/January%202012Burma%20Bulletin.pdf>. (Retrieved 24/02/2019).

⁵⁹ K. Olarn. (2012). Clinton: U.S, Myanmar to Exchange Ambassadors. Cable News Network, 13 January. <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/13/world/asia/myanmar-cease-fire/index.html>. (Retrieved 21/02/2019).

d'affaires⁶⁰ in the aftermath of 1988 democracy uprising and the subsequent nullification of the 1990 general election results.⁶¹

4.5. Violence in Kachin State (2012)

During his address to the UN General Assembly in September 2012, President Thein Sein said, "Ending the fighting in the Kachin state is my priority. The death of any soldier, from the Myanmar armed forces or the Kachin Independence Army, is the death of a Myanmar national. It is a loss for our country. It must stop". However, violence continued in Kachin state. It is pertinent to ask why the KIO/KIA and the Burmese military, which had a 17-year-old (1994-2011) ceasefire, were unable to reach agreeable terms when ceasefire agreements had been signed with majority of armed ethnic groups.

Whose fault was this and why did the Kachin problem seem more complicated to resolve? Like many other groups, the KIO's political demand was autonomy. Like the other armed ethnic groups that have signed ceasefire agreements, the KIO/KIA and the government's representatives met on several occasions in an attempt to reach an amicable solution. The KIO/KIA demanded that any ceasefire agreement should lead to a genuine political dialogue that would eventually pave the way for a federal Myanmar where ethnic minorities are guaranteed autonomy.

Apparently, experiences from the past and lack of mutual trust on both sides made the conflict even more complicated. One major hindrances to a peaceful

⁶⁰ A diplomat inferior in rank to an ambassador or a person who represents his/her country in the absence of an ambassador or in place of an ambassador.

⁶¹ N. Kipgen. (2013). US-Burma Relations: Change of Politics under the Bush and Obama Administrations. *Strategic Analysis*. Vol. 37 (2). https://www.idsa.in/strategicanalysis/37_2/US%E2%80%93BurmaRelations. (Retrieved 27/02/2019).

ceasefire agreement was over the control of rich natural resources such as timber and minerals and billions of dollars' worth of Chinese-financed energy projects contracted by the former military government in Kachin state. The fiercest armed clashes often occurred near a pair of major pipelines in nearby Shan state, which were expected to supply oil and gas to China's Yunnan province starting 2013.⁶² Thus, the continued violence in Kachin State in way had an adverse impact on the reforms process.

4.6. Violence in Rakhine State (2012)

The violence between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists in Rakhine state was another major challenge to the democratic transition. Although tension between these two groups has existed for the past several decades, the immediate cause of the violence was the rape and murder of a Rakhine Buddhist Woman on 28 May, 2012 by three male Muslims, which was followed by a retaliatory killing of 10 Muslims by a mob of Rakhine on 3 June. The violence between the two groups resulted in the loss of over hundred lives, destruction of thousands of homes and the displacement of tens of thousands of people.

Unlike the other conflicts in Myanmar, the root of Rohingya problem lies in the nomenclature itself. Although the Muslim call themselves as Rohingya, the Myanmar government and many people especially, ethnic Burmans and Rakhines call them illegal Bengali migrants from Bangladesh, which the Bangladeshi government disagrees. The Rohingya are denied citizenship status. Since both Myanmar and Bangladesh do not accept them as citizens, the Rohingya become

⁶²J.M. Myitkyina. (2012). Myanmar's Kachin State: Still Ablaze. *The Economist*, 15 September. <https://www.economist.com/banyan/2012/09/15/still-ablaze>. (Retrieved 12/04/2019).

stateless people under international law. The stateless status makes the situation of Rohingya population, about 800,000 in Myanmar and 300,000 in Bangladesh, even more complicated and vulnerable.⁶³

The Thein Sein government came under intense pressure from different quarters to resolve the Rohingya problem. In response, President Thein Sein suggested the resettlement of Rohingya population to third countries. While no third country came forward to accept the offer, both offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights rejected the resettlement programme. They instead, suggested that the Myanmar government should pursue a policy of integration and reconciliation between the Rakhine and Rohingya people.⁶⁴

With the international community's mounting pressure in the Myanmar government, President Thein Sein sent a letter to the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, promising that his government was prepared to address contentious political dimensions, ranging from resettlement of displaced populations to granting of citizenship when emotions subside on all side.⁶⁵ It is still unclear when this will materialize. Even if an integration programme is initiated, it is uncertain how long would it take for the Rakhine and Rohingya people to reconcile among themselves on some of the fundamental issues such as land and identity. Many Buddhists in Myanmar perhaps, the majority including the Rakhines, believe that the Rohingya

⁶³ N. Kipgen. (2012). The Rohingya Connundrum. *Myanmar Times*, 24 September.

⁶⁴ N. Kipgen. (2012). Burma should Seize the Opportunity. *The Jerusalem Post*, 7 November. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/op-ed-contributors/burma-should-seize-the-opportunity>. (Retrieved 15/04/2019).

⁶⁵ A.H. Tun. (2012). Myanmar President Says will Address Sectarian Violence. Reuters, 17 November. <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-myanmar-violence-idUKBRE8AG02Q20121117>. (Retrieved 14/04/2019).

are trying to steal scarce land and forcibly spread the Islamic faith.⁶⁶The animosity between the hard-line Buddhists and the Muslims in Rakhine State hampers the reforms process in the country as the government has to deal with the issue of violence in the region.

4.7. The 2015 General Elections

The 2015 General Election was a milestone in the transition process started in 2010. The transition toward democracy was highly controlled, with the military and the nominally civilian government—largely composed of former senior army officers—setting the pace and the direction. Nonetheless, the transition led to an opening of political space. The second national election under the 2008 Constitution was held on November 8, 2015. The electoral environment was radically different to that of 2010 elections for two reasons.

First, the media environment underwent dramatic changes during the five years prior: prepublication censorship had been abolished, which saw an increase in the freedom of expression and media freedom; a number of privately owned newspapers had started to operate; and the number of Internet users had increased. The relaxation of media controls and the end of censorship saw Myanmar improve its ranking in the Reporters without Borders' 'World Press Freedom Index' from 174 in

⁶⁶ M. Fisher. (2012). Video: The al-Jazeera Documentary that Burma's Government Publicly Condemned. *The Washington Post*, 3 March. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2012/12/10/video-the-al-jazeera-documentary-that-burmas-government-publicly-condemned/>. (Retrieved 16/05/2019).

2011 (out of 179) to 145 in 2015.⁶⁷ Despite this progress, however, certain restrictions on press freedom and freedom of expression are still in place.

For instance, criticizing the government or the military and disclosing state secrets or corruption are all still legally punishable.⁶⁸ A number of journalists were imprisoned in 2014, and several Facebook users were detained in the lead-up to the election.⁶⁹ Although these cases had an adverse impact on the freedom of expression during the campaign, they did not result in an uneven playing field. In fact, media coverage during the election campaign was rather balanced;⁷⁰ state media primarily focused on the incumbent party and President Thein Sein, while private news outlets (e.g., DVB) largely concentrated on the opposition, particularly Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD.

Second, new freedom of movement laws and freedom of association laws allowed opposition candidates to move freely and without fear. Although the Association of Political Prisoners Burma reported a backsliding of reforms in 2014 and 2015, documented an increasing number of activist arrests, and criticized the government for reducing spaces for political action, one has to concede that political party activists were not targeted by the regime during the election period. The arrests identified by the Association of Political Prisoners Burma resulted from Myanmar's

⁶⁷ RFB. (2015). Reporters without Borders, Annual Ranking. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>. (Retrieved 14/12/2021).

⁶⁸ M. Bünte. (2016). Myanmar's Protracted Transition: Arenas, Actors, Outcomes. *Asian Survey*, Vol. 56(2). p. 369-391.

⁶⁹ Asia Times. (2015). Myanmar activists gets 6 months for satirical Facebook post on military, 28 December. <http://atimes.com/2015/12/myanmar-activist-gets-6-months-for-satirical-facebook-post-on-military>. (Retrieved 14/12/2021).

⁷⁰ MID. (2015). Third Preliminary Report on media coverage of contestants during the election campaign period, Myanmar Institute of Democracy, 6 November. http://www.yangonyoungguns.com/docs/3rdreport_MID.pdf. (Retrieved 14/12/2021).

restrictive Peaceful Assembly Law, which allows peaceful protests only after the authorities have been notified.

Although authorities often use this statute to stifle certain protests and arrest activists⁷¹ – such as the student protests in 2015 and land-rights protests⁷²—opposition political parties did not complain about restrictions during campaigning. As a consequence of these new freedoms, the number of political parties almost tripled from 37 to 91 in 2015, while the number of candidates doubled from 3,154 to 6,189. A reason for this might lie in the fact that the Union Election Commission (UEC) had lowered the registration fee for candidates from 500,000 kyats to 300,000 kyats.

Elections were held for the Union Parliament—which has a lower House (Pyithu Hluttaw) and an upper House (Amyotha Hluttaw)—as well as for the unicameral assemblies in each of the 14 states and regions. The 2008 constitution provides the overall framework for these elections. Many weaknesses in the electoral law and its implementation can be traced to provisions of the military-drafted constitution that structurally impact the democratic character of the electoral and political processes. In particular, the military appoints 25 percent of the members of each house of Parliament, giving it a de facto veto over constitutional reform.

The military also appoints the ministers of defense, home affairs, and border affairs and appoints 25 percent of state and regional assemblies. These provisions can

⁷¹ Amnesty International. (2015). Going back to the Old Ways. A new Generation of Prisoners of Conscience in Myanmar, Amnesty International Briefing, 7 October. http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/amnesty_myanmar_pocs_briefing.pdf. (Retrieved 14/12/2021).

⁷² Op Cit, M. Bunte. (2016).

be considered as a fundamental violation of democratic norms and should be amended in order for Myanmar to become fully democratic. Other issues of concern with regard to the constitutional framework include the equality of the vote, which is not guaranteed under the current election system; an election management body (UEC) that enjoys broad authority but lacks guarantees of independence and impartiality and whose decisions are not subject to judicial appeal; unreasonably restrictive provisions on voter and candidate eligibility; and unreasonable restrictions on eligibility for the presidency, which appear to be directed at a particular individual.

The 16-member UEC, appointed by President Thein Sein in 2011, is responsible for managing all aspects of the electoral process, including voter registration and the designation of constituencies. Since the UEC chair was a former USDP member and reportedly close to the president, there was a widespread fear that the UEC would not be neutral. Election observers spoke of an over-concentration of decision-making power in the office of the chair.⁷³

Despite these concerns, the UEC refrained from systematically manipulating the elections. There were, however, some issues that diminished the quality of the elections. The accuracy of voter lists, for example, was a major source of contention throughout the pre-election period, with both parties and civil society organizations complaining about it. Nevertheless, it did not prove to be a problem on polling day,

⁷³ EU EOM. (2015). EU Election Observation Mission: Myanmar General Elections, Preliminary Statement. https://www.eods.eu/library/101115-ps-myanmar_en.pdf. (Retrieved 14/12/2021).

and no voters were turned away or prevented from voting.⁷⁴ The UEC did disqualify several Muslim candidates on the grounds of citizenship though. However, the UEC was not alone in this respect, as all major political parties discriminated against Muslims when selecting their candidates. For instance, neither the NLD nor the USDP fielded a single Muslim candidate.⁷⁵

Campaigning was also influenced by anti-Islam sentiment. In September 2015 President Thein Sein bowed to political pressure from the hard-line Buddhist Patriotic Association of Myanmar (Ma Ba Tha) and signed the so-called Protection of Race and Religion bills, which were seen as advancing an anti-Muslim, ultra-Buddhist nationalist agenda. Ma Ba Tha also claimed that the NLD would not protect Buddhism. Political parties and observers expressed their concerns about the mixing of religion and politics, which is prohibited by the Constitution.⁷⁶ Despite these ultra-Buddhist undertones, the campaign period – which lasted for 60 days – was generally regarded as peaceful and fair, and violence remained the exception on polling day.

The peaceful nature of the elections proved wrong those scholars who predicted a high risk of electoral violence.⁷⁷ The fact that 67 political parties came together to agree on rules for party conduct during campaigning (similar to those in

⁷⁴ Carter Center. (2015). Preliminary Statement. Myanmar General Election. Yangon, 10 November. http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/Myanmar-Preliminary-Statement-111015.pdf. (Retrieved 15/12/2021).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Min, Aung Kyaw. (2015). MaBaTha justifies religion in politics. Myanmar Times. 5 October. <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/16818-ma-ba-tha-justifies-religion-in-politics.html>. (Retrieved 14/12/2021).

⁷⁷ M. Nilsen and S. Tonnesson. (2014). High Risk of Electoral Violence in Myanmar, Prio Policy Brief. [http://file.prio.no/Publication_files/Prio/NilsenandTonnesson\(2014\)High-Risk-of-Electoral-Violence-in-Myanmar-PRIO-Policy-Brief-6-2014.pdf](http://file.prio.no/Publication_files/Prio/NilsenandTonnesson(2014)High-Risk-of-Electoral-Violence-in-Myanmar-PRIO-Policy-Brief-6-2014.pdf). (Retrieved 12/12/2021).

South Africa in 1994), which included the establishment of local conflict resolution centres, might have paved the way for the peaceful election in 2015.

The UEC also improved the ‘advance voting’ process. In 2015, approximately 34,000 nationals registered to cast early votes. The process went smoothly compared to the 2010 elections, when a dubious number of absentee ballots helped the USDP to a landslide victory. According to one estimate, six million advance ballots were counted in the 2010 elections. Transparency also increased tremendously in 2015, with the UEC officially inviting both international and domestic observers to monitor the elections.

According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 12,000 observers were accredited. Some of the major international observation teams included the Carter Center, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), and the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL). Polling day was overwhelmingly peaceful and free, and the secrecy of the vote was maintained – though maybe less so in military compounds, which international election monitors were not able to enter.⁷⁸ Around 23 million voters (69 percent of the registered 34 million) – slightly fewer than in 1990 – took part in what was later called a historic election.⁷⁹

The election was decisively won by the NLD, which obtained 77 percent of all seats (390) in both houses of Parliament. The incumbent USDP won only 8.1 percent of all seats (41). Parties representing ethnic minorities did not fare well

⁷⁸ Op cit, Carter Center. (2015).

⁷⁹ Vogt, R. J (2015): UEC puts election turnout at 69 percent. *Myanmar Times*, 3 December. <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/17948-uec-puts-election-turnout-at-69-percent.html>. (Retrieved 12/12/2021).

either, collectively winning only 11 percent of seats in the lower house – which was down on the 15 percent they managed at the highly manipulated 2010 elections and the 10 percent they won at the 1990 elections. Individually, only two ethnic parties achieved some success in 2015 - the Arakan National Party (ANP) with 22 seats and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) with 15 seats. All in all, the elections resulted not only in a seismic shift in the division of power but also the factual end of any electoral authoritarian ambitions of the USDP.⁸⁰

The 2015 elections ended military-guided electoral authoritarianism, yet they have not fully democratized the political system. For the second time since 1990, the NLD proved that it was able to beat a military-backed party in relatively free and fair elections. The NLD secured a landslide victory and a majority in both houses of Parliament, which it can use to further democratize the political system. Undemocratic laws inhibiting press freedom and freedom of movement can now be revised. While the elections ended electoral authoritarianism, they were not able to terminate the dominance of the military, which is able to veto far-reaching democratic changes.

The military is not only entitled to 25 percent of all legislative seats, the army commander also has the ability to appoint the minister of defense, the minister of border affairs, and the interior minister, who controls the whole bureaucracy. The Constitution additionally allows the commander-in-chief to re-impose military rule if he or she believes the country is on the verge of disorder. Thus, democratization is

⁸⁰ International Crisis Group. (2015). The Myanmar Elections: Results and Implications. Asia Briefing No. 147, 9 December. Brussels. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/myanmar-elections-results-and-implications>. (Retrieved 14/12/2021).

not complete. Myanmar is, at best, a tutelary democracy with fragile civil liberties and political rights.

Praetorian influence is also immense, although the commander-in-chief has recently indicated that the military might withdraw from politics at a certain point in the future.⁸¹ He also noted that this might take up to 10 years and is subject to positive developments, such as peace, national reconciliation, and the maturing of democracy.⁸² This points to the most important factor behind the military's involvement in politics - ethnic conflicts in some parts of the country.⁸³ Although Thein Sein signed a ceasefire with eight armed rebel groups in October 2015, tackling the issue of ethnic conflict remains a daunting challenge for the government. Some of the largest groups – such as the United Wa State Army and the Kachin Independence Army – have not signed the ceasefire.

Following the November 2015 elections, Aung San Suu Kyi promised that building peace with ethnic armies left out of the ceasefire agreements would be the NLD government's first priority. Another side effect of the long period of military rule is the heavy involvement of the military in the economy. The military-owned Union of Myanmar Economic Holding Ltd. (UMEH) and Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) are multibillion-dollar entities active in nearly every sector of the economy (e.g., the steel, jade, gems, and tourism sectors). Another issue resulting from military involvement is land grabbing carried out by the military and its

⁸¹ L. Weymouth. (2015). Burma's top general: I am prepared to talk and answer and discuss' with Aung San Suu Kyi's government. *Washington Post*, 23 November. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/burmas-top-general-i-am-prepared-to-talk-and-answer-and-discuss-with-aung-san-suu-kyis-government/2015/11/23/ddf3ac76-9124-11e5-a2d6-f57908580b1f_story.html. (Retrieved 15/12/2021).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ L. Jones. (2015). *Societies under Siege*. Oxford University Press.

cronies. Since all these problems overlap in ethnic minority areas, finding sustainable peace will be an enormous challenge.⁸⁴

Apart from military involvement, Myanmar's tutelary democracy also faces additional challenges – such as addressing its weak institutions, lack of the rule of law, and long authoritarian past. Moreover, the political culture of Burma is only very superficially attached to democracy. According to recent public opinion surveys, Burmese are attached to the word 'democracy' and the idea of democracy as a concept, but when it comes to the principles of liberal democracy, they are still very politically illiberal. Moreover, the Burmese have a lot of religious and ethnic sentiments.⁸⁵

4.8. National Reconciliation/Peace Process

The NLD fought the elections in 2015 on the platform of achieving peace and national reconciliation through political dialogue based on Panglong spirit; establishment of genuine federal democratic union based on the principles of freedom, equal rights and self-determination; resolution of problems between ethnic groups through dialogue based on mutual respect and balanced development of all the States and Regions.⁸⁶ The road map proposed by NLD to achieve peace is as follows:⁸⁷

⁸⁴ L. Jones. (2014). Explaining Myanmar's Transition: The Periphery is Central. *Democratization*. Vol. 21 (5). p. 780-802.

⁸⁵ Welsh et al. (2016). Clashing Attitudes towards democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, April. p. 132-140.

⁸⁶ National League For Democracy: 2015 Election Manifesto Authorised Translation. https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/NLD_2015_Election_Manifesto-en.pdf. (Retrieved 15/05/2017).

⁸⁷ An Uphill Mission But Not Mission Impossible. (2016). <http://mail.brudirect.com/news.php?id=17123>. (Retrieved 12/05/2017).

- Review and amend the political dialogue framework that was drafted by the previous government led by ex-general Thein Sein.
- Continue convening the 21st Century Panglong Conference
- Sign a Union peace agreement based on the 21st Century Panglong Conference.
- Amend the current Constitution in accordance with the Union agreement
- Hold multi-party democratic elections in accordance with the amended Constitution.
- Building of a democratic federal union based on the results of the election, revealing the government's ultimate aim.

Therefore, in line with the road map, the Union Peace Dialogue Committee (UPDJC) was reformed, National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) was established replacing previous Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC). NRPC became a government organization under the Ministry of State Counsellor's office.⁸⁸ Sub-committees were also formed to hold discussions with indigenous armed organisations that have signed the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) as well as with those organisations that have not signed the NCA. In parallel with the political dialogues the government also encouraged to set up Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Forums.⁸⁹

To have the maximum stake holder representation in peace process, State counsellor Suu Kyi also met the delegation of United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC) led by its chairman U N'Ban La. The UNFC represented the EAOs

⁸⁸ State Counsellor Office. (2016). *New Name for Peace Centre*. May 17. <https://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/en/node/23>. (Retrieved 12/05/2017).

⁸⁹ S. Mallemapati. (2017). *Myanmar's Reconciliation Process: Key Challenges*. Indian Council of World Affairs. October 9. New Delhi. https://icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=6335&lid=3428. (Retrieved 20/11/2018).

in peace process. The meeting was first of its kind between new government and non-signatory groups of NCA. She also met leaders of United Wa State Army (UWSA) and National Democratic Alliance Army - NDAA (Mongla) to discuss their participation in United Peace Conference (UPC).⁹⁰ According to the government, the UWSA assured that they will not ask for secession from the country.⁹¹

Apart from changes to various structures to the peace process as mentioned above, to take the Panglong spirit forward the NLD government conducted first and second session of 21st Century Panglong Conference/UPC in 2016 and in 2017. It was attended by the President, the State Counsellor, the Vice Presidents, the UN Secretary-General, Hluttaw Speakers, the Commander-in-Chief, and representatives from ethnic armed organization, political parties, the government and Hluttaw, diplomats and UN officials. The NCA signatories and non-NCA Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) have also attended the conference.

At the first United Peace Conference (UPC) held on 31st August 2016 in Nay Pyi Taw, a common understanding was reached to conclude political dialogue within three to five years; to convene a second UPC; to enable 30 percent women's participation and to honour and put on record NCA signatories.⁹² Though the issues agreed upon presented a positive picture, various views pertaining to nature of the state, role of Army, question of secession from the union and separation of powers between centre and states indicated that road map to peace in Myanmar was a complex process. For example, representatives from Army and USDP reaffirmed the

⁹⁰ State Counsellor Office. (2016). *Daw Aung San Suu Kyi talks with non-Signatory Armed Groups*. July 17. <http://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/en/node/160>. (Retrieved 12/05/2017).

⁹¹ State Counsellor Office. (2016). *Gover, Wa, NDAA (Mongla) meeting Brings Step Closer to Peace*. July 29. <http://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/en/node/173>. (Retrieved 12/05/2017).

⁹² Op cit, S. Mallempati. (2017).

need to adhere to the 2008 military-drafted constitution and basic principles of the NCA, whereas EAOs leaders and ethnic political parties called for greater separation of power between the state and central government.

The EAOs such as UNFC presented a 10-point agenda to bring the armed forces under civilian administration. It also demanded to reorganise the country into 14 states, with the seven current states preserved, and the seven regions turned into states of nationalities. Another EAO, the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) urged the government to ensure the future inclusion of the Northern Alliance comprising of Arakan Army (AA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) in peace processes.⁹³ The AA, TNLA, MNDAA and NSCN-Khaplang group chose not to attend the conference.

Based on the outcome of the first UPC and to make the peace process more inclusive, the NLD government decided to have three types of dialogues at regional, national and ethnic levels. The Joint Coordinating Body (JCB) for peace process funding was also formed in 20 December, 2016 and the funding was allocated to four sectors which were the Ceasefire Sector, the negotiation and dialogue sector, the peace supporting development sector; peace making process of the national reconciliation and peace centre-NPRC sector.⁹⁴

The government also formed five working committees to deal with political affairs, social Affairs, economic affairs, security affairs and land and natural

⁹³ Deciphering Myanmar's Peace Process: A Reference Guide. (2016). *Burma News International*. p.58, <http://mmpeacemonitor.org/images/books/dm%20peace%20process%20a%20reference%20guide%202016.pdf>. (Retrieved 13/05/2017).

⁹⁴ Op cit, S. Mallempati. (2017).

environmental affairs. These committees are formed to compile suggestions and proposals concerning the matters assigned to them for instance through national-level political dialogues.⁹⁵ These efforts by the government helped to organise the second UPC in May 2017. Before convening of second secession of UPC the government maintained that without the commitment of the ethnic organisations for non-secession from the union, they cannot move forward for discussing related issues such as constitution of respective states, equality and self-determination.⁹⁶

37 agreements were approved by the second UPC and were signed as a part of the Pyidaungsu Accord or Union Accord.⁹⁷ The issues agreed upon in the agreement provided a broad consensus on issues the centre and states and regions will have to adhere on order to achieve national reconciliation. For Myanmar government, agreement on the principles mentioned in the Pyidaungsu Accord was a major step forward in its peace road map. However, there are several challenges the NLD government have to address to complete the peace road map which include participation of non-NCA signatories in peace process, role of Army, solving of Rohingya issue and involvement and role of external actors in peace process.

The third iteration of UPC or the 21st Century Panglong Conference concluded on 16 July, 2018.⁹⁸ The conference supposed to be held bi-annually, was hosted in 2018 after a year-long delay, and witnessed five days of deliberations

⁹⁵ State Counsellor Office. (2016). *Formation of Working Committees*. February 16. <http://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/en/node/687>. (Retrieved 12/09/2017).

⁹⁶ State Counsellor Office. (2017). *UPDJC Reaches Agreements on Most Issues Except Secession*. May 29. <http://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/en/node/902>. (Retrieved 12/09/2017).

⁹⁷ State Counsellor Office. (2017). *37 Points Signed as Part of Pyidaungsu Accord*. May 30. <http://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/en/node/904> (Retrieved 12/09/2017).

⁹⁸ A. Choudury. (2018). *The Third 21st Century Panglong Conference: A Review*. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. August 2. http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=5499. (Retrieved 30/08/2019).

compared to three days in the 2017 iteration. It took place amidst continuing skirmishes between the military and EAOs and between various ethnic armies in Kachin, Shan, Karen, and Mon states.

The 2018 Conference unusually tense in its unfolding, ended on a note of frustration and skepticism.⁹⁹ Several ethnic leaders were critical of the sluggishness of the dialogue process under the framework of the NCA, particularly the core negotiating parties' inability to deliberate upon what they deem as the most critical points of dialogue.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, agreements signed with NCA signatory EAOs and lateral meetings between Naypyitaw and non-NCA northern groups somewhat indicate forward movement in the peace process.

In the 2018 UPC, principles relating to political, economic social and land sectors were adopted under Part II of the Union Accord.¹⁰¹ This is a modest number compared to the 37 agreements reached in 2017 under Part I. Contentious political issues like the right to secession, self-determination, and full autonomy for states or regions were deliberately left out of discussions so as to proceed with the dialogue process. Though this allowed for the conference to proceed, the obfuscation of tricky agendas in a way severely limits the overall scope of the peace process.

Thus, it can be said that though the NLD as well as the military wanted to initiate and proceed with the peace process in the country, they wanted peace mainly on their own terms and they showed little enthusiasm about giving exactly what the ethnic minorities desired i.e. a federal state with self-autonomy. This is attested by

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Dr. Khin Zaw Win in which he said that the military generals and the leaders of the NLD lectured the representatives of the EAOs in the Union Peace Conference on ‘what is best for the country.’¹⁰²

4.9. Rohingya Crisis

Alleged discriminatory policies of Myanmar’s government since the late 1970s have compelled hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya to flee their homes in the predominantly Buddhist country. Most have crossed by land into Bangladesh, while others have taken to the sea to reach Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. In 2016 and 2017, the military and local security forces mounted a brutal campaign against the Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority mostly resided in the Arakan region in Myanmar, allegedly killing thousands of people and razing hundreds of villages. Rights groups and UN officials suspect that the military committed genocide against the Rohingya.¹⁰³

In 2019, Gambia filed the first international lawsuit against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice, accusing the country of violating the UN Genocide Convention. Both Suu Kyi’s government and the military have denied that ethnic cleansing is taking place, and Suu Kyi defended the military at a tribunal in the International Court of Justice at The Hague. Most Rohingyas have sought refuge in the neighbouring country Bangladesh, where resources and land

¹⁰² Email Interview with Khin Zaw Win. (2022). September 26. Director, Tampadipa Institute, Myanmar. Email id: k.z.win@protonmail.com

¹⁰³ BBC. (2020). Myanmar Rohingya: What you need to know about the crisis, 23 January. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>. (Retrieved 21/04/22).

to protect refugees are somewhat limited. Bangladesh has continued to insist that Rohingya refugees be repatriated back to Myanmar.¹⁰⁴

The instability and chaos caused by the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar attracted tremendous attention from the international community and human rights groups and as such Myanmar's government as well as the military force have been subjected to a lot of criticism. Even the Nobel Laureate, Aung Sang Suu Kyi has been severely condemned and criticized for her silence in the Rohingya crisis and for her actions in defending the military in the International Court of Justice at The Hague, Netherland in 2019. This subsequently leads to stripping of awards and recognitions given by various institutions and organizations.

The Rohingya crisis has a lot of implications in Myanmar both internally and externally. The image of the NLD as well as Aung San Suu Kyi has been adversely affected in the international scenario. But in domestic affairs, it has not been affected much as majority of Burman generally considered Rohingya Muslims as foreigner. But the violence and conflict associated with the crisis have an adverse impact on the reforms process in the country. Unless there is peace and stability in a country, developments as well as reforms cannot be implemented properly.

¹⁰⁴ Council on Foreign Relations. (2022). Myanmar's Troubled History: Coups, Military Rule, and Ethnic Conflict, 31 January. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule-ethnic-conflict-rohingya>. (Retrieved 21/06/2020).

4.10. The 2020 General Elections.

In the 2020 general elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 920 of the total 1,117 seats, which was upped by 61 seats from its win in the 2015 election. The main opposition party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), won 71 seats, down 46 from the 2015 election when it won 117 seats. The election result gave a strong mandate to the NLD for another five years. On the other hand, the USDP accused the NLD of engaging in electoral fraud including the buying of votes, and called for fresh elections in coordination with the military.

Following a complaint from its proxy party, the USDP, the military initially said it would conduct an investigation in 218 townships where the military personnel and their family members cast their votes, which it expanded to 314 townships in all states and regions across the country; ethnic parties also alleged that the NLD government made certain pre-poll decisions that disadvantaged the ethnic minorities. This finally led to the declaration of a state of emergency rule (the military coup) on 1 February 2021.

4.11. The Military Coup in 2021

The controversies surrounding the election culminated in a military coup on February 1, 2021, hours before the new parliament was to convene for the first time. In the early hours of the day, the military detained several leaders of the NLD party, including President Win Myint and State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi. Following the coup, the military handed power to its commander-in-chief and declared a state of emergency for a year. As is normally the case, the military

disrupted phone and internet connections both to the administrative capital Naypyitaw and the commercial capital Yangon, and the state television channel went off air.

Newly elected members of parliament were confined to their residential compounds. The military chief promised to hold a free and fair election and transfer power to the winning party without giving a timeline, which he said would lead to a ‘genuine discipline- flourishing multiparty democratic system.’¹⁰⁵ Later in the day, the military announced the removal of 24 ministers and their replacements in 11 ministries, including finance, defense, foreign and home affairs.

The military justified its action by saying that it was necessitated by the election commission’s failure to address allegations of electoral fraud, the refusal to postpone the new parliament session, and because of protests from people who were unhappy with the electoral outcome. The military also cited the state of emergency provision in the constitution on sovereignty matters saying that “Unless this problem is resolved, it will obstruct the path to democracy and it must therefore be resolved according to the law.”¹⁰⁶

The coup received a mixed response from both people inside the country and abroad. Democracy activists and NLD supporters were angry and shocked, and condemned the military’s action. But supporters of the coup celebrated by parading in pickup trucks and waving the national flag. In a similar pattern, there were both

¹⁰⁵ N. Kipgen. (2021). The 2020 Myanmar Election and the 2021 Coup: Deepening Democracy or Widening Division?. *Asian Affairs*. Vol. 52 (1). February. p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Reuters Staff. (2021). *Myanmar military seizes power, detains elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi*. Reuters. February 1. <https://www.reuters.com/article/myanmar-politics-int-idUSKBN2A11W6> (Retrieved 22/05/2021).

condemnations and silence from the international community. The United Nations and the European Union, and countries such as the US, Britain, Australia, India, and Japan condemned the coup or expressed concerns.

The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the military must reverse these actions immediately, while Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, a long-time supporter of Aung San Suu Kyi, called on the Biden administration to respond strongly.¹⁰⁷ The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Myanmar is a member, called for ‘dialogue, reconciliation and the return to normalcy.’ But some individual ASEAN members such as Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines were quick to suggest that the development was Myanmar’s internal affair.¹⁰⁸

Unsurprisingly, China did not join other major nations in condemning the military’s actions and instead called for all sides to respect the constitution. President Joe Biden in a statement said that “We will work with our partners throughout the region and the world to support the restoration of democracy and the rule of law, as well as to hold accountable those responsible for overturning Burma’s democratic transition.”¹⁰⁹

The military regime officially, called the State Administration Council (SAC) then, declared a ‘State of Emergency’ for one year and further detained and charged de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi with corruption and other crimes. Massive protests erupted nationwide in the weeks after the coup.

¹⁰⁷ Op cit, N. Kipgen. (2021). p. 12

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Reuters Staff. (2021). Suu Kyi’s party demands her release as Myanmar generals tighten grip’ *Reuters*. February 1. <https://www.reuters.com/article/myanmar-politics-int-idUSKBN2A13AK> (Retrieved 22/05/2021).

Tens of thousands of people, including health workers, bankers, and teachers, joined what was originally a peaceful civil disobedience movement, refusing to go to work until the elected government returned to power.

Eventually, ousted NLD lawmakers, protest leaders, and activists from several minority groups established a parallel government known as the National Unity Government (NUG). It aims to bring together the disparate groups opposed to the military, foster greater unity among ethnic groups, create an agenda for a post-junta Myanmar, and cultivate support from foreign governments. In September, the NUG declared war on the junta and formed an armed division known as the People's Defence Force (PDF).

In August 2022, General Min Aung Hlaing declared the extension of emergency in the country for another one year¹¹⁰. The military further extended the state of emergency for another six months on February 1, 2023 while the pro-democracy supporters responded with a silent strike urging people to stay indoors and close their business.¹¹¹ Since the coup, nearly 3,000 people have been killed, 1.5 million have been internally displaced, more than 13,000 are still detained in inhumane conditions, and four people are known to have been executed while at least 100 have been sentenced to death. In addition, 7.8 million children are out of school.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ The Indian Express. (2022). Myanmar leader announces extension of state of emergency, 2 August. <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/myanmar-leader-announces-extension-of-state-of-emergency-8064517/>. (Retrieved 12/08/2022).

¹¹¹ BBC News. (2023). Myanmar coup anniversary: Silent Strike Marks Two Years of Military Rule. February 1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-64481138>. (Retrieved 04/02/2023)

¹¹² Amnesty International. (2023). *Myanmar: Two Years After Coup, Global Action Needed to Halt Military's Nationwide Assault on Human Rights*. January 30. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/myanmar-coup-second-anniversary/> (Retrieved 04/02/2023).

The coup is likely to isolate or alienate the country, especially from the Western democracies. Sanctions are imposed by some countries, which will disrupt and perhaps even destroy the achievements and progress made in recent years, following the end of a decades-old military regime in 2010. The coup adversely disrupts the political reforms process in the country as well as the ongoing peace process with the country's ethnic armed groups.

Even if the military maintains the agreements reached thus far with the armed ethnic groups, they may at times resort to unilateral action against the armed groups, especially on issues where the two sides cannot reach a mutual agreement. The peace process, even if continued, will be without the involvement of the civilian government. Moreover, some people who are frustrated with the military coup are now joining the forces with groups that are fighting against the military. A sense of freedom which was felt under the aegis of democracy among the people has been taken away.

As the people of Myanmar have already tasted democracy in recent period, it may now be difficult for the military to gain legitimacy. But it is pertinent to accept that the military is still very powerful and plays a significant and integral role in the country's politics. A reverse wave of democratization through a coup does not only go against the wishes of the majority of the people, but also damages the credibility of the military as an institution. If past history is to be taken as a reference, there is no guarantee that the military will hold an election and will return power to the winning party as it has claimed it will.

Chapter-5

Implications of Political Reforms in Myanmar on India-Myanmar Relations

This chapter mainly discusses the relations between India and Myanmar in the post reforms period in Myanmar. It further discusses the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on the relations between India and Myanmar. It also describes the ongoing relations between the two countries in terms of political, economic, cultural, defence and strategy. The two countries have enjoyed historic, ethnic, cultural and religious ties. India's relations with Myanmar are guided by New Delhi's 'Look East Policy' now Act 'East policy', which served as an important tool of its foreign policy. Myanmar has taken a number of positive steps to engage the country with regional and global powers for the growth and development of the country.

It has the potential to become a convenient trade route for India's growing trade with South-east Asia. Besides ASEAN, India and Myanmar are also cooperating at sub-regional levels like Mekong Ganga cooperation (MGC), Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Myanmar is also an observer in SAARC. The international community generally desires Myanmar to democratize and seeks to ensure that a political transition, when it occurs in Myanmar, is as smooth as possible.

India ignited its well-known Look/Act East Policy symbolizing a necessary move in India's Strategic vision in its external policy and its position in the international domain. Since then, India and Myanmar relations have received a boost

from more aggressive initiatives in forging formal agreements and deepening economic, strategic, political, cultural and people-to-people ties between them.¹ Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi came into power in 2014 and continued the commitment to the Look East Policy and renamed it ‘Act East Policy’ since then.

5.1. Myanmar’s Improvement in International Relations

The new government of Myanmar in 2011 under the leadership of Thein Sein has been engaging in serious reform process and has set itself an ambitious agenda of achieving good governance to achieve national political reconciliation and rapid economic development. The new developments in Myanmar have also evoked great interest amongst the international community. Myanmar’s relations with the international community, particularly with the Western nations, significantly improved in 2012.

In recognition of Myanmar’s democratic reforms, the European Union (EU) on 23 April, 2012 agreed to suspend sanctions except for arms embargo.² The EU, however, cautioned that sanctions were temporarily lifted and could be reinstated if the Myanmar government backtracks on its democratic reforms. The suspension of sanctions removed travel restrictions imposed on more than 800 companies and nearly 500 individuals. It also allowed the EU to resume financial assistance to

¹ Salmer Haider abd Ruhee Neog. (2017). Three Years of the Modi Government. *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*. p. 19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09416> (Retrieved 12/05/2020).

² T. Fuller and P. Geitner. (2012). European Union Suspends Most Myanmar Sanctions. *The New York Times*, 23 April. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/20/world/europe/europe-to-ease-sanctions-on-myanmar.html>. (Retrieved 13/04/2019).

Myanmar.³ In a similar move, Australia lifted its travel and financial sanctions on June 7, 2012.⁴

One of Myanmar's staunchest critic for more than two decades, the US government, also eased investment sanctions with effect from 11 July, allowing US Companies to begin investing in Myanmar. The White House stated that sanctions were suspended in recognition of significant progress towards economic reforms.⁵ With the lifting of investment restrictions, the US companies and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) began to re-establish links with Myanmar. The suspension of investment sanctions was followed by suspension of import bans from Myanmar on 26 September, 2012 in response to the continued economic and political reforms. In an immediate response to the suspension of import bans, President Thein Sein said that the people of Myanmar were very pleased and very grateful to the US government.⁶

One of the most significant developments in international relations was the visit of President Obama to Myanmar on 19 November. The president's visit was criticized by several rights groups, who argued that it was premature to make such a high-profile visit when violence still continued in Kachin and Rakhine states and when many political prisoners still remained behind bars. The Obama administration's justification was that the president's visit was to acknowledge the ongoing democratic reforms and to encourage further reform.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ White House. (2012). Statement by the President on the Easing of Sanctions on Burma, 11 July. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/07/11/statement-president-easing-sanctions-burma>. (Retrieved 20/04/2019).

⁶ Radio Free Asia. (2012). U.S. Eases Import Ban on Burma, 26 September. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/sanctions-09262012182211.html>. (Retrieved 23/04/2019).

The year 2012 saw different facets of politics in Myanmar. On a positive note, the USDP government and the NLD reconciled their differences and contested the 2012 by-elections. The successful conduct of by-elections and the release of political prisoners convinced the EU, Australia and the US to suspend sanctions. On the other hand, the sectarian violence in Rakhine state and the armed conflict between the KIO/KIA and the Myanmar Army jeopardized, if not hampered, the political transition. Empirical evidence suggests that the Thein Sein government had shown sincere commitment towards democratic reforms. The cooperation between Thein Sein administration and the opposition groups and improvement of diplomatic relations with other nations showed that the president's initiatives on democratic reforms had the support of the Myanmar people and that of the international community.

In parallel to the political transition, steps were undertaken to resolve longstanding ethnic conflict. By August 2013, the government had reached bilateral cease-fire agreements with 14 ethnic armed groups and began working toward a nationwide cease-fire agreement. However, only eight groups signed the accord in October 2015, and some major groups did not participate. Ceasefire signatories were removed from the list of 'unlawful associations,' creating space for these groups to play a role in democratic politics in the future.

In addition to ethnic conflict, anti-Muslim sentiment and Buddhist nationalism have emerged as a critical feature of politics in Myanmar, particularly in Rakhine state, where about one-third of the population are Muslim, many of whom self-identify as Rohingya. The government does not necessarily recognize the

Rohingya as an ethnic group. Relations between the ethnic Rakhine Buddhist majority and Muslim minority deteriorated to their worst level beginning in June 2012, when intercommunal violence across Rakhine state left hundreds dead or injured and tens of thousands displaced. To quell violence, the government separated the communities, isolating around 130,000 displaced Rohingya in camps and imposing heavy travel and other restrictions on the Muslim population as a whole.

5.2. Importance of Myanmar for India

Myanmar is perfectly situated to play the critical role of an economic bridge between India and ASEAN. Myanmar is the key to success of India's Look East/Act East policy, a policy which is aimed at strengthening India's relations with all ASEAN member states. India sees Myanmar as a natural partner and attaches great importance to its relation with Myanmar. As Myanmar stands at the threshold of political and economic transition to a democratic system and market economy, the two countries' relations are set to move to a higher plane, acquiring new depth and substance. This has also provided India and opportunity to work as equal partners to revive ancient links and rediscover the immense possibilities of cooperation that exist between the two countries.

The government of India is actively involved in over a dozen projects in Myanmar, both in infrastructural and non-infrastructural areas. These include upgradation and resurfacing of the 160km. long Tamu-Kaletwa road; construction and upgradation of Rih-Tiddim Road in Myanmar; the Kaldan Multimodal Transport Project etc. India can offer to establish development corridors along various

infrastructural project routes, with backward and forward linkages, which would be beneficial in bringing growth in both countries.

5.3. Improvement of Relations between India and Myanmar

The Indian missions in Myanmar have been encouraging Indian companies to come and assess opportunities in Myanmar. The response has been overwhelming and today when we are talking about India-Myanmar relations; there are more than 40 Indian businessmen in Nay Pyi Taw from Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Kolkata.⁷ As the investment climate in Myanmar improves, Indian companies are bound to invest in a variety of sectors for mutual benefit. There have been increasing interactions between both countries at all level covering the entire gamut of relations. This trend needs to be encouraged and provided right directions.

Myanmar has witnessed a number of positive political developments in recent period. It drafted a new Constitution, held a referendum to approve it, organized elections and put in place a new Parliament and installing a civilian led government although it was recently revert back by the military. Defence and security cooperation between the two countries is important as Myanmar needs security and stability to promote reforms processes. Anticipating these challenges, India and Myanmar can cooperate in non-traditional security issues, which may arise in the region.

⁷ S. Thanggal. (2014). Message. India-Myanmar: Rebuilding Synergies and Strengthening Partnership. In Rajiv K. Bhatia et al. (eds.) *Change in Myanmar*. New Delhi: Shipra Publication.

India's policy towards Myanmar in the last two decade has thus been primarily directed by realist paradigm and geo-strategic factors rather than deep ideological commitment to democracy. Ever since mid-1990s, India has tried to normalize relations with Myanmar regardless of the kind of government in power there. According to J.N. Dixit, "While India remains committed to democracy and related values, there was no reason for India to unilaterally assume responsibility of creating democracies in other countries. This had to be the choice and responsibility of the people of the country concerned, in this case the people of Myanmar".⁸ This purposeful shift by India from an idealistic foreign policy to one that was firmly anchored in realist politics has been the driving force behind the improvement of relations between the two countries since 1990s.

The pace of democratic reforms in Myanmar in recent times, however, speed up India's engagement with Myanmar. Even Aung San Suu Kyi said in an interview to NDTV in 2012, "Well, I was saddened then, but I got over sadness a long time ago... Politics involves a lot of pragmatism and if India felt that it was more pragmatic for them to follow a certain line, then that's the line they would follow and that might not be what we've wished for. But I don't think we have the right to condemn India or any other country for following the line that they thought was best for them".⁹ Thus, the changing foreign policy of Myanmar owing to the democratic reforms in the country significantly open up an opportunity for India to engage more seriously with Myanmar.

⁸ J.N. Dixit. (2000). India and Myanmar in a Crucial Relationship. India News, Online Edition. <http://news.indiamart.com/index.html>. (Retrieved 15 March, 2020).

⁹ Suu Kyi. (2012). Interview to NDTV, November 15. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/full-transcript-my-farewell-message-for-my-husband-was-too-late-says-aung-san-suu-kyi-to-ndtv-504680>. (Retrieved 15 March, 2020).

5.3.1 Exchange of High-Level Visits

India and Myanmar enjoy deep-rooted and multifaceted relations for centuries, enabled by common geography, history and cultural roots that they share. These close, friendly and good neighbourly relations have been strengthened further through exchange of high level visits in recent times. Since they began, high-level visits have been a consistent part of India and Myanmar bilateral relationship. Shri S.M. Krishna, Minister of External Affairs (EAM), was the first high-level dignitary to visit Myanmar on June 20-22, 2011, after the creation of the new administration on March 30, 2011, which was headed by President U Thein Sein.

He was accompanied on the trip by Smt. Nirupama Rao, who was the Secretary of Foreign Affairs. During this visit, S.M. Krishna and H.E. U Soe Thane, the Minister of Industry-II of Myanmar, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the establishment of an Indo-Myanmar Industrial Training Centre in Myingyan in Myanmar. In addition, documents concerning the building of ten 500-ton rice silos with support from the Indian government totaling US\$ 2 million were handed over. This construction took place in the Yangon and Ayeyarwaddy Divisions.¹⁰

On October 12-15, 2011, President Thein Sein embarked on a State Visit to the Republic of India. Following the installation of a new government in Myanmar in March 2011, this trip was the first state visit from Myanmar to India since the country's new leader took office. The meeting between President Thein Sein and the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, was followed by delegation level

¹⁰ Ibid.

negotiations between the two countries. He was joined by the Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Hla Htay Win, the Minister for Border Affairs and Myanmar Industrial Development Lieutenant General Thein Htay, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs Lieutenant General Thein Htay. U. Wunna Maung Lwin is the current Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation of Myanmar.¹¹

U Myint Hlaing is the Minister for Religious Affairs in the Myanmar government. Thura U Zaw Min is the Minister for National Planning and Economic Development as well as Livestock and Fisheries. U Myint Maung is the Minister for Industry. U Soe Thane is the Minister for Electric Power. U Tin Naing Thein is the Minister of Transport of the Myanmar government. U Nyan Tun Aung, the Minister for Energy, U Than Htay, the Minister for Science and Technology, U Aye Myint, the Minister of Commerce, U Win Myint, and the Deputy Minister for Health, Dr. Win Myint, along with other high-ranking government officials were present.

During the visit, two documents were signed: the Memorandum of Understanding for the Upgrading of the Yangon Children's Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital; and the Programme of Cooperation in Science & Technology for the period of 2012-2015. Both of these documents were related to the upgrading of hospitals in Yangon and Sittwe.¹²

A high-level legislative team travelled to India from December 11-17, 2011, under the leadership of the Speaker of the Lower House, Thura U Shwe Mann. This

¹¹ Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). (2011). Government of India. Joint Statement on the occasion of the State Visit of the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to India, 14 October. <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5326/Joint+Statement+on+the+occasion+of+the+State+Visit+of+the+President+of+the+Republic+of+the+Union+of+Myanmar+to+India>. (Retrieved 02/04/20201)

¹² Op. cit, MEA. (2012).

visit took place as a direct result of an invitation made jointly by Shri M. Hamid Ansari, Vice President of India and Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, and Smt. Meira Kumar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha during that time. The team from Myanmar came to India with the intention of learning from India's expertise in parliamentary practices and procedures. This was the purpose of the visit. From the 22nd to the 26th of January, 2012, Myanmar's Minister of Foreign Affairs, U Wunna Maung Lwin, travelled to India for official business. During the course of the tour, he paid a visit to the Prime Minister and participated in bilateral conversations with EAM. During the course of his trip, he gave a talk entitled 'Myanmar: A Country in Transition to Democracy' at the Indian Council for World Affairs in New Delhi.¹³

Dr. Manmohan Singh, the then Prime Minister of India, made a state visit to Myanmar on the 27th through the 29th of May, 2012. During the course of the visit, the Prime Minister made a number of important announcements and signed 12 memorandums of understanding and agreements. These included the extension of a new line of credit (LOC) to Myanmar in the amount of US\$500 million, support for the establishment of an Advanced Centre for Agriculture Research and Education in Yezin, a Rice Bio-park in the Integrated Demonstration Park in Nay Pyi Taw, and an Information Technology Institute in Mandalay, among other things. In addition, significant agreements were reached, such as the Air Service Agreement, the Establishment of Joint Trade and Investment Forum, the Memorandum of

¹³ Ibid.

Understanding on Border Areas Development, and the Border Haats and Cultural Exchange Program.¹⁴

The present Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi also visited Myanmar from November 11-13 in 2014 to attend the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and 9th East Asia Summit. The then External Affairs Minister of India, Shusma Swaraj visited Myanmar in August 2016. Meanwhile, Htin Kyaw, the newly elected President of Myanmar during that time visited India in August 2016. Myanmar's State Counsellor and Foreign Minister, Aung San Suu Kyi also visited India in October 2016 to attend the BIMSTEC Retreat and BRICS summit. The then India's Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan also visited Myanmar in February 2017 with the intention of strengthening hydrocarbon relations between India and Myanmar.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi again visited India to attend the 69th Republic Day celebration in New Delhi. At the invitation of His Excellency Shri Ram Nath Kovind, the President of the Republic of India, His Excellency, U Win Myint, the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Daw Cho Cho, the First Lady are paying a State Visit to India from 26 to 29 February 2020.

The visit reinforced the tradition of high level interactions, symbolizing the strong friendly relations existing between the two neighbours. During the interactions, the leaders discussed a wide range of bilateral, regional and international issues of common interest. They emphasized that regular high level interactions have added momentum to the bilateral relations. They welcomed the

¹⁴ Ibid.

synergies between Myanmar's independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy and India's 'Act East' and 'Neighbourhood First' policies, and reaffirmed their commitments to further strengthen partnership, explore new avenues of cooperation in order to expand bilateral relations for the mutual benefit of the two countries and peoples.

India and Myanmar leaders and officials in general have been enthusiastically discussing their opinions on strengthening their existing friendly relations. In October 2020, India and Myanmar trying to improve bilateral relations by a high level visit by Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and Chief of Army Staff Gen. M.M. Naravane from India to the eastern neighbour. Myanmar and the Northeast India maintains the focus of India's geopolitical policy towards the east. The essential aspects including connectivity, security and defence cooperation, borders, development assistance, energy cooperation, trade and commerce and people-to-people relations were the focal areas of interaction.

In early 2012, India offered a US\$ 500-million loan to Myanmar for development in several areas including health, infrastructure and power generation of which US\$ 140 million is for infrastructure.¹⁵ Emphasizing the importance of promoting the well-being of the people in the remote areas across the borders of the two countries, both sides agreed to commence the establishment of the border haats, with a priority to carry out a pilot project, which was previously agreed by both sides in accordance with the MoU signed in 2012. The two sides look forward to setting up of border haats after finalizing the mutually agreed Mode of Operation.

¹⁵ A. Kumar. (2021). India-Myanmar Relations: A Strategic Perspective. New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd. p. 39.

Both sides also expressed satisfaction at the success of the Myanmar-India Border Area Development Programmes in providing infrastructure and socio-economic development in Chin State and Naga Self-Administered Region through the Indian grant-in-aid projects. Under this, 43 schools, 18 health centres and 51 bridges and roads have been constructed in the above areas over the last three years. Both sides acknowledged with satisfaction that 29 additional projects under the 4th year's tranche of assistance of US\$ 5 million, will be implemented in 2020-21.¹⁶

Both leaders took note of the positive developments related to the Sittwe Port and the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project. They welcomed the appointment, since 1 February 2020, of a Port Operator to operate and maintain the Sittwe Port and Paletwa Inland Water Transport Terminal and associated facilities. Once operational, this port will contribute to the economic development of the region and benefit the local people.

Both sides also reaffirmed their commitment to the early completion of the Paletwa-Zorinpui road – the final leg of the Kaladan project. Once completed, the road will connect Sittwe Port to North-East India, generating more traffic for the Port. India appreciated Myanmar's cooperation and efforts in facilitating the movement of project personnel, construction material and equipment for the construction of the road component of Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project across the Mizoram border through Zorinpui southwards towards Paletwa.¹⁷

¹⁶ MEA. (2020). India-Myanmar Joint Statement during the State Visit of the President of Myanmar to India, February 26-29. <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral/documents.htm?dtl/32435/IndiaMyanmar+Joint+Statement+during+the+State+Visit+of+the+President+of+Myanmar+to+India+February+2629+2020>. (Retrieved 23/02/2022).

¹⁷ Op cit, MEA. (2012).

5.4. Major Indian Projects in Myanmar

Over a dozen projects, both infrastructure-related and non-infrastructure-related, are now being worked on in Myanmar with active participation from the Indian government. The upgrading and resurfacing of the 160-kilometer-long Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo road is one example of this. Other examples include the building and upgrading of the Rih-Tiddim Road in Myanmar, the Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project, and other similar endeavours. TCIL has successfully finished an ADSL project that provided high-speed data connections in 32 cities around Myanmar. Participating companies in the energy industry in Myanmar include ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), GAIL, and ESSAR. M/s RITES is a company that supplies railway coaches, locos, and components in addition to participating in the development of the rail transportation system.

The Ministry of Electric Power-1 (MoEP-1) and the NHPC signed an agreement for the development of the Tamanthi and Shwezaye Hydro-Electric Power project in the Chindwin River valley in September of 2008. Additionally, the NHPC has submitted the updated DPR on the Tamanthi project, and it is currently working on the DPR for the Shwezaye project. Both projects are located in the Chindwin River valley. On December 31, 2010, TATA Motors opened a large turbo-truck assembly factory that they had put up in Myanmar with financial support from the Government of India (GOI). An India-Myanmar Industrial Training Centre was established in Pakokku, Myanmar, with the assistance of the Government of India.

A second centre is currently being established in Myingyan, while the Myanmar-India Centre for English Language Training (MICELT), a Myanmar-India

Entrepreneurship Development Centre (MIEDC), and an India-Myanmar Centre for Enhancement of Information Technology Skills (IMCEITS) are all operational. Other projects include the restoration of the Ananda Temple in Bagan, the modernization of the Yangon Children's Hospital and the Sittwe General Hospital, and the construction of rice storage facilities that are resistant to natural disasters. Additionally, India has provided assistance in the rehabilitation of one high school and six elementary schools in the township of Tarlay, which was the region of north-eastern Myanmar that was hit the worst by the devastating earthquake that occurred in March 2011.

The Government of India is actively involved in over a dozen projects in Myanmar, both in infrastructural and non-infrastructural areas. These includes¹⁸:

- Upgradation and resurfacing of the 160 km long Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo Friendship Road;
- Construction and upgradation of the Rih-Tiddim Road in Myanmar;
- The Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP);
- Proposed Imphal – Mandalay Bus Service;
- ADSL project for high-speed data link in 32 Myanmar cities has been completed by TCIL.
- ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), GAIL and ESSAR are participants in the energy sector in Myanmar.
- M/S RITES is involved in the development of the rail transportation system and in the supply of railway coaches, locos and parts.

¹⁸ S. Trivedi. (2014). Message. India-Myanmar: Rebuilding Synergies and Strengthening Partnership. In Rajiv K. Bhatia et al. (eds.) *Change in Myanmar*. New Delhi: Shipra Publication. p. 84.

- In September 2008, Ministry of Electric Power-1 (MoEP-1) and NHPC signed an agreement for the development of the Tamanthi and Shwezaye Hydro-Electric Power project in Chindwin River valley.
- A heavy turbo-truck assembly plant set up in Myanmar by TATA Motors with GOI financial assistance was inaugurated on December 31, 2010.
- An India-Myanmar Industrial Training Centre has been set up by HMT (1) in Myanmar with the assistance of GOI in Pakokku, a second centre is being set up in Myingyan.
- Myanmar-India Centre for English Language Training (MICELT);
- Myanmar-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre (MIEDC) and;
- India-Myanmar Centre for Enhancement of Information Technology Skills (IMCEITS);
- Restoration of the Ananda Temple in Bagan;
- Upgradation of the Yangon Children's Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital;
- Erection of disaster proof rice silos; and
- In the reconstruction of one high school and six primary schools in Tarlay township, the area worst affected by the severe earthquake that struck north-eastern Myanmar in March 2011.

5.4.1. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project

The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (Kaladan Project) would bridge eastern flank seaports of Kolkata of India to its less utilised landlocked Northeastern state of Mizoram of India by crossing Arakan, Sittwe and Chin States of Myanmar via a recently constructed river and highway transportation

arrangement. India conceived the project intended to develop a route between its mainland and India's Northeast region for trade purposes which is a crucial component of India's Look (Act) East Policy.

The Kaladan Project is expected to strengthen the economic linkages with Myanmar and the rest of Southeast Asia. The original map conceptualised the Kaladan Project as a precursor to establishing a gas pipeline along the same route, and financing for the entire Project-currently estimated at US\$ 214 million-is being provided through the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).¹⁹

In April 2008, Myanmar and India signed a foundational agreement titled the Framework Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Union of Myanmar for the construction and operation of a multi-modal transit transport facility on Kaladan River connecting the Sittwe port in Myanmar with the state of Mizoram in India.²⁰ Since the Framework Agreement work has progressed sporadically, and the Project is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2020 after many delays.²¹

The Kaladan Project has geo-strategic significance for India as it is one of the endeavours by India to safeguard its interests in Southeast and East Asia by connecting the Mizoram state of India to Sittwe port of Myanmar.²² Indian scholars

¹⁹ Conference Report. (2015). India-Myanmar Relations: Looking from the Borders. *Institute of Social Science: Burma Centre Delhi*. New Delhi.

²⁰ MEA. (2017).

http://mea.gov.in/lokabha.htm?dt/28382/QUESTION_N06280_KALADAN_MULTIMODAL_TRAN_SIT_TRANSPORT. (Retrieved 21/01/2018).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

often raise the point that China's presence is expanding rapidly in the region, so simultaneously India must make some moves before it is left behind in the race.

To counter-balance China's growing influence in the region, especially in the Bay of Bengal, the Kaladan Project and port at Sittwe can be utilised by India. China's famously known 'String of Pearls'²³ strategy has Sittwe along with the Coco Islands and Kyauk Phyu which is often considered the major bases in its strategy. India has considered the Bay of Bengal its domain of influence and had always put efforts to maintain the status quo. India-Myanmar have been increasing their naval cooperation by engaging themselves in the IMNEX-March 2018 bilateral naval exercise with Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal to secure maritime borders.²⁴

5.4.2. Rihkhawdar-Tedim-Falam Road Project

Champhai in Mizoram is being connected to Rihkhawdar in Myanmar through a 225 km Rihkhawdar-Tedim-Falam (RTF) road. There are two very significant border trade points on the Indo-Myanmar border at Moreh and Champhai which were operationalised in 1994 and 2004, respectively. It has also been proposed by Indian railway that a railway link should be established with Myanmar through Northeast in the Jiribam-Imphal-Morch sector. It is proposed to extend this line up to Mandalay on the Delhi-Hanoi railway link. There is already an 80 km Rihkhawdar-Tedim road which connects Myanmar with Mizoram. It is also called an essential

²³ The String of Pearls is an alleged strategy deployed by China, by building a network of commercial and military bases and ports in many countries. This strategy has been deployed by China to protect its trade interests, as a major chunk of its trade passes through the Indian Ocean and various choke points like Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca and Lombok Strait.

²⁴ Op cit, A. Kumar. (2021). p. 44.

lifeline for increasing trade and commerce between the two countries and measure gain in Champhai district of Mizoram.

After declaring open for all, the Rihkhawdar-Tedim road will take its course and boost up trade and development between both the countries. There are confined businesses at the trade centre in Champhai due to the pity road connectivity on the Myanmar side. During the July 2010 visit of the Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman, State Peace and Development Council of Myanmar to India, it was decided that the construction and revamping of the Rihkhawdar-Tedim road in Myanmar would be financed through grant assistance of US\$ 60 million from India.²⁵

The proposed project has not taken shape because the road is in a poor condition at present. India can assist Myanmar to make it single lane road. By doing so, there will be a direct train and travel connections between Myanmar and Mizoram. There would be maximum benefits of making investments in the Zokhawthar Land custom Station (LCS) in Mizoram. Rihkhawdar is the adjoining town on the Myanmar sides and there is no proper road from Rihkhawdar to Myanmar. There is no mettled road from Kalemryo via Tedim to Myanmar. It is a kutchra road in literal terms which can be used only in dry weather. The road between the Indian border, Zokhawthar and Rihkhawdar town in Myanmar for 5 km required repairs and upgradation.

²⁵ Ministry of DONER, Government of India, (2010). Joint Statement During the visit of Chairman, State Peace and Development Council of Myanmar. https://mdoner.gov.in/contentimages/files/JointStatement_27.7.pdf. (Retrieved 15/09/2019).

Rihkhawdar-Tedim road connects Mandalay through Monywa. This is the only stretch between Zokhawthar and Mandalay in Myanmar. Indian Railway Construction Company Ltd (IRCON) has formulated the detailed proposal of the Rihkhawdar-Tedim, 80 km road worth Rs 298 crore.²⁶ The Committee of Non-Plan Expenditure (CNE) has already approved the proposal. The task has been decided to meet the completion after three years of requisite approvals. Another project that India has agreed to fulfill of Rihkhawdar-Tedim road development project in Myanmar. The Ministry of External Affairs has demanded technical support from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MORTH) for the above mentioned road.

Trade between India and Myanmar takes place on a regular basis but in limited volume via the Zokhawthar LCS. The Zokhawthar-Rihkhawdar trading point is more peaceful than the Moreh-Tamu border point even though there is a larger volume of trade exchange. Champhai is the closest town from the border, nearly an hour drive of 33 km at Zokhawthar in Mizoram. The road from Champhai to Zokhawthar is under construction and near completion with the assistance of ADB.

This road has been proposed to be widened at several points due to its likely use by the people. Champhai is 186 km away from Aizwal, the capital of Mizoram. It takes about 6 hours to cover the journey by bus. The road has to be upgraded on the Manipur side and made capable of handling heavy vehicles if an increase in trade is expected through border point at Mizoram. At present, the real picture differs but Zokhawthar-Rihkhawdar border point has high potential to increase the interaction

²⁶ Op cit, A. Kumar. (2021). p. 52.

between India's Northeast and Myanmar. The opening of the Rihkhawdar-Tedim road is also expected to boost bilateral trade between the two countries.²⁷

5.4.3. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway

It has utmost significance for all the three countries involved. Its primary purpose is to make connectivity from Moreh (India) to Mae Sot (Thailand) through Myanmar. The authorities have been proposed two routes-one through Mandalay and another one is bypassing Mandalay. Myanmar is interested in Mandalay route and requested the same to India. Myanmar's importance in Mandalay route lies in the significance of commerce angle for Mandalay which is the commercial city of the country. The two routes are:

- Moreh (India)- Tamu-Kalewa-Chaungma-Yinmabin-Pale-Kyadet-Lingadaw-Bagan-Kyaukpadaung-Meiktilabypass-Taungoo-Oktwin-Payagyi-Theinzayat-Thaton-Hpaan-Kawareik-Myawaddy-Mae Sot(Thailand) (bypassing Mandalay)
- Moreh (India) -Tamu-Kalewa-Yagyi-Chaungma-Monywa-Mandalay-Meiktila bypass Taungoo-Oktwin-Payagyi-Theinzayat-Thaton-HpaanKawkareik-Myawaddy-Mae Sot (through Mandalay).

Stretches:

- AH 1- 1650 km (Myawaddy-Yangon-Mandalay-Tamu)
- AH 2-807 km (Tachileik-Meikhtila-Tamu)

²⁷ India-Myanmar pact on combating terror hailed in NE. (2010). *The Assam Tribune*. September, 15. <https://assamtribune.com/india-myanmar-pact-on-combating-terror-hailed-in-ne>. (Retrieved 30/11/2018).

- AH 3-93 km (Mongla-Kyaing Tong)
- AH 14-453 km (Muse-Mandalay)

The road between Kalewa-Yagyi-Chaungma-Monywa is not adequately developed. It has been estimated that an amount of US\$ 140 million would be spent on building the 3,200 km of trilateral highway using her good offices.²⁸ India has promised to extend a loan amount of US\$ 500 million for constructing area of the road connecting India and Thailand via Myanmar.²⁹ The Manipur sight has been visited by the officials of ADB to do a technical survey and assess the total cost on the ground. The preliminary reports have also been submitted and examined by the Roadways Ministry, and then it would be forwarded to the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) after passing all the technical aspects.

It has also been made clear by the ADB to finance Northeast-Myanmar connectivity road project. Northeast inner connectivity with Myanmar via Moreh border town has vital importance from the economic growth angle. The distance from Moreh to Imphal is 110 km, and both places are connected by NH 39. It takes two hours to reach Imphal from Moreh. Imphal is also connected with Guwahati by NH 36, 37 and 39. The journey from Guwahati to Imphal nearly takes 12 hours to reach at present, with many stretches being in a poor state. Another option for travelling from Imphal to Guwahati via Haflong is also being considered, which is a shorter but more difficult route and suggestions for upgrading this Imphal-Silchar

²⁸ Op cit, A. Kumar. (2021). p. 54.

²⁹ Ibid.

road are also being considered.³⁰ Both countries should consider this project on priority as this connectivity would improve and boost up the economic flow.

India has also given the proposal to connect Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos with ports and Special Economic Zones (SEZ) of the ASEAN under the Trilateral Highway. This will work upon innovative financial and institutional mechanism. There is enormous scope for expansion of physical connectivity due to the development of soft infrastructure along these corridors.

5.4.4. The Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo Road Project

The India-Myanmar Friendship Road (160 km) was conceived in 1993 and was inaugurated in 2001. The road was entirely built by India, a gift to Myanmar, and now it's a part of the Asian Highway.³¹ India's BRO has built the Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo Friendship Road across the border from Moreh. For upgrading road network in the Northeast, a loan of US\$ 125.2 million has been signed between India and ADB.³²

The maintenance task of this road has been handed over to Myanmar. However, there are 70 weak bridges along the road, of which only one has been repaired by Myanmar so far, while the remaining 69 bridges need repair and upgradation.³³ The Border Road Organisation would not take responsibility for

³⁰ V.S. Seshadri. (2014). Transforming Connectivity Corridors between India and Myanmar into Development Corridors. *Research and Information System for Developing Countries*. https://ris.org.in/sites/default/files/Trans%20Report_0.pdf. (Retrieved 09/01/2017).

³¹ A. Baruah. (2001). India, Myanmar Road Opened. *Mizzima*. February, 13. <https://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/200102/msg00033.html>. (Retrieved 21/04/2018).

³² Op cit, A. Kumar. (2021). p. 55.

³³ Op cit, V.S. Seshadri. (2014).

repairing them, rather it is the Myanmar government's responsibility. It is also included in the Trilateral Highway.

5.4.5. Proposed Imphal-Mandalay Bus Service

In early 2015, a field survey for the proposed 579 km Imphal-Mandalay bus service began comprising a joint team from India and Myanmar which was initially submitted to the MORTH and the MDONER in 2009.³⁴ The entire range is expected to be the all-weather road. Three routes are under consideration in this proposal. The Imphal-The Moreh stretch is of about 110 km while the rest of the stretch from Moreh to Mandalay is of about 469 km. Both sides have signed the MOU for bus service from Imphal to Moreh and Moreh to Mandalay which was amended in 2012 and then in 2014, after the second meeting of the technical committee.

The members of the joint special team from both the countries had looked into the problems of construction of the road. The findings of the joint team recommend that the patch from Imphal to Moreh was in a good state, but as far as the route from Moreh to Yagi and Moreh to Gangawis is concerned, it was not in a good state. The above said MOU is yet to be ratified by both the parties. The technical committee proposed three routes for the bus service. However, the second route was not usable, especially in the rainy season. The committee has also observed that 70 bridges in the Yagi-Kalewa stretch required repairs and upgradations.

There is no doubt in the fact that both countries under the British rule did not have any rail and road links between them. The bus service between Imphal and

³⁴ Ministry of DONER, Government of India. (2012). *Bi-Lateral Projects with Myanmar & Indian Projects to Promote Connectivity & Trade with NEER*. <https://mdoner.gov.in/myanmar>. (Retrieved 17/0/2018)

Mandalay has a vital role to play not only in their bilateral trade but for the development of tourism in India and Myanmar. However, illegal trade remained the issue as this is one of the engaged routes for drug trafficking from Asia to Europe. This route is expected to be the impetus in increasing the legal trade and reducing the illegal one once it is operational. Passengers are required to possess valid passports and may be granted single-entry visas valid for 28 days on arrival.³⁵

In 2014, Route 1 was finalised and the bus-service was supposed to get operationalised from April 7, 2020 but it was disrupted due to COVID-19 pandemic.³⁶ The length of this route is 579 km long which can be covered in 14 hours. India and Myanmar are keen to enhance people-to-people contact on both sides to improve linkages. It has been decided that visa on arrival facility must be made available to travelers to ensure them easy access on both sides. Many people from the Indian state of Manipur have their relatives and businesses in Mandalay, Myanmar. It has also been felt by the experts that linking India with Myanmar and then to Southeast Asia is of utmost significance for India.

However, there has been no progress in this direction and it is still documented only. According to Myanmar's Ministry of Construction, there are plans in place to increase roads within the country, which will connect bilateral and multilateral projects in the tunnel and primarily benefit India's Northeast and neighbouring states like Thailand. Myanmar has significant national transport

³⁵ Htaung Sian Kan. (2017). Current Status and Challenges to Facilitation of International Railway Transport in Myanmar. Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network and Global Smart Rail Conference. Ministry of Transport and Communication, Myanmar.
https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/6E_Final%20report_TARWG.pdf. (Retrieved 14/05/2019).

³⁶ Op cit, A. Kumar. (2021). p. 57.

connectivity corridors in the tunnel, Mandalay-Tamu is one of the vital corridors. Once the Ministry of Construction of Myanmar will take the approval from the Parliament, implementation of the project will be started. The expected time for completion of all projects is estimated to be around 30 years. India has signed an agreement with Myanmar to upgrade the road links in Rakhine state in Myanmar worth US\$ 20 million and the Myiktina-Putao worth US\$ 140 million.³⁷

5.5. Commercial and Economic Relations

Trade between the two countries has increased substantially over the last three decades, growing from US\$ 12.4 million in 1980-1981 to US\$ 1070.88 million in 2010-2011.³⁸ Agricultural goods account for the vast majority of India's imports from Myanmar (beans, pulses and forest based products form 90 percent of our imports). Steel in its raw and semi-finished forms as well as medicines make up the bulk of India's exports to Myanmar. According to Yangon's Central Statistical Organization (CSO), the following is a breakdown of the city's exports and imports:

Table 5: India- Myanmar Bilateral Trade 2006-12 (US\$ million)

Year	India's Export	India's Import	Total	Trade Balance
2006-07	139.95	781.93	921.19	(-) 641.98
2007-08	185.43	809.94	995.37	(-) 624.51
2008-09	221.64	928.97	1150.61	(-) 707.33
2009-10	207.97	1289.8	1497.77	(-) 1081.83
2010-11	194.75	876.13	1070.88	(-) 681.38
2011-12 (Apr-Dec)	217.65	763.32	814.6	(-) 545.67

Source: *Central Statistical Organization, Myanmar* from MEA. Government of India. (2012). India-Myanmar Relations, July. <https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/myanmar-july-2012.pdf>.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 58.

³⁸ Op cit, MEA. (2012)

An agreement called a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed in February of 2000 between the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industry. Both of these organizations represent businesses and industries in Myanmar. In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was formed between the CII and the Myanmar Computer Federation (MCF) in the year 2001. An agreement on the establishment of a Joint Task Force was signed in 2004 between the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) and the Confederation of India Industry. In the same year, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Myanmar-India Business Club (MIBC) and the Federation of Industries and Commerce of North-Eastern Region. Both of these organizations are in Myanmar.

Reviewing and establishing policy goals for bilateral commerce between the two nations has been made possible thanks to the Joint Trade Committee (JTC), which is led by each country's Minister of Commerce. The Joint Trade Committee was established in 2003; it had had four meetings, the fourth meeting took place in September 2011, and it has been very effective in directing the fast expansion of business connections between the two nations. At the 4th Joint Trade Commission meeting, both parties discussed the state of bilateral trade and investment and reached an agreement to raise the level of bilateral trade to US\$ 3 billion by 2015.³⁹

United Bank of India signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with three Myanmar national banks - Myanma Foreign Trade Bank, Myanma Economic

³⁹ Ibid.

Bank, and & Myanma Investment and Commercial Bank in 2008 to facilitate trade between India and Myanmar. This took place during the 3rd Joint Trade Committee Meeting between India and Myanmar. However, the vast majority of business conducted via this route is limited to border transactions. In addition to this, in 2008, a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) as well as a Bilateral Investment Promotion Agreement (BIPA) were also inked. The India-ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement was first signed in August of 2009 and both India and Myanmar have since become signatories to the agreement. Additionally, Myanmar is a nation that benefits from India's Duty Free Tariff Preference Scheme for Least Developed Countries (LDCs).⁴⁰

Table 6: India- Myanmar Bilateral Trade 2013-18 (US\$ million)

Year	India's Export	India's Import	Total	Trade Balance
2013-14	787.01	1,395.67	2,182.68	(-) 135,794
2014-15	773.24	1,231.54	2,004.78	(-) 137,694.93
2015-16	1,070.65	984.27	2,054.92	(-) 118,716.67
2016-17	1,107.89	1,067.25	2,175.14	(-) 108,504.60
2017-18	966.19	639.64	1,605.84	(-) 162,054.83

Source: DGFT, Dept. of Commerce, India

For this reason, India places a high value on Myanmar's role as a conduit for the growth of commercial relations with Southeast Asian nations. Since the Prime

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Minister of India adopted the Act East Policy in 2014, there has been a significant increase in the amount of bilateral commerce that occurs between Myanmar and India. In recent years, Myanmar's exports have increased by a factor of three. 2008 saw trade totaling \$12.9 billion US dollars, whereas 2018 saw that number soar to \$39.5 billion US dollars. Particularly noticeable is the almost six fold growth in Myanmar's overall imports. 2008 saw imports totaling \$6.3 billion US dollars; by 2018, that number has climbed to \$24.2 billion US dollars. 2008 had exports of \$6.6 billion US dollars, while 2018 saw a rise to \$15.4 billion US dollars.⁴¹

However, Myanmar's exports have only increased by a factor of two over this period. As a direct consequence of this, Myanmar's trade imbalance has increased every year since 2013. From a profit of \$0.3 billion in the United States in 2006 to a loss of \$8.8 billion in the United States in 2018. In 2008, Myanmar's exports made up 19.1 percent of the country's GDP, but in 2018, they made up 22.4 percent. On the other side, imports were responsible for 18.3 percent of GDP back in 2008, but that number more than quadrupled to 35.2 percent in 2018.⁴²

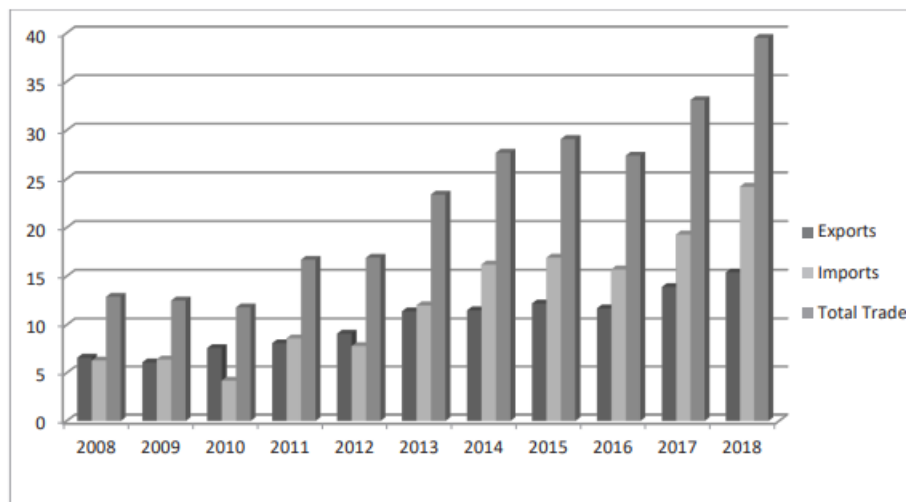
India's import growth have outpaced the growth of its export in recent years. India and Myanmar have signed a Bilateral Investment Promotion & Protection Agreement (BIPPA) and the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA). These agreements were targeted to provide easy access and flow of bilateral investments, business profits and taxation related concerns. India and Myanmar have been

⁴¹ Export-Import Bank of India (Exim Bank). (2019). India-Myanmar Trade and Investment: Prospects and Way Forward. Working Paper No. 90, June. <https://www.eximbankindia.in/Assets/Dynamic/PDF/Publication-Resources/ResearchPapers/110file.pdf>. (Retrieved 21/02/2022).

⁴² Ibid.

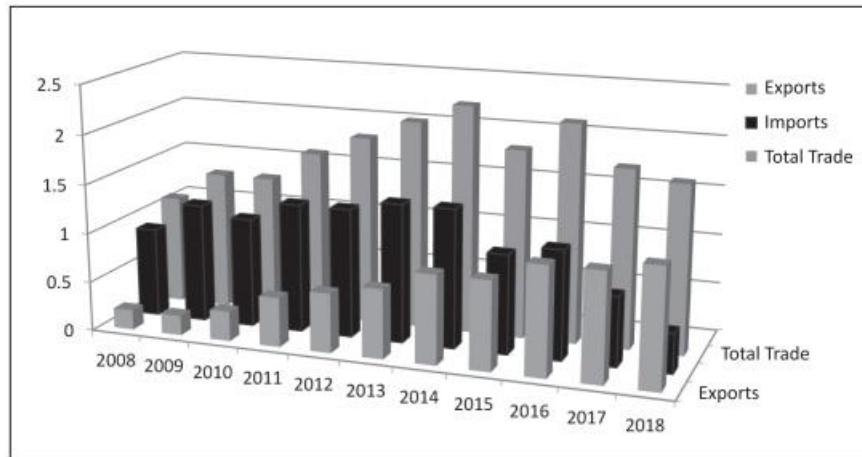
organizing several discussions and meetings frequently after the post-reforms period in Myanmar to improve connectivity, trade and investments.

Figure 1: Myanmar's Foreign Trade (US\$ billion)



(Source: Exim Bank, 2019)

Figure 2: India's Trade with Myanmar (US\$ billion)



(Source: Exim Bank, 2019)

There can be no growth of Indian markets in Southeast Asia until there is an improvement in the bilateral trade between India and Myanmar. Because of this, India has been working to strengthen its economic ties with Myanmar, and the result has been a rise in the volume of commerce between the two countries. In the fiscal year 2007-2008, Myanmar's bilateral commerce was valued at \$994.45 million US dollars. This figure increased to \$1.6 billion US dollars in the 2017-2018 fiscal year, representing an increase of around 61 percent.⁴³

However, as compared to the previous fiscal year, the 2017-2018 fiscal year saw a considerable decrease in trade for Myanmar, which was around 26 percent lower than the previous fiscal year. During the 2017-2018 fiscal year, there was a reduction of 13 percent in exports while there was a fall of 40 percent in imports.

⁴³ Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER). (2019). India-Myanmar Border Trade. Working Paper 378, June. https://icrier.org/pdf/Working_Paper_378.pdf. (Retrieved 21/02/2022).

One of the causes for the decrease in imports from Myanmar has been the restriction on imports of motors and lentils that the Government of India enacted in 2017.

This prohibition was implemented in 2017.⁴⁴ Mineral fuels, oil and its products, medicinal items, sugar and sugar confectionery, and other goods are some of the things that India sells to Myanmar. On the other hand, India imported edible vegetables, as well as various roots, tubers, and timber, items of wood, etc., from Myanmar in 2018, which accounted for 88 percent of the country's total imports.⁴⁵

In addition, a comparison of India's exports to Myanmar in the years 2011-2012 and 2017-2018 reveals that there is a wide variety of items being sent over there. The percentage of total exports contributed by the top five products dropped from 69 percent in 2011-2012 to 51 percent in 2017-2018. In other words, there has been a shift in the circumstance around the items that are exported. During the 2011-2012 fiscal year, iron or steel was the most popular product exported.⁴⁶ The following is a list of the top five items that India exports to Myanmar from its country.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Op cit, Exim Bank. (2019).

⁴⁶ Op cit, ICRIER (2019).

Table 7: India's Top 5 Exports to Myanmar (Value in US\$ million)

HS Code	Commodity Description	2011-12		2017-18	
		Value	% Share	Value	% Share
30	Pharmaceutical products	78	14.4	179	18.5
72	Iron and steel	31	5.6	109	11.2
85	Electrical machinery and parts	–	–	68	7.0
87	Vehicles and parts	–	–	67	7.0
17	Sugars and sugar confectionery	–	–	67	7.0
73	Articles of iron or steel	214	39.2	–	–
2	Meat and edible meat offal	28	5.1	–	–
23	Residues from food industries	27	4.9	–	–
	Total of Top 5 Exports	378		490	
	Share of Top 5 Exports in Total Exports		69.2		50.7

(Source: ICRIER, 2019)

Again, the results of a comparison of the items imported from Myanmar to India in the years 2011-2012 and 2017-2018 demonstrate that the top five imported products have not undergone significant changes in their composition or variety. The top two items brought into the country during this time period were practically identical, and together they were responsible for ninety-five percent of all imports. The results of a comparison of the five most important goods that Myanmar exports to India are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: India's Top 5 Imports from Myanmar (in US\$ million)

HS Code	Commodity Description	2011-12		2017-18	
		Value	% Share	Value	% Share
7	Edible vegetables and roots	668	49.1	432	71.1
44	Wood and articles of wood	669	49.1	143	23.5
72	Iron and steel	–	–	14	2.3
78	Lead and articles thereof	–	–	12	2.0
9	Coffee, tea, mate and spices	–	–	7	1.1
27	Mineral fuels, oils and their products	11	0.8	–	–
28	Inorganic chemicals	7	0.5	–	–
5	Products of animal origin, nes	6	0.4	–	–
	Total of Top 5 Imports	1361		608	
	Share of Top 5 Imports in Total Imports		99.9		100

(Source: ICRIER, 2019)

5.6. Border Trade

India and Myanmar signed a border trade agreement in 1994 and now have two active border trade stations (Moreh-Tamu and Zowkhawthar –Rih) along their 1,643 kilometre long border. Moreh-Tamu and Zowkhawthar –Rih are both located in India. It has been suggested that a third border commerce point should be created at the Avakhung Pansat/Somrai crossing. Betel nut, dried ginger, green mung beans, turmeric roots, resin, and medicinal herbs are the main products that are exported from Myanmar to India. The border trade between the two countries is estimated to have been worth US\$ 12.8 million in the fiscal year 2010–2011.⁴⁷ Major goods purchased by Myanmar traders from the Indian side include cotton yarn, auto parts, soya bean meal, and pharmaceuticals.

⁴⁷ Op cit, MEA. (2012).

There have been reports about smuggling of goods including fertilisers, vehicles, particularly two-wheelers, and other It was decided at the 3rd India-Myanmar Joint Commerce Committee meeting that took place in October 2008 that the Border Trade that was taking place at the current points would be upgraded to Normal Trade in order to facilitate and encourage bilateral trade between India and Myanmar. Both parties have made it clear that they have sent notifications to this effect.⁴⁸

India has opened up 31 Land Custom Services (LCS) in different border zones of the North-East states.⁴⁹ With the signing of the Border Trade Agreement (BTA) between India and the Government of Myanmar in 1994, it was agreed to open up four border trade zones, viz., Moreh-Tamu, Zokhawthar-Rih and Longwa in Nagaland and Pangsau Pass in Arunachal Pradesh. Indo-Myanmar border trade is largely through Moreh, a small border town in Manipur and Namphalong in Sagaing division of Myanmar and through Zokhawthar, a border village in Mizoram. The Zokhawthar-Rih trade sector which is the second Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Point, the first being the Moreh-Tamu trade sector, was inaugurated in 2004.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Centre Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs. (2016). *Commissionerate of Customs (Preventive), Northeastern Region, Shillong*. http://cexcusner.gov.in/about_cusprevner.htm#:~:text=The%20Commissionerate%20divided%20into%208,Stations%20along%20Indo%20Bhutan%20border. (Retrieved 21/90/2019).

Under the BTA, the following three types of trade across the Indo-Myanmar border were agreed to:⁵⁰

- a) Barter trade of items not exceeding US\$ 1,000 or its equivalent,
- b) Barter trade of items up to a value of US\$ 20,000 or its equivalent, and
- c) Normal trade against payment for supplies.

The first two types of trade envisaged the exchange of goods without any monetary transaction. Providing clarity at the conceptual level, Das⁵¹ differentiates the barter system carried out as part of the subset under border trade with that of border trade under normal trade. Under the Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement (BTA), it provides for barter trade of identified items under specific conditions as well as normal trade against payment.

Under barter trade, India accrued a trade deficit as most of the items listed in the agreement were not found favourable for India as demand for Indian products was lower. This makes it difficult for Indian traders to exchange it for goods equivalent to imported goods. On account of this, the barter system was subsequently replaced by normal trade. Contemplating the difficulties and problems associated with the barter trade system, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on November 5, 2015 abolished it and laid down guidelines for the functioning of normal trade.⁵²

⁵⁰ G. Das. (2006). Border Trade in India's North-East Theory and Practice. David R. Syiemlieh et. al. (eds.). *Challenges of Development in North East India*. New Delhi: Regency Publication. p. 54

⁵¹ Ibid. p.55.

⁵² R. U. Das. (2016). *Enhancing India-Myanmar Border Trade: Policy and Implementation Measures*. Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Government of India.

5.7. Cultural Relations

Since 1997, cultural troupes from India have been invited to regularly perform in Myanmar as part of an ongoing cultural exchange programme. Several cultural troupes have travelled back and forth between the two nations and performed there. A student delegation consisting of 13 people from Myanmar travelled to India to take part in the SAARC Cultural Festival in November of 2009.⁵³ A well-known band from Myanmar known as ‘Emperor’ travelled to India in December 2009 in order to take part in the South Asian Bands Festival that was organized by the ICCR. They also gave a performance at Shillong in Meghalaya.

The annual Indian Film Festival was held in Yangon in January 2010, and it was arranged by the Embassy. This event has established itself as a highlight on the cultural calendar for Yangon. A well-known landscape painter from Myanmar travelled to Puducherry, India in March 2010 in order to take part in the South Asian Artists Camp, which was organized by ICCR and SEHER. The paintings that were created during the camp were shown at the Embassy Auditorium in November 2010 and got an overwhelmingly positive reaction from the members of the surrounding community.

A theatre troupe consisting of 15 people from Myanmar travelled to India in March 2010 to take part in the South Asian Theatre Festival, which was organized by the ICCR and the NSD. During the final week of May in 2010, the band ‘Abiogenesis’ played concerts in both Yangon and Mandalay. In January 2011, a Qawalli ensemble known as the Shari Brothers gave performances in Yangon and

⁵³ Op cit, MEA. (2012).

other locations in Myanmar. For the festivities of Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birth anniversary, there was a jam-packed schedule of commemorative activities.

These activities included a dance play, seminar, artists' camp, film festival, and other such events. The Myanmar people and the media responded very positively to each and every one of the events.⁵⁴ With funding from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), the Embassy of India in Washington, D.C. began offering Bharatanatyam and Yoga classes in December of 2010.

India and Myanmar share close cultural ties and a sense of deep kinship given India's Buddhist heritage. Building on this shared heritage, India is undertaking some key initiatives such as restoration of the Ananda Temple in Bagan and made a donation of 16 foot replica of the Sarnath Buddha Statue which has been installed at the premises of Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon. The Samvad-II Interfaith dialogue was held on 6-7 August 2017 in Yangon.⁵⁵ The event was attended by Ram Naik, Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and then Minister of State for Home, Kiren Rijju.

ICCR and Sitagu International Buddhist Academy organised an International Conference on Buddhist Cultural Heritage from 15-17 December 2012. Performances by cultural troupes have been organized on a regular basis. Myanmar troupes and artistes have participated in South Asian and ASEAN cultural events in India. India has also responded to Myanmar's interest in restoring and renovating two historic temples in Bodh Gaya built by Myanmar rulers King Mindon and King

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Embassy of India. (2017). Cooperation. Yangon. <https://embassyofindiayangon.gov.in/pages?id>. (Retrieved 15/03/2022).

Baygyidaw. These temples and inscriptions will now be restored as a bilateral friendship project.⁵⁶

5.8. Indian Investment in Myanmar

Following the signing of the Indo-Myanmar Bilateral Trade Agreement in 1970, there was a continual growth in the trade links that existed between the two nations. India has boosted its involvement in many sectors of Myanmar in order to further its own economic and political objectives. This is because India has a geopolitically and strategically significant position in Myanmar. The eleventh biggest foreign investor in Myanmar is the country of India. India has spent a total of US \$771.838 million in Myanmar as of the 30th of June in the year 2020. This represents 0.90 percent of the country's total foreign investment.⁵⁷

Since January 2009 and continuing until December 2018, the majority of India's investments in Myanmar have been made in the oil and gas industry. Other sectors of investment include the manufacturing of wood products, financial services, and original equipment manufacturer (OEM) for non-automotive transport, amongst others.⁵⁸ Figure 3 provides an overview of the main economic areas in which India has invested in Myanmar.

On the other hand, a study of Myanmar's foreign investment reveals that the majority of that investment is concentrated in the areas of oil and gas production as

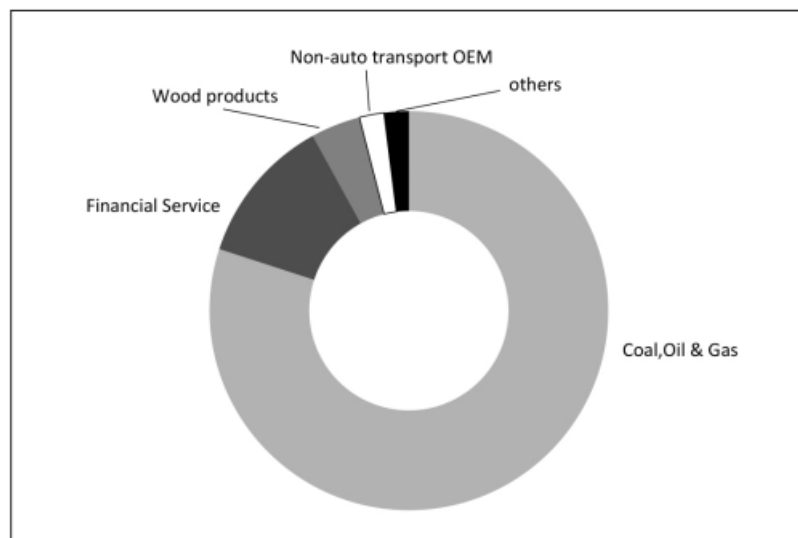
⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA). (2020). India-Myanmar Relations. <https://www.dica.gov.mm/>. (Retrieved 23/04/2020).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

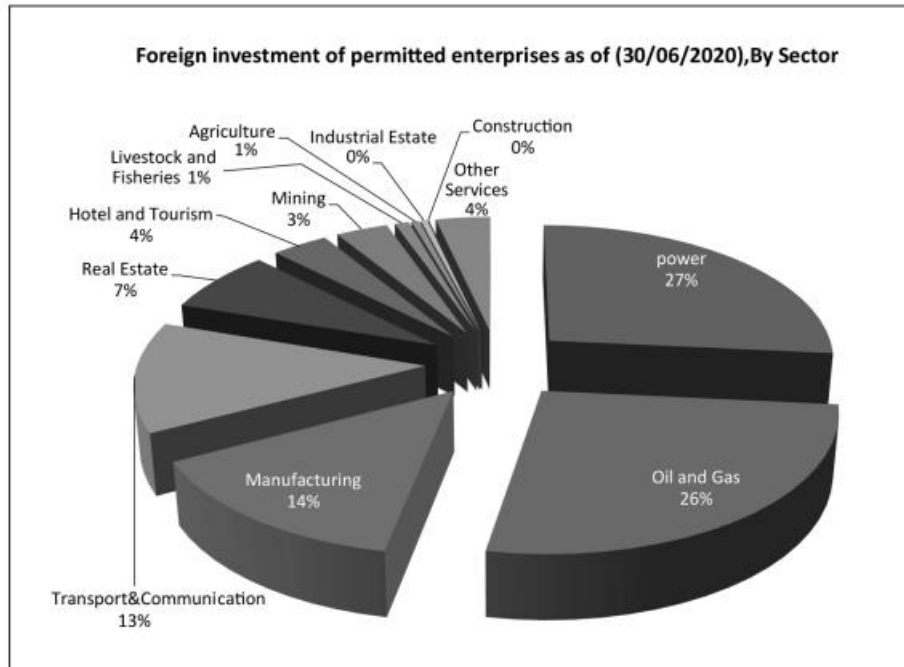
well as electricity generation. Figure 4 illustrates the many fields in which foreign investors have been active in Myanmar.

Figure 3: Sector-wise FDI Inflows to Myanmar from India



(Source: Exim Bank, 2019)

Figure 4: Foreign Investment in Myanmar (by sector)



(Source: DICA, 2020)

As of the month of November 2019, India is ranked 11th in the world in terms of investment, with 33 Indian companies having their investments totaling 771.488 million dollars being authorized.⁵⁹ The amount that Myanmar has invested in India is US\$ 8.97 Million.⁶⁰ There are thirteen Indian public sector organizations with a presence in Myanmar, each operating in a different industry. The majority of India’s investments have been made in the petroleum and natural gas industries.⁶¹

India is an open and mixed economy and Multi-National Companies (MNCs) from India are investing in different countries. Similarly, Foreign MNCs are

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

investing in India. Myanmar economy has also lifted sanctions, as a result of New Foreign Investment Law and the rules made by various respective departments. Thus, FDI is increasing in Myanmar and is ultimately allowed in particular sectors. In Myanmar, the government has now created a New Special Economic Zone Law, where foreign investments are invited to set up an industrial zone in industries. Myanmar has come up with reforms to take steps towards an open market for investments. Indian companies have shown interests in Myanmar especially in energy and infrastructural sectors.

The Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) and the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA) between India and Myanmar were both recently inked (DTAA).⁶² The goal of these agreements is to facilitate the movement of capital and corporate profits between the two countries, in addition to addressing issues pertaining to taxes. India and Myanmar have both shown their commitment to the accords by ratifying them. The mission of the Ministry of Commerce in India is to determine which industries and channels may benefit from increased commerce between India and other nations. By establishing a manufacturing base in Myanmar, Indian businesses may be able to profit from the LDC status of Myanmar, which is an advantage in and of itself for Myanmar.

When it comes to luring investments from the private sector in India, Myanmar could do more to attract such investments. One way to achieve this would be to host investment promotion events in various locations throughout India, highlighting the country's laws, incentives, and potential for investment. As a group

⁶² Op cit, Exim Bank. (2019).

that facilitates networking between businesses in India and Myanmar, the India-Myanmar Chamber of Commerce has the potential to facilitate the formation of business ties between the two countries. It would be helpful to comprehend the policy regime, programmes, and incentives that have been offered by the Myanmar government if there were more contacts with the different ministries of the Myanmar government. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an effect and loss in the commerce, trade, and travel between India and Myanmar.

5.9. Defence Cooperation

The political transition towards a democratic system in Myanmar has acted as a catalyst and provided an opportunity for India to engage more intimately. In the recent past, there have been several high-level engagements between the political leadership of the two countries; the Indian Prime Minister visited Nay Pyi Taw in April 2012 after a hiatus of nearly 25 years. Both sides exude a new found confidence in their relationship and have agreed to enhance trade to US\$ 3.0 billion by 2015.⁶³ India has promised US\$ 500 million line of credit to Myanmar and also agreed to develop livelihood opportunities in border areas and assist in setting up IT infrastructure.

Both sides have also agreed to establish network among educational institutions, such as universities and think tanks. India and Myanmar have now established a network among educational institutes such as universities and think tanks; to further enhance cooperation an agreement was signed between Institute of

⁶³ PM's Address to the Think-tanks, Intellectuals and Business Community in Yangon. (2012). 29 May. <https://archivepmo.nic.in/drmanmohansingh/speech-details.php?nodeid=1180>. (Retrieved 25/05/2021).

Defence Studies and Analysis, India, and Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies.⁶⁴ In the defence and security domain, India and Myanmar have acknowledged the need to establish robust security mechanisms for land borders to address the ongoing insurgencies and prevent instability in contiguous areas.

In the past, India has supported Myanmar's defence forces through capacity building and has supplied some military hardware. There are plans to train Myanmar military personnel too. As a maritime neighbour, the Myanmar Navy has participated in multilateral maritime forums. These initiatives are significant keeping in mind that India was under enormous pressure to isolate Myanmar at a time when the western world led by the US and several EU countries had imposed a number of sanctions.⁶⁵ Thus, India and Myanmar are increasing their cooperation in recent times with regards to defence and security matter.

5.10. Insurgency in Northeast

One of the important drivers for India to engage with Myanmar is the issue of insurgency in its Northeast. India has a long border with Myanmar, which runs for nearly 1643 kilometers alongside the states of Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The ongoing insurgency in the region is not new and has been in existence since the early years of Indian independence. Interestingly, as early as 1950, India had supplied six Dakota aircrafts to Myanmar to fight rebels.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Op cit, A. Kumar. (2021). p. 85.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ N.K. Jha and G.K. Jha. (2012). India Myanmar Relations: Balancing Morality, Military and Market. *World Focus*, June. p. 55.

Currently, there are at least eight insurgent or militant groups/outfits in the area, which have been operating from the Indian and Myanmar territory.⁶⁷ It is believed that these groups have received financial, logistic and military support allegedly from external sources in South Asia and also from Southeast Asia. They have established Sanctuaries/safe heavens with the connivance of sympathetic groups and communities in the neighbourhood. The Indian security forces have conducted counter insurgency operations, but the insurgents have managed to escape to neighboring areas, where the law enforcement agencies are either weak or disinterested.

However, there have been attempts in the past to flush out these insurgents from Myanmar. For instance, in November 1991, the Myanmar military conducted raids against Manipuri rebel bases and arrested 192 insurgents including United National Liberation Front (UNLF) chief Rajkumar Meghen.⁶⁸ Apparently, the latter was released by the Myanmar authorities. In 1994, India and Myanmar signed a MoU for the 'maintenance of peace and tranquility in border areas.'⁶⁹ This served as a useful instrument to launch Operation Golden Bird in 1995, a joint operation to intercept a huge consignment of arms being transported by insurgent groups from Cox Bazar in Bangladesh to Manipur. The operation came under diplomatic cloud

⁶⁷ The Asian Age. (2012). Will India-Burma Cooperation Neutralise Northeast Militants?. <http://archive.asianage.com/ideas/will-india-burma-cooperation-neutralise-northeast-militants-756>. (Retrieved 23/04/2022).

⁶⁸ B.P. Routray. (2011). India-Myanmar Relations: Triumph of Pragmatism. *Jindal Journal of International Affair*. Vol.1 (1), October. p. 315.

⁶⁹ P. Chidambaram. (2012). Minimal Presence of Maoists in Northeast. The Times of India, 21 March. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/minimal-presence-of-maoists-in-northeast-chidambaram/articleshow/12353571.cms>. (Retrieved 21/02/2021).

after the military authorities learnt that India had decided to award the Nehru Award for International Understanding' to Aung San Suu Kyi.⁷⁰

India and Myanmar have been holding regular border liaison meetings and during the 46th meeting held in August 2012, Myanmar and India discussed several measures along the border aimed at pushing the insurgents out of the Myanmar's territory.⁷¹ India also informed Myanmar that its security forces had stepped up the vigil in the tribal-dominated districts.

Likewise, the Myanmar military initiated offensives action in Sagaing Province, against Indian militant camps, but encountered stiff resistance partly due to coordination between the insurgents and their affiliates in Myanmar. In 2012, the attack was successful, but all senior leaders in these camps managed to escape unhurt.⁷² In June, 2015, a surgical strike was launched against the insurgents group NSCN-K in the India-Myanmar border areas, as 18 Indian soldiers were killed by the group. This was successfully done with the cooperation of the Myanmar Army.

5.11. Drug Smuggling

Myanmar has been identified as a major source of poppy cultivation (spread over nearly 43,600 hectares) in Asia and there are several processing units spread in the thick jungles in the north of the country. Although the Myanmar government has taken initiatives to curb poppy cultivation and production, the illicit trade continues. For India, the constants of geography and the location of the two primary sources of

⁷⁰ V. Sakhuja (2014). India-Myanmar: Rebuilding Synergies and Strengthening Partnership. Rajiv K. Bhatia et al (eds.) *Change in Myanmar*. New Delhi: Shipra Publication. p. 162

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. p. 163.

illicit opium in Asia, i.e., the Golden Crescent comprising of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Golden Triangle formed by Myanmar, Thailand and Laos, have resulted in turning it into a transit country for processed narcotics. India has also become a source of precursor chemicals, such as acetic anhydride (AA), ephedrine, and pseudoephedrine, which are used for processing opium.⁷³

India and Myanmar have devised a strategy to counter drug smuggling and the issue is discussed at the highest level. Early in 2013, during the annual Home Secretary-level meeting at Nay Pyi Taw, the two sides agreed to initiate necessary steps to prevent the smuggling of drugs, arms and ammunition.⁷⁴ In 2010, the two sides had agreed to the Ratification of Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty on Criminal Matters (MLAT) and this legal arrangement is a useful instrument to address a number of transnational crimes including insurgency, drug smuggling and gun running taking place across the borders of the two countries.⁷⁵

5.12. Defence Capacity Building

Defence cooperation between India and Myanmar is an important facet of bilateral relations. Both political leaders and military chiefs have visited Myanmar in the past and exchanged views on issues of mutual interest. In January 2013, The Indian Defence Minister visited Myanmar accompanied by a number of senior functionaries of the Indian Ministry of Defence including the Defence Secretary, the

⁷³ No End to Phensidyl Production Inside India. (2012). The Financial Express, August.

⁷⁴ Yangon Cracks Down on NE Rebel Camps. (2012). The Sangai Express, August. <http://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=9..290812.aug12>. (Retrieved 21/01/2019).

⁷⁵ Op cit, V. Sakhuja (2014). p. 163.

General Officer Commander-in-Chief in charge of Indian Eastern Army Command and the Vice Chief of Naval Staff.⁷⁶

According to an official press release by the Indian Ministry of Defence, “Both sides will discuss modalities for improving mechanisms for patrolling by their respective forces to curb activities of insurgent groups and other illegal and criminal activities along land and maritime boundaries in their jurisdiction. Both sides also agreed that neither should allow their territory to be used for activities detrimental to the security of the other. Both countries have agreed to conduct periodic coordinated land and maritime patrols.”⁷⁷ The Indian Navy appears to have been quite proactive and Indian naval chiefs have visited Myanmar.

There have also been regular port calls by Indian naval ships to Myanmar ports. Soon after the visit of the Indian Defence Minister to Myanmar in January 2013, a Myanmar Navy frigate and a corvette made port call at the Indian Navy’s Eastern Naval Command Headquarters at Vishakhapatnam in March 2013. The two navies also conducted joint exercises and engaged in coordinated patrol along the maritime boundary between Myanmar's Coco Island and India's Landfall Island, the northern most island of the Andaman group.

An official statement by the Indian Defence Ministry noted, “This first-ever such exercise comes soon after Defence minister A.K. Antony visited Myanmar in January to bolster defence ties, ranging from better border management to capacity-building of the Myanmar armed forces.”⁷⁸ Military training too has been an agenda

⁷⁶ Op cit, A. Kumar. (2021). p. 86.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Myanmar India Launch Joint Naval Exercise. (2013). Mizzima News, March.

of bilateral defence cooperation. In 2006, the Indian Army had offered special warfare training for Myanmar soldiers. In a significant move, during the visit of General Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services of Myanmar, to India in August 2012, India once again offered to train Myanmar Army personnel.⁷⁹

5.13. Maritime Security

India and Myanmar face a number of maritime security challenges in the Bay of Bengal. These are essentially non-traditional security (NTS) threats, which can emerge in the form of piracy, terrorism, gun running, drug smuggling, illegal fishing, and human smuggling. The Indian Prime Minister also highlighted this issue during his visit to Myanmar in May 2012 and observed that both countries need to expand their security cooperation, which is vital not only to maintain peace along their land borders, but also to protect maritime trade, which he hopes will open up through the sea route between Kolkata and Sittwe.⁸⁰ At another level, NTS challenges also include issues relating to climate change and marine environment; and the navies/maritime forces have been at the forefront to respond to climate change related disasters, providing rescue and relief.

5.14. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)

The Bay of Bengal is replete with weather and natural events and the region has been hit by cyclones and Tsunami. In recent times, Myanmar was hit by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and Cyclone Nargis in 2008, which left 78,000 people

⁷⁹ Op cit, V. Sakhuja (2014). P. 165.

⁸⁰ Op cit, PM's Address to the Think-tanks, Intellectuals and Business Community in Yangon. (2012).

dead/missing and affected 2.4 million others.⁸¹ Emergency humanitarian assistance was offered by the navies from a number of countries including the US, Britain and France, but their warships were refused ship-to-shore operations.⁸² However, two Indian warships were allowed to enter port to deliver relief materials under Operation Sahayata.⁸³

At the operational level, the regional capacity to respond to climate change induced disasters is quite limited. The Indian Navy's capacity to respond to HADR is quite substantive and has been showcased during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Since that event, the Indian Navy has acquired a number of naval platforms that are tailored to respond to various HADR mission and roles. However, Myanmar's capability to respond to these challenges is quite low and would require assistance from India.

5.15. Geopolitical and Geostrategic Consideration

In recent times, Indian policy makers have begun to position Myanmar prominently in the Look East Policy now Act East Policy framework. The Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has unequivocally stated that Myanmar holds a significant place both in India's Look East Policy and in its collaboration with ASEAN countries under the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAD).⁸⁴ Besides, Myanmar is an important partner of India in the BIMSTEC and an important node in the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) initiative.

⁸¹ UNEP. (2008). Myanmar Tropical Cyclone Nargis. <https://archive.iwlearn.net/unep.org/disasters/myanmarcyclone/default.htm>. (Retrieved 22/01/2017).

⁸² Op cit, V. Sakhuja (2014). p. 166.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Press Information Bureau (PIB). (2012). Joint Statement on the occasion of the visit of Prime Minister of India Dr Manmohan Singh to Myanmar, August. <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=84517>. (Retrieved 21/05/2019).

Myanmar's geographic location serves as a land bridge for India to engage with mainland Southeast Asia. It can facilitate and foster economic growth of India's Northeast region that has remained underdeveloped due to limited connectivity and absence of investments and industrial growth. It is generally agreed that the root cause of the insurgency in India's Northeast has been socio-economic development in the region resulting in a sense of alienation among the people, who have taken to insurgency. In the above context, the BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar) Cooperation Forum or the Kunming Initiative, a sub-regional can provide for a Kunming-Mandalay-Dhaka-Kolkata grouping, economic zone that can potentially contribute to regional economic integration.⁸⁵

At the strategic level, the tone and tenor of articulations by the Indian strategic community has moved away from labelling Myanmar as a 'satellite of China' and the fears of the Chinese operated electronic surveillance systems in Myanmar appear to have reduced significantly. Apparently, Myanmar had offered to India an access to the often cited surveillance facility at the Coco islands.⁸⁶ However, there are concerns that China's military assistance to Myanmar is continuing and the Myanmar Navy has signed agreement with Pakistan for submarine warfare training clearly suggesting that Myanmar continues to court both China and Pakistan, a relationship that has irked India.

It is true that China can offer better military aid package compared to India and, therefore, it is fair to argue that India need not appease the ruling government

⁸⁵ V. Sengupta. (2012). Strategic importance of Kolkata in Kunming Initiative. *South Asia Monitor*, March 14.

⁸⁶ Op cit, V. Sakhuja (2014). p. 169

with military sops; instead, India could explore the possibility of engaging Myanmar in the maritime domain and develop a robust agenda including capacity building to address non-traditional security threats and challenges in the Bay of Bengal. Besides, India is an active participant in the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meetings Plus (ADMM Plus) whose five working groups address Non-Traditional Security (NTS) issues, thus offering the two partners a substantive agenda for bilateral maritime security cooperation.

Myanmar's Political transition and its opening-up have resulted in creating a new platform for powerful states to grow their dominance and presence to influence the critical geo-strategic nations in the Southeast Asia. As for India, it has taken several initiative to increase its cooperation and engagement with Myanmar owing to the recent reforms in Myanmar. Myanmar has gone through a political and fundamental change with an apparent desire to change its foreign policy which has opened up new avenues for itself and India to pursue their national interest.

India-Myanmar relations are aspired by national interests, geo-strategic importance and national security aspects. The collective connections and exchanges through ideas, religious, trade and cultural have provided the foundation of bridging their relationship. India's relations with Myanmar are largely directed by its Look East/Act east Policy which has served as an essential instrument in its foreign policy. Myanmar's strategic location provides an opportunity to be the land bridge for India to connect mainland Southeast Asia. The traditional ties of friendly relations between India and Myanmar have been further strengthened since the recent political reforms in Myanmar.

In the post-reforms period in Myanmar i.e. since the military coup in 2021, India still maintains a warm relationship with Myanmar. India has taken a more measure approach to the unfolding situation in Myanmar and as such take a silent stance despite certain pressure from the international community. India looks unlikely to deviate from its policy of non-interference at the same time will likely call for peace from time to time.

India was among the eight countries to attend a military parade in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw on March 27, 2021 to celebrate the Tatmadaw Day. The main reason for India's silent stance regarding the political turmoil in Myanmar may be attributed to its adherence of pragmatism. Since India recognizes the importance of mutual cooperation and engagement with Myanmar for its national interest, it has to maintain a friendly relations with those in power whether it's the civilian or military government. Peace and stability in Myanmar whether under a civilian government or military government will be the desire for India in order to protect its investment and projects in Myanmar in order to achieve its national interest.

Chapter-6

Summary and Conclusion

This last chapter contains the summary as well as conclusion of all the chapters in the thesis. It further discusses the major findings as well as suggestions of the study. The first chapter of the thesis mainly deals with the introduction of the study. Myanmar (earlier Burma), formally known as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is the one of the biggest country within South East Asia. It is a multi-ethnic State with more than 100 ethnic groups. The majority of the people followed Buddhism as their religion however other religions such as Islam, Christianity and Hinduism are also widespread in Burma.

Myanmar is a Southeast Asian country located between latitudes 09° 32'N and 28° 31'N and longitudes 92° 10'E and 101° 11'E. It is surrounded by China, Laos, Thailand, Andaman Sea, Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh and India. It has seven regions, seven states and one Union Territory, and has enacted three Constitutions since its independence in 1948. It was a parliamentary democracy until 1962, when it was placed under a military administration.

Political reforms has been under place since the military regime enacted the new Constitution for Myanmar in 2008, followed by the General Elections in 2010. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won the elections, and Aung San Suu Kyi was liberated from house arrest. The nominal civilian government was constituted on 30th March 2011 with Thein Sein as the President, formally dissolving the military government. With the transition to a nominal civilian government, general amnesty was extended to 2000 prisoners, new labour laws were established,

and President Thein Sein signed a law allowing the expression of basic rights such as the right to peacefully demonstrate grievances. The National Human Rights Commission was established on 5th September, 2011.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) was re-registered as a political party in 2012 and the government also negotiated an agreement with the rebels of the Shan and Kachin ethnic groups. In January 2012, a ceasefire agreement was signed with the insurgents of the Karen ethnic group. The NLD won the April 2012 Parliamentary By-Elections with an absolute majority, winning 43 out of 45 seats. The new government of Myanmar eased press censorship permitting the establishment of privately owned newspapers, repealed the 25 years restriction on public gathering, and signed an agreement to open its communications network to global businesses. In July 2015, the first open general election in the country since 1990 was announced.

The 2015 general elections saw the National League for Democracy (NLD) secure an overwhelming victory, resulting in the formation of a genuine civilian government. Htin Kyaw was elected President of Myanmar on 15th March, 2016. The parliament held its first meeting on 1st February, 2016. The election of Htin Kyaw as the President affirmed civilian authority in Myanmar. Myint Swe, the military appointed member to the parliament, was elected as the First Vice-President and Henry Van Thio as the Second Vice-President. Aung San Suu Kyi took the newly created office of a State Counsellor on the 6th of April, 2016, similar to that of the Prime Minister. This was an important landmark in the history of Myanmar since the military coup in 1962.

The recent political reforms in Myanmar may not bring the country to a full-fledged democracy due to the military's ratification of the 2008 Constitution. The military leadership enacted the new Constitution to secure the formation of a 'genuine, discipline, multi-party democratic system', but measures for the country to become a fully-fledged democracy were never incorporated. In fact, the provisions of the Constitution 'prevent and restrict' the country from becoming a full democracy.

The 2008 Constitution allocated the military 25 per cent of all seats in both houses of the legislature and required a majority of more than 75 per cent to ratify any constitutional amendment. The military had been entrusted with the responsibility for the protection of the sovereignty and integrity of the country and safeguarding the Constitution. It also provided the military control of three key ministries in the government and authorized the Commander-in-Chief of the Military Services the right to take over and exercise sovereign power in case of state emergency.

It also permitted the Defence Services to participate in the national political leadership role of the State. The Panglong Accord of 1947 of the right to secession was denied and prohibited minorities from seceding or withdrawing from the country. It also restricted anyone having a foreign spouse or child from becoming the President and reinstated a multi-party system within a controlled democratic framework. It established the provisions for conducting General Elections which were held in 2010, 2015 and 2020.

Myanmar's political changes and transformation have had a significant impact on its foreign relations with other countries, with many countries now taking

keen interest in maintaining diplomatic and economic relations due to its abundant natural resources and geo-strategic location. Countries like the US, EU, EU, China and India are particularly interested in maintaining closer relations with the country due to its natural resources and strategic location.

India being an immediate neighbour of Myanmar closely observes the political changes in Myanmar. Myanmar has often been criticized for its violent measures against demonstrators. It has also been criticized for denying democratic movement, violation of human rights, repressing minority rebels, and isolating its economy. India is often expected to provide remedies to improve the situation in Myanmar. India's relations with Myanmar are closely linked due to the presence of rebels in Northeast India, the rising influence of China in India's neighbouring regions, and the recent political reforms in Myanmar. India is naturally inclined to encourage democratic reforms in Myanmar, and is responding by providing assistance and support in the nation-building process.

India has offered to co-operate with the government of Myanmar to give support in the area of Border Area Development Project (BADP). It also provides aid to Myanmar in health, tourism, infrastructural development education and Information Technology (IT) services. India has also established an aiding programme for Myanmar to support the development of social infrastructure, and has promptly and efficiently aided Myanmar in humanitarian assistance efforts following natural disasters. Exchanges at the highest political levels have developed with greater emphasis on greater engagement. India-Myanmar relations are likely to improve due to the recent reforms and transitions in Myanmar. Increased visits and cooperation are expected, offering promising signals of improvement.

The second chapter of the thesis mainly discusses certain periods of political developments in Myanmar since the colonial period till the present. The British conquest of Myanmar in 1886 allowed them to manage central Burma and the Frontier Areas separately, allowing the Frontier Areas to preserve their traditional political institutions and social norms. Christian missionaries constructed written languages of the Frontier people, creating a sense of distinct identity from the majority Burmans.

The beginning of the Second World War in 1939 marked a turning point for the independence movement in Burma, leading to the arrest of many nationalists and the promise of independence at the end of the war. The 'Thirty Comrades' left Burma secretly to receive military training in Japan, and the Burma Independence Army (BIA) was organized with the Thirty Comrades as the nucleus. Burma was granted independence in 1943 under Japanese rule, but the Burmese Army revolted against the Japanese forces in 1945 and joined the British Army to fight for independence. The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) was a nationalist party led by Aung San who fought for independence from Britain. The British eventually agreed to Burmese demands for independence, but insisted that the people along the Frontiers Areas should be allowed to decide their own future.

When the British left Burma, there were incidences of Burman soldiers killing Karen villagers and the Karen villagers retaliating. After the Second World War, the Burmans shifted their support to the Allied forces, but the animosity between the Burmans and the Karens remained due to the participation of ethnic minority groups in suppressing the Burmans who rebelled against the British colonial rule. Burman leaders also considered themselves superior to ethnic minorities,

leading to animosity between the mainland Burman people and the people of the Frontier areas before independence.

The Panglong Agreement of 1947 was a historic event in which 23 representatives from the Frontier Areas and mainland Burma signed an agreement to form the Union of Burma, which was not aimed at ending traditional autonomy or self-rule. The Panglong Conference of 1947 was a crucial year for ethnic minorities to decide whether to join the Union of Burma, but some were reluctant due to fear of losing their identity, culture and freedom. Aung San assured them of equal treatment, leading to the signing of the Panglong Agreement on 12 February, 1947. The 1947 Panglong Agreement was not intended to end traditional self-rule of the Frontier people and thus, the spirit of the agreement is yet to be fulfilled.

Burma was granted independence by the British in 1948 and U Nu became the first Prime Minister, but the Burmese government was disrupted by insurrections from various groups, including the BCP, CPB, PVO, KNDO, MNDO, and Mujahids. The communist groups fought for absolute power, while the ethnic minorities demanded autonomy or federalism. The Panglong Agreement was signed to form the Union of Burma, but many ethnic minorities did not sign due to lack of representation from the Frontier Areas. The Burman nationalists saw the minorities' demand for political autonomy/federalism as an attempt to disintegrate the union. The continued ethnic minorities' armed struggle is one of the longest in the world.

The U Nu government initially made a sincere efforts to implement the Panglong Agreement and 1947 Constitution of Burma, allowing local governments to use their own languages and demonstrating unity. However, this was threatened by

the transfer of Shan state power to the army, unequal treatment of ethnic minorities, introduction of nationalized policies and placing of Buddhism as the official state religion in 1961. Non-Burman ethnic groups were reluctant to accept the changes, seeing them as a mischievous Burmanization policy and a threat to their culture.

Myanmar experienced parliamentary democracy from 1948 to 1958, but the civilian government underwent a tumultuous period due to a split within the AFPFL. In 1958, Prime Minister U Nu invited Ne Win to form a caretaker government and hold elections. Ne Win earned the trust of many by appointing civilians to his cabinet and holding of elections in 1960. The 1960 general elections were held under a caretaker military government, with 72% of Rangoon residents voting for the Clean faction and 22% for the Stable faction. Lack of political maturity by the government ultimately leads to social unrest and political instability. U Nu's government was unable to establish a connection with the public, especially with ethnic minorities leading to a volatile situation.

U Nu played an important role in the landslide victory of his Clean faction due to his religious beliefs and ordinary citizen character. He announced Buddhism as the state religion before the elections, served as a Buddhist monk for six weeks, offered alms to the monks, sought the advice of important Buddhist leaders, and organized the Buddhist Synod. His main political rivals tried to emulate him, but their sudden change of heart failed to persuade the general public. The Union Party was divided into 'Thakins' and 'U-Bos' due to internal conflicts over the issue of membership of the executive committee. In December 1960, U Nu announced that he would step down from the party leadership but remain as the Prime Minister, indicating that the Union Party (Clean faction) was heading towards a split. During

this period, the armed ethnic groups were also vigorously demanding political dialogue based on federalism from the government but General Ne Win seized power in 1962 and further justified the coup by claiming the military had prevented the country from disintegrating.

Ne Win declared that parliamentary democracy had not worked for Burma, and the military stepped in to provide stability. There was fear and anxiety among the minorities that Burmanization would lead to the loss of their culture and identity, and fear within the military that secession of the minority areas would leave the country nearly indefensible. This led to the military stepping in to power. It can be said that the military coup in 1962 was primarily caused by the unsolved ethnic problems of the minorities in the frontier areas, leading to a period of military rule lasting for more than five decades.

Ne Win dissolved the Parliament and banned all political parties, leading to the end of parliamentary democracy and the beginning of military dictatorship in Burma. The Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) government introduced the 'Burmese Way to Socialism' in order to create a stable government and united country. The '8888' democracy uprising was sparked by the reduction of Burma's economic status to a 'Least Developed Country' by the United Nations (UN) in 1987, leading to a loss of confidence in General Ne Win's leadership and the loss of his cultural and political base.

The massacre of 8888 occurred on 8 August 1988, when an unknown number of demonstrators were killed in a tea shop scuffle between local youths and students of Rangoon Institute of Technology. Thousands of students organized protests across

the country, including teachers, monks, children, professionals and trade unionists. Ne Win loyalists and supporters in the army violently suppressed a pro-democracy uprising in 1988, leading to the massacre of hundreds of students and hundreds of arrests, leading to thousands fleeing to neighbouring countries.

Ne Win eventually resigned from the BSPP chairmanship. Thousands of people fled the country to take refuge in neighbouring countries, and the old socialist state was formally abolished. The military stepped in to form a new party called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), similar to the former BSPP. General Saw Maung, Chairman of the SLORC, claimed to have saved the country from disintegration. In 1989, the military regime changed the country's name from the Union of Burma to the Union of Myanmar, and the capital, Rangoon, was renamed Yangon. The SLORC government announced that it would hold general elections to re-establish a democratic society.

The All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) and the National League for Democracy (NLD) were subsequently formed to continue freedom struggle and to remove military dictatorship. Aung San Suu Kyi of the NLD was assisted by prominent figures such as Aung Gyi, a military General during Ne Win's reign, and Tin U, who once held the post of Myanmar's Minister of Defence. The SLORC then held an election on 27 May, 1990, which was considered free and fair except for polling areas disrupted by fighting.

The NLD won 392 out of the 485 seats contested in the 492 member assembly seats, a clear indication of the support for Aung San Suu Kyi and her party. The military-backed National Unity party (NUP) managed to secure only 10 seats.

The NLD won the 1990 election, but the military leaders were disappointed with the result. The military generals denied the democratically elected representatives power, leading to the formation of a government-in-exile, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).

The struggle for democracy in Myanmar received support from foreign countries, but the government imposed house detention and jail sentence on Suu Kyi to prevent her from speaking and organizing political campaigns. Suu Kyi's struggle is supported by the international community, but she was sentenced to 6 years of house arrest due to the internal politics in Myanmar. Aung San Suu Kyi was later released from house arrest on July 10, 1995. The military government changed the name of SLORC to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997, but the SPDC failed to gain majority support. Aung San Suu Kyi was detained in 2000 and released in 2002, sparking the people to demand democracy in Myanmar. The international community pressured and criticized Myanmar's military administration to take positive approaches to decrease pressure, resulting in Aung San Suu Kyi's release and house arrest in 2003.

Khin Nyunt's appointment as Prime Minister in 2003 paved the way for democracy in Myanmar by presenting a 'Roadmap to Democracy'. He promised to usher the country towards a new constitution and free elections, but his rule was cut short by allegations of corruption. General Soe Win was then designated as Prime Minister. In 2005, the military government moved the administrative capital from Yangon to a city it built in central Myanmar named Nay Pyi Taw. In May 2007, the military government extended Aung San Suu Kyi's term of house arrest for another year. In September 2007, the so-called 'Saffron Revolution' broke out, with

hundreds of Buddhist monks and their lay supporters marching down University Avenue. The monks march off without incident, leading ever larger marches in Rangoon until the government violently cracks down on their protests on September 26.

The government then published a proposed new constitution in April 2008, which allocates a quarter of seats in parliament to the military and bans opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from holding office. This was followed by a controversial constitutional referendum on May 10, which was overwhelmingly approved by 92.4% of the 22 million voters. The new charter paved the way for multi-party elections in 2010, guaranteeing the military 25% of seats in parliament and no special provisions for ethnic minorities. A general election was held in Myanmar on November 7, 2010, in accordance with the new constitution approved in 2008. The election was the fifth step of the seven-step 'roadmap to democracy' proposed by the SPDC in 2003, with the sixth and seventh steps being the convening of Myanmar's parliament and establishment of democracy. Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the NLD, boycotted the election.

The 2010 election was the first held since 1990. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) backed by the military won the 2010 election, forming a nominal civilian government and subsequently released Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest. President Thein Sein launched a series of political reforms, including the release of hundreds of political prisoners, easing of restrictions on media and civilian political activity, and implementing economic policies to encourage foreign investment.

Suu Kyi and her party NLD were allowed to resume political activities in 2012, resulting in the NLD winning the 2012 by-elections. In 2015, Myanmar held its first multiparty open general elections, which saw Suu Kyi's NLD party win a landslide victory and Htin Kyaw elected as the country's president. Aung San Suu Kyi was appointed to the newly created position of state counsellor and became the de facto head of the civilian government, as the constitution barred her from becoming president.

However, the 2008 Constitution includes provisions to protect the military's dominance, such as reserving 25% of parliamentary seats for the military. The 2015 general election in Myanmar marked a transition to a military-civilian hybrid government, with the NLD triumphing in general elections in November 2015. This was the first open general election since 1990 and the military readily transferred its power to the NLD government. The 2008 constitution gives the military control of three powerful ministries: defence, home affairs, and border affairs.

Alleged discriminatory policies of Myanmar's government have forced hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya to flee their homes, most of whom have crossed into Bangladesh. In 2016 and 2017, the military and local security forces mounted a brutal campaign against the Rohingya, killing thousands and razing hundreds of villages. Rights groups and UN officials suspect that the military committed genocide. Myanmar and its government have denied that ethnic cleansing is taking place, and Suu Kyi defended the military at a tribunal in The Hague.

The 2020 general elections in Myanmar saw the NLD win 920 of the total 1,117 seats, up 61 seats from the 2015 election. The main opposition party, the

USDP, won 71 seats. The USDP accused the NLD of engaging in electoral fraud and called for fresh elections.

In February 2021, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and other military leaders staged a coup after the USDP suffered a major blow in the 2020 general elections. The military regime declared a 'State of Emergency and detained and charged de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi with corruption and other crimes. Massive protests erupted nationwide, and ousted NLD lawmakers, protest leaders, and activists from several minority groups established a parallel government known as the National Unity Government (NUG). The fighting continues till today.

The third chapter mainly deals with the historical relationship between India and Myanmar. India and Myanmar are two significant countries located in South Asia and South East Asia, with a variety of connections spanning geography, colonial, political, history, religion, and culture. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram are the four Indian states that are located on each side of the 1,643-kilometer-long border. Both countries have historical parallels, with India responsible for bringing Buddhism and Hinduism to Myanmar. During the years 1857-1947 and 1886-1948, India and Myanmar were both subject to the imperial authority of the British government, allowing them to work together during their joint fight for independence.

The British Empire occupied India and Myanmar from 1857 to 1947 and 1886 to 1948, respectively, due to conflict between the Konbaung Dynasty of Myanmar and the British. This conflict resulted in the first Anglo-Burmese War, which was won by the British with the assistance of the Siamese. In 1885, the British

seized all of Myanmar, rechristened it Burma, and declared it a colony of British India. Lord Dufferin made an official declaration of the annexation of Burma on January 1, 1886.

Relations between India and Myanmar (Burma) were close during the time of the nationalist movement, which was heavily inspired by the national movement in India. Indian nationalists set the pace for changes on the different stages in Burma and displayed techniques of political activity aimed at winning independence from British colonial control. In the 1920s, India and Burma initiated the Non-Cooperation Movement in an effort to achieve full independence from the colonial control of the British Empire. The Indian National Congress maintained a presence in Burma, with the majority of its members being Indian settlers. However, a number of notable Burmese nationalists were also members of the provincial Committee of the Indian National Congress and attended its sessions.

The Act of India and Burma was approved by the British Parliament in 1935 and a new constitution was enshrined in the Government of Burma Act of 1935. On April 1, 1937, Burma became an independent nation and all administrative relations with India were severed. Jawaharlal Nehru visited Burma two months later to maintain a cordial atmosphere. The Burmese leader Aung San was in charge of a Thakins delegation that attended the Ramgarh session of the Indian National Congress in 1940. Burmese nationalists supported the independence movement in India, with Aung San expressing his concern for India on July 24, 1946. He called for mutual understanding and action for the independence of India, Burma, and all of Asia. India and Burma eventually won their freedom from the British rule.

India and Myanmar have maintained strong links in culture and religion since ancient times. Buddhism and Hinduism were both brought to Burma by Indian traders and settlers, with the majority of the Indian immigrants adhering to the Hindu faith. Evidence of Hindu influence can be seen in Burmese culture, such as architecture, sculpture, dancing, musical instruments, and literature and language. India was Burma's most important commercial partner before independence. The India and Burma (Trade Regulation) Order 1937 allowed free commerce between India and Burma for a few more years after it was issued. On April 3, 1941, a new trade agreement between India and Burma was signed, marking the end of open commerce and the beginning of a policy of reciprocal preferential treatment. However, the Second World War caused a disruption in commercial activity, leading to a new pattern of commercial interactions.

The post-colonial period of India's ties with Myanmar was marked by highs and lows. Between 1948 and 1962, India and Myanmar maintained cordial ties. The signing of treaty of friendship between India and Myanmar on July 7, 1951 was a significant step for their relations. Both India and Myanmar have strong confidence in the United Nations as a vehicle for safeguarding peace, and the cordial relationship between Nehru and U Nu ensured that Indians were not subjected to injustice. The phase of Myanmar's political isolation lasted from 1962 until early 1990s. During her time in power, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi held a number of conversations with General Ne Win. The visit to Burma by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1987 was an honest attempt to breathe new life into the relationship.

India publicly supported the democratic movement in Myanmar in 1988. India's policy of supporting the democracy movement and sidelining the military

regime at the expense of national interest was often met with strong opposition from India's officials from the military intelligence and the external affairs ministry in the 1990s. India changed its stance towards Myanmar after 1991 due to the growing triangular relationship between China, Pakistan, and Myanmar. India also shifted its strategy towards the SLORC administration from confrontation to continual engagement due to the threat posed by armed insurgency and trafficking in India's Northeast region.

It was also important for India to improve its ties with Myanmar since it served as a land bridge between the northeastern region of India and the nations of ASEAN. The government of India has implemented two pragmatic initiatives, the 'Look East Policy' (LEP) and a positive engagement with Myanmar since 1991. The growing India-Myanmar relationship can be seen in two path-breaking visits between leaders of the two countries. General Than Shwe's visit in 2004 was the first head of state level visit from Myanmar in 24 years, and Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam's return visit in 2006 was the first by an Indian President to Myanmar since Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit in 1987. Thus, the shift in India's position was due to evolving geopolitical, economic, and security considerations.

The fourth chapter mainly deals with the political reforms in Myanmar. The 2010 general elections were held based on the 2008 Constitution, but the NLD boycotted them due to the undemocratic nature of the 2008 Constitution. The Union election Commission (UEC) announced all election results by November 18, with the Union and Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) winning a 'resounding victory'. The USDP won 883 out of 1154 seats which is 76.52%, and the closest ethnic minority rival, Shan National Democratic Party won 57 seats which is 4.49%.

A nominal civilian government was established on 30 March, 2011 with Thein Sein as President, dissolving the military government.

The year 2011 saw a series of democratic reforms in Myanmar, culminating in the election of a president and two vice presidents. The democratic reforms in Myanmar have been achieved in two ways: domestic and international. On the domestic front, a new civilian government was formed, thousands of prisoners were released, the government and the NLD reconciled, and the government amended the 2008 Constitution for the NLD to re-register as a legal political party. On the international front, Myanmar was awarded the 2014 ASEAN chairmanship and its relations with the Western nations have improved significantly.

The government then formed the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission on 5 September, 2011 to promote and safeguard the fundamental rights of all citizens regardless of race or creed. Members include former government officials, diplomats, academics, doctors and lawyers. The government announced on 11 October, 2011 that it was granting amnesty to 6,300 prisoners. The USDP-led government, consisting of mostly former army generals, claimed to have liberalized its traditional hard-liner policies and to have started to open up to the international community. Organizations and governments around the world welcomed the amnesty initiative, but remained concerned by the continued detention of an estimated over 1,000 political prisoners.

In the second week of June 2011, the government's democratic reforms have further eased censorship of some publications, allowing sports journals, entertainment magazines, fairy tales and lottery numbers to be published without

prior approval from the Ministry of Information. Titles of stories will still be scrutinized before they go on sale. In December 2011, 54 journals, magazines and books including business publications were no longer required to submit their contents to the censorship board before publication, but censorship on news reports was not lifted.

The NLD was legally disbanded by the 2008 Constitution, and President Thein Sein invited Suu Kyi to Nay Pyi Taw on 19 August, 2011. This meeting was the harbinger of improved relations between the government and the NLD party. The NLD leadership unanimously decided to re-register their party and take part in the 2012 by-elections. The Election Commission approved the re-registration of the NLD as a legal political party on 13 December, 2011 and Suu Kyi and other party leaders officially re-registered the party on 23 December. By-elections were announced on 30 December, 2011 to be held on 1 April, 2012. On 2 April, 2012, the Union Election Commission (UEC) confirmed the NLD's overwhelming victory, and President Thein Sein said the elections were conducted in a successful manner.

The acceptance of the 2012 by-election results by Thein Sein, NLD and other political parties was essential for Western nations to review their sanctions policy with Myanmar. The Myanmar government experienced both peaceful transition and violence in 2012, with the KNU/KNLA signing a ceasefire agreement and deadly violence between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists. President Thein Sein addressed the UN General Assembly in New York on 27 September 2012, pledging to continue Myanmar's democratic reforms, which began with the 2010 general elections. He emphasized that the process is moving forward through tangible irreversible steps.

The 2015 General Election was a milestone in the transition to democracy in Myanmar, with the military and the nominally civilian government setting the pace and direction. The relaxation of media controls and the end of censorship saw Myanmar improve its ranking in the Reporters without Borders' 'World Press Freedom Index' from 174 in 2011 to 145 in 2015. Despite this progress, certain restrictions on press freedom and freedom of expression are still in place, such as criticizing the government or the military and disclosing state secrets or corruption. However, political party activists were not targeted by the regime during the election period, and new freedom of movement laws and freedom of association laws allowed opposition candidates to move freely and without fear.

The 2015 election saw the NLD win 77% of all seats in both houses of Parliament, while the incumbent USDP won only 8.1%. Ethnic minorities won only 11% of seats in the lower house, with only two ethnic parties achieving some success. The NLD secured a landslide victory and a majority in both houses of Parliament but the military was still able to veto far-reaching democratic changes. Following the November 2015 elections, Aung San Suu Kyi promised to build peace with ethnic armies left out of the ceasefire agreements. Myanmar's government also faces additional challenges, such as addressing its weak institutions, lack of the rule of law, and long authoritarian past. Finding sustainable peace was an enormous challenge for Suu Kyi and the NLD.

The NLD government conducted the 21st Century Panglong Conference/UPC in 2016 and 2017, attended by the President, the State Counsellor, the Vice Presidents, the UN Secretary-General, Hluttaw Speakers, the Commander-in-Chief, and representatives from ethnic armed organizations, political parties, the

government and hluttaw. The third UPC was held in 2018. The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signatories and non-NCA Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) also attended. The government decided to have three types of dialogues at regional, national and ethnic levels and formed the Joint Coordinating Body (JCB) for peace process funding.

Meanwhile, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar has caused hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya to flee their homes in the predominantly Buddhist country. In 2016 and 2017, the military and local security forces mounted a brutal campaign against the Rohingya. Rights groups and UN officials suspect that the military committed genocide against the Rohingya. Myanmar's government and the military have denied that ethnic cleansing is taking place, and Suu Kyi defended the military at a tribunal in the International Court of Justice at The Hague. The crisis has had a negative impact on the reforms process in Myanmar due to lack of peace and stability in the country.

The 2020 general elections saw the National League for Democracy (NLD) win 920 of the total 1,117 seats, up 61 seats from the 2015 election. The main opposition party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), won 71 seats. The USDP accused the NLD of engaging in electoral fraud and called for fresh elections. Ethnic parties also alleged that the NLD government made pre-poll decisions that disadvantaged them. The controversy surrounding the 2020 general elections resulted in the military coup on February 1, 2021, hours before the new parliament was to convene and detained several leaders of the NLD party, including President Win Myint and State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi.

Following the coup, the military handed power to its commander-in-chief and declared a state of emergency for a year. The military disrupted phone and internet connections, and the state television channel went off air. The military justified its action by citing the state of emergency provision in the constitution on sovereignty matters. The coup received a mixed response from both people inside the country and abroad. The international community condemned the coup, with the UN and the EU, and countries such as the US, Britain, Australia, India, and Japan expressing concerns.

The military regime in Myanmar declared a ‘State of Emergency’ for one year and detained and charged de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi with corruption and other crimes. Massive protests erupted nationwide in the weeks after the coup, leading to the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG). In September, the NUG declared war on the junta and formed an armed division known as the People’s Defence Force. In August 2022, General Min Aung Hlaing declared the extension of the state of emergency for another one year, and further extended the state of emergency for another six months on February 1, 2023 while the pro-democracy supporters responded with a silent strike.

The fifth chapter mainly deals with the relations between India and Myanmar in the post-Myanmar’s reforms period i.e. the implication of reforms in India-Myanmar relations. The new government of Myanmar in 2011 under the leadership of Thein Sein has been engaging in serious reform process and has set an ambitious agenda of achieving good governance to achieve national political reconciliation and rapid economic development. This has resulted in improved relations with the international community, particularly with the Western nations. In 2012, the

European Union (EU) agreed to suspend sanctions except for arms embargo, but cautioned that sanctions could be reinstated if the Myanmar government backtracks on its democratic reforms.

India sees Myanmar as a natural partner and attaches great importance to its relation with Myanmar. The government of India is actively involved in over a dozen projects in Myanmar, both in infrastructural and non-infrastructural areas, such as upgradation and resurfacing of the 160 km. long Tamu-Kaletwa road; construction and upgradation of Rih-Tiddim Road in Myanmar; the Kaldan Multimodal Transport Project etc. Myanmar has seen positive political developments in recent years, with Myanmar drafting a new Constitution, holding a referendum, organizing elections and installing a civilian led government. Defence and security cooperation between the two countries is important as Myanmar needs security and stability to promote reforms, and India and Myanmar can cooperate in non-traditional security issues in the region. The pace of democratic reforms in Myanmar in recent times has opened up an opportunity for India to engage more seriously with Myanmar.

India and Myanmar have enjoyed deep-rooted and multifaceted relations for centuries, strengthened further through exchange of high level visits in recent times. On October 12-15, 2011, President Thein Sein embarked on a State Visit to India, the first state visit from Myanmar since the country's new leader took office. During the visit, two documents were signed: the Memorandum of Understanding for the Upgrading of the Yangon Children's Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital; and the Programme of Cooperation in Science & Technology for the period of 2012-2015.

The Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh made a state visit to Myanmar in 2012, signing 12 memorandums of understanding and agreements, including a Line of Credit (LOC) of US\$ 500 million, support for the establishment of an Advanced Centre for Agriculture Research and Education, a Rice Bio-park, and an Information Technology Institute. The current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi also visited Myanmar on November 11-13 in 2014 to attend the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and 9th East Asia Summit. External Affairs Minister of India, Shusma Swaraj also visited Myanmar in August 2016. Meanwhile, Htin Kyaw, the newly elected President of Myanmar during that time also visited India in August 2016.

Myanmar's State Counsellor and Foreign Minister, Aung San Suu Kyi also visited India in October 2016 to attend the BIMSTEC Retreat and BRICS meeting. The then India's Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan also visited Myanmar in February 2017 with the objective of improving hydrocarbon relations between India and Myanmar. Meanwhile, Myanmar's State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi again visited India to attend the 69th Republic Day event in New Delhi. At the invitation of Ram Nath Kovind, the President of India, Win Myint, the President of Myanmar and Daw Cho Cho, the First Lady are undertaking a State Visit to India from 26 to 29 February 2020.

The leaders of India and Myanmar in their mutual visits discussed a wide range of bilateral, regional and international issues of common interest. They welcomed the synergies between Myanmar's independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy and India's 'Act East' and 'Neighbourhood First' policies. India appreciated Myanmar's cooperation and efforts in facilitating the movement of

project personnel, construction material and equipment for the construction of the road component of Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project.

The Government of India is actively involved in over a dozen projects in Myanmar, both in infrastructural and non-infrastructural areas. These include upgrading and resurfacing of the 160 km long Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo Friendship Road, construction and upgradation of the Rih-Tiddim Road in Myanmar, the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP), proposed Imphal – Mandalay Bus Service, ADSL project for high-speed data link in 32 Myanmar cities, ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), GAIL and ESSAR are participants in the energy sector in Myanmar.

M/S RITES is involved in the development of the rail transportation system and in the supply of railway coaches, locos and parts. An India-Myanmar Industrial Training Centre has been set up by HMT (1) in Myanmar with the assistance of India in Pakokku, a second centre is being set up in Myingyan. Other projects include restoration of the Ananda Temple in Bagan, upgradation of the Yangon Children's Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital, erection of disaster proof rice silos, and reconstruction of one high school and six primary schools in Tarlay township, the area worst affected by the severe earthquake that struck north-eastern Myanmar in March 2011.

Trade between India and Myanmar has increased significantly over the last three decades, from US\$ 12.4 million in 1980-1981 to US\$ 1070.88 million in 2010-2011. Agricultural goods account for the vast majority of India's imports from Myanmar, while steel and medicines make up the bulk of India's exports. The Joint

Trade Committee (JTC) was established since 2003 and has been effective in directing business connections. India and Myanmar have signed Bilateral Investment Promotion & Protection Agreements (BIPPA) and the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) to improve connectivity, trade and investments. India and Myanmar have been organizing discussions and meetings frequently in the post-reforms period in Myanmar to improve connectivity and trade.

India's investments in Myanmar have been primarily in the oil and gas industry, with other sectors of investment such as wood products, financial services, and original equipment manufacturer (OEM) for non-automotive transport. As of November 2019, India is ranked 11th in the world in terms of investment, with 33 Indian companies having their investments authorized. Myanmar has invested US\$ 8.97 million in India, with thirteen Indian public sector organizations operating in different industries. Foreign MNCs are investing in Myanmar due to the New Foreign Investment Law and rules made by various departments as a result of reforms in the country. In Myanmar, FDI is increasing due to the creation of a New Special Economic Zone Law and reforms to take steps towards an open market for investments. Indian companies have shown interests in Myanmar especially in energy and infrastructural sectors.

India and Myanmar have established a network among educational institutions and signed an agreement to establish robust security mechanisms for land borders. In the defence and security domain, India has supported Myanmar's defence forces through capacity building and supplied some military hardware. Myanmar has also participated in multilateral maritime forums with India. India and Myanmar are increasing their cooperation in defence and security in recent years. India and

Myanmar have been holding regular border liaison meetings. In June 2015, a surgical strike was successfully launched by the Indian Army with the cooperation of Myanmar Army against the insurgents group NSCN-K in the India-Myanmar border.

Myanmar is an important partner of India in the BIMSTEC and in the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) initiative. Myanmar's geographic location serves as a land bridge for India to engage with mainland Southeast Asia, and can facilitate and foster economic growth of India's Northeast region. India-Myanmar relations are driven by national interests, geo-strategic importance, and national security. India's Look East/Act East Policy serves as an essential instrument in its foreign policy, and Myanmar's strategic location provides an opportunity to connect mainland Southeast Asia. The traditional ties of friendly relations have been further strengthened since the recent political reforms in Myanmar.

India still maintained a warm relationship with Myanmar since the military coup in 2021, taking a measured approach to the unfolding situation. It is unlikely to deviate from its policy of non-interference, but will likely call for peace from time to time. India was among the eight countries to attend a military parade in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw on March 27, 2021 to celebrate the Tatmadaw Day. India's silent stance regarding the political turmoil in Myanmar may be attributed to its adherence to pragmatism. India recognizes the importance of mutual cooperation and engagement with Myanmar for its national interest, and wants peace and stability in Myanmar to protect its investments and projects.

The major findings of the thesis includes the following discussions. The minorities in the Frontier Areas in Myanmar (Burma) has developed a distinct identity which is

different from the majority Burmans and thus, during the dawn of independence, they were mostly apprehensive of the majority Burmans. This is mainly due to religious and cultural differences and the legacy of British colonialism as the British were administering the mainland Burma and Frontier Areas separately. Though the Panglong Agreement signed in 1947 paved the way for building a unified nation, various minorities groups are still not satisfied with the implementation of the agreement and as such they are still fighting for it even till today. Thus, the negligence of the aspirations of minorities in the Frontier Areas and the poor implementation of the Panglong Agreement is one of the main problems faced by Myanmar's government from the past till the present period.

Ethnic unrest leading to instability in the country is a major concern that has to be dealt seriously. Moreover, if one major factor has to be pinned down for reason of the military coup in 1962, it is the ethnic conflict and ethnic unrest faced by the country during that time. The long demand of autonomy or federalism in line with the provisions of the Panglong Agreement by the ethnic minorities is the major factor for ethnic unrest in Myanmar. The civilian governments before and after the military coup as well as the military governments in Myanmar did not seriously deal with the issue of the demand for autonomy or federalism to the minorities.

During parliamentary democracy before the military coup in 1962, the government was unable to establish sufficient connection with the general public, especially with ethnic minorities. There were limited skilled administrators, tools and resources for Prime Minister U Nu to run his government effectively, and the insurgents often threatened even Rangoon. This created a gap between citizens and the leadership, leading to a volatile situation in the country.

For a government to function responsibly, it is essential to have a system that can effectively connect leaders with the general public. Prior experience or expertise helps people who are in decision-making positions. In order to have a government that is accountable to the public, the leadership needs to be able to listen to the general public and incorporate feedback into policies and services. But in authoritarian regimes, experiences or expertise do not matter when it comes to policy decision making because all major policies are decided by military dictators.

The political developments in Myanmar has been largely influenced and shaped by the military as the military has ruled the country for more than five decades and as such the people of Myanmar in general has developed a sense of fear with the military personnel. According to various interviews conducted by the scholar with refugees from Myanmar staying in Mizoram, majority of the people still felt a sense of fear or apprehension of the military even after the installation of civilian governments in the country. Since they were under the military rule for too long, they don't know how democracy actually works so as many of their elected leaders. Their fear and apprehension once again proved right when the military staged another coup in February 2021.

The desire and demand for democracy has been the lifelong dreams of the majority of people in Myanmar which has culminated in various events such as the 8888 uprising, the Saffron Revolution in 2007 and the recent nationwide protest since February 2021. But since, the military has the power as well as resources to subjugate such protests and demonstrations, the dreams of the people of Myanmar are often devastated from time to time. Guilmartin in his article has discussed the importance of technology, strategy, cohesiveness, and logistics for a successful

military operation. A cohesive organization brings military troops together for a single goal, even when faced with violence or death threats. Despite certain internal disputes, Myanmar's military had an established coherent structure due to oppressive leadership and severe regulations. This cohesion has been difficult to penetrate in the absence of alternative robust institutions, such as civil societies or elected democratic organizations. Myanmar's military hierarchy has traditionally been a highly guarded institution, although it has often sought legitimacy, support, and collaboration from the international world.

Being a close neighbour, India and Myanmar has maintained relations and connections spanning geography, colonial, political, history, religion, and culture since ancient times. Even during the colonial period, nationalist movement in India and Myanmar were closely connected and inspired one another. The post-colonial period of India's relation with Myanmar was marked by highs and lows. Between 1948 and 1962, India and Myanmar maintained cordial ties as India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Myanmar's Prime Minister U Nu were good friend. The signing of treaty of friendship between India and Myanmar in 1951 was a significant step towards the consolidation and expansion of the relations. The relations got strained after the military took over the administration in Myanmar. As Myanmar followed an isolationist policy, bilateral relations between India and Myanmar were significantly reduced. Although diplomatic ties remained cordial but it was limited to formal exchanges.

India publicly supported the democratic movement in Myanmar in 1988 and even sent a petition for Aung San Suu Kyi's release to the Military government. India was of the opinion that a democratic administration in Myanmar would be

more amenable to India's national security interest. The shift in India's position in the early 1990s was due to the evolving geopolitical, economic, and security considerations. India's Look East Policy and Neighbourhood First Policy has been one of the guiding factors in this regard. India-Myanmar relationship has been strengthened by two path-breaking visits between leaders of the two countries. General Than Shwe's 2004 visit was the first head of state level visit from Myanmar in 24 years, and Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam's return visit in 2006 was the first by an Indian President to Myanmar since Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit in 1987.

India's pragmatic approach in place of idealist approach towards Myanmar has been witnessed since the early 1990s so as to achieve national interest. India has realized the importance of cooperating with the military when it comes to Myanmar politics. As India's Look East Policy is basically based on the consenting cooperation of Myanmar so as to enter Southeast Asian economy, India has no choice but to deal with the military regime in Myanmar. Besides this, the growing influence of China in nearby region has compelled India to engage with Myanmar so as to counter Chinese influence. Thus, it can rightly be said that India's pragmatic approach towards Myanmar has been largely shaped by geo-political, economic and strategic factors.

With regards to the political reforms in Myanmar, it can be seen that the military regime in Myanmar has really committed for the reforms process to take place in the country. But the reforms has been made according to their own terms and conditions. This has been clearly indicated by the provisions of the 2008 Constitution which the military themselves has drafted and adopted it. Since the 2008 Constitution has reserved 25 per cent of seats for the military in every level of

legislature, the military still enjoy certain control over the administration of the country either directly or indirectly. Besides this, the military still has control over border affairs, defence and home affairs.

The personality and leadership of President Thein Sein is remarkable in the actual implementation of political reforms in Myanmar. His political will and conviction led to a number of concrete reforms in the country. His permission to re-register the NLD as a political party and allowing them to contest in the by-elections of 2012 has been significant. The acceptance of the 2012 by-elections result as well as the 2015 general elections results by the former general Thein Sein and his party is noteworthy. It can be said that President Thein Sein has lead the country from military rule to democracy although the nature of democracy may be subjective.

The majority of the people of Myanmar had entrusted their faith in Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the NLD to lead the country into a new era of peace and development. Since they came to power, Suu Kyi and the NLD faces certain challenges to implement further reforms such as negotiating peace to the ethnic arms groups and attracting investments from abroad at the same time, managing a cordial relations with the military. Since the military is still a part and parcel of Myanmar's administration as according to the 2008 constitution, the civilian government led by Suu Kyi has to tread carefully with the military in governing the country.

The Rohingya crisis from 2016 in Myanmar put various pressures from the international community on Suu Kyi and the NLD to take necessary steps to ameliorate the situation. As Suu Kyi is known to the world as an icon of peace and democracy and even a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate in 1991, the international

community expected a lot from her in the midst of alleged genocide of the Rohingyas in Myanmar. But Suu Kyi in fact, defended the actions of Myanmar's military in the International Court of Justice denying an act of genocide from the military. The main reasons behind Suu Kyi's defending of military's action was that she realized the importance of managing a good relations with the military to keep the country intact. Moreover, she realized the importance of pragmatic approach rather than a strict adherence to principle and ideology at the cost of national interest. She realized the importance of managing the relations with the military in order to stay in power.

Besides these, majority of the people of Myanmar have regarded Rohingya Muslims as foreigners and as such they mostly don't care much about them. While Suu Kyi has lost a certain degree of credibility at the international level, she gains a certain degree of credibility and support at the domestic level from her own people. With regards to negotiating peace in the country, Suu Kyi and the NLD did not achieve much. The 21st Century Panglong Conference/ United Peace Conference did not bear the desire result for the implementation of peace process in the country. In fact, the lifelong desire and aspiration of the minorities of granting a federal state or self-autonomy to the minorities was still not considered in the conference.

Based on the observations and interviews conducted by the scholar, although the majority of people from the minorities still put their faith in Aung San Suu Kyi, they were apprehensive of her ethnic Burman colleagues in the NLD with regards to the granting of a federal state or autonomy by the government. Moreover, in comparison of government between the USDP led by Thein Sein and the NLD led by Suu Kyi, it can be said that the USDP government has done better in terms of

bringing reforms to the country. This is mainly because the reforms under the USDP began in earnest and President Thein Sein listened to his advisers.

Even in terms of freedom, there was more freedom under the USDP government as compared to the NLD government. The leash on the media and civil society was loosened during the USDP government. Many of them were reversed back by the NLD government. But it can be said that there was much more freedom under the civilian government led by both the USDP and the NLD as compared to the previous military government in the country. But both the civilian government have failed internally when it comes to bringing sustainable peace in the country as well as granting of federalism/autonomy to the minorities. The political culture of aversion to pluralism as well as addiction to authoritarianism has once again resulted in the military coup in the country.

In regards to the military coup in February 2021, Suu Kyi and the NLD leaders failed to comply with the military leaders. Besides this, the personal ambition of Myanmar's military chief, General Min Aung Hlaing seems to be the driving force behind this coup. As Min Aung Hlaing retirement is due on July 2021, his ambition of ruling the country by any means available is done by him. Besides, the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar provides a provision for the commander-in-chief to declare emergency in the country. The undemocratic nature of the 2008 Constitution in terms of assigning 25 per cent of seats in the legislature as well the provisions of giving undue advantages to the military is one of the main obstacle for Myanmar to become a full democratic country.

In regards to the implications of political reforms in Myanmar on India-Myanmar relations, it can be said that India-Myanmar relations have significantly improved in the post Myanmar's reforms period. As a functioning democracy, India naturally supported and welcomed the democratic reforms in Myanmar. Bilateral relations between the two countries entered the next step marked by high level visits from both countries. Economic relations improved to a considerable extent as compared to the period of the military regimes in Myanmar. India made a sincere effort to cooperate with the USDP and the NLD government to implement various projects and investments.

But, the relations between India and Myanmar in the post Myanmar's reforms was not boosted as expected. The reasons include the influence of China in Myanmar even under the NLD government. As Suu Kyi and the NLD had adopted pragmatic approach to serve their national interest, they cannot easily avert China. They have to look for the best which serves their benefits. Besides, India does not act promptly to various opportunities in Myanmar which could serve its interest. But, India-Myanmar relations have been improving over the two last decades since the adoption of pragmatic and positive approach to Myanmar by India.

According to interview with Myanmar's Ambassador to India, Moe Kyaw Aung by the scholar, he said that India lacked behind China since China is more agile, quick and productive. He believed that in the long run, India has a better potential and scope than China to be Myanmar's partner. Kiran Khatri, the Deputy Secretary of Ministry of External Affairs, in an interview with the scholar also emphasized that India always support democracy in its neighbouring countries including Myanmar. She also stated that India is a silent partner for Myanmar from a

long time along with Japan. In the post reforms period in Myanmar i.e. after the military coup, relations between India and Myanmar did not experience much differences. India still maintain a cordial relations with the military government in Myanmar. As India recognizes the importance of military elements in Myanmar politics, relations between the two countries is still very warm and cordial even after the military coup in Myanmar.

The suggestions made by the scholar includes the following discussion. With regards to the politics of Myanmar, the demand and aspirations of the ethnic minorities need to be dealt seriously by the government whether military or civilian in Myanmar. The long struggle for demand of autonomy in the form of a federal state by the ethnic minorities has to be properly addressed by whoever is in charge of power in Myanmar. Provisions for special protection and treatment for the minorities in Myanmar needs to be implemented by the government to preserve their own distinct culture, religions and social norms more or less like in India. Reservation of seats for the minorities in the government sector could also be implemented in Myanmar.

Under the federal system of government, provisions for a certain degree of autonomy can also be granted to those sub-ethnic tribes in the region more or less like the Sixth Schedule in the Constitution of India under Article 244 (2) and 275 (1). The politics of compromise needs to be made by the military as well as civil politicians in order to promote peace and stability in the country. Ethnic Armed Organizations of various groups need to be negotiated patiently by the government. Peace and stability should be the top most priority for the government in Myanmar.

Overall, the political culture of Myanmar in general needs to be improved drastically so as to embrace plurality, tolerance and inclusiveness.

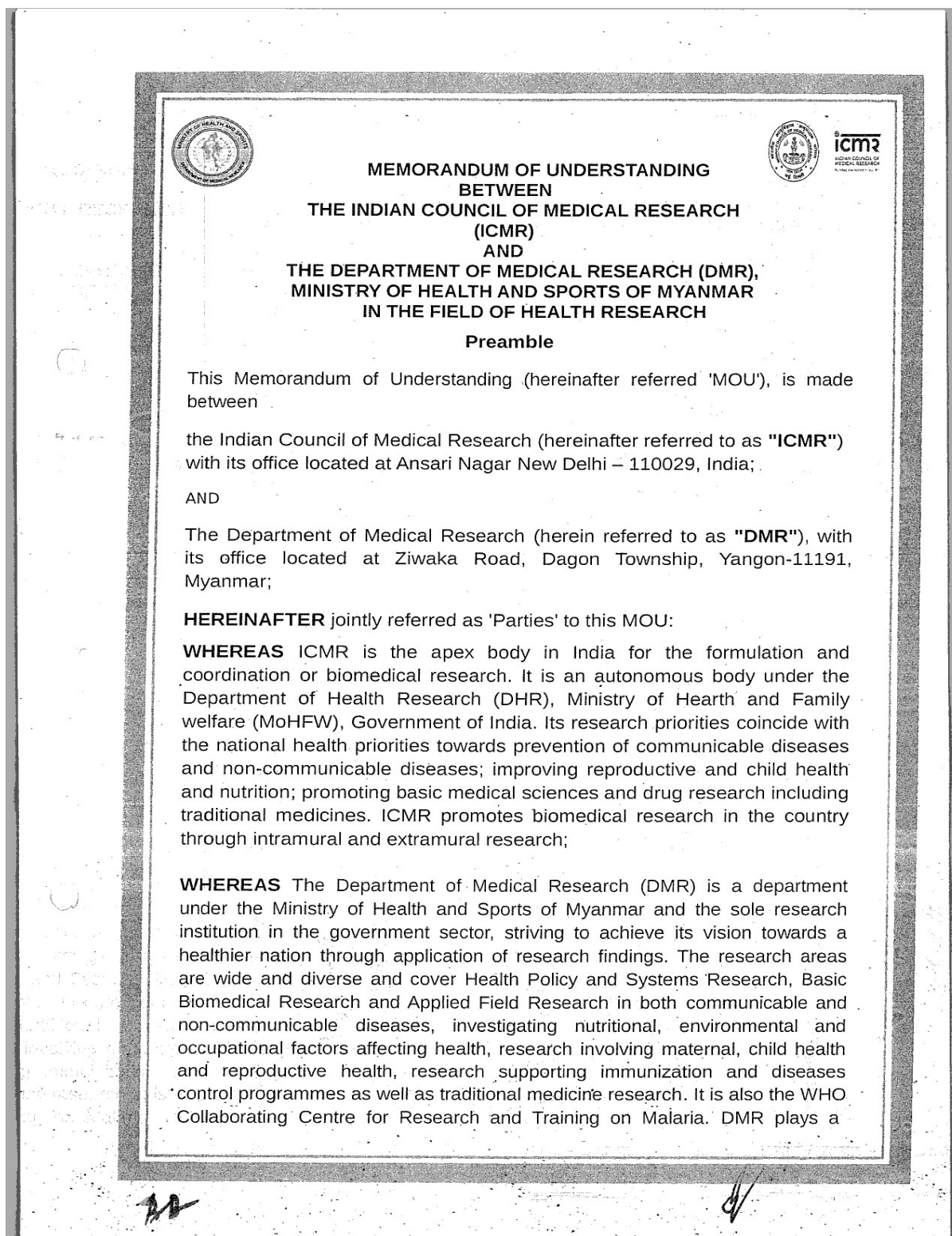
With regards to India-Myanmar relations, both countries can do better in terms of bilateral cooperation and engagement as well as in the regional and sub-regional level. The Northeast region of India is an essential factor in extending linkages with the Southeast Asian countries via Myanmar for India. But, inadequate development and connectivity with poor infrastructural set up has been the bottleneck. And as such, measures should be taken by India so as to boost India-Myanmar relations. India and Myanmar could establish Strategic Partnership. Scope and contours of the partnership should be aligned through high level summits. These summits would give a boost to the relationship, provide the platform to align views and stands on bilateral, regional and international issues.

India also needs to recreate its impression as a reluctant power before Myanmar and should consider taking a bold steps to enhance security and defence cooperation, especially with regard to maritime security. India should maintain a close cooperation with the military in Myanmar whether they are in charge of the government or not. People to people contact should be encouraged by both countries. The development projects involving India and Myanmar should be properly monitored by both the governments. Both countries need to work out on practical and tangible ways of increasing their multi-dimensional cooperation in regional and sub-regional organizations such as BIMSTEC, BCIM and MGC.

With regards to the political turmoil in Myanmar owing to the recent military coup, India can play a mediator role in negotiating for peace in Myanmar. India should strive for peace and stability in Myanmar in order to protect its investments and projects in Myanmar. At the same time, the refugee influx from Myanmar in different states of North East India due to the military coup also needs to be addressed by the Indian government. India should be more vocal in issues such as human rights violations and breach of personal freedom on grounds of humanity. Overall, India currently needs to tread carefully and positively with Myanmar in order to balance both its national interest and regards for humanity.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Memorandum of Understanding between ICMR, India and DMR, Myanmar



pivotal role in strengthening research integrity and ethical issues, developing quality research proposals with a responsible conduct of research, research capacity strengthening and knowledge management;

DESIROUS of intensifying cooperation and collaboration between themselves and of establishing appropriate working arrangements for the satisfactory implementation of the MOU;

HAVE REACHED THE FOLLOWING UNDERSTANDING:

Article 1: The Purpose/Objectives

The main purpose of this MOU is to build on the health research relationship in the topics of mutual research.

Article 2: Scope of Cooperation

- i. Elimination of Infectious Diseases (to be decided mutually)
- ii. Development of network platform for emerging and viral infections
- iii. Training/ Capacity building in Research methodology management, clinical trials, ethics etc.
- iv. Harmonization of regulatory mechanism.

Article 3: Modalities of Cooperation/Funding arrangements

ICMR and the DMR shall promote direct cooperation likely to be advantageous to both organizations through mechanisms that Parties may agree as on when the need arises. These mechanisms may also include, but shall not be limited to:

- i. Joint workshops/Symposia to scope calls for proposals and identify mutually important topics of collaboration.
- ii. Joint research proposals/projects in mutually identified areas which may include research, training and the application of knowledge.
- iii. The exchange of scientists under approved collaborative projects.
- iv. Commitment of funds for workshops/meetings and research projects may be decided from time to time as per the funds available at that time.

Arrangements to implement and execute all these activities shall be agreed to by the Parties prior to commencement of the activity.

Article 4: Governance and Management

The Parties shall establish a Joint Working Group (JWG) consisting of delegates from each organization. The JWG shall convene a meeting once a year or as required. JWG sessions shall be held alternatively in India and in.

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Myanmar. The expenses related to travel, including visa entry, accommodation, per diem, health insurance, local transportation of its JWG members, shall be borne by the Sending Party whereas the organizational expenses of the JWG meetings shall be borne by the Host Party.

The JWG shall be responsible for:

- (a) Providing an overview and overall direction to the programme and would be the final decision making body of the programme;
- (b) Review of the progress and recommending oversight and support mechanisms to both Parties for the smooth operation of the program;
- (c) Identify topical areas of particular strategic importance to the research cooperation between the Parties, and shall propose/prioritize topics for joint funding.

Article 5:

Intellectual Property Rights, Commercialization and Publications

Intellectual Property Rights:

- (i) The Parties shall ensure appropriate protection of Intellectual Property Rights generated from cooperation pursuant to MoU, consistent with their respective laws rules and regulations and multilateral agreements to which countries of both the Parties are party to
- (ii) In case of research results obtained through joint activities, the grant of intellectual property rights will be sought by both the Parties jointly and once granted these rights will jointly be owned by the Parties.
- (iii) The Parties shall not assign any rights and obligations arising out of the IPR generated pursuant to cooperation activities under this MOU to any third party without prior written consent of the other Party.

Commercialization:

In case of research results obtained through joint activities under this MOU both Indian and Myanmar Parties shall apply as co-applicants for the protection of intellectual property rights subject to exclusive rights of both the Parties to commercialize the technology in their respective countries. Commercialization in any other country shall be done jointly through a separate agreement.

Publication:

- (i) Any publication, document and/or paper arising out of joint work conducted by the participants pursuant to this MoU must acknowledge the ICMR- DMR Party partnership and will be jointly owned by the Parties.
- (ii) The use of the name, logo and/or official emblem of the Parties on any publication, document and/or paper shall require prior permission of both the Parties. It may however be ensured that the official emblem and logo is not misused.

Article 6: Confidentiality

- i. During the term of this MoU and thereafter, each Party, their affiliates, employees and agents shall not disclose any confidential information of the other Party.
- ii. Neither Party shall make any public announcement relating to scientific research outcome and commercialization under this MoU or any of the collaborative work hereunder without the prior written consent of the other Party.
- iii. All information and documents to be exchanged pursuant to the MoU will be kept confidential by the Parties and will be used subject to such terms as each Party may specify. The Parties will not use the information for purposes other than that specified without the prior written consent of the other Party.
- iv. All Confidential Information shall remain the exclusive property of the disclosing Party. The Parties agree that the disclosure of Confidential Information do not grant or imply any license, interest or right to the Recipient in respect to any intellectual property right of the other Party.
- v. Unpublished information, whether oral, in writing or otherwise, discovered or conceived by the scientists or technicians and exchanged under the provisions of this MoU will not be transmitted to a third party, unless otherwise agreed by the Parties.

Article 7:

Ethical issues/Transfer of biological Material/Data Sharing

1. Both Parties acknowledge the importance of the protection of human and animal subjects in any health program. In recognition of this, both the Indian and the Myanmar governments have adopted laws and regulations on the protection of human and animal subjects, including the transfer of biological material and intend to follow the same in accordance with applicable laws, regulations and policy of each country. Matters related to the transfer of biological material and research projects should receive prior approval on each side according to the existing rules and regulations of each country. In India such projects will require Health Ministry's Screening Committee (HMSC) approval.
2. Investigators should also share their findings with the relevant institutions articulating how the work informs policy and practice both in India and Myanmar. The Parties encourage the investigators to put the data arising from the funded work into open access.

Article 8: Disputes

Any dispute arising out of the interpretation or implementation of this MoU shall be settled amicably through consultation and negotiations between the Parties.

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Article 9: Exclusivity

The Parties understand that this relationship is not exclusive and that entering into this MOU will not prevent either Party from associating with any other Party for the purpose of conducting similar programmes.

Article 10: Obligations

This Memorandum of Understanding is not intended to create binding, legal obligations between the Parties.

Article 11: Validity

The duration of this MOU is five years from the date of the last signature of the Parties, unless terminated earlier. The MOU may be renewed for further periods by mutual agreement between the Parties.

Article 12: Termination

Either Party may terminate this MOU by giving 6 months advance written notice to the other. The premature termination of this MOU shall not affect the implementation of initiated or ongoing activities and projects.

Article 13: Amendment

Amendments, revisions or modification to this MOU may be proposed by either Party at any time during the term of the MOU and shall be effective from the date of written agreement signed by both Parties. These amendments shall serve as integral parts of this MOU.

In Witness whereof, the duly authorized representatives of the Parties have signed this MoU.

This Memorandum of Understanding is signed in two originals in English on 27th February, 2020 in New Delhi, India.

**For and on behalf of
the Government of the Republic
of India**

**For and on behalf of
the Government of the Republic of
the Union of Myanmar**



**Prof. (Dr.) Balram Bhargava
Director General, ICMR**



**HE Moe Kyaw Aung
Ambassador of Myanmar to India**

Appendix 2: Panglong Agreement, 1947

Panglong Agreement

Panglong, 12 February 1947

A conference having been held at Panglong, attended by certain Members of the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma, all Saohpas and representative of the Shan States, the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills:

The Members of the conference, believing that freedom will be more speedily achieved by the Shans, the Kachins and the Chins by their immediate co-operation with the Interim Burmese Government:

1. A Representative of the Hill Peoples, selected by the Governor on the recommendation of representatives of the Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples (SCOUHP), shall be appointed a Counsellor for Frontier Areas shall be given executive authority by similar means.
2. The said Counsellor shall also be appointed a Member of the Governor's Executive Council, without portfolio, and the subject of Frontier Areas brought within the purview of the Executive Council by Constitutional Convention as in the case of Defence and External Affairs. The Counsellor for Frontier Areas shall be given executive authority by similar means.
3. The said Counsellor shall be assisted by two Deputy Counsellors representing races of which he is not a member. While the two Deputy Counsellors should deal in the first instance with the affairs of their respective areas and the Counsellor with all the remaining parts of the Frontier Areas, they should by Constitutional Convention act on the principle of joint responsibility.
4. While the Counsellor, in his capacity of Member of the Executive Council, will be the only representative of the Frontier Areas on the Council, the Deputy Counsellors shall be entitled to attend meetings of the Council when subjects pertaining to the Frontier Areas are discussed.
5. Though the Governor's Executive Council will be augmented as agreed above, it will not operate in respect of the Frontier Areas in any manner which would deprive any portion of those Areas of the autonomy which it now enjoys in internal administration. Full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas is accepted in principle.
6. Though the question of demarcating and establishing a separated Kachin State within a Unified Burma is one which must be relegated for decision by the Constituent Assembly, it is agreed that such a State is desirable. As a first step towards this end, the Counsellor for Frontier Areas and the Deputy Counsellors shall be consulted in the administration of

such areas in the Myitkyina and the Bhamo Districts as are Part II Scheduled Areas under the Government of Burma Act of 1935.

7. Citizens of the Frontier Areas shall enjoy rights and privileges which are regarded as fundamental in democratic countries.
8. The arrangements accepted in this Agreement are without prejudice to the financial autonomy now vested in the Federated Shan States.
9. The arrangements accepted in this Agreement are without prejudice to the financial assistance which the Kachin Hills and the Union Hills are entitled to receive from the revenues of Burma, and the Executive Council will examine with the Frontier Areas Counsellor and Deputy Counsellors the feasibility of adopting for the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills financial arrangement similar to those between Burma and the Federated Shan States.

Burmese Government.

(Signed) Aung San

Kachin Committee.

(Signed) Sinwa Naw, Myitkyina

(Signed) Zaurip, Myitkyina

(Signed) Dinra Tang, Myitkyina

(Signed) Zau La, Bhamo

(Signed) Zau Lawn, Bhamo

(Signed) Labang Grong, Bhamo

Chin Committee

(Signed) Pu Hlur Hmung, Falam

(Signed) Pu Thawng Za Khup, Tiddim

(Signed) Pu Kio Mang, Haka

Shan Committee

(Signed) Saohpalong of Tawngpeng State.

(Signed) Saohpalong of Yawnghwe State.

(Signed) Saohpalong of North Hsenwi State.

(Signed) Saohpalong of Laihka State.

(Signed) Saohpalong of Mong Pawn State.

(Signed) Saohpalong of Hsamonghkam State

(Signed) Representative of Hsahung Saohpalong, Hkun Pung

(Signed) U Tin E

(Signed) U Htun Myint
(Signed) U Kya Bu
(Signed) Hkun Saw
(Signed) Sao Yape Hpa
(Signed) Hkun Htee

Source: Ethnic National Council of Burma (Website)

Appendix 3: Memorandum of Understanding between Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Govt. of India and Ministry of Electricity and Energy, Govt. of Myanmar.

Memorandum of Understanding

Between

Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, the Republic of India

And

Ministry of Electricity and Energy, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar

For

Cooperation in the field of Petroleum Products

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Electricity and Energy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (hereinafter referred to as "the Parties");

RECOGNIZING the opportunities for enhanced economic, technological and commercial cooperation between India and Myanmar and the importance of joint economic projects for fulfilling the energy needs of Myanmar people;

STRIVING to strengthen and expand cooperation in the petroleum products sector by jointly taking up projects for mutual advantage; and

BELIEVING that cooperation in the field of petroleum products on the basis of equality, reciprocity, flexibility and mutual benefit between the Parties can help to meet common goals

HAVE REACHED the following understanding:

Article 1

Objective

The objective of this Memorandum of Understanding ("MoU") is to establish a framework for cooperation in the petroleum products sector between the Parties with a view to develop mechanism for institutional relationship in the petroleum products sector on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.

Article 2

Scope of Cooperation

The Parties will cooperate to enhance ties in the petroleum products sector, in conformity with their domestic laws and regulations. Subject to this MoU, the areas of cooperation between the parties may include refining, stockpiling, blending and retails.

Article 3

Forms of Cooperation

The Parties agree to

- (a) Strengthen petroleum products cooperation in the areas of mutual interest, such as crude refining, feedstock production and also those relating to downstream refined petroleum products, and investments for development of the petroleum products industry.
- (b) Exchange information in accordance with laws and regulations governing the petroleum products business.
- (c) Exchange information in the areas of new technologies, scientific research and Research and Development (R&D).
- (d) Organize educational and training programs for scientific and technical personnel.
- (e) Organize seminars and meetings to promote business opportunities and attract investments; and
- (f) Any other form of cooperation as may be agreed upon by the Parties.

Article 4

Procedures for Cooperation

- (a) For discussion on the areas of cooperation and implementation of action points, the Parties may set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) consisting of representatives of the Parties.
- (b) The JWG may meet at least twice a year on mutually determined dates in India and Myanmar. Each Party will solely cover its expenses relating to its participation in the meetings of JWG.
- (c) The Parties shall encourage cooperation within the areas referred to herein and may do so through partnerships, joint ventures, investment projects or any other suitable means including by jointly cooperating with third party international / major petrochemical companies, for their mutual benefit.

Article 5

Amendments and Validity

- (a) This MoU may be amended by mutual written consent of the Parties, specifying the date of entry into force of such amendments. The amendment shall form an integral part of this MoU.
- (b) This MoU shall enter into force on the day of its signing and shall remain in force for an initial term of two (2) years from the date of signing. Before expiry of this MoU, it will be extended by mutual consent of both Parties upon six months prior written notice by either Party.
- (c) This MoU shall be terminated by either Party upon six (6) months prior written notice to the other Party at any time. The Termination of this MoU shall not affect the completion of activities initiated under the MoU, unless otherwise mutually agreed in writing by the Parties.

Article 6

Confidentiality

- (a) The Parties may use information exchanged in conformity with the provisions of this MoU, except in the case where the Party or authorized persons providing such information have previously made known any restrictions or reservations concerning its use and dissemination.
- (b) The Parties will take all appropriate measures in accordance with their respective national laws and regulations to preserve any restrictions or reservations and to protect intellectual property rights including commercial and industrial secrets transferred between authorized persons within the jurisdictions of either Party.

Article 7

Dispute Resolution

Disputes concerning the interpretation and application of provisions in this MoU will be settled amicably by negotiations on the basis of mutual understanding and goodwill between the Parties.

Article 8

Status of this MoU

- (a) This MoU is not an international treaty or any other legally binding document and in no way restricts either of the Parties from participating in any activity with either public or private agencies, organizations or individuals.

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greements to
February, 2020

(b) Cooperation under this MoU shall not affect the rights and obligations of the Parties arising from other international agreements to which they are Party.

Signed in New Delhi, India on this 27th day of February, 2020 in two original copies in English.

For and on behalf of
the Government of the Republic of
India



Shri Sunil Kumar
Joint Secretary
Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas

For and on behalf of
the Government of the Republic of
the Union of Myanmar



U Than Zaw
Director General
Oil and Gas Planning Department
Ministry of Electricity and Energy

8

Appendix 4: Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of Myanmar on Visa Exemption for Official and Diplomatic Passport Holders.

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA
AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR ON VISA EXEMPTION
FOR OFFICIAL AND DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT HOLDERS**

The Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Union of Myanmar (hereinafter referred to as the Parties);

Recognising the friendly ties existing between the two countries;

Desirous of strengthening further and to consolidate their traditional friendly relations;

Desiring to facilitate the entry of citizens of the Republic of India and the citizens of the Union of Myanmar;

Who are holders of diplomatic and official passports into their respective countries;

Have agreed as follows;

Article – I

1. A citizen of one Party holding a valid diplomatic or official passport shall be exempt from entry visa, transit visa and/or, exit visa where applicable, while entering, transiting and exiting from the territory of the other Party.

2. A citizen of one Party holding the said passport shall be allowed to stay in the other Party's territory for a maximum period of ninety (90) days. On the written request from the diplomatic Mission or Consulate of the Party to which the citizen belongs, the other Party may give an extension beyond the said period.

Article – II

1. Members of the diplomatic Mission or Consulate of either Party located in the territory of the other Party shall be granted a residence visa valid for the duration of his/her assignment at the written request of the diplomatic Mission or Consulate concerned, provided that they are citizens of that Party and are holding diplomatic or official passports.

2. A citizen of one Party being the representative of his/her country in an international organisation located in the territory of the other Party holding the said passport shall also enjoy the rights mentioned in paragraph-1 of this Article. This would however not apply to such passport holders who are international civil servants or who are employed by an international organisation, body, agency or any other such entity.

157

3. The facilities enumerated in paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Article shall also apply to the spouse of a member of the diplomatic Mission or Consulate and their children, provided they are holding a similar category of passport or names of children are entered in their father's or mother's passport.

Article – III

1. This Agreement does not exempt the holder of the said passport from the obligation of respecting all regulations under existing laws of the host country.
2. Either Party has the right to refuse entry or to cut short the duration of stay of any citizen from the other Party.

Article – IV

If a citizen of one Party loses his/her passport in the territory of the other Party, he/she shall inform the authorities concerned of the host country for appropriate action. The diplomatic Mission or Consulate concerned will issue a fresh passport or travel document to its citizen and inform the concerned authorities of the host Government.

Article – V

For reasons of security, public order or public health, either Party may temporarily suspend a part of or the whole Agreement. The Party which decides to temporarily suspend or denounce a part of/or the whole Agreement shall immediately inform the other Party of such a decision through diplomatic channels.

Article – VI

After the entry into force of this Agreement, the two Parties shall exchange through diplomatic channels the sample of the passport being used by each Party, within 30 days of the signing of Agreement, and/the sample of any new passport, at least 30 days before it is introduced.

Article – VII

1. The Agreement shall enter into force on the date of last written information regarding completion by the Parties of the internal procedures, if any, necessary for its enforcement.
2. This Agreement shall be valid for an indefinite period unless either Party gives to the other three months' notice in writing of its intention to terminate the Agreement.

3. This Agreement may be modified or amended by mutual consent of the two Parties.

IN WITNESS WHERE OF, the undersigned being duly authorised thereto by their respective Governments, have signed the present Agreement.


Done at Yangon on this (2nd) day of November of the year 2003 in two originals each in Hindi, English and Myanmar languages, all the texts being equally authentic. In case of any divergence of interpretation, the English text, shall prevail.

For the Government of
Republic of India



Kanwal Sibal
Foreign Secretary
Ministry of External Affairs

For the Government of
Union of Myanmar



Khin Maung Win
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Appendix 5: Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India and the Ministry of Education, Govt. of Myanmar.

**Memorandum of Understanding
Between
The Ministry of Human Resource Development,
Government of India
and
The Ministry of Education,
Government of The Union of Myanmar**

Recognising the friendship and mutual understanding between the two countries and considering it desirable to consolidate and strengthen mutual cooperation in the field of education, the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and the Ministry of Education, Government of the Union of Myanmar agree to enter into a formal MoU.

1. The two partners will jointly develop some or all of the following activities based on their respective academic and educational needs:
 - (i) exchange of research materials, publications and information;
 - (ii) organization of joint conferences and seminars;
 - (iii) organization of joint research programmes;
 - (iv) organization of joint training and retraining programmes;
 - (v) organization of sandwich programmes for Ph.D students;
 - (vi) exchange of academic and other administrative staff;
 - (vii) exchange of scholars and students; and
 - (viii) exchange and collaboration of technology.
2. The implementation of exchange based on this MoU shall be separately negotiated and determined by both partners.

3. Nothing shall diminish the full autonomy of either partner nor will any constraints or financial obligations be imposed by either upon the other in carrying out the agreement.
4. The MoU is subject to revision or renewal by mutual agreement. It is also understood that either partner may terminate the MoU at any time, although such action will only be taken after mutual consultation in order to avoid any possible inconvenience.
5. This MoU is effective from the date when the representatives of both partners have signed the document.



(KANWAL SIBAL)
FOREIGN SECRETARY
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

YANGON
2 November, 2003



(MYO NYUNT)
DEPUTY MINISTER
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
GOVERNMENT OF THE
UNION OF MYANMAR

YANGON
2 November, 2003

Appendix 6: Memorandum of Understanding between Govt. of India and Govt. of Myanmar on cooperation in the field of Agriculture and Allied Sectors.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA
AND
THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR
ON
COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF AGRICULTURE
AND ALLIED SECTORS

The Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Union of Myanmar, hereinafter referred to as the "Parties".

Desirous to develop further the existing friendly relations between the two countries through the development of cooperation in the fields of agricultural science and technology;

Recognizing the importance of strengthening of agricultural sectors;

Have agreed as follows:

ARTICLE - I

The Parties shall work to encourage cooperation in the fields of agricultural science and technology with the objective of increasing agricultural production. The Parties shall engage in joint activities in the areas of crop sciences, research, agricultural extension, sericulture, horticulture, jute, sugarcane, arid zone agriculture, cooperative farming, agricultural mechanization, agricultural statistics--

information system(GIS) fertilizer and pesticides use and agricultural joint ventures, agro based industries such as sugar, jute, cotton, tea processing industries, exchange of scientific information and germ-plasm, rainfed farming, watershed development and water resources development including irrigation.

ARTICLE - II

The parties shall promote development of cooperation in agricultural science and technology, exchange of delegation and experts and also exchange of trainees in order to acquaint themselves of the development in the areas referred to in Article - I.

ARTICLE - III

The parties shall promote cooperation within the frame-work of the joint activities mentioned in Article-I through biennial Work Plans to be drawn up by mutual agreement.

ARTICLE - IV

A Joint Working Group shall be formed comprising of equal number of members from each of the Parties which will monitor the activities carried out in fulfilment of this Memorandum of Understanding. The Working Group shall

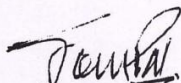
ARTICLE - VIII

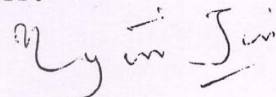
Any dispute between the Parties concerning the implementation or interpretation of this Memorandum shall be settled amicably by way of consultation or negotiation.

ARTICLE - IX

This Memorandum shall enter into force on the day of signing and shall remain valid for a period of 5(five) years and shall automatically be renewed for a subsequent period of 5(five) years unless either Party notifies the other, in writing, six months before the expiration of the validity period, of its intention to terminate it. The expiry or termination of this Memorandum shall not prejudice the completion of projects already in progress. Any addition or amendment to this Memorandum shall be carried out by mutual consent.

Signed in Yangon on this 25th day of April, 1998 in two originals each in Hindi, Myanmar and English languages, all the texts being equally authentic. In case of any doubt the English text shall prevail.


(SOM PAL)
MINISTER OF STATE FOR
AGRICULTURE
FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA


(MAJ. GEN. NYU:NT TIN)
MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE
AND IRRIGATION
FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE UNION OF MYANMAR

Appendix 7: The Gazette of India on Memorandum of Understanding between Govt of India and Govt. of Myanmar for import of toor and urad.

रविस्त्री सं. डी.एल.- 33004/99

REGD. No. D. L.-33004/99


भारत का राजपत्र
The Gazette of India

सी.जी.-डी.एल.-अ.-24062021-227865
CG-DL-E-24062021-227865

असाधारण
EXTRAORDINARY
भाग I—खण्ड 1
PART I—Section 1
प्रधिकार से प्रकाशित
PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY

सं. 175] नई दिल्ली, बृहस्पतिवार, जून 24, 2021/आषाढ़ 3, 1943
No. 175] NEW DELHI, THURSDAY, JUNE 24, 2021/ASHADHA 3, 1943

वाणिज्य एवं उद्योग मंत्रालय
(वाणिज्य विभाग)
(विदेश व्यापार महानिदेशालय)
सार्वजनिक सूचना
नई दिल्ली, 24 जून, 2021
सं.9 / 2015-2020

विषय: तूर और उड़द के आयात के लिए भारत गणराज्य की सरकार और म्यांमार संघ गणराज्य की सरकार के बीच समझौता-ज्ञापन (एमओयू) के संबंध में।

फा. सं. एम-5012/300/2002/पी.सी-2(क)/ई-2578.—विदेश व्यापार नीति (2015-2020) के पैरा 1.03 और 2.04 के तहत प्रदत्त शक्तियों का प्रयोग करते हुए और भारत गणराज्य की सरकार और म्यांमार संघ गणराज्य की सरकार के बीच समझौता-ज्ञापन के अनुसार, महानिदेशक विदेश व्यापार एतद्वारा निम्नलिखित को अधिसूचित करते हैं:

(क) भारत 2,50,000 मीट्रिक टन उड़द और 1,00,000 मीट्रिक टन तूर का वार्षिक कोटा प्रदान करेगा जिसका अगले पांच वित्तीय वर्षों अर्थात् 2021-22 से 2025-26 (अप्रैल से मार्च) के दौरान निजी व्यापार के माध्यम से म्यांमार से आयात किया जाएगा।

(ख) प्रत्येक वित्तीय वर्ष के जनवरी में म्यांमार से भारत के लिए उड़द निर्यात और तूर निर्यात जो उस समय तक किया गया है की कुल मात्रा का मूल्यांकन किया जाएगा। यदि वार्षिक कोटा में कोई गिरावट होती है, तो भारत गणराज्य की सरकार किसी अन्य देश से आयात हेतु कम हुई मात्रा को जारी करेगी।

2. उपर्युक्त एमओयू के तहत आयात के लिए प्रक्रिया और तौर तरीके पृथक रूप से अधिसूचित किए जाएंगे।

3478 GI/2021

(1)

3. इस सार्वजनिक सूचना का प्रभाव: 2021-22 से 2025-26 (अप्रैल-से मार्च) के दौरान म्यांमार से 2,50,000 मीट्रिक टन उड़द और 1,00,000 मीट्रिक टन तूर के आयात को भारत गणराज्य की सरकार और म्यांमार संघ गणराज्य की सरकार के बीच सम्पन्न समझौता-ज्ञापन के अनुसार अधिसूचित किया गया है।

अमित यादव, महानिदेशक, विदेश व्यापार एवं
पदेन अपर सचिव

MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

(Department of Commerce)

(DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF FOREIGN TRADE)

PUBLIC NOTICE

New Delhi, the 24th June, 2021

No. 9 / 2015-20

Subject: Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar for import of toor and urad - reg.

F. No. M-5012/300/2002-PC 2(A)(e-2578).—In exercise of powers conferred under paragraph 1.03 and 2.04 of the Foreign Trade Policy (2015-2020) and in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Director General of Foreign Trade hereby notifies the following:

- (a) India undertakes to provide an annual quota of 2, 50,000 metric tonnes (MT) of Urad and 1, 00,000 MT of Tur to be imported from Myanmar, through private trade, over the next five financial years, i.e., from 2021-22 to 2025-26 (April to March).
 - (b) In January of every financial year, an evaluation of total quantity of Urad export and Tur export from Myanmar to India that have taken place until then will be undertaken. If there is any shortfall in the annual quota, Government of Republic of India shall release that shortfall quantity for import from any other country.
2. The procedure and modalities for import under the aforesaid MoU shall be notified separately.
 3. **Effect of this Public Notice:** Import of 2, 50,000 metric tonnes (MT) of Urad and 1, 00,000 MT of Tur from Myanmar during 2021-22 to 2025-26 (April to March) as per the MoU entered between Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is notified.

AMIT YADAV, Director General of Foreign Trade &

Ex- officio Addl. Secy.

Appendix 8: Barter Trade with Myanmar under the Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement.

**Barter Trade with Myanmar under the
Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement
A.P.(DIR Series) Circular No.17 (October 16, 2000)**

**RESERVE BANK OF INDIA
EXCHANGE CONTROL DEPARTMENT
CENTRAL OFFICE
MUMBAI 400 001**

A.P.(DIR Series) Circular No.17

October 16, 2000

To

All Authorised Dealers in Foreign Exchange

Dear Sirs,

**Barter Trade with Myanmar under the
Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement**

Please refer to A.D.(G.P. Series) Circular No.8 dated 17th May 1997 on guidelines for the border trade between Myanmar and India, under the Border Trade agreement dated 21st January 1994 signed between the Government of Myanmar and the Government of India.

It has been decided in consultation with the Government of India that under the border trade arrangement between the two countries, imports from Myanmar into India should precede exports from India to Myanmar. Accordingly, the revised guidelines for the border trade are as follows:-

- i) The barter trade shall be restricted to land route as per the Border Trade Agreement between the two countries. Such barter trade transactions shall take place only by way of head load or non-motorised transport system.
- ii) Imports from Myanmar to India shall precede export from India to Myanmar.
- iii) The border trade will be restricted to items agreed to as per the Border Trade Agreement between India and Myanmar as listed in Annexure I.
- iv) There will be no monetary transaction under the barter trade arrangement.
- v) The consignments of imports and exports should be invoiced in U.S. dollars.

-
- vi) The value of goods exported under barter trade should not exceed U.S.\$ 20,000 per transaction.
 - vii) Exports from India to Myanmar under barter trade of the value not exceeding U.S.\$ 1,000 per transaction are exempt from declaration on the prescribed form viz. GR form, in terms of Reserve Bank Notification No.FEMA.23/2000-RB dated 3rd May 2000. However, such transactions should be completed in one or two days. Customs authorities at the Indo-Myanmar border will report import/export transactions of the value not exceeding U.S.\$ 1,000 to the Exchange Control Department, Reserve Bank of India, Guwahati, on monthly basis.
 - viii) On import of goods the party should submit documentary evidence such as Bill of Entry to the designated bank, where the value exceeds U.S.\$ 5,000.
 - ix) The export of goods from India to Myanmar against import of goods from Myanmar to India should be completed within a period of six months from the date of import.
 - x) The exporters should get the GR forms countersigned by one of the designated banks viz. United Bank of India, Moreh Branch, Manipur and State Bank of India, Champai Branch, Mizoram before submitting them to the Custom authorities. A copy of the contract for import and export with Myanmar parties should also be submitted along with the GR forms.
 - xi) On completion of export, the exporter should submit duplicate copy of GR form along with all commercial documents viz. copy of invoice certified by Customs, etc. within 21 days from the date of export, to the concerned designated bank.
2. (i) The following branches of authorised dealers (i.e. banks) have been designated for the purpose of monitoring transactions under the barter trade arrangement.
- (a) United Bank of India (UBI), Moreh Branch, Manipur.

- (b) State Bank of India (SBI), Champai Branch, Mizoram.
- (ii) The designated banks' branches should only handle proposals for barter trade and documents relating to imports and exports thereunder.
- (iii) The designated banks' branches should countersign GR forms original and duplicate, submitted to them by the exporters (before submitting to the Customs authorities) after satisfying themselves that the GR forms are supported by a Bill of Entry for import of goods from Myanmar to India. Both original and duplicate copies of the forms should be returned to the exporter. The GR forms may be superscribed as under:
- “Exports under barter arrangement with Myanmar. The payments have been received in the form of goods/commodities of the equivalent value”.
- (iv) The designated banks should maintain a record of the transactions under the barter trade arrangement on the basis of GR forms countersigned by them, in a register as per proforma enclosed (Annexure II).
- (v) The designated banks should forward a monthly statement as per the above form to the Exchange Control Department, Reserve Bank of India, Guwahati, within 15 days from the close of the month.
- (vi) On completion of export against receipt of payment in the form of import of goods/commodities from Myanmar, the concerned designated bank should surrender the duplicate copy of GR form and evidence of import to the Exchange Control Department, Reserve Bank of India, Guwahati along with the monthly statement, duly certified as under:

“Value of goods exported adjusted against value of goods imported under barter trade arrangement as per Contract dated”. Before certifying the GR forms, the

designated banks should verify documentary evidence for import of goods/commodities of corresponding value and ensure that the commodities exchanged are as per Annexure 1.

(vii) The transactions relating to barter trade should not be reported in R Returns.

3. Authorised dealers may bring the contents of this circular to the notice of their concerned constituents.

4. The directions contained in this circular have been issued under Section 10(4) and Section 11(1) of the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (42 of 1999) and any contravention or non-observance thereof is subject to the penalties prescribed under the Act.

Yours faithfully,

K.J. UDESHI
Chief General Manager

ANNEXURE – I**Commodities identified for exchange by residents
living along the border between India and Myanmar**

1. Mustard/Rape Seed
2. Pulses and Beans
3. Fresh Vegetable
4. Fruits
5. Garlic
6. Onions
7. Chillies
8. Spices (excluding nutmeg, mace, cloves, Cassia)
9. Bamboo
10. Minor forest products excluding Teak
11. Betel Nuts and leaves
12. Food items for local consumption
13. Tobacco
14. Tomato
15. Reed Broom
16. Sesame
17. Resin
18. Corriander Seeds
19. Soyabean
20. Roasted Sunflower Seeds
21. Katha
22. Ginger
23. Any other commodities as may be mutually agreed upon between the two sides.

Appendix 9: Some pictures taken during research field work.



Interviewed Mr. Samson Hmar (Original residence of Hmuntha, Myanmar and the translator of Myanmar Constitution in Mizo language) on 14th October, 2019 at Mission Veng, Aizawl, Mizoram.



Interviewed His Excellency Moe Kyaw Aung, Myanmar Ambassador to India on 4th December, 2021 at his official residence in New Delhi, Delhi.



Interviewed Smt. Kiran Khatri (IFS), Deputy Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India on 9th December, 2021 at her Office Chamber, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, Delhi.



Visit of Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India, New Delhi, Delhi.



Visit of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library at Teen Murti Bhavan, New Delhi, Delhi.



Visit of Dr BR Ambedkar Central Library at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) at New Delhi, Delhi.



Interviewed with Mr. Salai Lian Luai, Former Chief Minister, Chin State, Myanmar on 17th December, 2021 at Aijal Club, Aizawl, Mizoram.



Interviewed with Mr. Mang Hen Dal, Former Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and Mines, Chin State, Myanmar on 17th December, 2021 at Aijal Club, Aizawl, Mizoram.



Interviewed with Camp Leaders - Bawihkung and Hmunlian, Residence of Matupi, Myanmar at Myanmar Refugee Camp on 18th January, 2022 at Thazawl, Lunglei, Mizoram.



In front of Myanmar Refugees Christian Fellowship Church at Myanmar Refugee Camp, Thazawl, Lunglei, Mizoram.



With some refugees in Myanmar Refugee Camp, Thaizawl, Lunglei, Mizoram.



Inside Myanmar Refugee Camp, Thaizawl, Lunglei, Mizoram.

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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

**POLITICAL REFORMS IN MYANMAR: A STUDY OF ITS
IMPLICATIONS ON INDIA-MYANMAR RELATIONS**

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

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**POLITICAL REFORMS IN MYANMAR: A STUDY OF ITS IMPLICATIONS
ON INDIA-MYANMAR RELATIONS**

BY

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Submitted

**In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
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Introduction

Myanmar (formerly Burma), officially known as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is the one of the biggest country within South East Asia. It is a multi-ethnic State containing more than 100 ethnic groups. The majority of the population followed Buddhism as their religion although other religions such as Islam, Christianity and Hinduism are also prevalent in Myanmar. Myanmar is situated in Southeast Asia and is surrounded on the north and north-east by China, on the east and south-east by Laos and Thailand, on the south by the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal and on the west by Bangladesh and India. It is located between latitudes 09 32'N and 28 31'N and longitudes 92 10'E and 101 11'E.

There are seven regions, seven states and one Union Territory in Myanmar. The seven areas includes Ayeyarwady region, Bago region, Magway region, Mandalay region, Sagaing region, Tanintharyi region, Yangon region; while the seven states are Chin state, Kachin state, Kayah state, Kayin state, Shan state, Mon state, and Rakhine state. Nay Pyi Taw is the capital and the sole Union Territory in the nation. Myanmar had enacted three Constitutions in 1948, 1974 and 2008 since its independence on January 4, 1948 from the British. The country started off with a parliamentary democracy in 1948 and lasted into 1962. The country was placed under a military administration for over five decades from 1962 onwards.

Political Reforms in Myanmar

Political reforms in Myanmar have been under way since the military regime adopted the new Constitution for Myanmar in 2008. The adoption of the new

Constitution was followed by the General Elections in 2010 that clearly marked the beginning of political reforms in Myanmar. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) backed by the military claimed a resounding victory in the first elections for 20 years in the country. A week after the elections, Aung San Suu Kyi, a democratic symbol and leader of the pro-democratic movement was freed from house arrest. The nominal civilian government was formally established on 30th March, 2011 with Thein Sein as the President thereby, formally dissolving the military government.

With the establishment of a new government in Myanmar, general amnesty was granted to more than 2000 prisoners including 220 political prisoners. New labour laws were initiated permitting the formation of labour unions and granting the people of the right to strike. President Thein Sein also signed a law permitting the expression of the people's basic right such as the right to peacefully demonstrate grievances in the country. National Human Rights Commission was furthered established on 5th September, 2011.

For the By-Elections of Parliament in 2012, the National League for Democracy (NLD) party was re-registered as a political party which was earlier declared an illegal party by the government. The government further reached an agreement with the rebels of the Shan ethnic group and ordered the military to stop operations against Kachin ethnic rebels. In January 2012, a ceasefire agreement was also made with the rebels of the Karen ethnic group. April 2012 Parliamentary By-Elections marked a landmark victory for the NLD winning the election with an absolute majority, winning 43 out of 45 seats.

The new government further agreed to relax press censorship with the announcement of permitting the establishment of privately owned newspapers from April 2013. In early 2014, the government of Myanmar finally abolished the 25 years ban on public gathering of more than 5 people in the country. It also finalized a landmark agreement to open its telecom network, opening up its door to foreign investments. In July 2015, the date for the first open general election in the country since 1990 was announced.

The general elections were held on 8th November, 2015. In these general elections, the NLD won by an overwhelming victory by securing more than 85% seats resulting in the formation of the civilian government under the leadership of the NLD. The elected members to the parliament convened its first meeting on 1st of February, 2016. Htin Kyaw, the nominated member of the NLD was elected as the President of Myanmar on 15th March, 2016 who was later replaced by Win Myint on 28th March, 2018.

The victory of the NLD followed by the election of Htin Kyaw as the President affirmed civilian rule in the country. Myint Swe, the military appointed member to the parliament was also elected as the First Vice-President. Henry Van Thio, the nominated member of the NLD was also elected as the Second Vice-President. NLD's leader Aung San Suu Kyi assumed the newly created role of a State Counsellor on the 6th of April, 2016. The role of the State Counsellor was similar to that of the Prime Minister. Accordingly, civilian government was set up in coalition with the military nominated members under the leadership of the NLD. This was a significant landmark in the history of Myanmar since the military coup in 1962.

The military coup of 1962 in Myanmar witnessed the overthrow of U Nu's civilian government by the military under the leadership of General Ne Win. The main reason for this coup can be attributed to the fact that many of the top military personnel were politically active owing to the instability caused by various ethnic rebels. This resulted in their active interference in the affairs of the government. Consequent to their active political involvement, the military had been ruling the country directly or indirectly until the recent establishment of a civilian government in 2016 under the leadership of the NLD.

However, the recent political reforms in Myanmar may not necessarily lead the country to a full-fledged democracy. There exists a stumbling block in the transition of the system, the main reason being the military adopted the constitution of 2008. The military government at that time adopted the new Constitution to ensure the creation of a 'genuine, discipline, multi-party democratic system' in the country. Provisions for the country to become a full-fledged democracy were never incorporated. In fact, the military through the provisions of the Constitution 'prevent and restrict' the country from becoming a full-fledged democracy.

Under the 2008 Constitution, the official name of the country 'Union of Myanmar' was changed to the 'Republic Union of Myanmar'. It assigned the military 25 per cent of all seats in both houses of the legislature. It contained a provision that required a majority of more than 75 per cent to approve any constitutional amendment. Thus, constitutional amendment was not possible without the consent of the military. The military had been granted the responsibility for the preservation of the sovereignty

and integrity of the country. They were also responsible for safeguarding the Constitution.

It also continued to give the military control of three key ministries in the government, these are: (i) Border affairs (ii) Defence (iii) Home affairs. It further granted the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services the right to take over and exercise sovereign power in case of state emergency when the life and property of the people are endangered. Thus, the Commander-in-Chief could override the role of the President and the Executives of the State in case of threat to integration of the Union, national solidarity and loss of sovereign power. It also enabled the Defence Services i.e. military personnel to participate in the national political leadership role of the State.

It also prohibited anyone with a foreign spouse or child from becoming the President of the country which is considered as a move to check Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming the President under section 59 (f) of the constitution. The right to secede which was earlier included in the Panglong Agreement of 1947 was denied and hence, contained provisions that denied minorities in the country the right to secede or withdraw from the country. It also restored multi-party system within a controlled democratic model which granted the military a major role in safeguarding their interests. It contained the provisions for conducting General Elections in the country which were subsequently held in 2010, 2015 and 2020.

General Elections were again held on 8th November, 2020. In the 2020 general election, the NLD won 920 of the total 1,117 seats, which was boosted by 61 seats from their success in the 2015 election. The biggest opposition party, the USDP gained 71 seats, down 46 from the 2015 election when it won 117 seats. The election outcome

delivered a solid mandate to the NLD to rule for another five years. On the other side, the USDP accused the NLD of participating in electoral fraud including buying of votes, and called for fresh elections in collaboration with the military.

All the scepticism and controversy regarding the provisions of the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar proved right when the military once again seized a coup and took over the country on 1st February, 2021. Following a complaint from its proxy party i.e. the USDP, with regards to the 2020 general elections results, the military eventually seized power in a coup, citing large-scale electoral fraud which gives a major setback to the democratic reforms process in the country.

Implications of Reforms on India-Myanmar Relations.

Political reforms and transition in Myanmar have certain implications in its foreign relation with other countries. Myanmar's military regime was often criticized of its isolationist policy, denial of democracy and violations of human rights. So, many countries imposed certain political and economic sanctions towards Myanmar. However with significant reforms of recent, many countries now take keen interest in maintaining diplomatic and economic relations with Myanmar. Its rich natural resources and geo-strategic location makes it more appealing for countries to establish good relations with Myanmar. Hence, countries like the United States (USA), the European Union (EU), China and India are highly interested in maintaining better relations with the country.

India being an immediate neighbour of Myanmar closely monitors the political changes in Myanmar. The international community often pressure India to

involve itself in Myanmar's internal affair. Myanmar on its part is often criticized on grounds of its brutal actions against protesters in the country. It is also highly condemned for denying democratic movement, violation of human rights, suppressing minority rebels and isolating its economy. India has been highly expected to act to provide solutions to ameliorate the situation in Myanmar.

Besides, insurgents in Northeast India often operate in India-Myanmar borders and frequently use Myanmar for shelter and training. The growing influence of China in India's neighbouring regions including Myanmar poses serious threat to India's hegemony and security. All these factors put immense pressure on India with regards to its relations with Myanmar. Hence, the recent political reforms in Myanmar naturally put India at ease to a considerable extent. India, being a functioning democracy is naturally inclined to support democratic reforms taking place in Myanmar. Hence, India promptly responds to Myanmar's democratic reforms by trying to provide aid and assistance in the nation-building process.

India has made a commitment to co-operate with the government of Myanmar to provide assistance in the area of Border Area Development Programme (BADP). It also provided assistance to Myanmar in health, tourism, infrastructural development education and Information Technology (IT) services. This action on the part of India is intended to strengthen the socio-economic development process in Myanmar. India continuously gives Myanmar financial assistance and grants in structuring its infrastructural projects which covers vital areas of railways and roads in Myanmar.

Aiding programme for Myanmar has also been initiated by India to enhance the development of social infrastructure which includes provisions of scholarship for

Burmese students in India. In quick succession, India had promptly and effectively assisted Myanmar in humanitarian relief operations following natural disasters in Myanmar like - cyclone Nargis (2008), earthquake at Shan State (2010) and cyclone Komen (2015). Exchanges at the highest political levels have expanded with greater emphasis attached by both countries for greater engagement.

Moreover, the two countries share a close history with regards to kinship, culture, language, religion, historical perception and political experiences. Myanmar has even been a province of British India during the British colonial rule. A significant number of Indian communities are still residing in Myanmar till date. Moreover, they share international boundary of 1,643 kilometers in length passing through four northeast states in India. This makes it imperative for both countries to maintain cordial relations.

India's Look East/Act East Policy has been based on the consenting co-operation from Myanmar's government. A flagship project for India known as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP) was initiated from December 2010. It aims to enhance the Look East/Act East Policy of India. This project aims to link Kolkata and other East Indian ports through coastal shipping to Sittwe on the Arakan coast in Myanmar thereby enhancing connection through the Kaladan River and route to Mizoram on the Indian side. Hence, political reforms in Myanmar have considerably enhanced the implementation of this project.

There has also been several high level visits between the two countries since reform started in Myanmar. The last Prime Minister of India to visit Myanmar was Rajiv Gandhi back then in 1987. The then India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh

finally visited Myanmar on May 27-29 in 2012. His visit projected India as a serious partner for Myanmar. It also helped recognize that Myanmar could become an effective partner for India. The current Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi also visited Myanmar from November 11-13 in 2014 to attend the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and 9th East Asia Summit.

India's External Affairs Minister, Shusma Swaraj visited Myanmar in August 2016. Meanwhile, Htin Kyaw, the newly elected President of Myanmar visited India in August 2016. Myanmar's State Counsellor and Foreign Minister, Aung San Suu Kyi also visited India in October 2016 to attend the BIMSTEC Retreat and BRICS summit. India's Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan also visited Myanmar in February 2017 with the intention of strengthening hydrocarbon relations between India and Myanmar. Recently, Aung San Suu Kyi visited India on 25th and 26th January, 2018 to attend the 25th ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit and the 69th India's Republic Day celebration as chief guests along with other ASEAN countries leaders.

More high level visits and cooperation are likely to take place between India and Myanmar owing to the recent reforms that took place in Myanmar. All these recent visitations and cooperation show positive signs of improvement in their relation. India-Myanmar relations tend to improve in the wake of the recent reforms and transitions in Myanmar.

Statement of the Problem

Political reforms taking place in Myanmar has been subjected to a lot of controversy. The Constitution of Myanmar drafted and adopted by the military in 2008

restricted the country from becoming a full-fledged democracy. The military though remarked that the new Constitution had been adopted to ensure the creation of a ‘genuine, discipline, multi-party democracy’ in the country. The Constitutional provisions have restricted and limited the powers of the new civilian government. Even though the regimes in Myanmar have been democratized to a considerable extent, the prospects of becoming a full-fledged democracy is still in doubt. Thus, when it comes to real power, the military is still in control to a very large extent.

The lingering presence of military elements in the governance of the country poses a serious threat to the civilian government in Myanmar. In November 2014, Aung San Suu Kyi even remarks that reforms in the country have ‘stalled’. The Constitution of Myanmar provides 25 per cent reservation of seats for the military. It further contains provision that require more than 75 per cent to make any constitutional amendment. In June 2015, Myanmar’s Parliament voted to do away with the military’s veto power over constitutional change but failed, giving a hard blow to peoples hope for full-fledged democracy. Hence, the prospect of the country to become a full-fledged democracy is nearly impossible at the moment.

India-Myanmar relations in the wake of Myanmar’s political reforms tend to change the nature of their relations. India being the largest democratic nation is inclined to support the democratic nature of reforms in Myanmar. Their relation has started to improve positively in the wake of Myanmar’s political reforms. As such, India constantly provides financial aid and material support to Myanmar. Accordingly, exchanges at the highest political levels between the two have expanded marked by several high level visits by both countries’ political leaders. Thus, Myanmar’s political

reforms have certain level of implications on their relations. How far will the implications of the reforms have a bearing on their relations is yet to be seen.

The military recently staged a coup and overthrow the civilian government in February 2021, soon after the 2020 general elections in Myanmar. This inevitably will revert back the reforms process taking place in Myanmar. Likewise, the nature of relations between India and Myanmar might be affected to a considerable extend. A thorough and extensive study ought to be carried out to examine the causes, process and nature of the political reforms in Myanmar so as to understand the problems and prospects. Accordingly, the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on their relation need proper analysis to provide an insight to the problems and prospects.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are stated as under:

- 1) To study the political developments in Myanmar since the period of Military rule.
- 2) To examine the process of political reforms in Myanmar.
- 3) To analyse the political relations between India and Myanmar.
- 4) To study the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on India-Myanmar relations.

Research Questions

- 1) How did the military rule influence the political developments that took place in Myanmar?
- 2) How did India maintain its relations with Myanmar during the military rule?

- 3) What are the factors responsible for implementing the political reforms in Myanmar?
- 4) What are the problems and prospects of political reforms in Myanmar?
- 5) What are the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on India-Myanmar relations?

Methodology

The study is of descriptive as well as analytical in nature. Data and information are classified into 'primary' and 'secondary'. Descriptive, analytical and historical methods is employed to study the political developments and history of Myanmar. The primary data is collected through interview and observation methods. The secondary data mainly consisted of published and unpublished books, journals' articles, newspapers, pamphlets and so on. Television programs, online sources, social networking sites and other media related sources are also used to collect the requisite data.

Information is taken from the specific government officials or ex-officials, government reports and documents mainly from the official websites. The opinions and views of India-Myanmar relation specialists, academicians and experts, think-tank groups, universities and other institutions from India and Myanmar are also taken. Interview method of data collection is mainly used to collect the first-hand information and data. Observation method is also employed to collect data from certain events and situations.

Scope of the Study

Scope of the study starts from Myanmar's political developments with analysis on the period of British period. It also includes the study of political developments happening during the period of the military rule since 1962. It further discusses the political developments after the adoption of the new Constitution of Myanmar in 2008 and the subsequent reforms taking place in Myanmar marked by the general election in 2010. The study thus, analyses the political reforms taken place since 2010 in Myanmar. This study further examines the causes, process and nature of the recent political reforms in Myanmar so as to identify the problems and prospects of the reforms. This study also explores the historical relations between India and Myanmar since pre independence era till the period of recent political reforms in Myanmar. The study further evaluates the on-going relations between India and Myanmar thereby examining the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on India-Myanmar relations.

Limitation of the Study

The study initially attempt to focus on the nature, problems and prospects of the political reforms process in Myanmar but the military coup from February 2021 gives a major setback to the reforms process. And as such, the prospects of political reforms in Myanmar is in state of halt. The study also tries to examine the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on India-Myanmar relations which in a way is affected by the military coup in 2021. Thus, the study faces some limitations as the core of the study lies heavily on the political reforms in Myanmar. As the study mainly focuses on the political reforms in Myanmar and its implications on India-

Myanmar relations, relevant issues such as Rohingya crisis and the current political turmoil in Myanmar are not discuss in depth although it is mention in brief.

The global pandemic caused by Covid-19 also creates constraints for the scholar as it was complicated to visit Myanmar to get the first-hand information. The military coup in February 2021 which causes political turmoil in Myanmar also makes it difficult to visit Myanmar for research field work even after the end of the pandemic.

Chapterization

Chapter I- Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the study and includes the research problem, importance of the study, scope of the study, review of literature, research objectives, research questions and methodology.

Chapter II- Political Developments in Myanmar during Military Rule

This chapter deals with the study of political developments since the British era. It mainly focuses on the period of the military regimes and the political upheavals during this period.

Chapter III- History of India-Myanmar Relations

This chapter focuses on the historical relations between India and Myanmar starting from pre-independence era with special analysis from the independence era till the period of Myanmar's reforms. It contains a brief analysis of the nature and status of India-Myanmar relations till the period of political reforms in Myanmar.

Chapter IV- Political Reforms in Myanmar

This chapter studies the causes, process and nature of the recent political reforms in Myanmar. It further analyses the role of the National League for Democracy and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi. It also assesses and examines the process, problems and prospects of the political reforms in Myanmar.

Chapter V- Implications of Political Reforms in Myanmar on India- Myanmar Relations

This chapter contains the detailed study of the implications of Myanmar's political reforms on India-Myanmar relations. It further analyses the changes, problems and prospects of the relations corresponding to the political reforms in Myanmar.

Chapter VI- Summary and Conclusion

This chapter covers the summary and conclusion of all the chapters besides the major findings of the study. It also consist of the suggestions given by the scholar on account of the studies.

Major Findings:

The major findings of the thesis includes the following discussions. The minorities in the Frontier Areas in Myanmar (Burma) has developed a distinct identity which is different from the majority Burmans and thus, during the dawn of independence, they were mostly apprehensive of the majority Burmans. This is mainly due to religious and cultural differences and the legacy of British colonialism as the

British were administering the mainland Burma and Frontier Areas separately. Though the Panglong Agreement signed in 1947 paved the way for building a unified nation, various minorities groups are still not satisfied with the implementation of the agreement and as such they are still fighting for it even till today. Thus, the negligence of the aspirations of minorities in the Frontier Areas and the poor implementation of the Panglong Agreement is one of the main problems faced by Myanmar's government from the past till the present period.

Ethnic unrest leading to instability in the country is a major concern that has to be dealt seriously. Moreover, if one major factor has to be pinned down for reason of the military coup in 1962, it is the ethnic conflict and ethnic unrest faced by the country during that time. The long demand of autonomy or federalism in line with the provisions of the Panglong Agreement by the ethnic minorities is the major factor for ethnic unrest in Myanmar. The civilian governments before and after the military coup as well as the military governments in Myanmar did not seriously dealt with the issue of the demand for autonomy or federalism to the minorities.

During parliamentary democracy before the military coup in 1962, the government was unable to establish sufficient connection with the general public, especially with ethnic minorities. There were limited skilled administrators, tools and resources for Prime Minister U Nu to run his government effectively, and the insurgents often threatened even Rangoon. This created a gap between citizens and the leadership, leading to a volatile situation in the country.

For a government to function responsibly, it is essential to have a system that can effectively connect leaders with the general public. Prior experience or expertise

helps people who are in decision-making positions. In order to have a government that is accountable to the public, the leadership needs to be able to listen to the general public and incorporate feedback into policies and services. But in authoritarian regimes, experiences or expertise do not matter when it comes to policy decision making because all major policies are decided by military dictators.

The political developments in Myanmar has been largely influenced and shaped by the military as the military has ruled the country for more than five decades and as such the people of Myanmar in general has developed a sense of fear with the military personnel. According to various interviews conducted by the scholar with refugees from Myanmar staying in Mizoram, majority of the people still felt a sense of fear or apprehension of the military even after the installation of civilian governments in the country. Since they were under the military rule for too long, they don't know how democracy actually works so as many of their elected leaders. Their fear and apprehension once again proved right when the military staged another coup in February 2021.

The desire and demand for democracy has been the lifelong dreams of the majority of people in Myanmar which has culminated in various events such as the 8888 uprising, the Saffron Revolution in 2007 and the recent nationwide protest since February 2021. But since, the military has the power as well as resources to subjugate such protests and demonstrations, the dreams of the people of Myanmar are often devastated from time to time. Guilmartin in his article has discussed the importance of technology, strategy, cohesiveness, and logistics for a successful military operation. A cohesive organization brings military troops together for a single goal, even when

faced with violence or death threats. Despite certain internal disputes, Myanmar's military had an established coherent structure due to oppressive leadership and severe regulations. This cohesion has been difficult to penetrate in the absence of alternative robust institutions, such as civil societies or elected democratic organizations. Myanmar's military hierarchy has traditionally been a highly guarded institution, although it has often sought legitimacy, support, and collaboration from the international world.

Being a close neighbour, India and Myanmar has maintained relations and connections spanning geography, colonial, political, history, religion, and culture since ancient times. Even during the colonial period, nationalist movement in India and Myanmar were closely connected and inspired one another. The post-colonial period of India's relation with Myanmar was marked by highs and lows. Between 1948 and 1962, India and Myanmar maintained cordial ties as India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Myanmar's Prime Minister U Nu were good friend. The signing of treaty of friendship between India and Myanmar in 1951 was a significant step towards the consolidation and expansion of the relations. The relations got strained after the military took over the administration in Myanmar. As Myanmar followed an isolationist policy, bilateral relations between India and Myanmar were significantly reduced. Although diplomatic ties remained cordial but it was limited to formal exchanges.

India publicly supported the democratic movement in Myanmar in 1988 and even sent a petition for Aung San Suu Kyi's release to the Military government. India was of the opinion that a democratic administration in Myanmar would be more

amenable to India's national security interest. The shift in India's position in the early 1990s was due to the evolving geopolitical, economic, and security considerations. India's Look East Policy and Neighbourhood First Policy has been one of the guiding factors in this regard. India-Myanmar relationship has been strengthened by two path-breaking visits between leaders of the two countries. General Than Shwe's 2004 visit was the first head of state level visit from Myanmar in 24 years, and Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam's return visit in 2006 was the first by an Indian President to Myanmar since Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit in 1987.

India's pragmatic approach in place of idealist approach towards Myanmar has been witnessed since the early 1990s so as to achieve national interest. India has realized the importance of cooperating with the military when it comes to Myanmar politics. As India's Look East Policy is basically based on the consenting cooperation of Myanmar so as to enter Southeast Asian economy, India has no choice but to deal with the military regime in Myanmar. Besides this, the growing influence of China in nearby region has compelled India to engage with Myanmar so as to counter Chinese influence. Thus, it can rightly be said that India's pragmatic approach towards Myanmar has been largely shaped by geo-political, economic and strategic factors.

With regards to the political reforms in Myanmar, it can be seen that the military regime in Myanmar has really committed for the reforms process to take place in the country. But the reforms has been made according to their own terms and conditions. This has been clearly indicated by the provisions of the 2008 Constitution which the military themselves has drafted and adopted it. Since the 2008 Constitution has reserved 25 per cent of seats for the military in every level of legislature, the

military still enjoy certain control over the administration of the country either directly or indirectly. Besides this, the military still has control over border affairs, defence and home affairs.

The personality and leadership of President Thein Sein is remarkable in the actual implementation of political reforms in Myanmar. His political will and conviction led to a number of concrete reforms in the country. His permission to re-register the NLD as a political party and allowing them to contest in the by-elections of 2012 has been significant. The acceptance of the 2012 by-elections result as well as the 2015 general elections results by the former general Thein Sein and his party is noteworthy. It can be said that President Thein Sein has lead the country from military rule to democracy although the nature of democracy may be subjective.

The majority of the people of Myanmar had entrusted their faith in Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the NLD to lead the country into a new era of peace and development. Since they came to power, Suu Kyi and the NLD faces certain challenges to implement further reforms such as negotiating peace to the ethnic arms groups and attracting investments from abroad at the same time, managing a cordial relations with the military. Since the military is still a part and parcel of Myanmar's administration as according to the 2008 constitution, the civilian government led by Suu Kyi has to tread carefully with the military in governing the country.

The Rohingya crisis from 2016 in Myanmar put various pressures from the international community on Suu Kyi and the NLD to take necessary steps to ameliorate the situation. As Suu Kyi is known to the world as an icon of peace and democracy and even a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate in 1991, the international community expected

a lot from her in the midst of alleged genocide of the Rohingyas in Myanmar. But Suu Kyi in fact, defended the actions of Myanmar's military in the International Court of Justice denying an act of genocide from the military. The main reasons behind Suu Kyi's defending of military's action was that she realized the importance of managing a good relations with the military to keep the country intact. Moreover, she realized the importance of pragmatic approach rather than a strict adherence to principle and ideology at the cost of national interest. She realized the importance of managing the relations with the military in order to stay in power.

Besides these, majority of the people of Myanmar have regarded Rohingya Muslims as foreigners and as such they mostly don't care much about them. While Suu Kyi has lost a certain degree of credibility at the international level, she gains a certain degree of credibility and support at the domestic level from her own people. With regards to negotiating peace in the country, Suu Kyi and the NLD did not achieve much. The 21st Century Panglong Conference/ United Peace Conference did not bear the desired result for the implementation of peace process in the country. In fact, the lifelong desire and aspiration of the minorities of granting a federal state or self-autonomy to the minorities was still not considered in the conference.

Based on the observations and interviews conducted by the scholar, although the majority of people from the minorities still put their faith in Aung San Suu Kyi, they were apprehensive of her ethnic Burman colleagues in the NLD with regards to the granting of a federal state or autonomy by the government. Moreover, in comparison of government between the USDP led by Thein Sein and the NLD led by Suu Kyi, it can be said that the USDP government has done better in terms of bringing

reforms to the country. This is mainly because the reforms under the USDP began in earnest and President Thein Sein listened to his advisers.

Even in terms of freedom, there was more freedom under the USDP government as compared to the NLD government. The leash on the media and civil society was loosened during the USDP government. Many of them were reversed back by the NLD government. But it can be said that there was much more freedom under the civilian government led by both the USDP and the NLD as compared to the previous military government in the country. But both the civilian government have failed internally when it comes to bringing sustainable peace in the country as well as granting of federalism/autonomy to the minorities. The political culture of aversion to pluralism as well as addiction to authoritarianism has once again resulted in the military coup in the country.

In regards to the military coup in February 2021, Suu Kyi and the NLD leaders failed to comply with the military leaders. Besides this, the personal ambition of Myanmar's military chief, General Min Aung Hlaing seems to be the driving force behind this coup. As Min Aung Hlaing retirement is due on July 2021, his ambition of ruling the country by any means available is done by him. Besides, the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar provides a provision for the commander-in-chief to declare emergency in the country. The undemocratic nature of the 2008 Constitution in terms of assigning 25 per cent of seats in the legislature as well the provisions of giving undue advantages to the military is one of the main obstacle for Myanmar to become a full democratic country.

In regards to the implications of political reforms in Myanmar on India-Myanmar relations, it can be said that India-Myanmar relations have significantly improved in the post Myanmar's reforms period. As a functioning democracy, India naturally supported and welcomed the democratic reforms in Myanmar. Bilateral relations between the two countries entered the next step marked by high level visits from both countries. Economic relations improved to a considerable extent as compared to the period of the military regimes in Myanmar. India made a sincere effort to cooperate with the USDP and the NLD government to implement various projects and investments.

But, the relations between India and Myanmar in the post Myanmar's reforms was not boosted as expected. The reasons include the influence of China in Myanmar even under the NLD government. As Suu Kyi and the NLD had adopted pragmatic approach to serve their national interest, they cannot easily avert China. They have to look for the best which serves their benefits. Besides, India does not act promptly to various opportunities in Myanmar which could serve its interest. But, India-Myanmar relations have been improving over the two last decades since the adoption of pragmatic and positive approach to Myanmar by India.

In the post reforms period in Myanmar i.e. after the military coup, relations between India and Myanmar did not experience much differences. India still maintain a cordial relations with the military government in Myanmar. As India recognizes the importance of military elements in Myanmar politics, relations between the two countries is still very warm and cordial even after the military coup in Myanmar.

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