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3. India-Myanmar Relations- Strategic Partnership Amid Complex Challenges – International Relation

Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing's official visit to India marked a significant diplomatic engagement covering political reconciliation, security cooperation, connectivity projects, and economic partnership. Prime Minister Modi highlighted Myanmar's central role in India's Neighbourhood First, Act East, and MAHASAGAR frameworks. India raised the issue of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's detention since the 2021 military coup and reaffirmed support for Myanmar-led peace process involving all stakeholders. India also announced increase in Mekong Ganga ICCR Scholarships for Myanmar students from 36 to 100 annually from 2026.

1. Key Highlights of Myanmar President's Visit to India

Political and Security Commitments

1. India reaffirmed support for Myanmar-led, Myanmar-owned peace process involving all stakeholders
2. Myanmar assured its territory would not be used against India's security interests
3. Both sides emphasized preventing misuse of territories threatening each other's security
4. India reaffirmed commitment to Myanmar's sovereignty, territorial integrity

Connectivity Projects Reviewed

1. **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project**- Leaders reviewed progress, stressed need for early completion
2. **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway**- Both countries reiterated commitment to advancing regional connectivity, prosperity

Economic Cooperation

1. Rupee-Kyat bilateral settlement mechanism (operational May 2024) welcomed
2. Priority investment sectors identified- Agro-processing, petroleum, energy, mining
3. India-Myanmar bilateral trade- USD 2.15 billion (FY 2024-25); India = Myanmar's 4th largest trading partner

Cyber Scam Cooperation

1. India and Myanmar agreed to continue cooperation for rescue, repatriation of Indian citizens trapped in cyber scam compounds
2. India already repatriated 2,400+ Indian citizens from such scam centres

About Rupee-Kyat Settlement Mechanism

1. First operationalized May 2024 facilitating smooth currency flows
2. Reduces dependence on third-party currencies (US Dollar)
3. Settles trade directly through Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVA) handled by Punjab National Bank (PNB)
4. Transaction volumes experiencing steady growth

2. Significance of Myanmar for India

Convergence of Key Policies

1. Myanmar at intersection of three key Indian foreign policy frameworks-
 1. **Neighbourhood First Policy**- Prioritizing immediate neighbours

2. **Act East Policy**– Engaging Southeast Asia
3. **MAHASAGAR Vision**– Maritime security, blue economy cooperation
2. Making Myanmar critical partner in India's regional strategy

Gateway to Southeast Asia

1. India's land bridge to ASEAN facilitating connectivity, trade, Indo-Pacific engagement
2. Only ASEAN country sharing land border with India (1,643 km)
3. Also shares maritime boundary (Bay of Bengal) – unique dual-border neighbour

Northeast Security

1. Stability in Myanmar crucial for managing insurgency, cross-border crime
2. Several Northeast insurgent groups historically operated from Myanmar bases
3. Border stability directly affecting security of Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh

Connectivity Hub

1. Linchpin of Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (connects Kolkata–Sittwe port–Mizoram)
2. India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway connecting India to Southeast Asia
3. Sittwe Port development providing India access to Bay of Bengal–ASEAN routes

Economic Opportunities

1. Critical minerals, rare earth resources
2. Energy cooperation, petroleum refinery (proposed USD 6 billion project near Yangon)
3. Agriculture, agro-processing investment opportunities

Civilizational Connections

1. Shared Buddhist heritage providing strong people-to-people foundation
2. Long-standing cultural ties (Ananda Temple at Bagan restoration)
3. Educational exchanges through Mekong Ganga Cooperation framework

3. Challenges in India–Myanmar Relations

Border Security and Insurgency

1. Northeast insurgent groups historically operating from Myanmar bases
2. 1,643 km border passing through rugged mountains, dense forests, remote tribal regions
3. Geographical conditions making surveillance, fencing, law enforcement difficult

Political Instability in Myanmar

1. Ongoing internal conflict between Myanmar military and ethnic armed organizations
2. Uncertainty in bilateral engagement
3. Democratic backsliding since 2021 coup creating diplomatic complications

Delay in Connectivity Projects

1. Kaladan Project and Trilateral Highway facing delays
2. Primarily due to active hostilities in Rakhine State, areas controlled by ethnic armed groups
3. Directly hampering India's Act East Policy success

Refugee Influx

1. Violence, instability causing repeated refugee inflows into Mizoram, other border states
2. Mizoram hosting tens of thousands of Myanmar refugees since 2021 coup
3. Humanitarian and administrative challenges
4. Rohingya crisis straining India–Myanmar relations; Rohingyas fleeing to Bangladesh, India

Cross-Border Crime and Cyber Scams

1. Myanmar-based cyber scam compounds emerging as major transnational security concern
2. Organized criminal networks exploiting conflict zones

3. Ongoing repatriation efforts for trapped Indian citizens

Chinese Strategic Influence

1. Myanmar remains key arena of India-China competition
2. China's growing economic, geopolitical influence in Myanmar concerns India
3. India's engagement partly driven by balancing China's presence

4. Way Forward

Balancing Democracy and Strategic Interests

1. Balance support for democratic values with need to engage Myanmar's ruling authorities
2. Security, connectivity objectives requiring pragmatic engagement

Calibrated Border Management

1. Calibrated approach towards Free Movement Regime (FMR)
2. Strengthen border infrastructure, regulate cross-border movement
3. Formalize trade through designated entry points
4. Preserve traditional social, cultural, economic linkages of border communities

Counter Chinese Influence

1. Enhance economic cooperation, connectivity initiatives, development partnerships
2. Reinforce India as reliable regional partner respecting Myanmar's sovereignty

Expedite Connectivity Projects

1. Timely completion of Kaladan Project, Sittwe Port essential
2. Integrating Northeast India with Southeast Asia
3. Generating economic benefits for both countries

Promote Mutually Beneficial Economic Cooperation

1. Reduce trade imbalance encouraging Myanmar export market access
2. Expand investments in energy, infrastructure, manufacturing
3. Proposed USD 6 billion petroleum refinery project near Yangon deepening economic interdependence

Cultural and People-to-People Engagement

1. Leverage shared Buddhist heritage through educational exchanges, cultural programs
2. Ananda Temple restoration, damaged pagoda conservation
3. Expanded ICCR scholarships (36 to 100 annually from 2026)

Track-II Diplomacy

1. Facilitate dialogue involving policymakers, experts, civil society
2. Regional groupings- Quad, ASEAN Troika
3. Promote consensus-building, humanitarian concerns, national reconciliation

5. Conclusion

India's Myanmar policy must combine strategic pragmatism, economic engagement, security cooperation, and democratic outreach to protect national interests while contributing to Indo-Pacific stability.

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