

MYANMAR-INDIA POLITICAL RELATIONS UNDER THE USDP GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

Myanmar and India tried to cultivate friendly relations between them since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1948. With their common policy of peaceful co-existence and mutual cooperation, Myanmar and India tried to improve their relations from 2011 to 2015 by changing and adjusting their foreign policies. The aim of this research is to examine the bilateral relations between Myanmar and India from 2011 to 2015 focusing on political sector. Although the bilateral political relations became strained in late 1988 due to India's clear stand on the democracy movement in Myanmar, China's growing influence in Myanmar and its Look East Policy pushed India to change its approach from that of confrontation to engagement with it. Myanmar's changing relationship with China offered India an opportunity to engage more constructively with Myanmar. Between 2011 and 2015, Myanmar and India saw a strengthening and broadening of their political ties, driven by a growing number of high-level state visits. The political relations between Myanmar and India were widely seen as landmark under the USDP government.

Keywords: Myanmar, India, political relations, foreign policy, USDP government

Introduction

Myanmar is situated in mainland Southeast Asia and shares common border with five countries: Bangladesh, China, India, Laos and Thailand. The bordering regions between Myanmar and India are Northwest Myanmar and Northeast India. Northeast India is a gate way of commerce and culture that links India overland to East and Southeast Asia. Myanmar is geopolitically significant to India, as it stands at the center of the India-Southeast Asia. Myanmar's location at the tri junction of Southeast Asia, West Asia and East Asia creates security and economic imperatives for India. It is the only Southeast Asian country which shares a 1,643-kilometre land border with north-eastern India and a 725-kilometre maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal. Moreover, Myanmar is located in a crossroads of Asia, surrounded by the Indian subcontinent, China and the Southeast Asia. India sees Myanmar as an important "land-bridge" on its path to the consolidation of ties with Southeast and East Asia.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Foreign policy is important to formulate a state's strategy and to implement these policies concerning with other nations, encompassing diplomacy, defense, economic relations and international cooperation. In the book of Professor Dr. Tarik Oguzlu, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, "Chapter 6: Foreign Policy Preferences of States", he finds out "states think they can achieve their foreign policy interests through close interactions and cooperation with other states in the system." The high-level exchanges build trust and bilateral and multilateral relations between state leaders that serve as strategic instruments of diplomacy. It strengthens alliances and opens new channels of cooperation. Under the USDP government, there have been a lot of interactions

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between the top levels of Myanmar and India including exchange visits, MoUs and regional summit meetings.

In the book *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Toolbox*, “Chapter 5: To What Extent is Foreign Policy Shaped by Institutions?”, Jean-Frederic Morin and Jonathan Paquin express “Foreign policy decisions are always made within an institutional framework, which shapes actors’ preferences and behavior.” In the parliamentary visits, parliamentary delegations engage in soft diplomacy, foster inter-parliamentary dialogue and people-to-people connections and influence foreign policy through legislative support. The Myanmar and India parliamentary delegations’ exchange visits contribute to foreign policy by promoting mutual understanding and legislative cooperation. Such visits enhance transparency and accountability in bilateral relations and influence policymaking and promote democracy ways.

In the study “Reshaping defence diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance”, Andrew Cootey argued that external defence diplomacy assistance plays a role in supporting conflict prevention, the reform and democratization of armed forces and peacekeeping capabilities. The military officers’ exchanges build mutual trust and reduce threat interstates’ perceptions. The military training joint cooperation upgrades the ability of military exercises and intelligence sharing. These exchanges support in building confidence, developing interoperability between armed forces and aligning defense strategies. The 2013 bilateral exercises between Myanmar and India and military officers’ visits enhance security and peace along the border and strengthen the mutual trust among the military engagements. The interactions of high-level, parliamentary and military exchange of visits serve strategic and substantive purposes that ranges from alliance-building and defense cooperation to norm-setting and mutual trust-building.

Research Methodology

To implement the aim of this research that is to investigate the high level exchange of visits of Myanmar and India, and then the visits of parliamentary delegations and military personnel between them under the USDP government, this research was made in a qualitative research method by collecting the primary and secondary sources from the MoUs, the newspaper, records of exchange visits and agreements. In using the acquired data, descriptive research design is best suited to examine how the relations between Myanmar and India in the political sector developed from 2011 to 2015. And by using analytical research method, this research explores the political relations that shaped the Myanmar - India relations from 2011 to 2015 under the USDP government.

Historical Background of Myanmar-India Relations

Myanmar and India established formal diplomatic relations on 4th January 1948 when Myanmar became an independent state. Myanmar and India share profound historical and cultural links. During the colonial period, both countries were under British India. After their independence, the two countries cultivated a close relationship that culminated in the signing of two kinds of compromises respectively: (i) a five year Treaty of Peace and Friendship on 7th July 1951 and (ii) a Trade Agreement. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru and Myanmar's Premier U Nu shared common views on many issues regarding the conduct of international politics and pioneered the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Myanmar and India were close allies

in the NAM in the 1950s and the warm friendship between Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and U Nu contributed to close consultations and frequent exchange of visits.

Although the relations remained warm and stable in the 1950s, Myanmar - India bilateral relations were seen ups and downs from 1962 to 1988. General Ne Win's nationalization programme of the 1960s resulted in the eviction of thousands of people of Indian origin from Myanmar, causing frictions in the relationship. However, a number of agreements enhancing bilateral cooperation have been signed between the two countries. Myanmar and India also signed the Land Boundary Agreement in 1967 and the Maritime Boundary Agreement in 1986 due to the exchange of high level visits between them. The visit of the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1987 laid the foundations for a stronger relationship between Myanmar and India.

After taking State power on 18 September 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) government announced that it would continue to pursue an independent and active foreign policy. Under the SLORC government, Myanmar abandoned socialist economic system and its traditional neutrality. Myanmar foreign policy towards India has been largely based on its desire to diversity to external engagement at that time. Myanmar was seen by India as a counter - weight neighbor to reduce its dependence on China in the region. When the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) government came to power in Myanmar in 2011, the government made reforms to push the country toward democracy and recast the government's foreign policy to wean the country away from China. Under the USDP government, as declared in *the 2008 Constitution*, the principles of Myanmar foreign policy, which were independent, active and non-aligned, has been continued. Myanmar's transformation processes offered a unique opportunity for a major readjustment of India's foreign policy towards Myanmar. For India, Myanmar is a gateway to the ASEAN States. In 2014, India has shifted from its "Look East" to "Act East" policy (AEP).

The "Look East" Policy (LEP), which was launched in 1991 by the Narasimha Rao Government, was part of the development paradigm of the new economic reforms in India. India's LEP is the policy towards the Southeast Asian region, where is abundant in natural resources and plays a role in support for India in the Asia-Pacific regional strategy. Myanmar, which is considered "a bridge" between India and Southeast Asia, has an important role in the LEP of India. Therefore, India improved and increased cooperation relations with Myanmar in the political, economic and social fields especially restricting the China's strategic advantage which is increasing in Myanmar. Myanmar is considered an important "bridge" between India and South East Asia and a successful key of the LEP on all fields of economy, politics and diplomacy. As to the politics and diplomacy, Myanmar - India relations have been also improved. Through Myanmar, India can strengthen ties with Southeast Asian countries and lifts the political position of India from a nation with one ocean to a nation with two oceans. Besides, the relations with Myanmar help India clear the road to the Asia-Pacific region and overcome the difficulties that India is meeting in South Asia. The Myanmar's position is very important for India in curbing China and ensuring the political security position of India on the international arena. The success of the LEP facilitates India by increasing relations with ASEAN countries through Myanmar. This would bring the most benefit not only for Myanmar but also for India's LEP to reduce the China's control. The success of India's LEP not only brings the practical

effects of economy, politics and societies for Myanmar and India, but also can draw the useful experiences for the ASEAN countries to perform a new foreign policy.

The essence of India's LEP was to build on the stagnant diplomatic and trade relations with Southeast Asia, wherein the northeastern region was to facilitate as the gateway to these countries. The Prime Minister Modi government revitalized the LEP. The Act East Policy (AEP) was introduced in 2014 to deepen India's economic integration with the Southeast Asian neighbors. The focus of the LEP was to increase economic integration with the Southeast Asian countries and the area was just confined to Southeast Asia only. On the other hand, the focus of the AEP is economic and security integration, and focused area increased to South East Asia plus East Asia. India's extended neighborhood acquired special attention as the Prime Minister Modi government articulated a "Neighborhood First" policy with a pledge to take a more "integrated and holistic approach" to its cross-border regional engagement. Indian has a vision for creating a connected and collaborative neighborhood. Therefore, AEP, Neighborhood First policy and good relations with Myanmar have become important factors for India. Myanmar is an important part of the AEP as it plays a key in the geographical connection between India and Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, India carefully took advantage of the opportunities available to develop relations between Myanmar and India. In this way, Myanmar is the main actor in the implementation of India's AEP. India prioritized the AEP to expand its influence in the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia.

Findings and Discussion

High Level Exchange of Visits during the USDP Government

From the late 2010 onwards Myanmar's political landscape underwent significant changes: national and local elections were held, a new parliament was convened, and U Thein Sein became elected President and the USDP government took power in 2011 and continued to pursue an independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy. In addition, under the USDP government, a new policy had been put in place to re-engage with international organizations and reintegrate into the international community. This objective is not in conflict with the existing ones nor does it seek to replace them, but rather endeavors to supplement them to make Myanmar's foreign relations more active, dynamic, and international community. Myanmar has also sought to improve its international relations as it has made a number of reforms within the country for transition to democracy.

The political changes in Myanmar opened up new opportunities for India to pursue its interests and avoided the risks and pitfalls that plagued its policy towards Myanmar for many years. Since 2010, India turned to adopt an approach of making decisions based on rational calculations of costs and benefits, and it abandoned the previous approach of supporting democratic forces and engaged the SLORC and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) governments. India's policy towards Myanmar has always been a delicate balance between a refusal to renege on its earlier commitment to democracy and democratic ideals and maintaining good relations with the government of Myanmar. India's foreign policy objectives in Myanmar include: (i) balancing against China's growing economic and strategic footprints in the region; (ii) exploring the possibility of tapping Myanmar's rich hydrocarbon reserves; (iii) convincing the Myanmar government to flush out Indian insurgents from their shelters; and

(iv) obtaining guarantees of smooth passage for goods and services moving between India and Southeast Asia. Reconciliation between Myanmar and Western democracies has augured well for India's foreign policy towards Myanmar, producing tangible benefits by the ways of much increased investment in Myanmar's infrastructure. Myanmar's role is pivotal if India's Northeast is to benefit from the LEP. This benefit demands huge investments in Myanmar's infrastructure so that the Northeast can connect physically with the more prosperous markets of Southeast Asia. In 2014 India's new AEP signaled a major shift from its former "Look East" approach towards a more proactive stance. Therefore, political, economic and social cooperation between Myanmar and India were improved after 2011.

Under President U Thein Sein, Myanmar saw a liberalization period with the release of the majority of political prisoners. Restrictions were reduced in many sectors including political, economy and media area. The National League for Democracy (NLD) re-emerged as a legal political party and won 43 seats in parliament in the 2012 by elections. These changes prompted enthusiastic responses from supporters of a greater Indian engagement with Myanmar, as well as internationally. In 2012, President U Thein Sein suspended a Myitsone dam project. U Thein Sein's diplomatic readjustment was accelerated by China's assertive actions over territorial claims against some ASEAN nations in the South China Sea. Growing wariness about China's policy of expansion had more favorable for between Myanmar and India. The political transition towards a democratic system in Myanmar had acted as a catalyst and provided an opportunity for India to engage its neighbor more intimately.

As a steadily increasing number of Western politicians paid visits to Myanmar and talk of easing sanctions began, Indian government circles and ex-diplomats spoke up in favor of greater Indian involvement in Myanmar. A dominant line of argument was that India needed to strengthen its approach and engagement, in light of China's comparative strategic advantages. Again, the notion of a 'Sino-Indian Great Game' in Myanmar became center stage on the Indian side. Indeed immediately following the announcement of Myanmar's new government in 2011, India's Minister of External Affairs, S.M. Krishna, became the first foreign dignitary to visit Nay Pyi Taw, and after taking up office in six months President U Thein Sein visited India. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh travelled to Myanmar in 2012, and significantly supported both the new government and its opposition through meetings with President U Thein Sein and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. A steadily increasing number of agreements had been entered, with 12 new MoUs signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visiting to Myanmar.

High level visits have been a regular feature of Myanmar - India relations for several years. After the formation of the new government in Myanmar, President U Thein Sein accompanied by some Union Ministers and ambassadors visited India from 2 to 15 October 2011. President U Thein Sein and Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh discussed the matters of mutual interest between the two countries at the Conference Room of Hyderabad House in India. The two countries issued a Joint Statement on 14 October 2011. During the visit, the two documents were signed: the MoU for the up gradation of the Yangon Children's Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital; and the Programme of Cooperation in Science & Technology for the period of 2012-2015.

From May 27 to 29, 2012, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh visited to Myanmar as the first prime ministerial level visit since that by Rajiv Gandhi in 1987. The two governments announced several new initiatives and signed 12 MoUs and agreements which were used to signal a significant deepening of relations. The 12 MoUs and agreements were as follows:

No	Item
1	MoU regarding US\$ 500 million line of credit
2	Air Services Agreement between India and Myanmar
3	MoU on the India - Myanmar Border Area Development
4	MoU on establishment of a Joint Trade and Investment Forum
5	MoU on the establishment of the Advance Centre for Agriculture Research and Education (ACARE)
6	MoU on establishment of Rice Bio Park at the Department of Agricultural Research in Nay Pyi Taw
7	MoU towards setting up of a Myanmar Institute of Information Technology
8	MoU on cooperation between Dagon University and Calcutta University
9	MoU on cooperation between the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies and the Indian Council of World Affairs
10	Agreement on cooperation between the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies and the Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis
11	Cultural exchange programme (2012-15)
12	MoU on establishing of Border Haats (markets) along the border between Myanmar and India.

Source: New Light of Myanmar, 29 May, 2012

The 12 MoUs and agreements were signed to form the cornerstone of tangible interaction between Myanmar and India for a deeper relationship and the speed with which they were implemented that reflected the political will on both sides. MoU between India and Myanmar for Advance Centre for ACARE was signed on 28th May 2012. Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) was responsible for training, monitoring, and curriculum, procurement of equipment and setting of laboratories and providing full time on-site Advisor for 5 years. ACARE benefited all the stakeholders of Myanmar agriculture through enhancement in agricultural production and productivity, enhancing agricultural income, improved employment opportunities and creating a pool of skilled agricultural scientists and managers. MIIT was also established in Mandalay in 2015. It was an initiative under the friendship project Myanmar and India. It focused to transform higher education in Myanmar and MIIT is home to students from across the nation. Offering undergraduate programmes in Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) and Electronics and Communication Engineering (ECE), it is a place for young minds to experience a transformative journey through learning.

The two countries issued a Joint Statement on May 28, 2012. The decision to demonstrate a deepening of ties through a prime ministerial visit was intended to herald an exponential expansion in linkages. India rendered assistance in development of transport and infrastructures in the border areas. Multifaceted cooperation continued for the stability of border regions in the mutual interest of the two countries. In exercising democracy, Myanmar had to develop its democratic experience and practices and prioritized state peace and stability and national economic development. Steps were being taken for all political forces to be able to take part in political processes for peace and stability, and to make peace with national ethnic armed groups. In so doing, the aim of the government was that all the Myanmar people, including national race armed groups, must be able to live equally within the framework of law. The Indian Prime Minister praised Myanmar for its success in national reconsolidation efforts and fully supported those efforts. He expressed his wishes to see more cooperation between the two countries in regional and international issues, to further strengthen the relations with ASEAN and to invite President U Thein Sein to attend ASEAN - India Summit to be hosted in India. Both sides cordially discussed the signing of bilateral agreements and MoUs, India's investment in road, water and air transports, industrial and economic sectors and technological development, and opportunities for cooperation with the international community in peace, development and national consolidation efforts.

The second part of Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit was his undeniably most important engagement with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The two leaders accepted a forward looking and constructive approach. He spelt his visions of the bilateral relations as a partnership for progress and regional development along with the promotion of democratic norms and characterized that Myanmar and India are 'natural partners linked by geography and history. The two sides frankly discussed matters related to joint projects, commercial and economic cooperation, trade, investment, communications, education, science and technology, industry, culture, livestock and fisheries, defense, religious affairs, electricity, health, agricultural cooperation, finance and revenue, transport, oil and gas, ASEAN - India relations, and cooperation in regional and international arena.

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh paid again a two day official visit to Myanmar from 3 to 4 March 2014 to attend the 3rd BIMSTEC Summit. On 3 March 2014, President U Thein Sein and Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and his party discussed for further providing technical assistance for development of information technology, education, agriculture and industrial sectors, cooperation in energy sector and banking industry, defense security cooperation and development of SMEs and agricultural sector. President U Thein Sein clarified progress of political and economic reforms and peace making process in Myanmar. The Prime Minister disclosed that he fully supported Myanmar's democratization and efforts for national reconsolidation and pledged that India would cooperate with Myanmar. On 11 November 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party arrived at Nay Pyi Taw International Airport to attend the 9th East Asia Summit and related meetings in Nay Pyi Taw. Prime Minister Modi attended the 9th East Asia Summit and related meetings in Myanmar.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Myanmar in November 2014 was a welcome step in a new direction of Myanmar-India relations. Although Modi's primary reason for coming

to Myanmar was to attend the ASEAN meeting and the East Asia Summit (EAS), there were also bilateral talks with President U Thein Sein. According to him, having stronger relations with Myanmar was a priority area for India. India signaled rhetorically that it was serious about a new definition of its relations towards its smaller neighbors that had been neglected in the past, particularly Myanmar.

In 2014, Myanmar chaired the ASEAN for the first time in seven years after its membership of the association. Indian Prime Minister Modi highlighted the shifts of policy from “Look to Act East” at the summit. This policy aims to move beyond its traditional limited focus on ASEAN and ASEAN - centric forums. To implement effectively from the “Look to Act”, Prime Minister Modi highlighted a major paradigm shift in India’s foreign policy to Act East focusing with 3 Cs, connectivity, commerce and culture at the East Asia Summit hosted by Myanmar in 2014. Myanmar - India cooperation in 3Cs can be observed in the regional groupings like ASEAN, BIMSTEC and Mekong Ganga Cooperation.

Exchange Visits of Parliamentary Delegations during the USDP Government

In the exchange of parliamentary delegations, there had been exchanges of parliamentary delegations and the speakers of the Hluttaw visited India, and numerous contacts had been taken place at ministerial level since 2011. On December 11, 2011, Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann led a high level parliamentary delegation to India at the invitation of Speaker of the Council of State Mohammad Hamid Ansari and Speaker of House of Representatives Meira Kumar (Smt) of the Republic of India. The objective of the visit was to share India’s experience in parliamentary practices and procedures with the visiting Myanmar delegation.

On 13 February 2013, President U Thein Sein received an Indian delegation led by Lok Sabha Speaker Honourable Smt. Meira Kumar at Credentials Hall of the Presidential Palace. They discussed the implementation of Kaladan Project, sooner completion of India-Myanmar - Thai highway construction, gearing up of the repair works of Moreh-Tamu-Kalay- Kalewa - Mandalay route, effective cooperation for ensuring peace and stability in border region, further cooperation in Information and Communications, and Technology (ICT) sector with the Ministry of Science and Technology. Smt. Meira Kumar’s visit to Myanmar from 12 to 15 February 2013 was designed to strengthen relations not only between the two parliaments but also between the two countries. Chairperson of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also met an Indian parliamentary delegation led by Speaker Lok Sabha Honourable Smt. Meira Kumar. They had a cordial discussion on India’s parliamentary experience, the exchange of experiences between the two parliaments, conducting parliamentary training courses, cooperation in flourishing developing a culture of democratic practices and providing necessary stationery for Myanmar’s parliament. Speaker of Pyidaungsu and Amyotha Hluttaws U Khin Aung Myint received an Indian parliamentary delegation led by Speaker Lok Sabha Honourable Smt. Meira Kumar. Both sides discussed on Information Technology (IT) development, cooperation in agricultural and human resources development, parliamentary affairs between the two countries and study of India’s parliamentary experience. Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann met a delegation led by Speaker Lok Sabha Honourable Smt.

Meira Kumar. The pace and growing momentum in Myanmar - India relations indicated that the bilateral ties would be indeed poised to flourish in the future.

Exchange Visits of Military Personnel during the USDP Government

In the exchange of visits of military personnel, following the political liberalization enacted by the U Thein Sein government, some new momentum had been injected into bilateral ties between Myanmar and India. This was apparent especially after the visit to Myanmar by former Indian Defence Minister A.K. Antony in January 2013. In March, Myanmar and India agreed to bilateral exercises and coordinated patrolling in the southern Bay of Bengal. During the visit, Antony highlighted the importance of enhancing bilateral ties with Nay Pyi Taw in all the fields, especially defense. He underlined that the visit of all three Service Chiefs of India to Myanmar in 2012 was reflective of India's desire to strengthen ties with Myanmar. While interacting with the delegation, the President U Thein Sein stated that Myanmar would not allow its territory to be used by anti-India insurgent groups. The ongoing cooperation between the armed forces of both the countries anticipated an enhanced interaction between the two navies and the air forces. On 30 October 2013, President U Thein Sein and Chief of the Army Staff of the Indian Army General Bikram Singh discussed a wide range of matters including modernization of Myanmar's Tatmadaw and the border security between the two nations. They implemented the works in accord with the bilateral agreements during the visits of Myanmar President to India and Indian Prime Minister to Myanmar. India assisted Myanmar for the development of human resources and offered a large number of scholarships to servicemen of Myanmar's Tatmadaw to take training courses in India for cementing bilateral relations between the two armies. In the meeting, the two countries discussed about military modernization and border security issue.

On 30 October 2013, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met with the Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army. He said not only Myanmar but also India would not accept any acts that can harm stability and security of the two countries. The Indian Army made cooperation with Myanmar's army in border regions stability and development, disaster risk management and other emergency matters, and health care in border regions. Chairman of the Indian Chiefs of Staff Committee Air Chief Marshal NAK Browne paid a goodwill visit to Myanmar in November, 2012 and so did Indian Defence Minister Mr. AK Antony in January, 2013. Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing also paid a goodwill visit to India in August 2012. He talked with the Indian Army Chief on bilateral relations between the two armies and further cooperation in border security.

In Myanmar - India political relations, several visits of high-ranking persons, party delegations and military personals enhanced mutual interest between the two countries and the achievement of parliamentary practices and procedures, and military modernization for Myanmar. A number of agreements enhancing bilateral cooperation had been signed between the two countries. Myanmar and India would not accept any acts that can harm stability of the two countries. The change of government in India in 2014 there was an opportunity for a completely fresh start in relations between India and Myanmar. Therefore, the year 2014 regarded as the remarkable year for Myanmar - India political relations. The USDP government attempts to improve bilateral political relations with India in order to counter China. It examines Myanmar's

changing relationship with China offered India an opportunity to engage more constructively with Myanmar. The political relations between Myanmar and India from 2011 to 2015 have strengthened and expanded based on the increasing exchange of high-level state visit between them. The political relations between them were widely regarded as "Landmark" under the USDP government.

Under the USDP government (2011-2015), there were interactions among the top leaders of Myanmar and India. There were several visits between them. Among these visits, President U Thein Sein visited two times and Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh visited Myanmar twice in total and he visited Myanmar for the first time in May 2012 and met President U Thein Sein and signed 12 MoUs. For the second time, he attended the BIMSTEC meeting in March 2014 and signed three MoUs. In November 2014, India's Prime Minister Modi visited Myanmar for the first time attending the 12th ASEAN Summit and 9th East Asian Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar and met with President U Thein Sein and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Chairman of the Indian Chiefs of Staff Committee Air Chief Marshal NAK Browne visited Myanmar as a good will visit in November 2012 and Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing also visited India in August 2012. They discussed the promotion of military cooperation between the two countries and security and peace along the border. In January 2013, the military relationship between the two countries became more prominent after the Ak Antony, the Minister of Defence of India had visited to Myanmar. In March 2013, India and Myanmar held bilateral military exercises and agreed to conduct regular patrols in the Southern part of the Bay of Bengal. Antony emphasized the importance of cooperation in the defence sector to enhance bilateral relations. Myanmar government did not allow Indian insurgent groups to carry out terrorist activities against India within Myanmar's territory. Regarding military cooperation, they expected better reciprocal relations between the navies and air forces of the two countries.

In order to strengthen the relationship between the two armies, India has given many scholarships for Myanmar Army personnel to attend training courses in India. Under the USDP government, Myanmar and India signed a MoU on border cooperation on 8 May 2014. The agreement included plans to provide a framework for security issues, information and intelligence sharing and coordination, and expanded framework for the border region. Under USDP the government, the political relations between India and Myanmar was significantly improved from 2011 to 2015. The political relations between high ranking officials, military personnel and people between Myanmar and India led to mutual understanding and personnel ties between them.

Conclusion

After gaining their independence, Myanmar and India cultivated a close relationship. However, these relations were strained during the Myanmar socialist era (1962-1987). The relations were further strained in late 1988 when the military oppressed pro-democracy movements. Myanmar was included in India's new regional geopolitical vision that was redefined in the LEP. In the period of 1988-1992, relations between Myanmar and India further deteriorated. India initially took an approach similar to that of Western countries and scaled

down its diplomatic contacts with Myanmar. In the period of 1991 – 1992, the foreign policy establishment in India started reviewing its policy towards Myanmar to serve its national interests. During the 1988 Myanmar uprising, India stood firm on the side of the pro-democracy people, and the relations between the two countries remained cold. However, since 1990, India has tried to establish the LEP policy in order to enter Southeast Asia, focusing on its own national interests. Since Myanmar is located as a gateway to Southeast Asia, India has realized the need to increase relations with Myanmar. Myanmar was also blocked by Western countries, so it had to live in isolation and it had to take a lot of help from neighboring China. Later, when trying to deal with other countries, neighboring India became the best neighbor to focus on increasing relations. Since 1990, India tried to increase bilateral relations and during the USDP government in 2011, India welcomed the widespread implementation of political and economic reform in Myanmar.

Since 2011, the bilateral relationship developed in a growth direction and reached a positive peak. With the democratization process in Myanmar, India's vital interest remained to have a stable a reliable partner across its north-eastern border. The continued or increased support for democratization could bring long - term stability and secure friendship with future governments. The years 2012 and 2014 had been widely regarded as "historic milestones" between Myanmar and India. After the election of new governments in India in 2014 and in Myanmar in 2015, new directions in the bilateral relations had been improved. Particularly the proclamation of India's AEP signaled a major shift from its former "Look East" approach, towards a more proactive stance and "Neighborhood First Policy" for good and friendly relations with its immediate neighbors. According to realist and liberal perspectives, India's LEP was clearly aimed at becoming a regional power to get its economic and strategic benefits, simultaneously limiting and competing with China. By changing the LEP into AEP in 2014, India expanded and cultivated its relations with Northeast Asia and South Pacific countries in the political, economic and social fields.

In 2014, Prime Minister Modi renewed the LEP as the AEP and refreshed it with three primary objectives: first, to enhance trade, investment, and cultural relation between emerging India and Southeast Asia, particularly the ASEAN countries. Second, the Policy emphasized creating opportunities and stabilizing India's unstable and conflict-prone Northeastern Region. Third, it endeavors to counter China's growing economic and military power in neighbouring Myanmar, both bilaterally and in collaboration with like-minded ASEAN countries. Therefore, India's policies implications have had many positive effects on Myanmar - India relations. Seeking cooperative relations with two Asian giants - China and India is keen to leverage Myanmar's strategic location to derive maximum benefits, while safeguarding its independence. For India, Look East Policy was shown rather clearly India aimed at becoming a regional power to get its economic and strategic benefits, simultaneously curbing and competing with China. To reach this objective, the LEP was seen as a new direction for India's foreign policy after the Cold War. When the Look East Policy was changed into AEP in 2014, India expanded and improved its relations with Northeast Asia and South Pacific countries in all dimensions: the political, economic and cultural fields. To get stability in the northeast, Myanmar has played an ambivalent role in relations to militants in India's north-east. Myanmar's changing relationship with China

offered India an opportunity to engage more constructively with Myanmar. India built on the long-standing historical, cultural and geographical linkages with Myanmar. It helped not only on the economic front with capacity building but also Myanmar's democratic institutions. Engaging with Myanmar could be presented a win-win situation as it helped to open the door to East and Southeast Asia and promoted in its "Look East Policy," that led to improve border situation, boost trade and business ties, access to available energy resources, and gaining ground as a regional power. Therefore, from 2011 to 2015, Myanmar and India were able to successfully align their policies to improve political, economic and social sectors between them.

In fact, the Myanmar-India relations had been moving towards as an upward trend and experiencing a positive peak since 2011. It gained peak during the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Government and had again gathered momentum during the time of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Political changes in Myanmar combined with a clear desire to diversify its foreign policy and opened up new opportunities for India to pursue its interests and avoid the threats and pitfalls. Political relations between Myanmar and India were strengthened under the USDP government.

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