

MYANMAR-INDIA POLITICAL RELATIONS (2011-2020)

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Abstract

Myanmar and India share a long land border of 1643 km and a maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal. In 1951, Myanmar and India signed a Treaty of Friendship which laid the foundation for their subsequent bilateral relations. During the leadership of Prime Minister U Nu and Indian Prime Minister Nehru, Myanmar-India relations were close and cordial. However, the relationship between Myanmar and India has fluctuated, with periods of strong cooperation and times of strain before 2011. During the period of 2011-2020, Myanmar and India generally enjoyed cordial relationships, driven by shared strategic, economic, and security interests. The objective of this paper is to analyze the political relations between Myanmar and India during the period (2011-2020). It is conducted through a qualitative method by using the secondary sources. This paper seeks to examine the factors that have shaped the dynamics of Myanmar-India political relations 2011 to 2020. It analyzes how these factors have influenced bilateral relations and explores the reasons behind both countries' efforts to improve their partnership. It concludes that both the Myanmar and Indian governments had tried to continue to develop and improve the sustainable relationship between the two countries for their interests.

Keywords: Myanmar, India, Prime Minister, diplomatic, relationship.

Introduction

Myanmar and India share a long land border of 1643 km and a maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal. The geographical proximity has helped develop and sustain cordial relations between the two countries. After independence, Myanmar and India established diplomatic relations and maintained close ties. In the early years after independence, U Nu and Jawaharlal Nehru emphasised the importance of economic and political cooperation. They shared similar ideals of non-alignment during the Cold War and worked together on various regional and global issues. Trade and cultural exchanges were promoted, and both countries sought to build a mutually beneficial partnership.

Myanmar and India signed a Treaty of Friendship in 1951 that declared “everlasting peace and unalterable friendship” between them. The treaty focused on fostering close political, economic, and cultural cooperation between the two nations. Myanmar and India had generally cordial and closer relations prior to the 1960s, with both nations sharing strong historical, cultural, and economic ties. The relations between the two countries, however, became strained in 1962. India strongly opposed the imposition of the military dictatorship in Myanmar by General U Ne Win and supported the pro-democracy forces.

The visit of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1987 laid the foundations for a stronger relationship between Myanmar and India. However, some tensions remained in the relations between Myanmar and India after Myanmar's military government, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), came to power in 1988. After 1993, however, India's policy toward Myanmar was reviewed and India adopted a more pragmatic and less moralistic

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stance. This pragmatic shift allowed India to maintain a delicate balance between supporting democratic principles and securing its strategic interests. This purposeful shift from an idealistic foreign policy to one that was firmly anchored in realpolitik has been the driving force behind the improvement of relations between the two countries. Since that time, Myanmar-India relations had been growing politically, economically and militarily.

Foreign Policies of Myanmar and India (2011-2020)

The fundamental principles of Myanmar foreign policy, stipulated in article 41 of *the 2008 Constitution*, are that the Union practices independent, active, and non-aligned foreign policy aimed at world peace and friendly relations with nations and upholds the principles of peaceful coexistence among nations. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) government practiced an “independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy,” while also advancing efforts towards establishing a genuine, disciplined, multi-party democratic system in line with the mandates of *the 2008 Constitution*, which involved instituting various reforms in domestic governance and reintegrating into the international community. As it sets a foreign policy objective of reintegrating Myanmar into the international community, the USDP government pursued a foreign policy strategy based on multilateralism, with a particular focus on regional institutions and cooperative security, and realignment of Myanmar’s foreign relations in the context of strategic competitions among major powers active in the region.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) government continued to adhere to the “independent, active, and non-aligned foreign policy,” the policy implemented through multiple tracks in diplomacy with a possibility of stronger focus on people-to-people contacts and multilateralism. The NLD’s foreign policy, in terms of objectives and principles, was not new but it was different, as adjustments were made in the realm of diplomacy. The NLD government’s foreign policy objectives were shaped by the legacy of Myanmar’s military rule, during which the country was largely isolated from the international community and heavily reliant on China. Upon assuming power, the NLD sought to diversify Myanmar’s foreign relations to reduce this dependency and enhance its global engagement.

The government aimed to secure economic development, attract foreign investment, and gain international legitimacy for its democratic transition. There was no significant change in the foreign policy objectives and principles and the adjustments were mostly in the realm of diplomacy. It was “activism” and “people-centred approach” in diplomatic relations with other nations. The NLD government’s foreign policy strategies were guided by principles of sovereignty, non-alignment, and strategic engagement with global and regional powers, including China, the United States, ASEAN, and notably, India.

India’s foreign policy is a blend of idealistic principles and pragmatic considerations. While its leaders frequently emphasise moral and ideological values, realpolitik plays a significant role in shaping policy. Since 1992, fundamental changes have been undergone by India’s foreign policy with Myanmar since the initiation of the “Look East” policy, which has also significantly improved India-Myanmar relations. The “Look East” Policy was officially launched in 1992 and was enforced by Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao (1991-1996). India deploys the “Look East” Policy to develop economy and trade relations with East Asian countries

and maintain a high and stable rate of Indian economic growth. Myanmar, being India's immediate neighbor and a gateway to ASEAN, played a key role in the implementation of the "Look East" policy of India.

India's foreign policy toward Myanmar under the administrations of Prime Ministers Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi had focused on maintaining stable political, economic, and security relations, with an emphasis on connectivity, counterinsurgency cooperation, and balancing China's influence in the region. Despite changes in leadership, the overall trajectory remained consistent, with some notable shifts in emphasis between the two periods. India viewed Myanmar as a critical partner, which aimed at enhancing economic and trade links with Southeast Asia. Under Singh, several connectivity projects were initiated to link India's northeastern states with Myanmar and the ASEAN region. Notable projects include the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, which aimed to connect the northeastern states of India with the Rakhine and Chin states of Myanmar through an integrated transport corridor of sea, river, and road routes.

The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, which was initiated during Singh's tenure, was another key project aimed at boosting connectivity with Southeast Asia as part of the "Look East" policy. In the realm of security, India collaborated with Myanmar on defense issues, focusing on cross-border insurgency, maritime security, and counter-terrorism efforts, particularly along the shared border. Energy cooperation was another significant aspect, with Indian companies like ONGC Videsh investing in Myanmar's rich natural gas resources, alongside efforts to explore renewable energy projects. Additionally, cultural ties were strengthened through educational exchanges, tourism, and the promotion of shared Buddhist heritage, which fostered closer people-to-people connections between India and Myanmar. Through these various forms of cooperation, India aimed to establish itself as a regional power while deepening its relationship with Southeast Asian nations under the Look East Policy.

Modi's administration rebranded the "Look East" policy as the "Act East" policy, signaling a more assertive approach in engaging with Southeast Asia, including Myanmar. As a vital link due to its geographical proximity and cultural ties, Myanmar plays a crucial role in this policy. The "Act East" policy emphasises boosting bilateral trade, with India exporting pharmaceuticals, machinery, and textiles, and importing agricultural products and raw materials from Myanmar. Connectivity and infrastructure projects initiated during Singh's time, such as the Kaladan Multimodal Project and the Trilateral Highway, were continued and prioritised under Modi.

India's foreign policy toward Myanmar was also driven by its desire to counterbalance China's growing influence. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) had made significant inroads in Myanmar, including investments in deep-sea ports, pipelines, and other infrastructure. India sought to counter this influence by offering its own development assistance and infrastructure projects. Security cooperation is another key component, addressing counter-terrorism and insurgent groups along the India-Myanmar border, with initiatives to enhance naval cooperation in the Bay of Bengal for securing maritime trade routes. High-level diplomatic visits further strengthen the partnership, focusing on cooperation in trade, security, and cultural exchange. Myanmar plays a crucial role in India's Act East Policy, serving as a bridge to Southeast Asia.

However, the relationship is influenced by evolving political dynamics, security challenges, and regional geopolitical considerations.

Diplomatic Visits between Myanmar and India (2011-2020)

In the field of diplomacy, since 1992, the relationship between two countries have gradually improved and developed through regular exchanges and contacts in high-level relations, through which many important documents have been signed. It can be said that India's practical diplomacy with Myanmar since 1992 is a "parallel two-way policy" combining "India's political and spiritual support for democratic forces" with "a commitment to the Myanmar military government to improve and enhance relations between the two governments", thereby helping India strengthen relations with Myanmar, a neighboring country with an important strategic position from the field of politics to bilateral economic and trade cooperation and security and defense. In January 2002, an agreement was signed between Myanmar and India to reopen the Consulate General in each country. Subsequently, the Consulate General of Myanmar was reopened in Kolkata, India and the Indian Consulate General in Mandalay, Myanmar. This action has contributed to the restoration of formal diplomatic relations, enabling frequent negotiations between Myanmar and India.

High-level visits have been a regular feature of Myanmar-India relations for several years. In October 12-15, 2011, President U Thein Sein visited India to promote bilateral cooperation of the two countries. Delegation-level talks were held by President U Thein Sein with Indian President Pratibha Devisingh Patil and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during the visit. During the visit, two documents were signed. In 2012, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh paid a historical visit to Myanmar on 27 to 29 May. The Prime Minister and President U Thein Sein held a restricted meeting, followed by delegation level talks on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. During the visit of the Prime Minister, several new initiatives were announced and twelve MoUs and agreements were signed.

President U Thein Sein attended the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in December 20-21, 2012 in New Delhi and also visited Mumbai and Ratnagiri. A two-day official visit to Nay Pyi Taw from 3-4 March 2014 was also undertaken by the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to participate in the 3rd BIMSTEC Summit. In March 3, 2014, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met with President U Thein Sein at the Credentials Hall of the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw. They discussed matters related to 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. Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and 9th East Asia Summit from November 11-13, 2014, in Nay Pyi Taw. Prime Minister Modi met with Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin on 15 July 2015 in New Delhi, India. Emphasizing the strategic significance of Myanmar to India, Prime Minister Modi expressed India's utmost priority in its relations with Myanmar and its commitment to being a steadfast partner in Myanmar's development.

Myanmar President U Htin Kyaw paid a State Visit to India from August 27 to 30, 2016. During the visit, President U Htin Kyaw held wide-ranging discussions with Rashtrapati and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and four documents were signed. This is the first top-level

engagement between India and Myanmar since the NLD government took office in Myanmar. State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi undertook a State Visit to India in October 17- 19, 2016 after participating in the BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in October 16, 2016 in Goa, India. During her three days visit to India, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi met with Indian President Pranab Mukherjee, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister. This was the first official visit of the State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to India since the NLD government assumed office in Myanmar. During the visit, three MoUs were signed. India assured support for the creation of livelihoods, up-gradation of skills, reconstruction of roads, power, education facilities and health infrastructure for Myanmar people.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also paid a State Visit to Myanmar in September 5-7, 2017. In September 6, 2017, the Indian delegation led by Prime Minister Modi held bilateral talks with the Myanmar delegation led by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The State Counsellor and the Indian Prime Minister witnessed the signing and exchange of various documents between Myanmar and India in the areas of health, culture, capacity building, maritime security and collaboration between key institutions and held a Joint Press Conference. They reviewed ongoing official exchanges, economic, trade and cultural ties, as well as people-to-people exchanges that reflect the harmony between Myanmar's independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy and India's pragmatic "Act East" and "Neighbourhood First" policies.

President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind and First Lady Smt. Savita Kovind paid a State Visit to Myanmar in December 10 to 14, 2018. During his visit, he met with President U Win Myint and State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and two MoUs were signed. The visit further strengthened bilateral ties between India and Myanmar, particularly in the areas of science, technology, and judicial cooperation, reflecting the growing partnership between the two nations. State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi visited India during the 25th India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in January 2018. She met with Prime Minister Modi on the sidelines. An invitation for President of Myanmar, U Win Myint to visit India in 2019 was extended by President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind during his State Visit, and the former has accepted it. President U Win Myint attended Indian PM Modi's oath-taking ceremony for the second term in May 30, 2019. President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho paid a State Visit to India in February 27-29, 2020. During the visit, he also held talk with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and witnessed signing the ten MoUs and Agreements. These high-level visits reinforced the diplomatic ties between Myanmar and India.

With respect to Military Personnels Visits between Myanmar and India, in January 2012, Chief of Army Staff of India General V.K. Singh visited Myanmar and from November to December 2012, the Chairman of the Military Staff Committee and Air Force Commander Norman Anil Kumar Browne visited Myanmar respectively. In January 21-22, 2013, the defence Minister Shri Antony paid an official visit to Myanmar and met with President U Thein Sein. During the visit, they exchanged views on mutual friendship, multifaceted cooperation, inter-governmental and people-to-people cooperation, wider bilateral cooperation, joint efforts for border security, betterment of India-Myanmar road networks bridging South Asia and Southeast Asia.

In October 2013, General Bikram Singh visited Myanmar, where discussions were held on Myanmar's military modernization, the safety of the India-Myanmar border regions, and the provision of scholarships for Myanmar officers and soldiers to facilitate human resource development. In response, Myanmar Vice Senior General Soe Win visited India in December 11-16, 2013, where matters about security and the strengthening of bilateral military relations between the two countries were discussed, along with other issues, with Indian Army Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Military Region, Dalbir Singh.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services, visited India in July 2015, where he met with Prime Minister Modi and other high-ranking defense officials. During the meeting, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing underlined India's role as a "reliable development partner" and pledged to deepen defense and security engagement with India, particularly in the maritime security domain. National Security Adviser Mr. Ajit Doval visited Myanmar as Special Envoy of the Indian Prime Minister in June 16, 2016 and met with President U Htin Kyaw and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar Defense Services, met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi, India in July 29, 2019. At the meeting, they discussed further promotion of assistance for uplift of capability of the Myanmar Tatmadaw, situation for cooperation between the two countries, and issues on peace and stability of Rakhine State. Military visits between Myanmar and India during the period 2011-2020 were crucial in enhancing bilateral security cooperation between the two countries.

With regards to Parliamentary Delegation visits between Myanmar and India, a high-level parliamentary delegation to India from December 11-17, 2011, was led by Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann. The objective of the visit was to have India's experience in parliamentary practices and procedures shared with the visiting Myanmar delegation. Myanmar Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin paid an official visit to India in January 22 to 26, 2012. During the visit, meetings were held with the Indian Prime Minister, and bilateral discussions were conducted with External Affairs Minister (EAM). Additionally, a lecture on the topic "Myanmar: A Country in Transition to Democracy" was delivered by Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin at the Indian Council for World Affairs. He also visited India in 6 March 2014 to attend Delhi Dialogue VI.

Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw His Excellency U Khin Aung Myint also visited India in 2-6 December 2013. Meira Kumar and India Parliament delegation paid an official visit to Myanmar from 12 to 15 February 2013. Throughout the visit, they engaged in meetings with both the Speakers of the Myanmar Parliament and conducted a detailed discussion with Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann. An India-Myanmar Business Conclave was hosted by India at Yangon in May 18-20, 2016 as part of its "Act East" policy. The event saw participation from a 25-member Indian business delegation, led by Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Commerce and Industry. This was the first visit by an Indian Minister since the NLD government assumed office in Myanmar. Minister of State for External Affairs Shri V.K. Singh met the State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on the sidelines of 14th India-ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in July 26, 2016 in Vientiane, Laos.

India External Affairs Minister (EAM) Ms. Sushama Swaraj visited Nay Pyi Taw in August 22, 2016 and had warm interactions with President U Htin Kyaw and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. During the meeting, they discussed matters related to cooperation in education, health and energy sectors and trade between the two countries. In addition, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on the sidelines of the 14th India-ASEAN Summit and 11th East Asia Summit in September 8, 2016 in Vientiane, Laos. These reflected the cordial relations between the two countries. The External Affairs Minister of India, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, visited Myanmar in May 10-11, 2018. During the visit, she called on U Win Myint, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and met Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs. During the bilateral meetings, boundary and border related issues, peace and security matters, developments in the Rakhine State, including return of displaced persons, India's development assistance to Myanmar, ongoing projects, and other issues of mutual interest were discussed. During the visit, the Minister also met the Commander in Chief of the Myanmar Defence Services, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and seven Agreements/MoUs were signed during the visit. The visit reaffirmed India's commitment to heightened partnership with Myanmar.

Foreign Secretary, Shri Vijay Gokhale visited Nay Pyi Taw in October 22, 2018 and met with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. During the meeting, they discussed the promotion of bilateral relations, cooperation in regional and international arenas and development cooperation in all regions of Myanmar including Rakhine State. H.E. Mr. Vijay Gokhale also met with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and other senior military officials of Myanmar. They discussed focusing on the progress of cooperation in peace, stability and development of border region of two countries between the two armed forces, Indian ocean and regional security measures, exchange of information about prevention of danger of storms and natural disasters, bilateral cooperation in training affairs. In implementation of India's "Act East" Policy, India and Myanmar signed an important MoU in October 22, 2018 for the appointment of a private port operator for the operation and maintenance of Sittwe Port, Paletwa Inland Water Terminal and associated facilities included in the Kaladan Multi Model Transit Transport Project. The MoU was signed on behalf of the Government of India by H.E Vijay Gokhale, Foreign Secretary and by H.E U Win Khant, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Transport and Communications on behalf of the Government of Myanmar.

The NLD government continued to collaborate with India on key infrastructure projects, particularly the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. These projects were critical for regional connectivity and trade, reflecting Myanmar's importance in India's "Act East" policy. Under the NLD government, Myanmar-India relations remained positive, with continued engagement in areas such as security, infrastructure development, and regional cooperation. However, the Bengali crisis presented a diplomatic challenge that India managed cautiously, seeking to maintain its strategic partnership with Myanmar while addressing the humanitarian dimension.

MoUs and Agreements Signed between Myanmar and India (2011-2020)

The USDP government pursued active diplomacy with India to bilateral ties. During the period of the USDP government, there were numerous interactions between the top leaders of Myanmar and India. Specifically, between 2011 and 2015, there were sixteen visits exchanged between the two countries. Myanmar officials visited India seven times, while Indian officials visited Myanmar nine times. On the Myanmar side, President U Thein Sein visited India twice, during which documents related to health care, science and technology were signed. On the Indian side, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Myanmar twice, during which key agreements were signed on a broad range of sectors, including finance, aviation, agriculture, education, cultural exchange and border area development.

There were Fourteen MoUs and Agreements between Myanmar and India during U Thein Sein administration (See Table (1)).

Table-1 List of MoUs/Agreements signed under the USDP Government (2011-2015)

No.	MoU Name	Year
(1)	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Upgradation of the Yangon Children's Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital	October 2011
(2)	Programme of Cooperation in Science & Technology for the period of 2012-2015	October 2011
(3)	MoU regarding US\$500 million Line of Credit	May 2012
(4)	Air Services Agreement between India and Myanmar	May 2012
(5)	MoU on the India-Myanmar Border Area Development	May 2012
(6)	MoU on Establishment of Joint Trade and Investment Forum	May 2012
(7)	MoU on the Establishment of the Advance Centre for Agriculture Research and Education (ACARE)	May 2012
(8)	MoU on Establishment of Rice Bio Park at the Department of Agricultural Research in Nay Pyi Taw	May 2012
(9)	MoU towards setting up of Myanmar Institute of Information Technology	May 2012
(10)	MoU on Cooperation between Dagon University and Calcutta University	May 2012
(11)	MoU on Cooperation between Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies and Indian Council of World Affairs	May 2012
(12)	Agreement on Cooperation between Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies and Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses-IDS in New Delhi	May 2012
(13)	Agreement on Myanmar-India Cultural Exchange Programme (2012-2015)	May 2012
(14)	MoU on establishing of Border Haats across the border between Myanmar and India	May 2012

Sources:(a) Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, October, 2011, <https://embassyofindiayangon.gov.in>

(b) Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, May, 2012, <https://www.mea.gov.in>

Two documents were signed during President U Thein Sein's visit to India on 12-15 October, 2011. Due to MoU for the Upgradation of the Yangon Children's Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital, the sixty-seven medical equipments including CT Scan machine, multiple parameter monitor (neonatal), Oxygen Concentrator with air compressor and piping with vacuum outlets, ENT equipments, Orthopaedic equipments, etc., were supplied to Yangon Children Hospital and Sittwe General Hospital in April 2019.

During the USDP government, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited to Myanmar, twelve MoUs and agreements were signed in May 27 to 29, 2012. Due to MoU on the India-Myanmar Border Area Development, India granted \$5 million every year for the basic infrastructure and livelihood development of Myanmar's Chin State and Naga Self-Administered Zone, 43 schools, 18 health centres and 51 bridges and roads have been constructed in the above areas for the border area development between the two countries. According to MoU on Establishment of Rice Bio Park at the Department of Agricultural Research in Nay Pyi Taw, ACARE was handed over to Government of Myanmar on 25 March 2022. The Rice Bio-Park was handed over to Myanmar during the State visit of Hon'ble President of India in December 2018. Due to MoU towards setting up of Myanmar Institute of Information Technology, Myanmar Institute of Information Technology was set up as a National Centre of Excellence in 2015. Due to MoU on establishing of Border Haats across the border between Myanmar and India, the first haat between India and Myanmar was set up at Pangsau Pass, adjacent to Sagaing Region (Myanmar) and Arunachal Pradesh (India).

Political relations were underpinned by economic and infrastructural agreements, with India emphasizing its "Look East" policy. Initiatives like the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project were discussed to boost connectivity between India's northeastern region and Myanmar, which would enhance regional trade and political stability. Both countries emphasised collaboration on border security to combat insurgent groups operating in the region. India supported Myanmar's efforts to maintain stability, particularly in the northeastern states, which share a long border with Myanmar. Cross-border cooperation in dealing with Ethnic Armed Organization (EAOs) and ensuring security along the Myanmar-India border became a critical area of focus. India's support for Myanmar's political and economic reforms during this period was crucial. India welcomed Myanmar's democratic transition and saw it as an opportunity to build stronger bilateral ties. The USDP era was crucial for normalising and re-establishing political ties after Myanmar's long isolation. The initial political engagement during this period set the stage for deeper relations between the two countries.

After the USDP government, the NLD government took the foundation laid by the USDP government and built on it, expanding and institutionalizing political relations. The relations between Myanmar and India continued to improve under the NLD government, with an emphasis on deepening strategic partnerships. Under the NLD government, there are fourteen times of state visits between Myanmar-India relations. During the fourteen visits, Security and Defense consultations were held three times; five times for MoU signing; three times for economic matter, two times for policy discussions. During the NLD government, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Htin Kyaw, U Win Myint, and Defence Minister Senior General U Min Aung Hlaing had

visited India respectively. There were thirty-seven MoUs and Agreements between Myanmar and India during the NLD Government. Among them, seventeen MoUs and Agreements were signed during high-level visits of Myanmar (See Table (2)).

Table-2 List of MoUs/ Agreements during high-level visits of Myanmar under the NLD Government (2016-2020)

No.	Name	Year
(1)	MoU on Cooperation in the construction of 69 Bridges including Approach Roads in the Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa Road Section of the Trilateral Highway in Myanmar	August 2016
(2)	MoU on Cooperation in the construction / upgradation of the Kalewa-Yagyi Road Section	August 2016
(3)	MoU on Cooperation in the Field of Renewable Energy	August 2016
(4)	MoU on Cooperation in the field of Traditional Systems of Medicine	August 2016
(5)	MoU between Financial Regulatory Department of Myanmar and Insurance Institute of India for designing an academic and professional building programme for insurance industry of Myanmar	October 2016
(6)	MoU on Cooperation in the field of Power Sector	October 2016
(7)	MoU on Banking Supervision between RBI and Central Bank of Myanmar	October 2016
(8)	MoU for Cooperation on Combating Timber Trafficking, and Conservation of Tigers and other Wildlife	February 2020
(9)	Agreement between the Government of Myanmar and the Government of India regarding Indian Grant Assistance for Implementation of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)	February 2020
(10)	Project Agreement between the Rakhine State Government and the Embassy of India for construction of incinerator in Mrauk Oo Township hospital, construction of seed storage houses and water supply systems in Gwa Township under the Rakhine State Development Programme	February 2020
(11)	Project Agreement between the Rakhine State Government and the Embassy of India, Yangon for distribution of electricity by solar power in five townships of Rakhine State under Rakhine State Development Programme	February 2020
(12)	Project Agreement between Rakhine State Government and Embassy of India, Yangon for construction of Kyawlyaung-Ohlyphyu road, construction of Kyaung Taung-Kyau Paung road in Bhuthidaung Township under Rakhine State Development Programme	February 2020
(13)	Project Agreement between Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and Embassy of India, Yangon for construction of pre-schools under Rakhine State Development Programme	February 2020

No.	Name	Year
(14)	MoU between the Department of Medical Research of Myanmar and the Indian Council of Medical Research in the field of Health Research	February 2020
(15)	MoU on Cooperation in the field of Communication	February 2020
(16)	MoU in the field of Petroleum Products	February 2020
(17)	MoU between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Government of the Republic of India on Cooperation for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons, Rescues, Recovery, Repatriation and Reintegration of Victims of Trafficking.	February 2020

Source: Ministry of Information, Nay Pyi Taw, November, 2020, <https://myanmar.gov.mm>

During his first visit to India, President U Htin Kyaw met with Prime Minister Shri Narendra and conducted wide ranging discussions and signed four MoUs related to Cooperation in Traditional Medicine, Renewable Energy, Construction of sixty-nine bridges (Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa), Cooperation in the Construction of Kelawa -Yagyi road, Trilateral Highway. Due to the MoU on Cooperation in the construction, sixty-nine bridges of World War II vintage were to be replaced with new Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) bridges and National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) had been identified as the implementing agency for the project. During Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to India, she met with Rashtrapati, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister and signed three MoUs on Power, Insurance and Banking supervision. President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho paid a State Visit to India in February 27-29, 2020. A total of ten MoUs/ Agreements were signed during his visit.

In addition, there were also India high-level visits to Myanmar during the NLD government. A total of twenty MoUs and Agreements were signed between Myanmar and India (See Table (3)).

Table-3 List of MoUs/ Agreements during high-level visits of India under the NLD Government (2016-2020)

No.	Name	Year
(1)	MoU on Maritime Security Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar	September 2017
(2)	Cultural Exchange Programme between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar for the year 2017-2020	September 2017
(3)	MoU between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Government of the Republic of India on Enhancing the Cooperation of the Upgradation of the Women's Police Training Centre at Yamethin, Myanmar	September 2017
(4)	MoU for Sharing White Shipping Information between the Indian Navy and Myanmar Navy	September 2017

No.	Name	Year
(5)	Technical Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar for providing Coastal Surveillance System	September 2017
(6)	MoU between the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Republic of India and Food and Drugs (FDA), Ministry of Health and Sports of Myanmar on Cooperation in Medical Products Regulation	September 2017
(7)	MoU between the Ministry of Health and Family welfare of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Health and Sports of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on cooperation in the field of Health and medicine	September 2017
(8)	Exchange of Letter for Extension of MoU on the establishment of MIIT	September 2017
(9)	Exchange of Letter for Extension of MoU on the establishment of India-Myanmar Center for Enhancement of IT-Skill	September 2017
(10)	MoU in the field of elections between the Election Commission of India and the Union Election Commission of Myanmar	September 2017
(11)	MoU on Cooperation between Myanmar Press Council and the Press Council of India.	September 2017
(12)	Agreement on Land Border Crossing	May 2018
(13)	MoU on Restoration and Preservation of Earthquake Damaged Pagodas in Bagan	May 2018
(14)	MoU on assistance to the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee	May 2018
(15)	MoU on Training of Myanmar Foreign Service Officers	May 2018
(16)	MoU on Setting up Industrial Training Centre (ITC) at Monywa	May 2018
(17)	MoU on ITC at Thaton	May 2018
(18)	Exchange of Letters on extending a maintenance contract for ITC Myingyan.	May 2018
(19)	a programme on cooperation in science and technology between the Indian government and Myanmar government from 2018 to 2021	December 2018
(20)	MoU between the Office of the Union Chief Justice of Myanmar and the National Judicial Academy of India for conducting training for Myanmar judges and judiciary officers.	December 2018

Sources: (a)Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, India. September, 2017,

<https://www.myanmarmedelhi.com>

(b)Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, May, 2018,

<https://mea.gov.in>

During the NLD government period, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Myanmar twice and signed eleven MoUs and discussed India's parliamentary practices and procedures. The External Affairs Minister of India, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, visited Myanmar in May 10-11, 2018. During his visit, seven MoUs/Agreements were signed between Myanmar and India. The Land Border Crossing agreement had been brought into effect with the simultaneous opening of international entry-exit checkpoints at the Tamu-Moreh and the Rihkhawdar-Zowkhawtar border between Myanmar and India. Due to the MoU on ITC at Thaton, ITC, it was officially inaugurated on 10 January 2024. President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, and First Lady Smt. Savita Kovind paid a State Visit to Myanmar from December 10 to 14, 2018. During his visit, two MoUs were signed between Myanmar and India. Signing many MoUs highlighted the commitment to strengthen bilateral relations between Myanmar and India.

Conclusion

The political relations between Myanmar and India from 2011 to 2020 reflected a complex yet steadily evolving partnership, shaped by both regional strategic imperatives and domestic political developments in each country. Throughout this period, the bilateral relationship remained robust, with both governments prioritizing cooperation in areas of security, economic development, infrastructure, and regional connectivity.

Under the USDP government (2011-2015), led by President U Thein Sein, Myanmar initiated significant political and economic reforms, which provided an opportunity for India to deepen its engagement. India's support for Myanmar's democratization, combined with its strategic interest in strengthening ties as part of its "Look East" (later "Act East") policy, resulted in increased collaboration, particularly in infrastructure projects like the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. Many MoUs and Agreements were signed during this period to enhance cooperation in various sectors such as infrastructure, connectivity, energy, and security. The period thus represented a constructive and forward-looking phase in Myanmar-India political relations, with both countries recognising mutual interests in stability and development between the two countries.

The NLD government (2016-2020), led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, continued this trajectory of strong bilateral relations. Both countries continued to prioritise security cooperation, economic development, and regional connectivity. India remained committed to supporting Myanmar's development, while Myanmar recognised the importance of India as a key partner in countering regional challenges, including China's growing influence. High-level diplomatic exchanges and signing many MoUs and Agreements reflected not only mutual interests but also a shared vision for regional peace, connectivity, and development between the two countries. Overall, this period was characterised by a steady and mutually beneficial political relations with India, underpinned by shared strategic concerns and the NLD's balanced foreign policy that sought constructive ties with all major regional powers including India.

Despite the overall strength of bilateral ties, particular challenges remained. Cross-border insurgency, infrastructural delays, and internal ethnic conflicts within Myanmar occasionally strained relations. However, both governments managed to navigate these challenges without compromising the strategic nature of their partnership. The political relations between Myanmar

and India during the 2011-2020 period were characterized by a strong foundation of mutual interest, regional security, and economic collaboration. Both countries demonstrated resilience in managing domestic and external pressures, ensuring that their partnership continued to evolve. Moving forward, the relationship holds significant potential, particularly in areas of connectivity, trade, and security cooperation. As both countries seek to navigate a rapidly changing regional environment, their diplomatic ties will remain a cornerstone of stability and growth in South and Southeast Asia.

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