

IMPACT OF MYANMAR 2015 GENERAL ELECTION ON INDO- MYANMAR RELATION

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Introduction: Myanmar/Burma has been under Military Junta dictatorship for the last about 50 years since 1962 till 2010 elections, the first ever democratic election in the ‘annals of Burma history’, which was still somehow influenced by the military elite representatives. The landmark elections of 2015 election opened a new vista for full democracy in the country under the leadership of State Counselor, Ms Aung Saan Suu Kyi and her NLD (National League for Democracy) party members in the parliament.

Abstract: All the 22/23 warring ethnic minorities in the country were dissatisfied with Burmans’ aristocracy and high handedness, who struggled for the last 60 years long for autonomy were invited for ‘Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement’ (NCA). Altogether, till this writing, 8 ethnic groups signed the NCA on the 7th September 2017 respectively. The remaining armed groups to sign the NCA one after another, as expected the newly installed democratic government of Myanmar/Burma.

Keywords: Myanmar/Burma, ethnic minorities, democracy, autonomy, insurgency, ceasefire.

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Myanmar general elections 2015 have great impact on India, [*NewsX, 12 Nov, 2017*], its foreign policy towards Myanmar. India, being the largest democratic country in the world, was once a strong critic of the military junta in Burma. In response to the Burmese coup of 1988 was virulently negative. It was probably the most vociferous critic of the SLORC until the early 1990s. It even employed U Nu's daughter as the head of all India Radio's Burma service. India also provides a refuge to about 100,000 Burmese dissidents and refugees, of which 40,000 is hosted by Mizoram, [*Bibhu Prasad Routray: 2005*]. Dissident Burmese organisations still operates from Indian Territory, [*Indian Defense Review: 2009*]. It is said that George Fernandes who is now the Defence Minister till the writing of this thesis, gave shelter to Burmese activists and the All Burma Students operates now from his residence in New Delhi, [*Conference Document: 2003*]. That was the attitude of India towards Burma during 1980s.

However, things change from time to time and so do the political scenario and the ecological geopolitics. The fear psychosis of Myanmar's Military Junta is being exploited by China and this cannot be in the interest of either India or any other democracies of the free world. It is important to end Myanmar's isolation and to allay its fears that the whole world is ganging up against it, [*Brig. Gurmeet Singh: 2009*]. The dramatic uprising that took place in Burma in 1988 and the arrival of a new Junta in Rangoon through another coup d'Etat in September 1988, made the Indian Government refocused its Burmese policy. With the new geopolitics of the region by the late 1980s and early 1990s, India had to rethink its policy and to drop its neglected attitude towards its eastern bordering countries, [*Conference Document: 2003*].

However, India does not completely forsaken or forgotten democracy movement in Myanmar. It ought to be, to have a double-sided face so as to appease both pro-democracy activists on one side and the Military Junta on the other. When Aung San Suu Kyi was released for the second time in May 2002, the Indian government released a discreet statement cheering her liberation but at the same time showing its trust in the democratic transition efforts of the Myanmarese government.

It is prudent to say that `the advent of Vajpayee government changes, at least initially the Indian attitude vis-a-vis Burmese Military. In 1998-99, the foreign policy was basically focused on the "Nuclear Issue" and the rivalry with Pakistan. Further more George Fernandes was appointed Defense Minister of the NDA's Government and he has been known

as one of the fiercest leaders of the anti-China campaign when he stated that China was 'enemy number one' of India. He also stoutly denounced the Chinese influence over the Burmese Junta and accused Beijing of using Yangon's military regime as a spear against India on its eastern flank. More over, when Jaswant Singh took up the post of Foreign Affairs, he reshaped 'India's Burmese policy' by anchoring the realist approach in south block. The 'Eastern Strategy' of Jaswant Singh made India gained the foothold in Asia through Myanmar,(Op cit), [*Conference Document: 2003*]. To sum up, instability in the north east, India's willingness in South-East Asia and the 'Chinese threat' prompted India to change its policy towards Myanmar.

The relationship between India and Myanmar can broadly be classified into two main perspectives, in terms of co-operation in developmental projects & trading on one hand and counter insurgency on the other. Brief analysis on some of the events where India and Myanmar collaborated is as under:

1. Developmental Projects

India, firstly to bridle the reins of Burmese Junta, launched different kinds of developmental projects through its 'Look East Policy' which will be beneficial to both countries. In the spirit of Look East Policy, several institutional projects were set up in the region. BIMST-EC (Bangladesh India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation), the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and the Kunming Initiative are being under taken in Myanmar for suiting the geographical node. India chose to engage Myanmar and get closer to it through these regional organisations, [*Conference Document: 2003*].

For India, Myanmar is the bridge with Southeast Asia. In fact, it is a bridge between all the countries comprising the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). According to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, the first decade of the 21st century has witnessed growing strategic engagement between India and Myanmar. Relation with Myanmar has become truly multi-faceted... "with the cooperation in a range of developmental and other projects in the areas of roads, power, hydro-carbon, oil refinery, transmission lines, tele-communications and information technology"(op cit), [*Brig. Gurmeet Singh: 2009*]. Training centre at Pakokku was also set up under India's assistance, a part from setting up of a turbo truck plant at Magway, [*Ministry of External Affairs, 1 March 2010*].

2. Trade Features

As a part of follow up programme, an official Central delegation from Delhi, led by RR Jha (NE), MHA and Naveen Verma, Jt. Secy (NE), MHA and Dy. Director Intelligence Bureau (IB) have a meeting of the Border Liason Officers at Tamu, Myanmar on 5 March 2010. The delegations of the two countries discussed enhancement of trade relations between India and Myanmar. They also discussed the list of trade items and other strategies to control cross border migrations and checking of militant infiltrations along Indo-Myanmar border, [*The Imphal Free Press, 6 March 2010*].

3. Counter Insurgency

Apart from developmental projects, India's national interest in a strong and stable Myanmar that observes strict neutrality between India and China and cooperates with India in the common fight against the urgencies raging in the border areas of both the countries. It is a well-known undisputed fact that India's north-eastern region is infested by various tribal insurgent outfits, which add fuel to the fire of Delhi's headache over it's rivalry with Pakistan over `Kashmir' the bone of contention for both countries. The Chinese `Threats' over large area of Indian Territory in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, is a long phenomenon since Sino-Indian war of 1962. For decades the northeast of India has been going through political instability and ethnic insurgencies. The region along the foothills of the Himalayas and Brahmaputra River and Indian Ocean is inhabited by mosaic of peoples and cultures. Since the independence of India and Burma in 1947 and 1948, these ethnic minorities have been struggling for more autonomy, and some even independence or at least a specific political and cultural recognition.

4. Joint Operation against NE Rebels in Myanmar

insurgents were killed and a huge cache of arms was recovered, [*Journal of Defence Studies, 28 November 2016*].

According to the 'Times of India (TOI)' a follow up programme to flush out N-E militants, the union Home Minister GK Pillai met his Myanmarese counterpart, Brig-Gen. Phon Swe in Yangon on 18 February 2010 to discuss the matter. The source also stated that the home secretary saying that the Indian delegation had given Myanmarese officials maps of rebel camps located in Myanmar, [*The Times of India, 2 March 2010*].

Accordingly, in the year 2001 in November, Myanmar armies have raided several Manipuri rebel bases, rounded up almost 200 rebels and recovered 1,500 guns. Indo-Myanmar

co-operation is not only essential for counter insurgency, but also to control narcotics trafficking and stopping of proliferation of small arms. [*The Times of India, 2 March 2010*].

In regards with counter insurgency, the Indian army under Para 12 entered Myanmar to kill Northeast terrorists. Over 20 insurgents were killed and 11 seriously injured in the operation. The crackdown on the terrorist took place between 1 AM to 4 AM where Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) were used in the action. The surgical strike was completed within 30 minutes, where 2 rebel camps were completely annihilated by the Indian army reported the source, [*News 18, 10 June 2015*].

In 2006, Indian and Myanmar army have launched joint operation inside Myanmar to flush out NSCN (K) militants, who are out of the Naga-GOI Peace Accord. Again after a decade long secret diplomacy reaching out to Myanmar's army by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), who played a critical role in setting the stage for cross-border, strikes deep inside Myanmar on 10 June 2010. The military strike back was in retaliation of the Manipur ambush in which 18 soldiers of 6 Dogra Regiment got killed on 4 June by NSCN (K), [*The Indian Express, 10 June 2015*].

5. Mechanism to tackle Insurgency

To cope up with these many problems relating to Pakistan and that with China, without the help or support of second party country, it would be rather too burdensome for Delhi. In addition, sources reported that Burma has been hosting many Indian insurgent outfits. Bangladesh and China are not exception, in this regard. Therefore, to counter insurgency problems, the 'Look East policy' strategy has to be applied after gaining hold of Burma's bridled-reins. As a part of counter insurgency in the north-east, a two-day meeting of DGPs held from 30 October 2009 set up a 'Regional Cooperation Mechanism (RMC)' at Shillong, [*Zee News/ PTI, 5 Nov. 2009*], among the seven north-eastern states and Sikkim to exchange about battalions movement and plans of the outfits. In the spirit of look east policy, a delegation of India, Minister of External Affairs, S.M Krishna had raised the issue of north-east insurgent groups to the delegation members attending the meeting, during his three day visit to Burma starting from 10 December 2009, [*Ramesh Ramachandran, 6 Dec 2009*], it was adopted in the 12th BIMSTEC ministerial meeting to co-operate in combating international Terrorism, [*Asia News International, 12 Dec. 2009*].

6. Guards along Eastern Borders

The Home Ministry on 22 February 2010 has decided that half of the 29 Border Security Force (BSF) battalions be deployed along Riverine areas of Bangladesh border, and Assam Rifles (AR) to boost deployment along Myanmar border. Ajay Maken, Minister of state for Home also stated that 16 of the 29 battalions be used to meet the requirements along Bangladesh border and the remaining 13 battalions will serve as reserves for the 187 battalion strong BSF and enable regular turnover for training, rest and recuperation, [*Hindustan Times*, 23 Feb, 2010].

7. Installation of Hotlines

As a part of counter insurgency, delegations of India and Myanmar, discuss about the installation of hotline at the meeting of Border Liaison Officers at Tamu on 5 March 2010. Taking into account the request of Myanmar delegations, Home Ministry of India has started issuing the process for providing Bolero, motor Bike and Telephone, for the purpose of installing and operating 'Hotlines'.

The latest input till this writing is that in the Rajya Sabha sitting in the Indian Parliament on 9 March 2010, [*Zee News/PTI, 5 Nov 2009*]. Minister of state for Home Affairs, Mullappally Ramchandran informed the House that insurgents in north east are using foreign made arms procured through smugglers based in South East Asia and in Yunnan Province of China, through Sino-Myanmar border and the porous Indo-Myanmar border. In this regard, Government of India voiced its concern with the Government of Myanmar and Bangladesh over the smuggling of arms through their territories.

It is evident and vividly seen from the above events of meetings and of undertaking of developmental projects and of the strategies being applied to counter insurgency by India and Myanmar proves that the two countries are co-operating vis-à-vis. To cope up with northeast insurgent groups camping on the soil of Myanmar, India needs the co-operation of Myanmar government; on the same footing Myanmar requires the assistance and support of India for the implementations of developmental works in Myanmar.

In the meantime it is also reported by the officials that 'Fencing of Indo-Myanmar Border' as a part of counter insurgency had kick up over 'Tamil Temple' located presently on the Indian side which is likely to be parted to Myanmar, [*A Zee News/PTI, 5 Nov. 2009*]. Related result of such concerns has been a quite aggressive effort to engage in border fencing

between India and Myanmar. Local fieldwork by the author discovered that during summer 2013, in various places, the ongoing construction work of the border fence by the Myanmar Army was encroaching on Indian Kuki settlements, including some churches. Numerous Kuki villages are directly affected and a large slice of land, 1 km into Indian Territory and 10 km long, was occupied by Burmese border fencing constructors—significantly, all of this is Kuki territory. Non-governmental organisation (NGO) reports have confirmed such evidence (*Laithangbam, 2013*), which has led to growing demand for a re-surveying of the Indo-Myanmar border. While the Government of India has voiced its concerns over this with the Government of Myanmar, India seems more concerned about controlling the north-east insurgent groups than protecting its territorial integrity, while Myanmar requires the assistance and support of India for implementing development work in Myanmar. Since in all these new developments Kukis are again becoming victims, in this case through surreptitious ceding of their territory to Myanmar by India, new anger is emerging and the situation is becoming increasingly dangerous again, especially in the affected border areas, [*TS Haokip: 2015 SAR, vol.35 (1)*].

8. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

Apart from the above to bolster ties and strengthen mutual understanding and co-operation between the two neighbouring countries, India and Myanmar signed 11 agreements in a range of sectors on 6 September 2017. The agreement includes 2 MoUs on maritime security cooperation and sharing of white shipping information to further strengthen their multi-facet partnership by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Myanmar's state Councillor Aung San Suu Kyi in a wide range talks, [*Times of India, 6 September 2017*].

A technical agreement was also signed for providing coastal surveillance system. Another MoUs signed include between the Election Commission of India and Union Election of Myanmar, Cultural Exchange programme for 2017-2020, Myanmar Press Council and Press Council of India, two MoUs on India-Myanmar Centre of IT Skill & Myanmar Institute of Information Technology (MIIT) were extended, two other MoUs on Medical products regulation and in the field of health & medicine, another MoU on enhancing co-operation for upgrade of women's police Training Centre at Yamethin, Myanmar. [*Times of India, 6 September 2017*]. These are some of the tactful appeasement strategy of India towards Myanmar for future co-operation and mutual understanding between the two neighbouring countries.

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