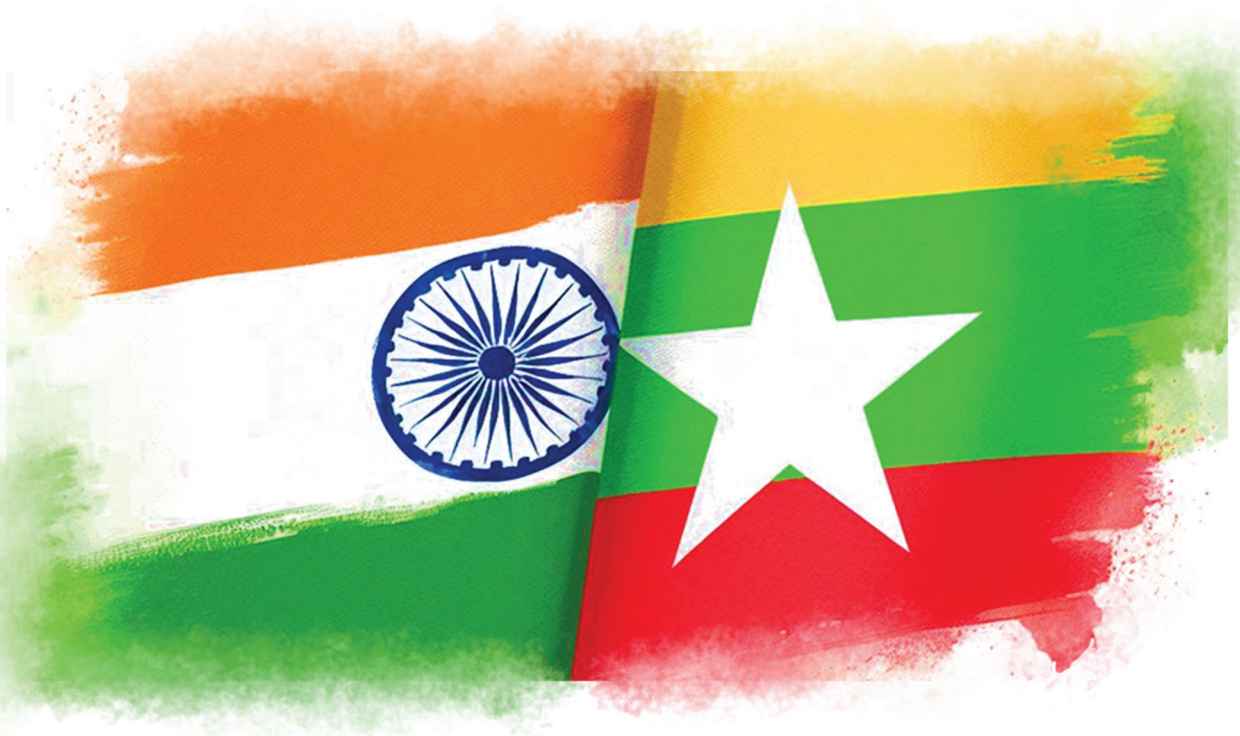




Event Report

Indo-Myanmar Relations, Current Situation & Implications for India's Security



20th February 2024

EVENT REPORT : INDO-MYANMAR RELATIONS, CURRENT SITUATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA'S SECURITY HELD ON 20 FEB 2024

Executive Summary

1. The seminar outlined the complex geopolitical situation between India and Myanmar, particularly focusing on the current political turmoil in Myanmar and its implications for India's security. The key points that emerged from the talks by each speaker are given in succeeding paragraphs.

2. **India-Myanmar Relations.** The relationship between India and Myanmar has evolved due to various factors such as historical linkages, British rule legacy, economic development in India's Northeast, increased trade with ASEAN, energy security concerns and heightened Chinese involvement in Myanmar.

3. **Myanmar's Political Turmoil.** Myanmar is experiencing significant unrest following the military coup in 2021. Various ethnic armed groups are challenging the military junta, leading to violence and instability, with implications for India's security, including the risk of refugee influx and illegal immigration.

4. **Implications for India's Security.** India is concerned about the Rohingya refugee crisis and the potential for illegal activities along the porous India-Myanmar border. India has initiated measures like smart fencing to address these concerns and ensure effective border management. There was a unanimous view by most of the participants for effective border management and a phased construction of border fencing.

5. **Panel Discussion.** Talks were followed by a seminar to analyse the geopolitical landscape and discuss measures to secure India's interests, engage with Myanmar, and manage the border effectively. There was an active participation and the insights from the individual talks and the seminar are given below:-

(a) Various experts highlighted historical, cultural, and ethnic linkages between India and Myanmar and the related challenges that get thrown up due to this, such as opposition to abolishing the FMR and construction of border fencing.

(b) Challenges posed by insurgency, refugee crisis and China's influence were also brought out by all the speakers and other participants. Possibility of balkanisation was stressed upon by almost all the speakers and most participants. However, DGAR was of the view that ultimately Myanmar Army will prevail due to sheer superiority of combat power and control over governance.

(c) Recommendations include dialogue with all the stakeholders, ensuring security of infrastructure projects, construction of border fencing selectively based on priorities, resolving the Manipur problem through talks and dialogue, dealing effectively with criminal networks and drug trafficking, and enhancing border management including raising of additional AR Battalions.

(d) Regarding the internal stability of Myanmar, former Ambassador Gautam Mukhopadhyay proposed a solution that envisions a loose form of federalism. This would entail the establishment of a national consensus government initially, with states granted greater autonomy and authority. He suggested that an international effort, spearheaded by India, could pave the way for this solution before China gains more influence in Myanmar and assumes a leading role in facilitating a resolution.

6. Overall, the summary underscores the importance of understanding the complex dynamics between India and Myanmar and the need for strategic measures to address security challenges and promote stability in the region.

Introduction

7. The intricate and dynamic geopolitical interplay between India and Myanmar coupled with the current political instability in Myanmar, has significant implications for India's security. This situation also necessitates particular emphasis on border management. India-Myanmar relations have undergone significant changes over the last decade due to four main factors: the economic development of India's Northeast, India's increased interest in trade with ASEAN, India's search for energy security, and increased Chinese involvement in Myanmar.

8. **Myanmar's Current Political Turmoil.** The civil war, also called the *Myanmar Spring Revolution* and the *People's Defensive War*, is an ongoing conundrum following Myanmar's long-running insurgencies, which escalated significantly in response to the 2021 military coup d'état and the subsequent violent crackdown on anti-coup protests. Myriad ethnic armed groups are now fighting with the military for greater autonomy. The Three Brotherhood Alliance (3BHA), formed in June 2019, is an alliance between the Arakan Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army. The alliance has recently taken control of Laukkai town, a crucial strategic point along Myanmar's northern border with China. *This represents the biggest military challenge to the Junta since the coup.* The Arakan Army has also launched massive operations in Rakhine State almost routing the Tatmadaw.

9. **Implications for India's Security.** The instability in Myanmar has potential security implications for India with the risk of an inflow of refugees or illegal immigrants from Myanmar. The Indian government is highly concerned about the Rohingya Muslim minority, a target of the Tatmadaw fleeing to the country. The coup has significantly undermined India's economic and security interests in Southeast Asia. As a consequence, India has issued orders for smart fencing for an additional 300 km out of the 1,643 km of India-Myanmar border, running along Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram. The decision has been made in the background of ongoing ethnic conflicts, illegal migration, and recent instances of both rebel fighters and Tatmadaw soldiers seeking shelter in Indian territory in large numbers. Large-scale smuggling of products, narcotics, weapons, and ammunition on the porous border is also a cause for concern.

10. In light of the above, a seminar was organised by CLAWS, aimed at examining the complex geopolitical landscape, the ongoing political turmoil in Myanmar and implications for India's security. The desired outcome being to bring forth implementable measures to secure own interests in the region, meaningfully engage Myanmar and for effective border management.

Opening Remarks by DG CLAWS

11. The opening remarks were delivered by Lt Gen Dushyant Singh, PVSM, AVSM (Retd) DG CLAWS. He highlighted the seriousness and complexity of the situation in Myanmar since after the 'Operation 1027' launched by the Three Brotherhood Alliance against the Junta and explicated the security concerns of India due to the instability and the intensity of violence in Myanmar. He expressed the need for effective border management and engaging with the Myanmar Government to ensure peace in the region.

Talk by Ambassador Gautam Mukhopadhyay

12. Ambassador Gautam Mukhopadhyay drew attention by focusing on the background of the current situation in Myanmar. Some of the salient aspects highlighted by him are as under:-

(a) **Historical Construct.**

(i) India and Myanmar have had relationship of Amnesia, although both have been civilizational neighbours and even during the colonial period, both the countries had a close administrative relationship. This amnesia continues till today. The situation in Myanmar is the preserve of a few handful of people who are following the issue very closely and in general most of the Indian populace is in the dark about what happens in Myanmar.

(ii) Democratic movement in Myanmar was never a people's movement unlike India. Freedom movement of Myanmar was hijacked by the Tatmadaw who perceived and projected themselves as the guardian of the unity and integrity of Myanmar and have fiercely defended it since then. A pro-democracy movement only ensued in various forms in 1962 and very fiercely in 1988. Besides, there were other kinds of movement such as the saffron revolution in 2007 and finally the elections that took place in 2010-2011, 2015 and 2021.

(iii) Myanmar underwent 10 years of relatively open democratic rule with media and economic freedom. People who were generally subdued and isolated for 50 years were able to finally raise its heads. In these 10 years, a new generation influenced by social media emerged, which strongly opposed the military coup in February 2021 and rose in revolt against the Junta.

(iv) Apart from the Army, the other two power centres in Myanmar are the Ethnic Armed Groups and the Democratic / Student movement. The Army usually keeps one of the two on its side. It is only in the current situation that it is struggling against both.

(v) It is inherent in the ethnic and tribal nature of the society to have a strong tendency to reserve territory and turf and not share it with others.

(b) **Current Dynamics.**

(i) Two peculiarities of the current situation are that firstly, a large majority of Burma youth whose peaceful resistance to the Myanmar army coup was suppressed, have taken to armed struggle. They have left the cities and joined the ethnic armed organizations. Secondly, in terms of territory, ethnic armed organizations which are now called the Ethnic Resistance Organizations and the Peoples Defence Forces (PDFs) and have mushroomed all over the country probably control roughly 50 to 60 percent of the territory but not necessarily an equivalent amount of population of Myanmar.

(ii) Over the last three to four months the coordinated offensive of the Three Brotherhood Alliance consisting of the Arakan Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) have virtually taken control of the whole of the northeast of Myanmar which is largely northern Shan state bordering China.

(iii) The ethnic armed organizations now control many of the border points and areas in vicinity of strategic projects such as the Kaladan Multi Modal Trade and Transit Project and the Trilateral highway.

(c) **Analysis of the Situation.**

(i) In 1988 and 1990, India took overtly pro-democracy stance. At that time, the Myanmar Army was able to attain control over the situation by making peace with the ethnic armed organizations with the help of China and suppressed the agitation in the Burmese heartland.

(ii) International interventions haven't worked in the past. Even the ASEAN five-point initiative has been a complete failure. The US has also largely kept its hands off. Every time Myanmar has been isolated and pushed to a corner, they have been drawn close to the Chinese.

(iii) There is a tendency in India specially among security analysts to look for external drivers of the conflict and suspect Chinese / US role but it is a false understanding of the situation. The Myanmar crisis is 95% homegrown, even though, no rebel movement is entirely, free of some external interest and involvement.

(iv) Few questions that need to be answered are that will the Junta be able to hold on and if so, what? Also, is there a likelihood that Myanmar may Balkanize?

Talk by Lt Gen Rana Pratap Kalita, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM (Retd), Former Army Commander, Eastern Command

13. Salient aspects of the talk are as under :-

(a) India shares more than 1600 kilometres of borders with Myanmar. Both countries have historical, cultural and ethnic linkages and were ruled by British, who had left lot of legacy issues unresolved. Myanmar through India's North-East region is the gateway to the Southeast Asia and holds the key for fructification of 'Act East' policy. Developments in Myanmar also impact India's extremely restive North-Eastern region. Similarly, Myanmar is extremely important for China because it opens up the avenue towards the warm Indian ocean waters.

(b) Insurgency in Myanmar has been prevalent since independence. At presently, there are almost 19 active insurgent groups, who are active towards the North-East and Western part of Myanmar. Kachin state, Karen State, Mon as well as Shan State, Rakhine and Chin have got active insurgent groups which have traditionally been fighting for autonomy or for some form of sovereignty. However, they have never been united. Myanmar Army has got a total strength of about 4 lakh 50 thousand as compared to about 2 lakhs with the ethnic armed groups.

(c) **Rohingya Refugee Crisis.** In 1982, Rohingyas were declared as foreigners and an oppressive regime forced approximately 1 million Rohingyas into Bangladesh. Some of them also entered India and moved to various places such as Jammu, Delhi and the North-East. This influx of the Rohingyas is a potential threat to India's integrity.

(d) **Camps of Indian Insurgent groups in Myanmar**. Because of the ethnic linkages and people of similar ethnicity living on both sides of the Indo-Myanmar border, Indian insurgent groups such as NSCN-IM, NSCN-KYA and others, all have their camps in the Sagaing and Chin Areas of Myanmar. In 2019-20, Indian Army along with Myanmar Army had carried out 'Operation Sunrise' towards the northern part of the Sagaing region and Chin areas, where some of the insurgent camps were destroyed by the Myanmar Army while the Indian Army established a blockage on the Indo-Myanmar border.

(e) **Sino-Myanmar Relations**. Similar to India and Myanmar, China and Myanmar also have historical linkages. A number of people of Chinese ethnicity are living in the northern and eastern parts of Myanmar. Myanmar and China have signed a treaty of friendship and non-aggression in 1954. China is Myanmar's largest trading partner as well as its largest arms supplier to the Army, Navy and Airforce. China is also constructing the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), under which an oil-gas pipeline has been constructed from Kyaukpyu to Kunming. There are a number of infrastructure development projects, products and hubs and construction of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), oil and gas exploration activities in Myanmar, in which China is heavily investing. China has also helped out by leveraging its veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and supporting the Myanmar army during various resolutions against the military rule in 1988, 2008, 2017, and 2021. China calls its relation with Myanmar as 'Pauk Phaw' which means blood brothers. Even during the recent military action, there are some reports that China has helped Myanmar with manpower and technology for information warfare and cyber warfare. China is constructing a submarine base at Myingun island which is close to Sittwe. Also, its involvement in Coco Islands, which is close to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, is an area of concern. The relationship between Myanmar and China seems to be more of a relation of convenience than anything else. The word traditionally used for Chinese people in Myanmar is called 'Tayoke' which means ghost. China has constructed 2000 kilometre of high-tech wire fencing along the border with Myanmar, which has become a point of contention between the Chinese and the military rulers of Myanmar. The spillover of the fighting between the ethnic groups and Myanmar Army has also been an issue which has been repeatedly represented by the Chinese delegation. It also seen that post-2021 military coup, anti-Chinese sentiments have increased among the pro-national unity government supporters. Chinese infrastructure including factories have also been targeted by the PDF as part of the recent turmoil which has been going on in Myanmar.

(f) **Indo-Myanmar Relations**. The artificial border created between India and Myanmar when the British left, divided a lot of people of the same ethnicities. This enforced the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the border, which allows people to cross over within 16 kilometres of the Indo-Myanmar border with headloads. FMR has traditionally been exploited by all the armed groups as also anti-national elements on both sides for all types of illegal activities whether it is movement of armed groups, illegal gun-running or narcotic trading. Capture of border areas by the Three Brotherhood Alliance is likely to further exacerbate the illegal activities in the area.

(g) While the Myanmar Army still controls the hinterland, there are many internal fissures. While India is a firm supporter of democracy, it is engaging in a friendly relationship with the Myanmar Army as well. The future lies in reconciliation and co-existence.

14. **Recommendations.** General Kalita suggested the following way ahead :-

- (a) India needs to leverage its influence to commence a dialogue between various stakeholders.
- (b) Security of own infrastructure projects needs to be ensured.
- (c) International isolation of Myanmar needs to be prevented to preclude greater Chinese influence.
- (d) There is a need for robust border management mechanism which will require more Assam Rifles battalions to be deployed on the border.
- (e) Stability in the North east states needs to be ensured.
- (f) India needs to evolve a comprehensive plan to deal with the situation.

Talk by Lt Gen P C Nair, PVSM, YSM, AVSM, DG Assam Rifles

15. The salient aspects of the talk are as under:-

(a) **Border Management.**

- (i) India shares borders with five countries in the NE and among those, the three open borders are with Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar. Bhutan is a closed country and hence there is not much movement across the border. Nepal is a free open border, so whatever happens there has implications on India.
- (ii) Border with Myanmar divides common ethnicities and cultural affinity. Sub-nationalism is very strong in the area. First allegiance is to the tribe, then to the state and then to the nation.
- (iii) Indo-Myanmar border (IMB) is a legacy imposed by the British without local will and consent dividing tribes and villages. IMB is 1643 Kms long and is characterised by forests, fast-flowing rivers and streams and a lack of physical connectivity. The border is sub-divided as under:-
 - (aa) BP-1 to 32 is with Mizoram (510 kms).
 - (ab) BP-30 to 130 is with Manipur (398 km).
 - (ac) BP-131 to 155 is with Nagaland (215 Kms).
 - (ad) BP-155 to 186 is with Arunachal Pradesh (384 km).
 - (ae) Beyond BP-186, there are no border pillars up to the India-China-Myanmar border due to hostile terrain.
- (iv) Certain peculiarities make the task of Border guarding more challenging. There is lack of infrastructure and no specific distance between the border pillars, which makes the border porous. Visibility of pillars between one another is also a challenge. Lack of clear demarcation on ground creates operational problems for units.

(v) The role of Assam Rifles (AR) includes Counter Insurgency as well as Border management. It is also involved in conventional operations. Out of a total of 46 battalions, 20 are involved in border management.

(vi) According to 2018 Land border crossing Agreement, villagers on either side of the IMB, can go across and stay for almost 14 days.

(vii) Owing to the ethnic connect, there are approximately 20 camps of Indian Insurgent groups across the border.

(viii) The official trade figures accounts for only 5-8% of the overall trade. Despite COVID, there was an increase in Contraband smuggling. In 2023, it had gone up to 1800 Crores.

(ix) Similar to the Trans- Arunachal Highway, there are plans to make a highway in Nagaland and further connect to Manipur. However, it will take some for Mizoram due to its difficult terrain.

(b) **Current Situation.**

(i) Fighting has spread to the hinterland even though major impact has been in the border areas where there have been mass surrenders and desertions by the Myanmar Army. Army has used Air attacks and Arty Attacks, in retaliation to PDF and Ethnic groups and they have used drone warfare resulting in a large number of casualties of the Myanmar Army.

(ii) 400 Tatmadaw posts have been overrun. While the Myanmar Army still retains control over South Arunachal, Nagaland border posts and Moreh, the posts on Manipur and Mizoram borders have been taken over by Armed groups.

(iii) Approximately 20 thousand illegal immigrants have entered India. However, most of it is temporary and a large number continue to go back. 796 Myanmar Army personnel have also been repatriated.

(c) **Implications for India.**

(i) There has been an increase in trans-border movement of militants, increased trafficking of drugs as also an increase in number of refugees. This is a drain on resources in Mizoram. Sanctity of the Indo-Myanmar border is also threatened and many players are exploiting the cross-border movement.

(ii) There may be an adverse effect on Kaladan highway project, though three days back Arakan army has stated that the project will remain unhindered.

(iii) Relations with China are more out of compulsion and not likely to impact relations with India.

(d) **Long Term Effects on India.** There is likely to be a refugee influx and demographic imbalance, not so much in Manipur but more in Mizoram. India's land access to Far East to further its Act East policy may also be threatened if the fighting

does not subside anytime soon. Indo-Myanmar relations is likely to come under stress as fighting continues.

(e) **Border Fence.** There is immense opposition to the idea amongst the locals. Post Government announcement for construction of border fence, Mizoram has issued number of statements against it. Nagaland is also joining hands against the fence, though there are some differing views. The fence construction will require large scale resources. There will also be a need to increase India's deployment to fill the gaps and dominate the fence.

(f) **Recommendations.**

(i) India continues to be considered friendly. There is need to engage with Army, student movement and Ethnic Armed groups.

(ii) India needs to capitalise on Buddhism and cultural connect.

(iii) Myanmar Army is likely to remain the major party in control. India needs to continue ground level engagements with the Myanmar army.

(iv) Additional AR battalions will be required to man the border fence.

Panel Discussion and Response to Audience Questions

16. **Question 1.** What is the way ahead? Is there a likelihood of civilian government assuming power?

17. **Panelist 1.** Myanmar army is now resorting to use of indiscriminate force using air power and artillery. Ground troops have depleted and become demoralized and Army is not being able to carry put fresh recruitment. The Army is attacking civilians in order to build pressure on the ethnic resistance organizations. The ethnic groups are not very well integrated amongst themselves. There may be a virtual fragmentation / enclaves within the country. The situation maybe exploited by China. Myanmar Army may split but it will continue to play a major role. Most armed groups may be looking for a federal democratic union even though a federal democratic union has a poor chance. The country is already failing and may not be able to remain together by force. The only question is whether it will happen in 2024 or will take longer.

18. **Panelist 2.** There are two bad choices. It is likely that there may be a split within the Myanmar army also. Some sections may like to go towards some kind of reconciliation. The opposition forces today will not accept a military led future for Myanmar. The military has to step back and take an important role because no one favours a situation like Iraq, where the Myanmar army is the only institution. It is in India's interest to preserve a strong role for the military within a united and probably democratic Myanmar.

19. **Panelist 3.** There is no coherent fighting by Ethnic Armed Groups. Each of them, traditionally, are only looking at their pockets of interests and some autonomy. Besides, the NUG is more in the cyber world than on ground, because of the fact that Tatmadaw comes down very heavily on them. So, there's no collective organization, no political players and no coherence amongst them. Myanmar army is different from others in the neighbourhood. They had a very great role to play in nation building from the very beginning and it started with the Burmese independence army. They took control in 1962. Since then, there has been no looking back despite the small periods of democracy and despite the 2008 constitution which

is still in existence. There is China factor, which shares 2480 kms of border which is even more than India. For projects such as the China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), two ocean policies, Myanmar is essential for China. Thus, Army may continue to exercise control.

20. **Question 2.** What is China's involvement? Is it having a dual policy with different stakeholders in Myanmar?

21. **Panelist 1.** There are groups on the Yunnan border and some of these groups are being funded by China. Scam centres, illegal gambling and smuggling of weapons is carried out at a large scale. China exercises substantial influence in these areas and uses it as a hedge against the Tatmadaw to apply pressure. The first ceasefire with the three-brotherhood alliance which didn't last was also brokered by China, so there is a clear sign of the fact that China will come into play whenever they feel the need. The Chinese have been trying to gain advocates as they have their strategic and economic interests however Myanmar has managed to keep China off balance. Chinese have good relations with Tatmadaw however, if things do not progress well, they are capable of switching sides and making agreements with whichever ethnic forces that are at their border. India should prioritise United Myanmar and be ready to deal with a new dispensation if required.

22. **Question 3.** Do you think there is any alternative to the Junta? Can Ethnic Armed groups replace the Tatmadaw?

23. **Panelist.** The power of the Myanmar army is denuding. Army units are disintegrating at the tactical level. Wherever they are under attack, either they have surrendered or joined hands with the PDF or the ethnic armed groups or have sought refuge in Thailand or in India. Army's survival cannot depend on such poorly motivated and trained soldiers. On the other hand, Ethnic Armed groups need to get into some agreement with each other and align themselves in order to provide a viable and sustainable alternative.

24. **Question 4.** Can the Ethnic Armed Groups provide an alternative to the Junta or have a Reconciliation?

25. **Panelist.** There is the probability of a negotiated settlement but chances are very slim and almost negligible. The gap between the two parties is unbridgeable. There can be no conversation with the NUG or with the ethnic armed organizations that recognizes the 2008 constitution and the Army is not going to give up that position. There are big differences between particularly the NUG, dominated by the NLD and the NUCC, which is the National Union Consultative Council, which consists of basically all the resistance forces, civilians, CSOs, labour groups, etc. The NUG and the NUCC and the other forces have all agreed on a federal union charter. This is a major step, even if there is doubt that it will succeed. At least they are agreed on a federal union charter. What they don't want is the domination of a single Barman leader like Aung San. They may agree on collective leadership. However, a collective leadership idea has never worked anywhere. The Tatmadaw can give them a federal union and equality as entities within Myanmar. They can make a de facto reality a de jure reality. The ethnic groups are not going to surrender the powers that they have already enjoyed and they are capable of administration. In fact, the Arakan army, or rather through their proxies, is already virtually governing, ruling, administering, and providing justice in the areas that they already occupy. There is at least some degree of maturity amongst the opposition as well.

26. **Question 5.** Which one is a practical solution, scrapping of FMR or redefining FMR in the long run?

27. **Panelist 1.** The government has already given its directive. Even if the FMR gets scrapped it's going to take minimum a decade to erect the fence. People have been misusing FMR. There is no control over people who do not return. The fence will prevent misuse of FMR by armed groups.

28. **Panelist 2.** The majority of the people who are coming in are refugees who have been displaced because of the fighting in the Myanmar close to the borders. They have been displaced and majority of them go back. Some of them have migrated to the interiors, to the hinterland because of the livelihood and the other issues. But those refugees are harmless. The problem creators are armed groups. There is a need to distinguish between genuine refugees and the armed groups.

29. **Question 6.** AR is at the receiving end in Manipur. Was the six-point oath by MPs/MLAs in Imphal in January 2024 a good idea?

30. **Panelist.** AR have been at the forefront in Manipur and hence they are at the receiving end too. Various narratives in the national media are agenda driven due to vested interests and don't give a true picture. AR have all India troops and it is unjust to be seen as being partial to one at the cost of other. AR has been absolutely neutral. Bad press doesn't prevent AR from performing their duty. What the politicians do, is a political decision. It doesn't change AR's methodology of operation.

31. **Question 7.** How is the fence seen from perception management perspective as it may alienate locals in already sensitive locations?

32. **Panelist.** The British were the first to draw a line between India and Myanmar, in 1886 but were wise to not enforce it as a hard frontier. Burmese passport rules in 1948, also left FMR open. The Indian passport rules of 1950 allowed FMR and the 2018 agreement just codified and rationalized it. People in the border areas, most of all Nagas have never accepted this line. Imposing a hard frontier through border fencing will arouse sentiments of the population and the border itself may be questioned. Historically for 2000 years, people have moved back and forth and the FMR has actually allowed people to come study, work and go back. On the other side, the Kuba valley is in the plains and is far more prosperous than the hills on Indian side.

33. **Comments by DGBR on viability of Fence construction.** Out of the 1600 kms of border, only about 1300 kms may be fenced since 300 kms is a No Go. Construction of the fence will be met with extreme challenges due to hostile terrain, and weather in addition to security challenges. It will also involve construction of approach points for induction of stores since road heads are located 10 to 70 kms away in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh respectively. Construction of the fence is necessary to prevent misuse of FMR.

Key Takeaways / Recommendations

34. The key take aways / recommendations of the event are as under :-

(a) **Foreign Relations.**

- (i) Notwithstanding the historical and cultural linkages, India has neglected Myanmar for long in spite of it being critical to stability in India's North East. India needs to evolve a comprehensive plan for Myanmar and give it due priority.

- (ii) India needs to capitalise on its friendly image and engage with all stakeholders to enable peace and long term stability in the region. Support to Myanmar is essential to prevent international isolation which could push the country towards China.
- (iii) The Junta is likely to remain a major player in Myanmar and thus India needs to continue to maintain good relations with the Army.
- (iv) Security for Indian infrastructure projects is essential and must be ensured.
- (b) **Military Diplomacy.** Indian Army has been collaborating with the Myanmar Army in the past. Myanmar Army is likely to remain the major party in control. India needs to continue ground level engagements with the Myanmar army.
- (c) **FMR.** The FMR is aligned to regional sentiments and any attempt to create a hard frontier may prove counter-productive. While misuse of FMR needs to be controlled, its authorized usage should continue to be facilitated in line with regional aspirations as per will of the people since local support is critical for stability in the sensitive North-eastern states.
- (d) **Border Fence.** The border fence is essential for controlling the illegal activities in the area and misuse of FMR. The construction of fence will involve major logistical and security challenges including construction of approaches. It may be advisable to modify the alignment of the fence to reduce construction and subsequent manning costs. Adequate check posts may be established to enable facilitation of FMR.
- (e) **Assam Rifles.** Assam Rifles are indeed the sentinels of the North East. Their professionalism in dealing with the challenges and unbiased actions need to be given due coverage to prevent proliferation of agenda driven false narratives. There will be a need to raise more AR battalions to man the border fence and ensure its sanctity.
- (f) **Political Resolution.** Myanmar crisis is 95% homegrown. Most ethnic groups do not seek sovereignty and may be satisfied with requisite autonomy. The military Junta considers itself important to prevent balkanisation of the state. It is in interest of Myanmar as well as regional security that all parties arrive at a consensus solution. A loose form of federalism may be the way ahead.

Closing Remarks

35. The closing remarks of the talk were delivered by the Lt Gen Dushyant Singh, DG CLAWS who thanked everyone for successful conduct of the event. He assured that requisite focus will be given to the subject and key takeaways will be processed for consideration.