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At the Edge of Stability:
India's Options
amid Myanmar's
Unfolding Crisis

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Abstract

This issue brief explores India's evolving strategic considerations and policy challenges in the context of Myanmar's instability following the assumption of power by the State Administrative Council (SAC). Myanmar's complex internal conflict, deepened by resistance movements, pro-democratic fighters and ethnic armed organisations, has intensified regional insecurity. As insurgency and humanitarian crises escalate, India's border management, counter-insurgency partnerships, and diplomatic engagements face critical challenges. Drawing on geopolitical, economic, and military developments upto mid-2025, this paper presents possible future scenarios and offers pragmatic policy options for India.

Keywords: India-Myanmar relations, Myanmar Military (Tatmadaw), Rohingya, State Administrative Council (SAC), Insurgency, Act East Policy, Border security, China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), Refugee policy, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Introduction

India and Myanmar share deep-rooted historical, religious, ethnic and economic ties shaped by ancient Buddhist linkages, colonial legacies and post-independence trajectories. With a 1,643-kilometre land border and maritime connectivity via the Bay of Bengal, Myanmar remains pivotal to India's Act East Policy and strategic interests in Southeast Asia. In the aftermath of Myanmar's 2021 military takeover of governance, India is confronted with a range of complex and evolving challenges. These include the diminishing legitimacy of the Myanmar state, the growing strategic footprint of China through infrastructure investments, defence cooperation and a renewed surge in cross-border insurgent activities affecting India's northeastern region. Since the assumption of governance by Myanmar's State Administrative Council in 2021, the regional security landscape has undergone significant transformation. For India, this evolving situation necessitates a careful reassessment of its strategic posture, particularly regarding the northeastern frontier. Key considerations include managing emerging security dynamics, ensuring the continuity of cross-border infrastructure, connectivity initiatives and maintaining constructive diplomatic engagement with all relevant stakeholders. In this context, India's approach remains anchored in the principles of regional stability, non-interference and mutually beneficial cooperation. This article analyses the historical and

contemporary dimensions of Indo-Myanmar relations, assessing the implications of Myanmar's internal instability for India's security and proposing policy options to safeguard its strategic interests.

The prevailing situation necessitates a calibrated response aimed at safeguarding strategic infrastructure, ensuring border stability and fostering regional connectivity through ongoing projects such as the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. India remains committed to a policy of constructive engagement, upholding the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, while supporting inclusive dialogue and regional mechanisms that promote peace, stability and sustainable development in Southeast Asia.

Post-Independence Political Developments

Myanmar gained independence from Britain on 04 January 1948, amidst high hopes of federal unity and democratic governance. In 1958, unique in the world's democratic history, the Burmese democratic government under U Nu called for its military (Tatmadaw) to govern Burma for two years. General Ne Win, who had been the Prime Minister during the caretaker government from 1958 to 1960, staged the coup as Army Chief and declared himself Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, effectively becoming the head of state on 02 March 1962. This marked the beginning of a long era of military rule under his Burmese Way to Socialism. The 'Burmese Way to Socialism' entrenched one-party military rule. Ethnic minorities were reportedly suppressed, the economy deteriorated and democratic institutions were dismantled. The 1988 pro-democracy uprising, famously known as the '8888 Uprising', was met with brutal military crackdowns, leading to the emergence of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), later renamed State Peace & Development Council (SPDC). The political history of the country is marked by oscillations between nascent parliamentary democracy, socialist militarism and recent civilian-led but military-influenced governance. General Thein Sein could be named as the reformist and moderate General and President of Myanmar, who executed inclusivity and brought numerous reforms to bring in democracy and liberalisation in Myanmar. Tatmadaw owns the nation and remains the guardian of the unity of the federal structure.

Evolution of Democracy in Myanmar

The Constitution of 2008, formulated under the guidance of Myanmar's military leadership, established a framework for a hybrid governance structure that blended elements

of civilian administration with institutional safeguards for the armed forces. It allocated 25 per cent of the seats in the Hluttaw (Parliament) to military appointees and vested control of pivotal ministries—namely Defence, Home Affairs and Border Affairs, under military oversight, thereby ensuring a sustained role for the armed forces in national governance.

Myanmar's journey towards democratic governance has been long, non-linear and fraught with interruptions by military interventions. In 2011, a nominally civilian government was installed, followed by the landmark 2015 general elections in which Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy secured a majority and formed the democratic government. The decade preceding the administrative transition in Myanmar on 01 February 2021 is often referred to as a 'period of significant promise and transformation'. Marked by gradual political liberalisation, economic reforms and increased engagement with the international community, this era witnessed robust economic growth, infrastructure development and a notable expansion of civic freedoms. For many within the country, it was a time of renewed optimism, as democratic institutions began to take root and opportunities for socio-economic advancement broadened. The period also saw Myanmar becoming more integrated into regional and global frameworks, reflecting a shift towards openness and participatory governance. This phase, often termed the 'golden decade', laid the foundation for aspirations of lasting peace, prosperity and national reconciliation.

The 2021 Military Takeover of Governance and the State Administrative Council

Following disputed results of the 2020 general elections, the Tatmadaw propelled a series of representations culminating in the takeover of Governance on 01 February 2021—thus detaining civilian leaders and establishing military rule headed by the State Administrative Council (SAC). This triggered mass protests, international condemnation and the formation of the shadow National Unity Government. Resistance movements, including the People's Defence Force (PDF), gained momentum, while ethnic armed groups (EAGs) consolidated territorial control in peripheral regions. As of 2025, Myanmar continues to experience significant internal fragmentation, with governance marked by complex and evolving dynamics. The SAC, backed by the Tatmadaw, faces considerable challenges in extending effective administrative control across large parts of the country. Numerous regions, particularly in the ethnic peripheries, are under the influence of various Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), creating a mosaic of contested authority and limited central oversight. The SAC maintains authority over most major urban centres such as Yangon, Mandalay and

Naypyidaw as well as key transport corridors essential for its operations. However, the SAC's grip on rural and border regions has significantly weakened, particularly since late 2023, as coordinated offensives by EAGs and the PDF have resulted in substantial territorial losses for the SAC. Resistance forces now collectively hold more than half of Myanmar's territory, forming a broad arc from the Chinese border through Kachin State, across Sagaing Region and Chin State, and extending southward towards the Bay of Bengal. Strongholds in Karenni and Karen States, along with areas in Tanintharyi Region, further erodes SAC control. The Arakan Army, for example, has established near-total control over the Rakhine State and is making advances into neighbouring areas, while other ethnic armies such as the Kachin Independence Army and Karen National Liberation Army continue to expand their influence. The emergence of a decentralised resistance landscape underscores the fragility of the state and the deep-rooted failure to implement inclusive federalism. This diffusion of control underscores the pressing need for inclusive political dialogue and calibrated governance strategies to foster long-term national reconciliation and stability.

China's Influence on Myanmar

China's growing presence in Myanmar represents a defining element of the geopolitical landscape in South and Southeast Asia. Following the 2021 military takeover of Governance and resultant Western sanctions, Myanmar's increasing reliance on China for diplomatic protection, economic investment and military hardware has altered the regional balance of power. India must endeavour to protect its interests in the Indo-Pacific.

Strategic and Economic Interests

China views Myanmar as a geostrategic fulcrum in its effort to secure energy routes, bypass the Malacca Strait and extend its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) into the Indian Ocean. Major Chinese-led infrastructure initiatives aligned with BRI and related China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), underscores Beijing's strategic ambitions in Myanmar:

- ***Kyaukpyu Port and Special Economic Zone (SEZ):*** Situated on the Bay of Bengal, this deep-sea port grants China critical maritime access to the Indian Ocean, thereby bypassing the vulnerable Strait of Malacca (Lintner, 2025).
- ***Oil and Gas Pipelines:*** Stretching from Kyaukpyu to China's Yunnan province, these overland pipelines secure China's energy imports and diversify its supply routes, enabling China to access maritime trade routes without transiting the contested South China Sea (International Crisis Group, 2023).

- ***Muse-Mandalay Railway and Border Trade Zones:*** These initiatives are designed to streamline overland connectivity, boost bilateral trade and increase China's influence over Myanmar's transport and commerce corridors. (Irrawaddy, 2024)
- Beijing also supplies over 50% of Myanmar's military hardware, including fighter aircraft, artillery systems and surveillance equipment. Chinese private military contractors have allegedly been deployed in Myanmar's sensitive industrial zones under the guise of infrastructure protection. China gifted a Type 035G Ming-class submarine to Myanmar, which was officially commissioned into the Myanmar Navy on 24 December 2021. As of May 2025, the Myanmar Navy possesses a total of two submarines— one Soviet-era Kilo-class submarine (UMS Minye Theinkhathu), transferred from India in 2020 and one Type 035B Ming-class submarine (UMS Minye Kyaw Htin), gifted by China and commissioned in December 2021.
- **Diplomatic Shielding and Tactical Leverage by China**
 - China has consistently used its position at the United Nations Security Council to shield the Tatmadaw from international censure using its veto power. It has resisted sanctions, diluted resolutions and encouraged ASEAN's non-interventionist approach.
 - Additionally, Chinese interlocutors have played quiet roles in ceasefire negotiations between the Tatmadaw and Ethnic Armed Organisations like the Arakan Army. However, Beijing's involvement is viewed with suspicion by Myanmar's resistance groups and civil society due to its perceived support for authoritarianism.
 - The working relationship between China and SAC (Tatmadaw) has seen many ups and downs in the past. Post 2021, it has been driven by mutual compulsions. Since 2021, international isolation and Western sanctions have left SAC increasingly reliant on China for political recognition, economic investment, and military support. China, in turn, views the SAC as the only force capable of maintaining a semblance of stability in Myanmar and protecting Beijing's substantial economic interests, particularly infrastructure projects like the CMEC.

- **Chinese Long-term Objectives and Regional Implications**

- China's strategic objectives in Myanmar are multifaceted. First, it seeks secure and direct access to the Indian Ocean through alternative trade routes, thereby reducing its dependency on the vulnerable Strait of Malacca. Second, Beijing aims to establish buffer zones by supporting loyalist militias and local actors capable of safeguarding its investments and infrastructure. Third, it aspires to counterbalance the western influence in the region and reinforce its leadership role within ASEAN. Finally, China is actively pursuing the extraction of valuable resources such as jade, teak, rare earth minerals, magnets and hydroelectric energy from Myanmar's frontier regions (Irrawaddy, 2024; Lintner, 2025).
- However, China's deepening involvement is not without its challenges. Sino-phobia is not new in Myanmar. Since 1967, the last five decades of nationalisation have seen exploitation of Myanmar by China; whereas Myanmar has shown adequate resilience and often rising anti-China sentiments, driven by nationalist and pro-democracy movements within Myanmar, have led to sporadic attacks on Chinese interests. Furthermore, the opaque nature of many Chinese investments, concerns over environmental degradation, and perceptions of inequitable economic benefits have generated local resentment, distrust and simmering anti-China sentiments. (International Crisis Group, 2023).
- In response, India must pursue a well-calibrated strategy that combines security cooperation, diplomatic engagement and development alternatives. Offering transparent, inclusive and regionally integrated projects can help position India as a credible partner, thereby reducing Myanmar's overdependence on Beijing. (Irrawaddy, International Crisis Group; Lintner).

Evolution of Indo-Myanmar Relations

India and Myanmar share a civilisational relationship rooted in centuries of cultural exchange, religious diffusion and maritime trade. The propagation of Theravada Buddhism from India to Myanmar, beginning as early as the third century BCE during the Mauryan Empire, laid a spiritual foundation that continues to bind the two societies. Over the centuries, the Bay of Bengal served as a conduit for commerce and migration, facilitating the flow of

goods, ideas and people between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. From the spread of Theravada Buddhism to maritime trade across the Bay of Bengal, bilateral ties have historically been strong. However, in the post-colonial period, bilateral relations have undergone periods of both alignment and strategic ambiguity. The historic enduring linkages had fostered a sense of mutual familiarity, particularly among borderland communities that straddle modern state boundaries.

Historical and Cultural Ties

- India was among the first nations to recognise Myanmar's independence in 1948. The two countries shared anti-colonial solidarity, cultural affinity through Buddhism and linguistic commonalities among border communities. Culturally, mutual reverence for Lord Buddha and the legacy of the ancient maritime routes that connected India's eastern coast to Lower Burma underscore deep-rooted people-to-people linkages. These foundations are vital for framing bilateral diplomacy today.
- In the post-colonial era, Indo-Myanmar relations have traversed a complex landscape shaped by internal political transitions, regional geopolitics, and evolving security dynamics. India's support for Myanmar during the latter's early years of non-alignment and socialism signaled a phase of solidarity; however, this gradually gave way to strategic disengagement during Myanmar's prolonged military rule in the late twentieth century. It was only in the early 1990s that New Delhi recalibrated its approach, embracing pragmatic engagement through the 'Look East Policy', later rearticulated as the 'Act East Policy'.

Diplomatic and Strategic Cooperation

- The 1951 Treaty of Friendship laid the groundwork for institutional bilateral dialogue. However, relations remained lukewarm during the Cold War, largely due to Myanmar's isolationist policies and India's democratic idealism. A paradigm shift occurred in the early 1990s when India adopted the 'Look East Policy'. This marked a strategic reorientation towards Southeast Asia. Myanmar was identified as a bridge to ASEAN and an essential partner in regional connectivity. The policy evolved further under the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji into the 'Act East Policy,' aimed at strengthening connectivity, countering China's influence and facilitating economic growth in India's Northeast. India has since increased high-level visits, bilateral dialogues and infrastructural investments.

Bilateral Military and Security Cooperation

Despite ideological differences, military cooperation between India and Myanmar has been pragmatic. India has consistently supported Myanmar's efforts against insurgent groups operating along the border. Key areas of defence and strategic collaboration between India and Myanmar have expanded significantly in recent years, especially in the context of regional counter-insurgency and maritime security. Notable initiatives include the following:

- **Operation Sunrise I and II:** These joint military operations were launched to dismantle insurgent networks of Indian origin, such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), operating from Myanmar's Sagaing Region. These operations underscored the growing strategic alignment between the two countries in tackling cross-border militancy.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** India has provided professional military education to officers of the Myanmar Armed Forces through institutions such as the National Defence College (NDC), the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) and the Indian Military Academy (IMA). These engagements have enhanced interoperability and fostered defence diplomacy.
- **Equipment Transfers:** India has transferred critical defence hardware to Myanmar, including radar systems, artillery units, torpedoes, kilo-class submarine and offshore patrol vessels. These contributions aim to bolster Myanmar's maritime security posture, particularly in the Bay of Bengal.
- **Strategic Infrastructure:** The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project remains a flagship initiative designed to link Kolkata to Sittwe Port in Myanmar. This infrastructure improves regional connectivity and strengthens logistical pathways crucial for strategic and military mobility.

Key Challenges in Bilateral Relations

China's expanding footprint in Myanmar has become a pressing strategic concern for India, particularly in the context of Western disengagement following the establishment of the 2021 SAC Governance. Myanmar's growing engagement with China, manifested through substantial economic investments, strategic infrastructure projects and sustained diplomatic coordination, has notably altered the regional balance of influence. Initiatives such as the CMEC, which connects Yunnan province to the Indian Ocean via Myanmar's Kyaukpyu Port,

underscore Beijing's expanding footprint. This deepening partnership provides Myanmar with critical economic lifelines and political backing on international platforms. However, it also poses strategic concerns for India, whose traditional influence in the region has been increasingly constrained. In this evolving landscape, India is compelled to reassess its approach, leveraging both bilateral and multilateral frameworks to preserve its strategic equities and advance a stable regional order. (Anand, 2023; Lall, 2016).

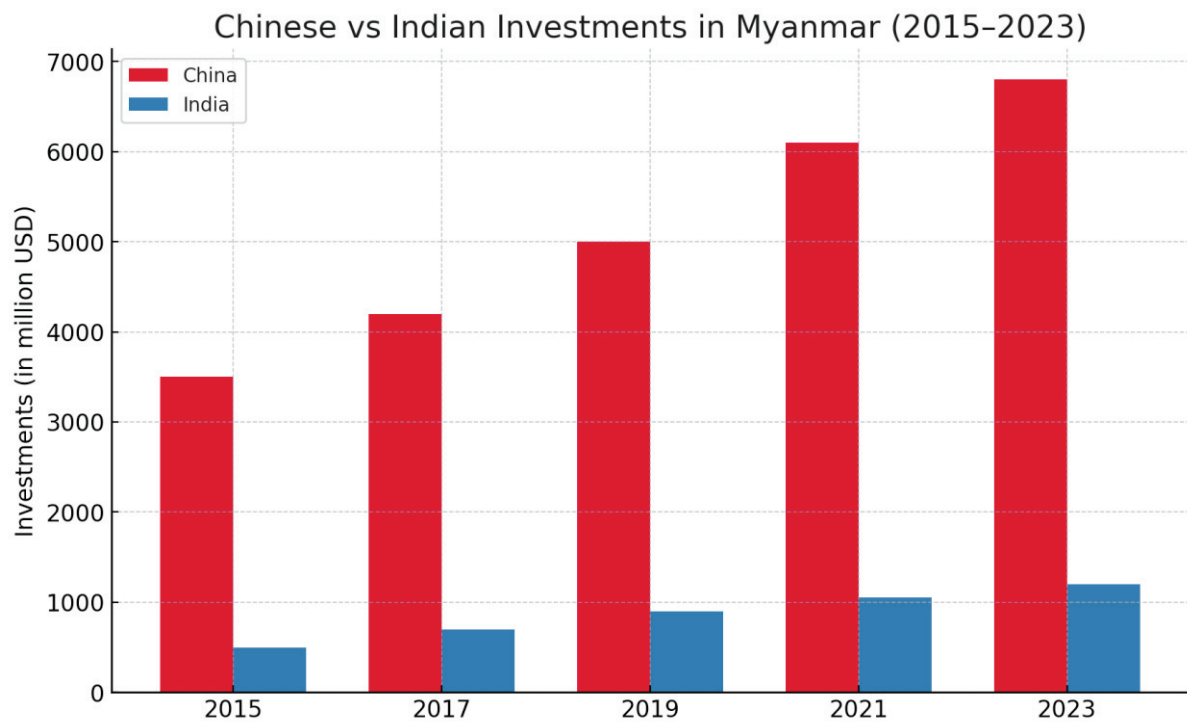


Figure 1: Chinese v/s Indian Investments in Myanmar (2015–2023)
Source: Irrawaddy (2024); Ministry of External Affairs (2025)

- Simultaneously, India's infrastructure projects, such as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transportation Project and Trilateral Highway, have encountered enduring delays due to logistical bottlenecks, bureaucratic inertia and regional instability. India's ability and influence in the region are affected. (Chanda, 2020).
- India's normative commitment to democracy further complicates its policy posture. Engaging with Myanmar's military regime while upholding democratic values presents a complex diplomatic dilemma. This tension has forced India to walk a fine line between strategic necessity and normative diplomacy (Lall, 2016; Chanda, 2020).
- Moreover, India faces humanitarian and security challenges arising from Myanmar's internal instability. The influx of refugees, particularly Rohingya and ethnic Chin

populations, into Border States such as Mizoram and Manipur has placed considerable pressure on local governance and security mechanisms. (Haokip, 2024).

- Reflecting these multifaceted challenges, India's foreign policy has transitioned from idealistic aspirations to a more pragmatic approach that balances democratic principles with hard strategic interests and regional security imperatives. India's approach has gradually shifted from idealism to realism. Today, it adopts a pragmatic strategy that combines normative support for democracy with security imperatives and regional ambitions.



Map 1: Map showing Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transportation Project (KMMTTP)

Source: <https://southasiajournal.net/challenges-faced-by-indo-myanmar-kaladan-project/>

Insurgency and Security Concerns between India and Myanmar

The porous, mountainous Indo-Myanmar Border (IMB) has long served as a strategic haven for insurgent groups, narcotics traffickers and arms smugglers. These transnational security threats have direct implications for India's northeastern states particularly Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, making bilateral security cooperation imperative.

Indian Insurgent Groups Operating in Myanmar

- Several Indian insurgent groups have historically operated from Myanmar's Sagaing Region, taking advantage of the challenging terrain and the limited reach of the security forces. Notable among these are the United Liberation Front of Assam – Independent (ULFA-I), the National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khaplang (NSCN-K), the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur and the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL). These groups utilise the border's topographical complexity to establish training camps, supply lines and operational bases.
- In addition to these, Myanmar-based armed actors such as the Arakan Army (AA) and KIA have maintained strategic linkages with Indian insurgent organisations. These relationships often involve logistical collaboration, training support and arms exchange, thereby complicating regional security dynamics.
- Recent field assessments suggest that the Myanmar military, or Tatmadaw, now exercises effective control over less than half of the country's territory (International Crisis Group, 2023). Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), including the KIA, Chin National Army (CNA) and the AA, have expanded their control over key regions and increasingly functions as de facto authorities. This shift has significant implications for India's security calculus along the northeastern frontier.
- Given the evolving power structures in Myanmar, India must recalibrate its border security strategy. It must account for the fragmented nature of Myanmar's internal politics and assess the potential misalignment between strategic interests of Indian insurgents and those of various EAOs operating along the Indo-Myanmar corridor.

Refugee Flows and the Rohingya Crisis

- As of early 2025, over 40,000 Rohingya refugees reside in India, with highest concentrations in Jammu, Hyderabad and Delhi. States like Manipur and Mizoram have adopted divergent responses. Mizoram extends limited support based on ethnic kinship with Chins, while Manipur has enforced deportations citing security concerns.
- The crisis is further complicated by the presence of Chin and Kuki refugees from Myanmar's civil war. India lacks a formal refugee law, making responses ad hoc and politically contested. While humanitarian considerations are essential, unchecked refugee flows raise legitimate security concerns, including potential radicalisation,

demographic pressures and administrative burden (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2023; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2025).

Radicalisation of the Displaced Rohingya Population

- In recent years, there has been growing international concern over signs of increasing radicalisation among segments of the displaced Rohingya population, particularly those residing in congested refugee camps along the Bangladesh–Myanmar border. Prolonged statelessness, limited access to education and livelihoods and exposure to transnational extremist narratives have made sections of this vulnerable community susceptible to radical influences. While majority of Rohingyas remain peaceful, isolated incidents involving armed groups such as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) have raised security apprehensions in the region. In response, the United Nations and various humanitarian organisations have advocated for the establishment of a 'safe corridor'—a secure and monitored passage facilitating the voluntary, dignified and safe return of Rohingyas to Myanmar. This proposed measure is seen not only as a means to address the humanitarian crisis but also as a preventive strategy against further radicalisation and regional destabilisation.

Counterinsurgency Measures and Border Management

- India has adopted a series of counterinsurgency strategies to address cross-border militancy, frequently engaging with the Myanmar government through discreet bilateral mechanisms. Among the most notable efforts were Operation Sunrise I and II, which targeted insurgent camps located across the border in Myanmar's Sagaing Region. While these operations achieved limited tactical success, they demonstrated the potential of coordinated military initiatives in tackling cross-border threats.
- Another critical area of cooperation has been intelligence sharing, enabling both countries to monitor insurgent movements, track arms flows and respond more effectively to emerging threats along the border. However, the 2021 military takeover of Governance in Myanmar fundamentally disrupted the country's internal cohesion. The Tatmadaw, now embroiled in widespread civil conflict and facing mounting resistance from EAGs and PDFs, has seen its capacity and willingness to counter Indian insurgent activity significantly diminish. This shift compels India to increase reliance on its own domestic security apparatus and border management infrastructure.

Recommendations for India's Multipronged Approach

In light of Myanmar's continued instability, India must adopt a multi-pronged and forward-looking strategy to safeguard its national interests, stabilise its northeastern region and promote regional security and development. The recommendations below are framed across five critical domains viz. security-border management, diplomatic-economic strategy, pragmatic engagement, humanitarian & refugee policy and countering Chinese influence.

Security and Border Management

- Strengthen Border Management:*** India must prioritise an integrated and technology-driven approach to border security in response to the growing complexities along the Indo-Myanmar frontier. The Indian government's decision to fence the complete IMB is a crucial decision, but needs timely, pragmatic implementation given local sensitivities. Enhancing surveillance and inter-agency coordination is urgently required along the India-Myanmar and India-Bangladesh borders, particularly in sensitive regions, to prevent extremist infiltration and arms trafficking.
- Technological Augmentation:*** A persistent surveillance system incorporating drones, artificial intelligence-enabled sensors, radar networks and thermal imaging must be deployed to monitor trans-border movement in real time.
- Institutional Coordination:*** A unified command mechanism should be established, enhancing coordination among the Assam Rifles, state police forces and central intelligence agencies to enable swift operational response.
- Reforming the Free Movement Regime (FMR):*** FMR allows residents living within 16 km of the IMB on either side to cross the international boundary without a visa, for up to 72 hours, upon producing a border pass issued by the respective governments. It was designed to respect and preserve the traditional tribal and familial ties of communities such as the Chin, Naga, Kuki and Mizo, who have lived across the borders for generations. While culturally significant, the FMR requires transformation into a biometric-monitored entry system and prevent its misuse by the insurgent groups. A phased, inclusive, and technologically aided approach is critical for safeguarding India's Northeast.
- Cross-Border Intelligence Sharing:*** Operational intelligence exchanges must be reinforced with Tatmadaw/ SAC and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) in Myanmar that are aligned with India's counterinsurgency objectives.

Diplomatic and Economic Strategy

- India's strategic engagement with Myanmar must adapt in response to the evolving geopolitical landscape and the broader regional aspirations for peace, stability, and inclusive development. As the situation on the ground continues to shift, India must recalibrate its approach, balancing its security imperatives with developmental priorities and aligning its outreach with the long-term goal of fostering regional cooperation, connectivity, and resilience. Such an approach would not only safeguard India's strategic interests but also reinforce its role as a responsible and constructive regional stakeholder.
- **Recalibrate ASEAN Engagement:** India should reaffirm support for ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus while promoting Track II diplomacy that includes Myanmar's EAOs and civil society. This would create space for inclusive political discourse (ASEAN Secretariat, 2024).
- **Leverage Sub-Regional Groupings:** Platforms such as BIMSTEC, Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) and the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation should be activated to broaden India's outreach and counterbalance China's bilateral predominance (BIMSTEC Annual Review, 2024).
- **Accelerate Infrastructure Projects:** The Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the revival of the Stilwell Road must be fast-tracked to enhance trade, connectivity and military logistics.
- **Build Local Partnerships:** Engagement with regional actors like the Chinland Defence Force and the Arakan Army is crucial for development diplomacy and safeguarding Indian infrastructure on the ground and assisting humanitarian commitments in adjoining border areas.
- **Agricultural Alliances:** Government-to-government connections should facilitate alliances between the big farmers/ enterprises to enable Agricultural alliances to mutually benefit from the yield, owing to the use of Indian technology and scientific methods of farming.

Maintaining a Pragmatic Approach

- **Dual-Track Diplomacy:** India must adopt a dual-pronged strategy that acknowledges ground realities while remaining diplomatically nimble. Formal relations with the SAC/ Tatmadaw should be complemented by unofficial channels with the National Unity

Government (NUG) and People's Defence Forces (PDFs), allowing India to maintain strategic flexibility.

Humanitarian Assistance and Refugee Policy

- Establishment of border relief camps in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Launch of humanitarian corridors into conflict-affected regions such as Chin and Sagaing under multilateral frameworks.
- Development of a national refugee policy that includes biometric identification, designated settlements and clear repatriation protocols must be enacted at the earliest (UNHCR, 2024; Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).
- India must adopt a calibrated and multidimensional approach to address the potential radicalisation of Rohingya communities, safeguarding its national security while upholding humanitarian values:
 - **Engage in Regional Diplomacy:** Leverage platforms such as BIMSTEC and ASEAN to promote coordinated responses to the Rohingya crisis, focusing on safe zones, structured repatriation and monitoring mechanisms in cooperation with UN agencies.
 - **Support Socio-economic Stabilisation Measures:** In collaboration with Bangladesh and international partners, India can assist in development programmes in Rohingya camps to reduce the appeal of radical ideologies by improving access to education, skills training and basic services.
 - **Advance Humanitarian Diplomacy:** Support efforts towards the voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, while modestly engaging with the authorities in Nay Pyi Taw to foster conditions that enable sustainable return, including pathways to legal recognition, security assurances and inclusive community reintegration.

Countering Chinese Leverage

- India should present alternative development models rooted in transparency, local employment and ecological sustainability; emphasise people-centric, participatory infrastructure projects that contrasts with China's top-down, extractive investment approach (RIS, 2023).
- India's regional posture should blend long-term strategic realism with short-term adaptability. A balanced approach that upholds democratic principles while securing

core interests will be key to ensuring peace, prosperity and resilience in the Indo-Myanmar corridor.

Conclusion

India-Myanmar relations are at critical crossroads shaped by a complex interplay of geography, history, insurgency, economic ambitions and shifting regional power equations. As Myanmar continues to grapple with instability, expanding insurgent networks and growing dependency on China, India must adopt a calibrated yet resolute strategy to safeguard its interests in the eastern frontier.

India's strategic imperative lies in not only addressing immediate threats, such as insurgent sanctuaries and refugee inflows, but also in ensuring long-term regional integration through infrastructure connectivity and economic engagement. A pragmatic dual-track policy that engages both the Tatmadaw and democratic stakeholders, including the National Unity Government and Ethnic Armed Organisations, is vital for maintaining influence and promoting stability. It is imperative at this juncture to preserve regional stability and safeguard national security by constructively addressing the prevailing challenges and concerns within the framework of bilateral relations. Ultimately, Myanmar's conflict is not merely a contest between military and civilian authority; it is a manifestation of layered historical, ethnic and geopolitical crises. India's foreign policy must reflect this complexity with long-term vision and adaptability.

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