



Geopolitical dynamic of India and Myanmar: A historical perspective

Lalmalsawma Ralte ^{1*}, Vishwambar Prasad Sati ²

¹ Assistant Professor, Government Hrangbana College, Mizoram, India

² Professor, Department of Geography & Resource Management, Mizoram University, Mizoram, India

* Corresponding Author: **Lalmalsawma Ralte**

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Abstract

India and Myanmar (Burma till May 1989) have been close neighbours having centuries old historical, geographic, cultural, and strategic links with each other. Indian cultural and religious influence seeped into Burma much before AD 1000. Burma received Hinduism as well as Buddhism from India. Indians also migrated to Burma for trade and commerce. Relationships between India and Myanmar are founded on historical, ethnic, cultural, and religious affinities. There is also ethnic closeness between the various ethnic groups in Myanmar and inhabitants of north-east India. The two peoples have interacted for a long time, mainly along the Assam-Myanmar border. Myanmar's architecture and sculpture, temple inscriptions, music, dancing, and even painting, show considerable Indian influence. Pali, the sacred language of Buddhism, has been the source of many Burmese words. Burma's early legal system also had a close affinity with that of India. This paper examines the geopolitics of the relations between India and Myanmar in light of the world power structures, economic cooperation, bilateral trade, oil and gas, infrastructure and interstate economic interactions and the implications and relevance of Act East Policy & Look East Policy and Kaladan multi modal transit transport project.

Keywords: geographic, India-Myanmar, geopolitics, bilateral trade, act east policy, look east policy, Kaladan multi modal transit transport project

1. Introduction

India and Myanmar were once part of the British Empire in Asia. Since the two countries' independence at the end of World War II, relations between them have largely been friendly. Jawaharlal Nehru and U Nu, the first two prime ministers, worked closely together to promote economic expansion. India and Myanmar both played a significant role in the Non-Aligned Movement, and India even provided Myanmar with a significant amount of military assistance. However, tensions between the two began to rise in 1962. India backed the pro-democracy movements and vehemently opposed General Ne Win's establishment of a military dictatorship in Myanmar. The Ne Win regime withdrew from the Non-Aligned Movement in 1979, refused to join the Commonwealth of Nations, and adopted an anti-Soviet stance while relations between India and the Soviet Union were developing. Even if certain issues remained, India and Myanmar's ties began to improve after 1988. In 1993, after Aung San Suu Kyi had already been branded persona non grata by the Myanmar government, she was given the Jawaharlal Nehru Prize for international understanding by India. At the time, India was funding NGOs that supported democracy. The two countries' resumption of full diplomatic relations was made more challenging by the State Law and Order Restoration Council's isolationist stance. After 1993, nevertheless, India's policy towards Myanmar was changed, and India adopted a more pragmatic and less moralistic stance. This intentional shift from an idealistic to one that was firmly anchored in realpolitik has been credited with improving relations between the two countries. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's focus on the Southeast Asian nations was a reflection of India's growing interest in the nations around it. India's Look East policy sought to expand up markets in Southeast Asia, and it required tight coordination with Myanmar to be successful.

This project's challenging partnership with Bangladesh only served to highlight Myanmar's importance. The potential of continuous insurgencies would have made it difficult for many north-eastern Indian states to flourish without this adjustment in strategy. There is significant interest worldwide in Asia as a source of economic growth in the twenty-first century, as seen by both the Look East policy and India's interest in Myanmar. Myanmar applauds India's expanding engagement with its neighbourhood and wider region and supports its desire for a sunny location. The administration of Myanmar is happy to have the additional objective of settling problems in the north-eastern states. Furthermore, India's choice to engage Myanmar is a clear reflection of its growing concern that Myanmar is abandoning its position of neutrality between India and China and is instead subtly drifting towards China. The following are some of the internal and external factors that underpin India's strategic importance of Myanmar:

1. Myanmar is India's second-biggest neighbour and the largest country on its eastern frontier. The Kachin, Sagaing, and Chin states of Myanmar are bordered by the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram along a 1,640 km common land border that is almost entirely unfenced. It is well known that several rebel groups maintain bases in Myanmar and carry out operations in India's northeast. Such alliances can only be successfully fought off on a bilateral basis
2. Myanmar has a maritime border with India and plays a vital role in the littoral region of the Bay of Bengal. Myanmar contributes to India's developing understanding of the importance of its own geographic centre in the northern Indian Ocean. A hostile Myanmar may permit a rival naval presence in the Bay of Bengal, making Indian security more difficult.
3. The 2,185-kilometer border between Myanmar and China is located close to the problematic section of the India-China border.
4. According to reports, Myanmar has the tenth-largest gas reserves in the world, with anticipated reserves of 90 trillion cubic feet of gas. India has a stake in gaining access to these resources. India might give financial support and technological assistance for both production and exploration.

1.2 Economic Cooperation

Mutual Financial Assistance India and Myanmar signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Peace and Quiet in Border Areas in January 1994. The two countries concur that the joint secretary and home secretary yearly meetings would be held alternately in each country. Up to this point, there have been 14 home secretary meetings and 15 joint secretary meetings. Stronger relationships have resulted from frequent high-level visits. The earliest and most recent visits by Senior General Maung Aye were in January 2000 and April 2008, respectively. The State Peace and Development Council's current chair, Senior General Than Shwe, visited India in October 2004. The president of Myanmar hadn't travelled to India in 25 years. In November 2003, Vice President Shekhawat visited Myanmar, and in March 2006, President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam travelled there for the first time as the head of state of India since Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as prime minister in 1987. More recently, vice president Hamid Ansari visited Yangon in February 2009. The foreign ministers of India and Myanmar have met multiple times during the

previous 10 years. During these tours, a number of agreements and memorandums of understanding have been reached.

1.3 Bilateral Trade

From \$273 million in 1980–1981 to \$995 million in 2007–2008, trade between the two countries rose. India has just surpassed Thailand, Singapore, and China as Myanmar's fourth-largest trading partner. It also receives over 25% of the nation's exports, making it the second-largest market after Thailand. Since India imports mostly agricultural and forestry goods from Myanmar and Myanmar exports principally steel and pharmaceuticals, the balance often favours Myanmar. The 1994 Border business Agreement included details on cross-border business. When they do, the agreement will be very beneficial in lowering illegal trade and monitoring rebel activity in the border regions of the two nations. The border trade points at Moreh and Zokhawthar in India and Tamu and Rhi in Myanmar have recently undergone improvements to become regular commercial links. Avankhu, located in the state of Nagaland, is now being developed as a third border trading post. There has been a minor reduction in bilateral trade as a result of the popularity of items imported from China and other countries. Trade has been impeded by intimidation by rebel groups in the border regions, despite a memorandum of understanding signed in 2004 regulating the free movement of tribal people residing in the border regions of both nations who have relations to their counterparts on an ethnic basis.



Fig 1: Land Custom Station Building at Zokhawthar (India – Myanmar border)

1.4 Oil and Gas

The lack of significant rewards from the business is another reason why the inhabitants are disgruntled. Oil and gas India has been given permission to build, manage, and use an offshore hub for Myanmar gas. The undertaking should be completed in five years and establish a link between Sittwe, Myanmar, and Mizoram, India. The landlocked nations of the north-east will get direct access to world commerce as a result, and bilateral trade will rise. In the competition for Myanmar's offshore gas resources in Rakhine state, China defeated India. The initial pipeline project, which was planned in partnership with Bangladesh, had to be cancelled because of that country's unreasonable demands. Due to its lack of economic feasibility, a second plan to build a pipeline

from Myanmar via the north-eastern states to West Bengal was shelved in July 2009. India still hopes to someday utilise Myanmar's enormous energy resources. Only deft diplomacy and friendly relations to the military leadership will be able to achieve this. A 1,575-kilometer pipeline from Sittwe to Aizwal to Silchar to Guwahati to Siliguri to Gaya is the most recent proposal for transporting gas. While the pipeline is being constructed, India has agreed to export the gas as liquefied natural gas. The oil and natural gas industry have a 30% stake in the discovery and development of the offshore natural gas deposits at Sittwe.

1.5 Infrastructure

After finishing the 160-kilometer India-Myanmar Friendship Road in 2001, India is currently working on the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project. The Ministry of Commerce is developing the Sittwe port and the open sea route going to Mizoram state in northeastern India. Additionally, joint ventures for the construction of the 1,200 megawatt Thamanthi hydropower dam and the 600 megawatt Shwezaye hydropower dam in the Chindwin river basin have been formed between India and Myanmar, as well as agreements for the Thathay Chaung hydropower project in Rakhine state. India will fund both dams, and the state of Manipur in India would get the power they generate. At a time when energy security is crucial for all developing nations, New Delhi and Yangon are working together on a hydropower development strategy that would ensure India's supply of electricity while simultaneously harnessing the hydropower potential in the area. The Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Facility will connect the two countries as well as enhance connectivity inside and between India's north-eastern states as well as across the border with Myanmar. The project's goal is to build a network of roads and rivers that would link Myanmar's Sittwe port with India's eastern coast ports. Over the past ten years, India has routinely given infrastructure projects and more than 100 crore rupees (\$20 million) in development funding to Myanmar. Both nations are active participants in a variety of international organisations, such as the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation group and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. Myanmar is a full member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), while India is a member at the summit level. In the alliance between Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar (BCIM). In addition, India might expedite the implementation of its Look East plan and enhance its links with Southeast Asia by building the Trans-Asian Railway Project, which would connect 28 nations.

1.6 The China Factor

China has progressively increased its presence in Myanmar and other Southeast Asian nations. It has provided major political, military, and economic support to Myanmar despite the Western sanctions. India is conscious that it faces the risk of slipping behind in economic and commercial relations with Myanmar if it does not engage politically with that country, particularly in relation to the recently discovered and urgently needed oil and natural gas resources. India needs to do its part to counter China's growing sway in Myanmar. Myanmar obtains a lot of military equipment from China. Using a barter mechanism, it has given Myanmar jet fighters, armoured vehicles, and naval ships worth close to US\$2 billion, as Myanmar lacks the foreign exchange means to pay

for these weapons. Additionally, China has assisted the Myanmar government in modernising its naval installations in Hanggwi, the Coco Islands, Akyab, and Mergui. The Myanmar army is the second biggest in Southeast Asia, behind Vietnam's, mostly due to China's support. In just a few years, it increased from 180,000 to 450,000 employees. A road connecting Kunming in southern China with Mandalay in central Myanmar has also been constructed by China. Trade between the two countries has increased, becoming China Myanmar's third-largest trading partner (after Singapore and Thailand). A 1,100-kilometer pipeline from Myanmar's Kyaukphyu port to Kunming, the province capital of Yunnan, would also be used to transport gas and oil. Formal preparations for this project have been developed. Once this pipeline is completed and functioning, China will be far less reliant on the Malacca Straits. In accordance to the Indian standpoint, China's strategic choices in the Indian Ocean region have greatly increased as a result of its close connections to Myanmar. The upgrade of military bases and ports presents an opportunity for China to watch Indian maritime activities and naval bases in the Bay of Bengal, and this has India concerned. China values its relationship with Myanmar because it gives them land access to the Indian Ocean, allowing it to avoid the South China Sea and the Malacca Straits. Myanmar has confirmed to India that it does not presently and will not in the future lease any bases to China. Recurring allegations claim that the Chinese government has established a naval reconnaissance and electronic surveillance station in the Coco Islands. China has made it clear that it wants to keep close connections with Myanmar by engaging in "cooperation" in the military and business. Such engagement is the obvious outcome of its strategy to maintain India's vulnerability and prevent it from becoming as a competitor regional power. In China's String of Pearls encirclement strategy, which is a key component of its foreign policy towards India, Myanmar is a significant pearl. Even while the military-led government in Myanmar is strong on the internal front, it has been powerless against China's immense influence and is only now fully understanding the effects of its dependence on China. India interprets Myanmar's ongoing and growing interest in cooperation as a move to counteract Chinese influence.

1.7 Look East Policy

Nearly 35 years have passed since India announced its Look East Policy (LEP). Numerous advantages of this programme have been realised, including improved strategic ties between India and Asia. How well we have connected the rest of Asia to our eastern and north-eastern areas will increasingly have an influence on this approach.

India and the nations of Southeast Asia followed distinctly different courses as a result of the changing dynamics of the cold war. When India announced the Look East Policy (LEP), pragmatic reasons and even actual politics recognised the calibrated change in its foreign policy focus. The new wave of economic reforms and liberalisation in the framework of new guidelines that saw a structural shift in the broader geopolitical international order ushered in a fresh push to reengage with the Southeast Asian area as a result. Since gaining independence, the LEP was the first time the Indian government has focused on the ASEAN area economically. The creation of air and land links, as well as economic relations and integration with the ASEAN area, were all key components of the programme. In 1992, India began a

sectoral discussion with ASEAN, and in 1995, a complete dialogue began. When India joined the East Asia Summit in December 2005 after joining ASEAN at the summit level in 2002, a new dimension indicating the economic drivers of India's strategic concerns emerged. Through political discussions in multilateral organisations like ASEAN and the expansion of its commerce with Southeast Asian countries, India has extended its connection with the area of Southeast Asia in recent years. Although India's look-east policy was initially based more on economic than strategic considerations, it has evolved over time to include political, defence, maritime, strategic, and previously unexplored economic cooperation with Pacific Asia as well. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said: "We are engaged in a process of dialogue and consultation to help shape a new security environment." Sea routes that are extremely important from a strategic standpoint are near our region and must be safeguarded. India has become an indispensable component of the Asia-Pacific strategic debate as a result of the LEP's progressive strategic dimensioning. This may be seen as the continuation of the first phase of the engagement, which started in 2003 and involved more actors from East Asia to Australia, with ASEAN at its centre. Importantly, regardless of their political views, all administrations that came to power in New Delhi supported this strategy unanimously. The ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), which India joined in October 2003, reaffirmed ASEAN's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and non-interference in its internal affairs. It is interesting that ASEAN values and welcomes India's presence there because India and Southeast Asia have never been at war with one another. It is simpler to develop positive connections between India and Southeast Asia since there is little disagreement on important topics and because the two regions face similar difficulties. The constant collaboration between them is shown in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the regional collaboration Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), and the MILAN exercises that India organises every other year. Studying Myanmar's status within this framework is important since it shares a border with the north-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram. India and Myanmar share crucial seas in the Bay of Bengal, including the strategically significant Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where the two nearest Indian and Myanmar islands are only 30 km away. Myanmar's states that border India include Kachin, Sagaing, and China. Additionally, Myanmar's ports offer India the quickest access point to a number of its north-eastern states. Because the northeast is the point of connection where there are unmistakable similarities in cultural and social systems between India's northeast and Southeast Asia, Myanmar's strategic position as a bridge between India and Southeast Asia is important not only for the security of India's northeast and in containing the growing influence of China. The resurgence of the historical, ethnic, cultural, and religious links that the people of the two areas have in common may also be leveraged as a soft power resource. Given that Myanmar is the land bridge connecting India to the ASEAN nations with which it has developed engagement models, Myanmar's physical proximity to other countries is crucial. Due to Myanmar's strategic importance, India, China, and Southeast Asian countries have begun to recognise the importance of Myanmar in developing their bilateral ties and Indian ocean strategies.

1.8 Act East Policy

India and nations in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific have overlapping interests in the twenty-first century. The globalisation process and the advent of new regional difficulties, which forced India to pause and re-evaluate its foreign policy towards the nations to its east, have greatly influenced the new narrative. While the United States is pursuing a pivot to Asia strategy, India's government, led by Narendra Modi, has prioritised its relations with its neighbours in East Asia and the South Pacific. According to India's Look East Policy, the Modi government has been quite explicit that India would place an increasing amount of emphasis on enhancing its relations with ASEAN and other East Asian nations. In order to improve India's economic involvement with its eastern neighbours, P.V. Narasimha Rao's administration developed the Look East Policy in 1992. During her 2014 visit to Hanoi, Vietnam, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj recommended a replacement strategy called Act East Policy. It will have an emphasis on playing a more proactive role and serving as a mechanism for developing strategic alliances and security cooperation in the area. The paradigm change in Indian policy was driven by pragmatism and realism, and it resulted in the Look East Policy, which established the theoretical foundation for engaging Southeast Asia and eventually the South Pacific. Act East Policy, which is currently being developed, reaffirms India's commitment to the East Asian area and its plan for forging tighter connections with the nations in the region. The South Pacific and Southeast Asian nations are the focus of the Modi government's foreign policy, which should improve awareness of the area. The Asia-Pacific area was the primary target of India's Act East Policy. The strategy, which was first intended to be an economic effort, has taken on political, strategic, and cultural elements, including the creation of institutional frameworks for communication and collaboration. India has developed strong relationships with all of the nations in the Asia-Pacific region, upgrading its relations with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Australia, Singapore, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to strategic partnerships. Further, apart from ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and East Asia Summit (EAS), India has also been actively engaged in regional fora such as Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Act East Policy has placed emphasis on India-ASEAN cooperation in our domestic agenda on infrastructure, manufacturing, trade, skills, urban renewal, smart cities, make in India and other initiatives. Connectivity projects, cooperation in space, Science & Technology and people-to-people exchanges could become a springboard for regional integration and prosperity. Our Act East Policy (AEP) has given the North East of India top attention. AEP offered a connection between the ASEAN area and North East India, including the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Consistent efforts are being made to promote and improve connection of the north-east with the ASEAN area through commerce, culture, people-to-people interactions, and physical infrastructure (road, airport, communications, electricity, etc.) as part of a number of strategies at the bilateral and regional levels. The Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, the Rhi-Tiddim Road

Project, Border Haats, etc. are a few of the larger projects. Adopted in August 2015, the ASEAN-India Plan of Action highlights specific objectives and areas of collaboration along the three pillars of political-security, economic development, and sociocultural exchange. India kept up its increased attempts to develop tighter alliances with relevant regional and multilateral organisations including ASEAN, ARF, EAS, BIMSTEC, ACD, MCG, and IORA. Buddhist and Hindu connections might be reactivated to create new connections and relationships on the cultural front. To build a cogent plan in the area of connectivity, in particular for tying ASEAN with our North East, special efforts are being undertaken. A number of actions are being taken, such as constructing transit infrastructure, encouraging airlines to improve connectivity in the area, and establishing connections between academic and cultural organisations. India has increased its economic involvement with ASEAN; regional integration and project delivery are top concerns. As of July 1, 2015, the ASEAN-India Agreement on Trade in Services and Investments became effective for India and seven ASEAN nations. A revision of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement has been assigned to the ASEAN-India Trade Negotiating Committee. Additionally, India has extended an invitation to ASEAN members to join the International Solar Alliance, which it co-launched with France on November 30, 2015, during COP21. India and its major allies increasingly share similar security objectives on strategic problems, both in a bilateral and international setting. On the basis of international norms and regulations, more collaboration is being undertaken in the fight against terrorism, supporting regional peace and stability, and promoting maritime security. The 21st century, in Modi's opinion, will be the Asian century. He also questioned if it would be the Indian Century. The major economies in Asia, China, Japan, and India, are among those most likely to dominate strategically significant Asia in the latter half of this century. But in recent years, China has taken a more forceful stance in the area, which has alarmed the relevant parties. In order to avoid direct conflict with China, it appears that Modi's foreign policy is concentrated on strengthening bilateral ties to new heights with strategically positioned Asian nations like Japan, Vietnam, and Australia. No formal security alliances in the Indo-Pacific area have been formed. Due to its positive relations with both Russia and the US, India is sometimes seen as the deciding factor in the struggle for strategic dominance in Asia between the democratic alliance of Japan and the US and the China-Russia club.

1.9 Strategic Role of Mizoram in India's Act East Policy

As Mizoram shares a 404 km international boundary with Myanmar, the local people on both sides of the border are continuously engaged in trade. Border commerce began in the form of village trade in the pre-colonial era because people inhabiting the border areas happened to be from the same ethnic stock. It is evident that tribes of the Zo ethnic group inhabit both sides of the border separating India and Myanmar, particularly in Mizoram and Chin State. Mizoram's districts of Lawngtlai, Siaha, Hnahthial, and Champhai have a common border with Chin State, an area inhabited on both sides of the border by tribes of the same Zo ethnic group that are related genealogically, linguistically, socially, culturally, and religiously. People on both sides have maintained border trade since pre-colonial times. Similar tribes of the Zo ethnic group, including the Bawm (Bawmzo),

Pang (Pangkha), Miria, and Lusei (Lushai), live in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, where there is also a sizable Chakma community. These tribes have maintained trading and sociocultural ties regardless of whether there was authorised border commerce since they live on both sides of the border. These business ties clearly show how important Mizoram is to India's Act East Policy.

The Kolodyne Hydro-Electric Project II and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project are two significant projects that highlight the importance of Mizoram in India's Act East Policy. The Kolodyne HEP II is anticipated to maximise the Kolodyne River's capacity for many uses, which should be advantageous for the local population. The Government of India increased its efforts to work with Myanmar by pursuing the projects under the LEP/AEP, in part as a result of an external cause. The first political leader of Mizoram who had the vision to harness hydro-electricity from the Kolodyne (Chhimtui) River was Brigadier T. Sailo, a former Chief Minister of Mizoram, but he could not accomplish his vision. Although the NTPC started functioning in Lawngtlai in 2009, the Kolodyne HEP II could be effectively implemented, indicating that the successful completion of the project requires the cooperation of the state government, local authorities, civil society, and local people of the state. As Myanmar is a significant actor in the completion of the Kolodyne HEP II and the KMMTTP, the Government of India has been appeasing Myanmar in different ways. The main agenda for appeasing Myanmar is the joint exploitation of Myanmar's gas deposit in Rakhine state, the multi-modal project for development of highways, the inland waterway on the Kolodyne River, Sittwe Port, and hydro-electric power generation from a dam on the Kolodyne River. The KMMTTP also has three components: building the Sittwe port, making the Kolodyne River navigable up to Mizoram, and developing highway connectivity from the Indian border of Mizoram.

In addition to the Kolodyne HEP II and KMMTTP, a Land Custom Station has been operating at Zokhawthar since 1995, and at this day, that is the only border trade between Mizoram and Myanmar that is legally acknowledged. The installation of two more LCSs is suggested for Tlabung and Zorinpui. As a result, Mizoram is crucial to the success of India's Act East Policy, which aims to harness the northeastern states' potential as a conduit for Indian trade with Asean nations.

It is evident that if India remains a silent spectator it would be detrimental to its interests after the escalation of Chinese trade activities in the Rakhine State of Myanmar which is geographically contiguous to Saiha and Lawngtlai districts of Mizoram. Some natural problems may also emerge alongside the LEP projects such as increasing smuggling and cross-border crime, and illegal arms and drug trade that the grassroots administration may not be able to effectively combat. If timely and appropriate steps are not taken both by the state and central government, it would negatively affect the marginalized communities who are inhabiting the strategically located international border areas. Undoubtedly, the AEP projects may reduce the distance between Northeast India and mainland India and open Mizoram to Southeast Asia. Mizoram's geostrategic position has naturally raised its importance in India's Act East Policy, and this fact has to be acknowledged and taken into account.

1.20 Rhi-Tiddim Road

The 225-km Rhi-Tiddim-Falam road is being built to connect

Champhai in Mizoram to Rhi in Myanmar. It is important to note that Moreh and Champhai are two important border-trading points along the Indo-Myanmar border, which became operational in 1994 and 2004, respectively. The Indian Railways have also recently proposed a rail link to Myanmar through the Northeast which involves laying tracks in the Jiribam-Imphal-Moreh sector; this line could be extended to Mandalay as part of the Delhi-Hanoi rail link. A trading facility in Mizoram's Champhai district will immediately benefit from the opening of the 80-km Rhi-Tiddim road, which connects Myanmar with Mizoram in India and is seen to be essential for growing trade and business. The Rhi-Tiddim road's opening would undoubtedly increase trade between the two nations. There isn't a lot of commerce going on in the Champhai trade area right now because of the weak road connections with Myanmar. It was resolved to use a grant aid of US\$60 million from India to finance the building and renovation of the Rhi-Tiddim road in Myanmar during the visit of Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman, State Peace and Development Council of Myanmar, to India in July 2010.²³ However, because the project has not yet been completed, the current road is in disrepair. It may be converted into a single-lane road with India's support, which is anticipated to enhance commerce and transport connections between Myanmar and Mizoram and contribute to maximising the value of the investment made in the Zawkhawthar LCS in Mizoram. Rhi is the neighbouring town on the Myanmar side, and the road leading from Rhi farther interior into Myanmar is now unpaved. The only road now linking Zokhawthar LCS to the Myanmar side is a simple kutchra road that runs from Kalemryo to Tiddim and is only passable during the dry season. For complete communication from Zokhawthar to Rhi and beyond, a four to five-mile section between the Indian border at Zokhawthar and Rhi town in Myanmar must be upgraded. Monywa and Mandalay will be connected by the Rhi-Tiddim road. In essence, it will provide a connection between Mandalay and Zokhawthar in Mizoram.



Fig 2: Map of Rhi – Tiddim – Falam Road

The 80-km Rhi-Tiddim road is estimated to cost INR 298 crore by IRCON. The CNE's (the Committee on Non-Plan Expenditure) clearance of the MEA has been received. The

building project will be finished three years after receiving all necessary clearances. The Ministry of External Affairs of India (MEA) has requested technical support for the road from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MORTH). India has committed to the implementation of the Rhi-Tiddim Road Development Project in Myanmar with grant assistance to that country.

The Zokhawthar LCS facilitates frequent traffic between India and Myanmar, however the volume of such trade is modest. The Zokhawthar-Rhi trade point is more tranquil than the Moreh-Tamu border crossings, despite the latter seeing a higher number of transactions. From the border at Zokhawthar, the journey to Champhai, the closest town in Mizoram, is around 33 km away and takes a little over an hour. With funding from the ADB, the road connecting Champhai and Zokhawthar is being built and is almost complete. It is now a little one, but as it gets closer to completion, the road is widening in a few places and getting better. The distance from the capital city Aizawl of Mizoram, to Champhai is about 186 km and the journey takes about six hours. For increase in trade through the border point at Mizoram, the road on the Manipur side needs to be improved and made capable of handling heavy vehicles. This is not the case at present. The Zokhawthar-Rhi border point has a lot of potential for increasing links between India's northeast and Myanmar. The opening of the Rhi-Tiddim road is also expected to boost bilateral trade between the two countries.

1.21 The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project

The Look East Policy envisaged by the Government of India will be beneficial to the geographically land-locked north-eastern region of India. The region with rich untapped natural resources and huge potential human resources must have an outlet to generate economic growth of the region. The north-eastern region is located in a strategically important region which touches in the north China, and south Myanmar and in the west, Bangladesh, becomes a potential gateway to the most developed Asian regions. The opening of eastern border trade points with Myanmar are all part and parcel of the India's Look east Policy. The fact of the matter is that without a close rapport and co-operation with Myanmar, the Look East Policy will not be successful because Myanmar is located at the gate of our immediate and distant eastern neighbors. The people of Mizoram watch the Look east Policy with great enthusiasm, some of them expressed their doubts about the utilities to be reaped by the Mizos. In the Look East Policy, Zokhawthar-Rih sector border trade center and Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport project occupy important place in Mizoram. The reasons of signing the historical agreement on Kaladan MultiModal Transit Transport Project between India and Myanmar are many. Both of them want to develop good neighborly relations. Both countries want to strengthen bilateral relation and promote greater economic integration. Both countries want people to people contact for mutual benefit. Both India and Myanmar want to explore possibility of constructing commercial route which connects the port of Sitwe in Myanmar with the State of Mizoram. By keeping in view of all these things, the Indian Government and the Myanmar Military Junta chalked out this historic project that will link the Eastern sea port of Kolkata with Sittwe port in Arakan State of Myanmar. The transportation initiative will combine an interstate and inland waterway network. Both India and Myanmar signed an agreement on April 2, 2008²⁵ for the building of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP), after carefully reviewing the

comprehensive project study created and presented by Rail India Technical Economic Services (RITES) in December 2003. See the map of the trade routes at the conclusion of this chapter. The KMMTTP will have a significant positive impact on the backwardness of the Northeastern States in general and the State of Mizoram in particular. The goal of the project is to use this route to connect the Northeast States to the sea. The State of Mizoram is very far from sea ports. Even though Kolkata sea port is very near from the air, it is very far by land route, as such, people need to pass through Siliguri in West Bengal by road. Another way through short route is through Bangladesh but that is not possible. In this context, goods in bulk cannot reach Mizoram easily. Fortunately, one of the biggest rivers in Mizoram, river Kaladan in Mizo called Chhimtuipui flows through Myanmar Sittwe port in Bay of Bengal. Sittwe is a big sea port in Bay of Bengal in Myanmar. After surveying Kaladan River from different angles, it has been found out that the river Kaladan from Kaletwa to Sittwe which is about 225 km can be made navigable. The distance from Mizoram border to Kaletwa in Myanmar is 62 km which is not navigable, therefore, land route is to be constructed along the river Kaladan. All expenditures in the project are to be incurred by the Government of India. After investigations by the groups of experts India and Myanmar have made the following agreements, firstly, expenditures for the project are to be borne by India, secondly, Myanmar Government will levy taxes to those who utilize the transport facilities of these projects. Thirdly, from Kaletwa to Sittwe port is to be made navigable. Fourthly, from Kaletwa in Myanmar to Lawngtlai in Mizoram is to be made motorable. Apart from that, from Kaletwa in Myanmar up to river Zochaw in Mizoram–Myanmar border is to be made doubled land-motorable road. Therefore, when Kaladan Multi-Modal Project is completed, the route of Kolkata-Sittwe-Lawngtlai-Aizawl will be shorter by several 685 kilometres. The routes will be immensely benefited by Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and southern region such as Barak valley of Assam. Through this initiative, Mizoram and the States that utilise these road will have access to Singapore and other eastern Asian nations via commerce corridors. The Governments of India and Myanmar have divided the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Project (KMMTTP) into three sections. In order to provide a clear image of the project, a brief description of each step is provided in the sections that follow.



Fig 3: Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Road at Zochachhuah, Mizoram

First Phase of KMMTTP

Rebuilding and expanding Sittwe port to handle larger vessels is the first phase. This phase also includes enlarging the approach river channel to provide room for ships up to 6000 tonnes. Building landing facilities will increase the Sittwe port's present size. To boost the port's capacity, loading and storage areas will also be expanded. The port landing stages will be increased by 219 x 15m when the project is finished, making it possible to handle 20,000 cargo ships. Another plan is for building an Inland Waterway Terminal (IWT) with a 54 x 15-meter port pier to accommodate smaller boats navigating the river. Currently, Sittwe port composes of 78 x 15m landing stage, and as such, it is suitable for handling only for vessels of 2000-3000 tons.

The Second Phase of KMMTTP

The river Kaladan transit from Sittwe port to Kaletwa in Chin State is the Second Phase of the KMMTTP. The Second Phase's anticipated 225 km overall length includes Paletwa, which is situated halfway between Kaletwa and Sittwe port. More than 2 million cubic metres of materials must be removed from the river during the building and expansion of the River Kaladan in the Second Phase of KMMTTP. The river will become passable as a result. At Kaletwa, another Inland Waterway Terminal will be constructed. This will make it easier to convey freight from the river to the road, which will help move people and products from the second phase to the third phase.

The Third Phase of KMMTTP

The land transport portion of KMMTTP Phase 3 runs from Kaletwa to the border river Zocha between Mizoram and Myanmar. In Mizoram, Kaletwa and the river Zocha are separated by 62 kilometres. A distance of 99.830 km is covered from the river Zocha at the Indo-Myanmar border to the Lawngtlai National Highway.²⁵⁹ The Third Phase of the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project is located between Kaletwa and Lawngtlai along NH-54. As a result, the Third Phase may be divided into the Mizoram segment and the Myanmar section. The Indian government conducted feasibility assessments for the land route. According to the report, the project must be implemented effectively by a skilled construction company, however in June 2009, the Myanmar military administration chose to start building the country's internal highways. Public Works Department (PWD), Mizoram, will oversee the Lawngtlai to Myanmar border Highway Project of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP). RITES, Rail India Technology and Economic Services, has surveyed the region extending from Lawngtlai to Myanmar. It mainly involves improvement and widening of existing Border Road Organization roads, such as, Lawngtlai-Dingtlang-Parva (LDP) and NCV-Nalkawn-Chamdur valley (NCV), and about 30 km of new alignment is made by PWD, Government of Mizoram. The Mizoram Public Work Department (PWD) rejected the Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES) survey and prepared a new alignment. The Government of India has accepted the detailed Project report,²⁶¹ prepared by Mizoram Public Work Department (PWD) in principle and is expected to begin their work by the year 2010. The Sittwe port project which has been planned at the cost of US\$120 is a system of build transfer and use project to be funded by a grant from the Government of India. Berth users will be charged for services offered by the port

once it has been upgraded and operated. When the project is completed, it will be handed over to the Burmese Government. This project involves development of a trade route between India and Myanmar along the river Kaladan. River Kaladan is navigable from the point where it merges with the Bay of Bengal of Sittwe port up to Kaletwa (Setpyitpyin) in Myanmar and then from Kaletwa (Setpyitpyin) and beyond the river is not navigable. As per the report prepared by the Ministry Development of Northeastern Region (DoNER), Kolkata port is at a distance of 539 km from Sittwe by sea, while the distance from Sittwe to Kaletwa (Setpyitpyin) via river Kaladan is another 225 km, and from there to the Indian border of Mizoram is 62 km by road. Again, as per the project report of the PWD, the Government of Mizoram, from Mizoram-Myanmar border to Lawngtlai NH-54 is 99.830 km. From Kaletwa, Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project runs parallel to the river Kaladan linking the District Headquarters of Lawngtlai. The road is to be made in double land of 12 metres wide and out of these 8 meters to be black topped. This project connects the NH-54 from Lawngtlai which in turn connects the entire mainland of India. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project will link the NH-54 from Lawngtlai to Sittwe port in Arakan via kaletwa in Myanmar into the India Ocean. From the Sittwe port the trade route links up to Haldia in Kolkata then to Vishakapatnam (Vizag) in Andhra Pradesh and to different ports. With regard to the KMMTTP Third Phase, Lalthanhawla, who was the chief minister of Mizoram informed the Assembly House stating that under Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project Rs 680 crores has been sanctioned by the Centre Government for the construction of road from Lawngtlai (Mizoram) to Myanmar border. For this purpose issuing of tender is in the process and the work is to be completed within 4 years. This project will run through the State of Mizoram and will boost the economy. Due to the fact that it only takes eight hours to go from Sittwe to Kolkata, the cost of moving products and people from Mizoram via the Sittwe port in the Bay of Bengal would fall. 265 The State of Mizoram will be directly traversed by the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Route. The landlocked Mizoram will see economic prosperity as a result of this development. Since it only takes eight hours to go by water to get from Sittwe to Calcutta, transporting products and people through Sittwe would cut down on both travel time and costs.

Conclusion

It is impossible to study international relations without a solid understanding of geography. Throughout recorded history, populations have increased and decreased, natural resources have been discovered and used up, political systems have frequently changed, empires and states have risen and fallen, and technologies have developed and devolved. However, the locations of continents, islands, seas, and oceans have not changed significantly. Great nations who do not understand geography do so at their peril. Since the state is seen as a living entity, its boundaries are changeable. They evolve throughout the state's existence. In other words, when a state's strength is increasing at the expense of an older state that is declining, the state expands its area. The evolution of the political organism is determined by its environment.

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