
4. India–Burma relations

Thin Thin Aung & Soe Myint

I. Introduction

India and Burma have a historical connection that goes back to the fifth century and since then have enjoyed mutual contact in the realm of trade, commerce, religion, law, political philosophy and culture. Both countries came under British colonial rule, and Burmese leaders associated with Indian leaders during the struggle for national independence. Nehru and U Nu built up a personal friendship that formed the basis of good Indo-Burmese relations, which with ups and downs have lasted 50 years. The two countries have not once reached a point of diplomatic stand-off or conflict since independence.

The lowest point came after the 1988 people's uprising when India was the first neighbouring country to criticize the Burmese military government. The Indian Embassy in Rangoon actively supported the pro-democracy student activists and many entered India for shelter after the military coup in 1988.¹⁴³ From 1988 to 1990, India followed a policy committed to open support of the forces of democracy and "complete disengagement" with the ruling military junta in Burma.

However, in the 1990s, relations between India and Burma thawed again. Now India and Burma are cooperating in many fields, including countering insurgency on the border, checking narcotics smuggling across the border, sharing intelligence on a real-time basis, promoting trade and investment. India has also extended economic aid to Burma.

In this research paper, an attempt is made to map out the policies of India towards Burma from the post-independence era to the present time and to analyse the major factors behind these policies. The authors also look at the implications of these policies with regard to democraticization in Burma; and they put forward some suggestions for Burmese pro-democracy groups on how to get political support from India.

For this research, the authors have relied mainly on personal interviews with Indian policy-makers including former foreign secretaries and government officials as well as books written by them. Their experiences and stay in India as political refugees-cum-journalists for a decade have helped them in adding assumptions and conclusions on the subject.¹⁴⁴

It is hoped that this research paper can contribute, even in a small way, to working for consistent international policy towards democratization in Burma. It is hoped that India will use all means available to restore a democratic government in its neighbouring country Burma while maintaining its interests and principles.

¹⁴³ The mother of NLD's leader Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of Khin Kyi a Burmese ambassador to India; and Aung San Suu Kyi studied in India before she moved to England.

¹⁴⁴ The authors wish to express sincere thanks to Nehru Memorial Library in New Delhi for having allowed them to consult with the books and materials of the library for this research.

II. Historical background

Indian influence has been felt in Burma since ancient times.¹⁴⁵ Hinduism and Buddhism came to Burma from India by the seventh century. Burma received the foundation of its legal system from India: the earliest law book in Burma was “the Wagaru Dhammathat” of India, which in Burmese known as “Manusara Shwemin”. Linguistically, Pali, which originated from India, was the source of many Burmese words.

Trade relationships between the two countries were also established from ancient times and Indian traders established permanent settlements along the coast of Burma.

Politically too, the connection between India and Burma began well before the British conquest. The Arakanese Kings had close contact with India in the 14th century. Burmese king Bayinnaung (1850–1881) attacked and subdued the present day Manipur of India.

After the British occupation, the two countries became a part of British Empire. Burma was ruled by the British as a part of British India till 1937. The British brought numbers of Indians to Burma during its rule. “There was no department of the public services, police, military or civil, without Indians” in British Burma, wrote W.S. Desai. For the 10 years following 1885, some 18,000 Indian soldiers were stationed in Burma, and the Rangoon police was entirely Indian in 1861. On the morning of independence on 4 January 1948, there were some 300,000 – 400,000 Indians living in independent Burma.

The association of the two countries under British rule created a common understanding and they cooperated in their common struggle for independence. The Indian National Congress (INC) was sympathetic to the Burmese nationalists. In its Resolution on 27–28 March 1931, the Congress declared: “This Congress recognizes the right of the people of Burma to claim separation from India and to establish an independent Burma State or to remain an autonomous partner in a free India with a right of separation at any time they may desire to exercise it”.

After separation of Burma from British India, the leaders of the struggle supported each other’s nationalist movement against British imperialism. Burmese leaders closely watched the Indian independence movement, especially in its last stages. While Aung San was appointed as Vice President of the Executive Council in Burma, Nehru was in the same position in India. When Aung San, along with his six colleagues in the Executive Council, was assassinated on 19 July 1947 in Burma, Jawaharlal Nehru issued a statement in which he mourned for Aung San and his comrades, for Burma and for Asia “which has lost one of her bravest and most far-seeing sons” and he informed the people of Burma that India would “stand by them in the difficult days ahead”.

The Indian Government placed at the disposal of the Burmese Government Sir N.B. Rau, one of its outstanding specialists on constitutional questions to help Burma’s work when it was drafting its constitution. On the eve of the independence of India and Burma the two countries grew closer. Dr Rajendra Prasad, the then President of the Constituent Assembly of India, declared at a meeting of Rangoon citizens on 5 January 1948, “Free Burma could always count on India’s assistance and services whenever she needed them”.

¹⁴⁵ Some historians trace Indian immigration to Burma back to the fifth century. “Some of the early Indian immigrants came to Burma by way of an overland route through Assam into Upper Burma, whereas most others came by sea from South India to Lower Burma”, wrote Uma Shankar Singh in her book on *Burma and India* (1948-1962).

III. India's policies towards Burma

1948–1962

The mutual understanding and close contacts between the leaders of the independence struggle contributed to the friendly relationship after India and Burma achieved independence from the British on 15 August 1947 and 4 January 1948, respectively. On the day of Burma's independence, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said,

As in the past, so in the future, the people of India will stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Burma, and whether we have to share good fortune or ill fortune, we shall share it together. This is a great and solemn day not only for Burma, but for India, and for the whole of Asia.

The relationship between the two countries was strengthened by the personal friendship that existed between the two Prime Ministers Nehru and U Nu. Whenever a troublesome issue occurred, the two Prime Ministers worked closely with mutual trust and friendship.

On the other hand, the post-colonial relations between India and Burma were influenced the fate of people of Indian origin in Burma.

After independence the government of Burma took a number of measures calculated to strengthen the economic interests of Burmese against the foreigners. These measures generally hit Indians, as Indians constituted the biggest section in the foreign population of independent Burma. Among the several acts passed by the Burmese Government in 1948, the Land Alienation Act forbade the sale of land to non-Burmese nationals. The Burma Land Nationalization Bill, which was passed on 11 October 1949, aroused deep resentment and strong protest among Indians in both Burma and India.

However, the friendship between Nehru and U Nu averted any confrontation between the two countries. Nehru felt that the Land Nationalization Acts of Burma were non-discriminatory, although they mostly affected Indians. But he stood firm that adequate compensation should be paid by Burma, although the agreement that was reached was half-heartedly carried out by Burmese Government.

Another factor, which contributed to the cordial relationship between the two countries in this period, was rice export from Burma to India. India, in the 1950s, was the largest rice customer for Burma. At one stage, India even agreed to take more rice from Burma at an enhanced rate.

At the time of internal crisis Burma faced just after its independence in 1949, India extended whatever assistance and help to restore normalcy to its neighbour. When the Burmese Government needed cash urgently to meet its military expenses for suppressing the insurgency in the country, India organized a meeting of the governments of Commonwealth countries in New Delhi in February 1949 to discuss the matter.

Nehru provided arms to the Burmese Government in 1949, which prevented the fall of Rangoon under the rebels. In April 1950, the Indian minister of industry and supply Mr Gadgil confirmed the sale of six Dakota airplanes to Burma, which helped the government of Burma to maintain some sort of liaison with the towns remaining in their control during those hours of crisis. India contributed 1 million pounds sterling out of total 6 million pounds sterling of Commonwealth loan to Burma in 1950.

In addition to this assistance, the Indian Government announced in April 1950 a special loan to Burma of 5 million rupees for rice supplied to India by Burma.

Thus, Indian concern over the treatment of Indians in Burma receded. The two Prime Ministers started a pattern of regular consultation and cooperation on issues of concern to both countries and wider issues like world peace and other international issues.¹⁴⁶

On 7 July 1951, India and Burma signed a Treaty of Friendship in New Delhi. This treaty was for five years and was to remain in force “for ever thereafter” if neither side gave notice of its desire to terminate it six months before its expiry. The Treaty of Friendship came into force on 31 January 1952 with the exchange of instruments of ratification in Rangoon in accordance with Article VII of the treaty. Article II of the treaty stipulated that “(T)here shall be everlasting peace and unalterable friendship between the two States who shall ever strive to strengthen and develop further the cordial relations existing between the peoples of the two countries”. Article IV of the treaty said, “(T)he two States agree that their representatives shall meet from time to time and so often as occasion requires to exchange views on matters of common interest and to consider ways and means for mutual cooperation in such matters”.

The relationship between Burma and India at that time was so informal that the Burmese Prime Minister or other members of the Burmese Government were welcome in Delhi whenever they chose to discuss problems with Nehru and the Government of India. Nehru stressed the informal and intimate character of Indo-Burmese relations when he said, “We are in frequent touch with the government of Burma on many matters. We are not only friendly in the normal sense of the world, but if I may say so, somewhat more friendly”, at a press conference in Delhi on 28 February 1952. This informality was further strengthened by the affection and high esteem, which Nehru felt towards U Nu.

In September 1949, when Chinese communist troops approached the Northeastern borders of Burma, the Burmese Government was greatly worried that Chinese troops would invade its territories taking advantage of the presence of Kuomintang troops on Burmese territory. After failing to persuade the United States to intervene with the Chinese nationalist government for the withdrawal of Kuomintang troops from Northeastern Burma, the Burmese Government decided to take the case to the United Nations. The Indian Government strongly supported the Burmese case both in and outside the United Nations.

V.K. Krishna Menon, India’s representative in the United Nations on 17 April 1953, expressed his delegation’s deep concern in the matter. On 14 October of the same year, together with eight other countries, India supported a resolution calling on foreign troops in Burma to lay down their arms or to submit to internment. V.K Krishna Menon, on 5 November 1953, in a United Nations debate on Burma’s complaint against the presence of Chinese nationalist troops on Burmese territory, warned: “What hurts Burma hurts us equally. We have no military alliance but Burma is closely linked to us and it is naturally of great concern to us that she should suffer”.

Apart from all this, U Nu and Nehru shared a common world view. Both were great advocates of Asian solidarity. Burma and India participated in a number of Asian conferences and their leaders dominated various conferences. Moreover, generally speaking, both Burma and India pursued a course of non-alignment in world affairs.

¹⁴⁶ India acceded to Burma’s request to allow it to be the first country outside the communist bloc to recognize the new Chinese People’s Republic. Burma recognized communist China on 18 December 1949 and India followed Burma on 31 December 1949.

It must be concluded that the friendship between Burma and India during the period after independence served the interests of both countries. However, the relationship cooled when General Ne Win came to power by staging a military coup on 2 March 1962.

1962–1988

A major change in Burma's foreign policy towards China had repercussions on Indo-Burmese relations. A Sino-Burmese border agreement and a treaty of friendship and mutual non-aggression was signed on 28 January 1960 when General Ne Win was leading a caretaker government in Burma.

The changing attitude of China to Burma also figured prominently in the Indian Parliament. On 22 August 1961, Pandit H.N. Hunzru said that: "Since the conclusion of the Sino-Burmese Agreement, China has been making efforts to woo Burma", and "offers of help are being made to Burma in order that Indian influence there might be lessened".

A Sino-Indian border conflict broke out in October 1962. Burma showed a neutral stand on the issue, not wanting to incur the hostility of either of the two. The silence of Burma was interpreted as 'pro-Chinese' by India and naturally Indo-Burmese relations were disturbed. This trend continued until about the end of 1964.

In economic policy, the Ne Win government showed nationalistic fervour. In the early part of 1964, the Ne Win government nationalized shops and stores, hitting small traders. The previous nationalization measures initiated by the U Nu government affected mostly the Indian chettyars, landlords, and the big financiers. The Indians were the hardest hit by Ne Win's nationalization measures. According to the spokesman of the Burma Displaced Persons Association, over 12,000 Indian concerns with assets worth Rs.15 crores were affected.

The latest nationalization measure was so vigorous that many Indians were deprived of their means of livelihood. No compensation was paid to them at the time of nationalization. Many of them wanted to go back to India. But even this was not possible for them as they could not pay their passage and the Government of Burma did not provide even passage facilities to them.

When allowed to leave Burma, they were not allowed to take anything with them. Such were the conditions of the Indians in Burma, that the relations between Burma and India were brought nearly to a breaking point.¹⁴⁷

However, towards the end of 1964, the relationship between the two countries began to regain its former cordiality. One important reason for this shift was the apparently strained relationship between China and Burma because of China's support to Burmese insurgents. In June 1967, anti-Chinese riots broke out in Burma, although there was no evidence to suggest that the Burmese Government inspired the riots.

The close ties that existed between India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Burma's new leader General Ne Win in this period were also important to the two countries' relations. General Ne Win paid three visits to India in this period and Mrs Gandhi visited Rangoon in March 1969. P.M.S. Malik wrote in an article on Indo-Myanmar Relations that: "Ne Win recognized that as long as he fed her ego by visiting her almost as regularly as the contacts he maintained with the top-ranking Chinese leadership he would have nothing to fear from India".

¹⁴⁷ The Indian Ministry of External Affairs in its Annual Reports for 1964–65 said that, "the presence of nearly half a million persons of Indian origin in Burma has on occasion tended to be a disturbing factor in the friendly relations between the two countries".

In February 1965, General Ne Win visited India and the two countries issued a joint communiqué which said that: “A common outlook on international issues resulting from the pursuit of policy of non-alignment has helped in the development of close and good neighbourly relations between the two countries”.

On a six-day private visit to India on 15 March 1968, General Ne Win and Indira Gandhi were believed to have discussed the Chinese threat to the two countries and the possibility of closer political cooperation between them in meeting the “common danger”. China expressed its great displeasure over Ne Win’s visit. A Peking Radio commentary of 13 March 1968 in Burmese lashed out at the visit and called the Burmese Government a “fascist dictatorship”.

On 10 March 1967, India and Burma signed the boundary agreement to formally delimitate and demarcate the entire boundary between the two countries. Both the governments then ratified the Agreement and the Instruments of Ratification were exchanged in New Delhi on 30 May 1967.¹⁴⁸

In the realm of trade and commerce the relationship between the two countries began to decline in 1960 when China replaced India as the largest importer of rice from Burma. The Japanese War Repatriation was another source of help for Burma in this period. Although an agreement to promote trade between India and was signed on 24 December 1962 in Rangoon, there was not much increase in trade relations of the two countries till 1968–69. The agreement remained in force for three years only.

A boost to Indo-Burmese trade was initiated with General Ne Win’s visit to India on the invitation of Indian President V.V. Giri during 15–22 January 1970. Besides having talks with the Indian Prime Minister, Ne Win met the Indian Minister for External Affairs and Foreign Trade. Bilateral trade relations and regional economic cooperation were among the discussions.

On 17 August 1974, a new payment agreement between India and Burma enabled Burma to buy goods from India like cotton textiles, pharmaceutical products, electrical goods and hardware worth Rs. 7.5 crores; India would import from Burma commodities like urea and mineral ores. Then during October 1979 there was a provision for a Rs. 2.17 crore project. Under the project, India would set up 21 pilot projects in Burma in areas ranging from plants for menthol, calcium carbide, glue and gelatin, to electro-chemical metallurgy, orange juice and ferro-tungsten. The two-way trade turnover during 1987 was about Rs. 36 crores.

Another dimension of Indo-Burmese relations in this period was that of border problems posed by insurgents in Northeast India, particularly Nagas and Mizos. Both Nagas and Mizos have been living on both sides of the borders of the two countries. Burma was very helpful to India in countering the insurgency in the Northeast.¹⁴⁹

In this period, there was one noted change of Burma’s foreign relations regarding the non-aligned movement. On 28 September 1979, at the Sixth Triennial Non-Alignment Summit Conference in Cuba, the Burmese delegation walked out of the meeting and withdrew from the movement of which

¹⁴⁸ There was disagreement about the position of Moreh, which Burma claimed, later solved by mutual discussion: interview with Eric Gonslaves. Hence most of the 1,643 kilometre boundary between the two countries was demarcated and the leaders of the Joint Boundary Commission in New Delhi on 24 March 1976 initialed 1,560 maps. Only demarcation of the tri-junction between India, Burma and China at Diphir near Rima at the eastern tip of the McMahon Line still remains incomplete in this regard.

¹⁴⁹ Indian External Affairs Minister Mr Dinesh Singh told the Indian parliament on 6 August 1966 that: “Government of India has been receiving friendly cooperation from the Government of Burma in preventing underground Nagas and Mizos from using Burmese territory as a corridor for crossing over to Pakistan or as a sanctuary...”

Burma was a founder. The main reason given by the Burmese delegation was Cuba's attempt to swing the non-aligned group into the Soviet bloc. In fact, Burma's foreign policy, after 1962 and particularly after 1972 can be termed as an isolationist policy.

Even in this period of isolation, Indian leaders paid visits to Burma. Indian External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh visited Burma in April 1973 and another External Affairs Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (the present Prime Minister of India) visited Burma in August 1977.

However, there was a lull in the Indo-Burmese relationship from 1977 till 1988 as Burma nurtured friendship with China. Moreover, by 1987, Burma was expanding its relations with other countries through visits of General Ne Win to the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany. Although Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Burma in December 1987, it did not indicate much improvement in Indo-Burmese relations.

The ticklish question for Indo-Burmese relations in this period was the case of deposed Prime Minister of Burma U Nu, who requested political asylum in India. He was allowed to stay in India because of personal friendship that existed between U Nu and Nehru's family, and took shelter in India from 1974 to 1980.

1988–1999

The lowest point in the deterioration of Indo-Burmese relations came with India's support to the pro-democratic upsurge in 1988 in Burma. India was the first neighbouring country to stand firmly on the side of democracy when the 1988 uprising took place in Burma. The Indian Embassy in Rangoon was active in helping pro-democracy activists and officials were in touch with opposition groups like the All Burma Federation of Students' Unions (ABFSU), Aung San Suu Kyi and U Nu during the uprising.

When the Burmese student activists fled to the Indo-Burmese border, the Indian Embassy in Rangoon provided them financial assistance to go to India. The Government of India opened refugee camps for these students in Mizoram and Manipur States. The then External Affairs Minister (later Prime Minister) Narasimha Rao informed a parliamentary panel in 1989 that "strict instructions" had been given not to turn back any genuine Burmese refugees seeking shelter in India.

The Indian Government, along with the USA and Western countries, isolated the Burmese military regime. India was a sponsor of a United Nations resolution condemning the Burmese military junta for its violations of human rights in 1992.

When the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in the 1990 general election in Burma, the Burmese Government intensified the crackdown on the democratic activists, in general, and the NLD in particular.

However, between 1991 and 1992, the foreign policy establishment in India started reviewing its foreign policy towards Burma. One factor, which prompted the Indian policy-makers to review Burma policy, was the problems at the border with Burma (see section IV below).

The Burmese army had stepped up its military campaigns along the border of the country, including on the Indo-Burmese border. There were waves of refugee exodus from Burma to neighbouring countries as a result of these military campaigns. In particular, hundreds of Naga refugees fled to Nagaland in India in the beginning of 1992. India protested over this Naga refugee issue and asked the Burmese government to stop atrocities on innocent villagers on the border. Later, India and Burma worked together for the repatriation of these Naga refugees to Burma.

There were cases when Burmese army personnel crossed the Indian border in pursuit of the Burmese rebels. When the Burmese government started paying attention to Kachin insurgents on the Indo-Burmese border, an unwritten understanding developed between the authorities of the two countries: troops from either side could cross the border to a certain limit in pursuit of the insurgents. As in the 1970s, India realized that it needed a friendly relationship with the Government of Burma to contain its own insurgency problem in Northeast India, as some of these groups established their camps within Burma.

Another factor behind the policy review was that India after 1990 wanted to move faster towards “globalization” and to have closer economic cooperation with its neighbours, including Burma. Moreover, the growing Chinese influence in Burma and the closer military and economic cooperation between China and Burmese military regime since 1988 made the policy-makers in New Delhi worried.

In 1990, India began some initiatives to express its willingness to normalize the relationship with Burma. The Burmese government initially negated these attempts.¹⁵⁰

In 1991, India acceded to the pressure of the Burmese government to stop AIR Burmese Language Broadcasting against the government of Burma. When the Burmese government formally complained to the government of India that Daw Than Than Nu, the daughter of U Nu, was using “abusive” language attacking the government of Burma, the Indian government barred her from broadcasting.¹⁵¹

Finally, in 1992, the Burmese government responded positively to India’s offer to normalize the bilateral relationship. An eight-member Burmese delegation led by U Aye, Director-General of the Political Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visited India on 11 to 14 August 1992 and met the senior officials in the ministries of External Affairs, Home, Defence and Commerce of the Government of India. This was the first ever official Indo-Burmese senior-level meeting since Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to Burma in 1987. In March 1993, India’s Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit visited Rangoon and met the Burmese leaders including Lt. General Khin Nyunt. These two bilateral visits were viewed as misunderstanding-managing exercises for both countries. At the same time, India specifically asked the Burmese government to release all political prisoners and stressed that India continued to support restoration of democracy in Burma.¹⁵²

In January 1994, Burma’s Deputy Foreign Minister U Nyunt Swe visited India; during his six-day visit, he held a series of meetings with Indian ministerial officials and discussed wide-ranging issues to improve the relationship between the two countries. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 21 January 1994 to increase cooperation between the civilian border authorities of the two countries and to prevent “illegal and insurgent activities”.

A bilateral agreement was also signed to regularize and promote border trade to be conducted through Moreh in Manipur State of India and Champhai in Mizoram State of India corresponding to Tamu and Hri on the Burma side. The border trade was, accordingly, officially opened on 12 April 1995 at Moreh in the presence of the Indian Commerce Minister P. Chidambaram and the Burmese trade minister Lt. General Tun Kyi. Since that time, the Indo-Burmese relationship has been steadily

¹⁵⁰ Muchkund Dubey’s interview.

¹⁵¹ Since that time, the AIR Burmese language service has stopped broadcasting its regular 10-minutes programme on current political situation in Burma. This programme used to criticize the military regime in Burma. The AIR, moreover, stopped broadcasting political commentaries on Burma, which were regularly contributed by analysts and scholars from India.

¹⁵² For example, during his visit to Burma in March 1993, Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit told the Burmese military leaders that: “We are opening the relations because India’s interests are affected. It does not mean any changes in our criticism of you having suppressed democracy”.

improving and there have been a number of informal and formal visits of the senior officials and ministers of the two countries.

However, India continued to extend shelter to a number of Burmese democratic activists and Members of Parliament on Indian soil. When Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 1991, the people of India heartily welcomed it. Prominent citizens and leaders of political parties expressed their support to the democratic movement and urged the military government to release her from house arrest.

On 3 February 1992, the then President of India R. Venkataraman called on the Burmese military regime to restore democracy in Burma while receiving the credentials of the new Ambassador for Burma. He said that India was concerned at the delay and uncertainty in forming a popular government there and called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners in Burma. Moreover, India conferred its prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding for 1993 to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on 14 November 1995 in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, the relations and cooperation between India and Burma continued to improve. Regular meetings, exchange visits and sharing of intelligence became more frequent. In trade too, the bilateral trade between India and Burma increased substantially.¹⁵³

The improvement in trade relations had its impact on the political relations of the two countries. Indeed, for India and Burma, trade was a step towards reconciliation and cooperation. The Burmese military junta is basically looking for recognition, especially from India and countries in Asia.

A number of high level ministers and officials of both countries have exchanged visits after the India–Burma/Myanmar Trade Treaty was signed in January 1994. The following are some noted visits:

- An official delegation to Rangoon on 10–11 June 1994 in order to review the arrangement for operationalization of the Border Trade Agreement (BTA) with Burma.
- Another round of official talks was held with Burma from 10–12 January 1995 to finalize the arrangements for operationalization of the border trade agreement with Burma.¹⁵⁴
- From 3 to 12 April in the same year, at the invitation of the then Indian Minister of State for Commerce, P. Chidambaram, a Burmese trade delegation visited India to discuss matters relating to bilateral relations, economic and border trade.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ According to available figures, India's exports to Burma, though small in relation to trade with its major trading partners, have increased from Rs. 9.4 crores in 1991-92 to Rs. 172.8 crores in 1997-98, while imports from Burma grew from Rs. 125.6 crores to Rs. 811.7 crores during the same period. As a result, India's bilateral trade with Burma, which amounted to Rs. 135.0 crores in 1991-92, increased to Rs. 984.5 crores in 1997-98. The increase was due mainly after opening the border trade through Moreh of Manipur State of India and Tamu of Burma in 1995. India has now become the largest export market for Burma accounting for 23% of Burma's total export.

¹⁵⁴ Ashok Jha, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce of India and was accompanied by an inter-Ministerial delegation. The Burmese were led by Khin Maung Oo, M.D. Inspection and Agency Services, and was accompanied by a 16 member official delegation. The talks, which were held at Imphal, included visits to the border posts of Tamu in Burma and Moreh in India to review the arrangements made for commencement of border trade.

¹⁵⁵ During their stay in India, the delegation held discussions with the Chairman and Members of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in Bombay and Delhi respectively, Lt. Gen. Tun Kyi also called on the Minister of External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee and discussed matters relating to strengthening friendship, promotion of trade and economic cooperation of mutual interest between the two countries.

- The Deputy Home Minister of Burma Col. Tin Hlaing, accompanied by four officials and the Burmese Ambassador in India, called on the Commerce Minister of India on 17 August 1995 and had a wide-ranging discussion on various aspects of boosting bilateral trade relations.
- Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Saleem I. Shervani visited Burma in November 1997. He inaugurated the second Indian Trade Exhibition in Rangoon.
- Indian Commerce Secretary P.P. Prabhu visited Burma in the first week of November 1998 to promote trade between the two countries. During his visit it was proposed that India enter into joint ventures for exploration and exploitation of nickel and coal deposits in upper Burma.
- Maj. General Nyunt Tin, Burmese Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, visited Delhi in August 1998, exploring the possibilities of India's participation in Burma's agricultural sectors. In February 1999, a 10-member strong delegation from Myanmar Computer Federation visited Delhi and Bangalore.
- Indian foreign Secretary K. Raghunath visited Burma on 25–28 February 1999 at the invitation of Deputy Foreign Minister of Burma.
- A delegation from Burma's Ministry of Science and Technology led by Minister U Thaung was in June 1999 in India. He met with Indian industrialists during his tour. He signed an agreement with Indian Human Resources Minister Dr Murli Manohar Joshi in cooperation in science and technology between the two countries.
- In July 1999, a high-level meeting between Home Ministry officials of Burma and India was held in New Delhi. The meeting “identified ways and means to strengthen mechanisms for cooperation on issues like cross border terrorism, sharing of intelligence on real time basis, setting up of better communication links, etc.”¹⁵⁶ The meeting also agreed to review the work relating to the maintenance of the boundary pillars on the Indo-Burmese boundary. Moreover, India agreed to organize training for anti-narcotics officials to take strict measures in checking illegal narcotics smuggling across the Indo-Burmese border. During their stay in Delhi, the Burmese delegation called on Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani, Commerce Minister Ram Krishna Hegde and Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Ms Vasundhara Raje.
- General Maung Aye visited India 14– 21 November 2000 at the invitation of Indian Vice-President Mr Krishan Kant. The high-powered Burmese delegation, which included six senior ministers besides Maung Aye, was given the kind of “ceremonial welcome” which is usually reserved for visits by heads of State or government to India.
- General Maung Aye’s visit was the first high-level contact between India and Burma since 1988. Business and security were the two main agendas during his visit. Before this, several senior ministers, bureaucrats and military officials of the two countries had exchanged visits. These visits included former Indian Army Chief V.P Malik’s visit to Burma in January and again in July 2000. In January, General Maung Aye paid a one-day trip to Shillong, the headquarters of the eastern command of the Indian Air Force. At that time, his trip was at the invitation of General Malik.

However, the India–Burma relationship is not free from problems. In October 2000, three Indian soldiers were killed when Burmese fired on an Indian patrol party mistaken as "Naga rebels" near Border Pillar 153, close to Lungwa in Nagaland's Mon district. The Burmese army later tendered its "unqualified apology".

¹⁵⁶ During the three-day talks on 28-30 July, Burmese delegation was led by Deputy Home Minister Brig. General Thura Myint Maung while Indian delegation was led by Home Secretary Kamal Pandey.

While Indian army chief General Ved Prakash Malik was visiting Burma in July 2000, the powerful Burmese intelligence chief and SPDC Secretary –1, General Khin Nyunt, flew to India's arch rival Pakistan with a high-level delegation. Pakistan is known to be supplying arms and ammunition to Burma and there have been close ties between the armed forces and defence industries of Burma and Pakistan.¹⁵⁷

Pakistan military leader General Pervez Musharraf paid a three-day state visit to Burma in May this year and his visit was preceded by a visit of three Pakistan Navy ships, the first foreign naval visit to Burma since 1988. Some foreign policy analysts in New Delhi think that China is actually behind the close ties between Burma and Pakistan as a part of its policy of containing India from outside.

Fall-out of India's constructive policy towards Burma

As a result of pursuing friendship with Burma, the Indian government has stayed away from the US-led condemnation against the military junta for its human rights violations and crackdown on members of the National League for Democracy inside Burma. At the government level, India, along with China and ASEAN countries, was silent when the rest of the world condemned the Burmese government for blocking Aung San Suu Kyi outside Rangoon and later putting her under house arrest. India was one of the minority that voted against the decision of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to take action against the regime for failing to curb forced labour in the country.

Though India continues to allow hundreds of Burmese pro-democracy activists to stay in India, the Indian authorities have been closely watching their movements and activities. In some cases, there are restrictions on their political programmes. Three days before the visit of General Maung Aye to India in November 2000,¹⁵⁸ India turned back a prominent exiled Burmese activist from the airport despite the fact that he was holding a valid visa issued by the Indian Consulate in Chaing Mai, Thailand. Apparently, Indian authorities were taking precautionary measures against any embarrassing incidents for the Burmese top leaders during their visit in India.

- On 4 September 1998, 64 Burmese activists were arrested while they were staging a demonstration against the visiting Burmese Health Minister, General Ket Sein, in New Delhi. The activists were charged with violating Section 144, which does not allow the gathering of more than four persons. After hours of detention, they were released on bail. Again on 26 February 1999, the Indian police arrested about 50 Burmese activists in New Delhi while they were in a demonstration against the military rule in Burma. They too were charged and released on bail.
- In December 1998, the Indian Home Ministry, at the last minute, cancelled the venue of a seminar on Burma, when the Burmese democracy activists tried to organize it at the Constitution Club in New Delhi. Moreover, Indian police and intelligence personnel have been closely monitoring the activities and movements of Burmese activists in Delhi. Burmese refugees in Delhi were asked to register with the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) in Delhi. The Indian Home Ministry has reportedly directed the UNHCR Office in New Delhi not to recognize any more Burmese as refugees.
- Again in July 1999, the Indian government banned a Burma Democracy Conference (scheduled to be held in Calcutta on 6–8 July) and did not issue a visa to those Burmese exile activists who planned to participate in the meeting.

¹⁵⁷ *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 June 2000.

¹⁵⁸ General Maung Aye visited India 14–21 November 2000 at the invitation of Indian Vice-President Mr Krishan Kant.

- On 29 July 1999, a Burmese activist who is working as an India-based stringer for Radio Free Asia (Burmese Language Service) was arrested by the local police in Moreh, Manipur State of India. He was later released on 30 July.

Aung San Suu Kyi expressed disappointment with the change in policy. In a conversation with Indian journalists in December 1995, Aung San Suu Kyi said that she expected India to help the movement for democracy in Burma. She said that both India and China continued to have friendly relations with the junta in power. China was not a democracy, she said, but from India she expected greater assistance for her National League for Democracy.¹⁵⁹

Indian policy analysts maintain that India has supported and continues to support the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people, despite its official working policy towards the military regime. “The government of India has been a host to various refugee groups from Myanmar and members of the democracy movement. That has not changed over the years. This itself shows India’s stand,” said Sanjoy Hazarika, a senior fellow of the Center for Policy Research (CPR).¹⁶⁰

“What has changed, however, is the government of India’s emphasis and public recognition of the importance of the regime in Rangoon both from the security point of view and in terms of economic relations with that country,” he added in a recent interview.

With respect to Indian policy, P.M.S. Malik wrote:

This is a case of making the best of a bad bargain, a recognition of the fact that there is little that the international community can do, for the present, for the restoration of democracy in Burma.... Further the manner, in which the military has so far controlled the political, social and economic areas of the country, has ensured that they can keep the world out.

In November 1997, when Indian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Saleem I. Shervani visited Burma, the question of Indian support to the Burmese pro-democracy movement was raised. “I told them that India is a vibrant democracy and we do not just preach freedom, but also practice it. But India will never allow itself to be used by anybody to destabilize another country”, said Mr Shervani.¹⁶¹

An editorial in *The Hindu* newspaper reminded that India’s engagement with the Burmese junta should not mean neglect of India’s consistent policy of supporting democracy in Burma. It said that:

There are strong trade-cum-strategic arguments in favour of engaging the military regime in neighbouring Myanmar, but these should not be allowed to cloud or sideline India’s principled policy of supporting the democratic forces in that country. Engagement is not endorsement, apologists for the trade-led policy... Let India engage the junta in Myanmar but let us also simultaneously pile pressure on the regime to return the country to the democratic path. Let us reiterate at every possible forum that a ruthless dictatorship in Myanmar is a major destabilizing force in a region strategically important for this country.¹⁶²

The editorial concluded by saying that: “The men in Khaki must realize that returning the country to democracy can bring lasting peace, with substantial dividends in terms of stability and progress”.

¹⁵⁹ *Times of India*, 12 December 1995.

¹⁶⁰ Interview on 6 November 2000.

¹⁶¹ *The Hindu*, 7 November 1997.

¹⁶² *The Hindu* newspaper, 18 November 1997.

IV. Major factors contributing to the relationship between India and Burma

From India's point of view, three major factors involved relations with Burma. These are: 1) the security aspect of Indian North East insurgency and Chinese influence in Burma, 2) the economic aspect of promoting trade and economic relations with the neighbouring country and 3) the presence of people of Indian origins in Burma. Since independence of both countries in 1947–48 these were serious issues in the relationship between the two countries, although the issue of Indian origins in Burma became less important for India after the late 1980s.

From the SPDC's point of view, it is important to have a good relationship with India as it enhances its own political image both inside and outside the country. Moreover, it is important for trade purposes and gives it some degree of dependence on China. Over the years, India has emerged as the largest export market for Burma, accounting for one-fourth of Burma's total export.

Security Aspect: insurgency on Indo-Burmese border and Chinese influence

It is a known fact that some major insurgent groups that are fighting against the Indian State have bases on the Burmese side of 1600-km long Indo-Burmese border. These groups include both factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and Manipur insurgent groups.¹⁶³

India wants cooperation from the Burmese regime to “contain” or “eliminate” these insurgents as the SPDC now effectively controls almost the entire area bordering with India. Some of the Indian insurgent groups are believed to have established relations with the local Burmese commanders and are thus able to make movements along the border areas.

It is also in Burma's own interests to tackle the insurgency problem, as it has insurgents like the Kachins and the Chins in this area. Although the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) entered a truce with the Burmese government, the Chin National Front (CNF), which was formed to fight for self-determination of Chin people in Burma, has its camps inside Indian border.

There have been joint military efforts between the two armies to counter insurgency across the border. For example, a joint operation – code-named Operation Golden Bird – was launched between the Indian and Burmese armies against the Indian insurgents in the Northeast in July 1995. The Burmese army had taken some casualties in this operation. However, in the middle of the operation, Rangoon ordered its army to pull out of the operation because the Indian government announced that it was awarding the Jawaharlal Nehru Prize for Peace and Understanding (the highest civilian honour in India) to Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Indian side then returned to a consistent approach in getting Burmese help by befriending the Burmese military junta. There were several exchange visits as well as regular civilian and military meetings between the two countries.

Former Indian Army Chief V.P Malik's two visits to Burma in 2000 contributed to enhancing bilateral border management. The Burmese military has been extending its cooperation to India in countering Northeast insurgents on the border. Indian Home Minister L.K Advani, after meeting with visiting Burmese Home Minister Col. Tin Hlaing, said on 17 November 2000 that the Burmese army is

¹⁶³ According to *Indian Defence Year Book* (1998-99), the Nagaland-Manipur area (which has 613 kilometre border with Burma) alone has an estimated 10,700 armed guerrillas belonging to such bigger outfits as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland – NSCN (IM), NSCN (K), Manipur's United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People's Liberation Army (PLA), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Kuki National Front (KNF) and the Kuki National Army (KNA).

helping India fight against Naga insurgency and that it had destroyed five National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang faction) camps that year. In addition, Burmese generals have assured the Indian government they would continue similar operations against the remaining camps of Indian insurgents inside Burmese territory.¹⁶⁴ Obviously, this is a result of the growing friendship between the two governments. A high-level six member Burmese military team led by Vice-Admiral Kyi Min, commander in chief of Burmese Navy, visited India in November 2001.

Another important security consideration in building the relationship with Burma was the growing Chinese presence and interests in Burma, particularly after 1988. Strategically, Burma controls one of the most important land routes from China southwards. India is worried about China's strategic attempts to use Burma as an access to India's Northeastern States.

India believes that its closer relationship with the junta will help to "balance" Chinese influence. "We found that Chinese were selling large amount of arms, establishing defence cooperation and a relationship. This was the strategic challenge to India... We want to balance Chinese influence. We do not want China dominating the strategic area of northern Myanmar",¹⁶⁵ said former Foreign Secretary Mr. J. N. Dixit who was instrumental in normalizing of ties with Burmese junta in 1993-94.

"(T)he Burmese are so dependent on China that the Chinese are able to exercise quite a bit of leverage over the military junta in Yangon. The Pak-Burma relationship is the outcome of Yangon's dependency on Beijing", said Brahma Chellaney from the Center for Policy Research (CPR) in New Delhi.

India thinks that by distancing itself from the military regime in Burma, it is pushing Burma closer to the Chinese, which primarily threatens India's interests.

P.N.S. Malik supported this view in his article on "Indo-Myanmar Relations". He wrote that:

For India the real problem is one of security; a nuclear China is present on all three sides of its land borders. This is the consequence of the Chinese influence in Pakistan and Burma. The idea of Burma being a friendly and a non-threatening buffer state between India and China has disappeared for good. India has to plan its strategic response to this position by reinforcing its ties with the elements that are likely to retain control even if a constitutional form of government comes into existence.

Economic aspect: promoting trade with the neighbouring country

Economic interest has pushed India to establish a good relationship with the Burmese junta, and it plays a very major role in the present India-Burma relationship. From the viewpoint of Indian industry and business, Burma is a bridge between India and Southeast Asian markets, and a gateway to Southeast Asia.¹⁶⁶ While Indian economic relations with other ASEAN countries such as Thailand and Singapore are relatively good, Indian business sees Burma as a potential not only for bilateral economic cooperation but also for regional cooperation due to its geographical proximity with India.

As Burma is part of both BIMSTEC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) and ASEAN, Burma is crucial for some regional projects like the Trans-Asian highway and railway projects. (Burma is being linked to the rest of Southeast Asia under the trans-Asian highway project from Iran to China.) And India is keen to import gas from Burma. India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Videsh Ltd. is reportedly negotiating with South Korea's Daewoo International Corp. to buy a 30% stake in Daewoo's offshore exploration block in the Arakan offshore in northwestern Burma.

¹⁶⁴ *The Asian Age*, 18 November 2000, New Delhi.

¹⁶⁵ Interview on 13 July 1999.

¹⁶⁶ CII's meeting with General Maung Aye on 17 November 2000 and CII interviews.

Moreover, Indian business is keen to strengthen linkages between India and Mekong basin countries, which include Burma. Cooperation among these countries in the transport and infrastructure sectors includes railways, roads and air travel as well as greater cooperation in science, technology and human resources.

The apex industry association of India, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), is playing an active role to increase economic ties between India and Burma. Apart from signing MOUs with Burma, it hosted an interactive meeting between General Maung Aye-led Burmese delegation and Indian industry in New Delhi in November 2000. At the meeting, Burmese leaders invited more Indian investment in Burma in areas including agriculture, fisheries, pearl cultivation, infrastructure, oil and gas, mining and tourism. The CII had proposed to have a target of US\$ 2 billion bilateral trade between the two countries by the year 2003.

Indian investment in Burma accounted for about 1.1% only, amounting to US\$ 4.5 million, while ASEAN countries' investment in Burma accounted for 50% of Burma's US\$ 7.3 billion foreign investment. And the balance of trade between the two countries is hugely in Burma's favour.⁵

The 100-mile Kalay–Kalaywa–Kyigon–Tamu road in Sagaing Division of Burma, built with the assistance of India for three years, was formally inaugurated by the Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh and the SPDC's Secretary – 2, Lt. Gen. Tin Oo on 13 February this year. This Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road connects northern Burma with India's national highway 39 that terminates at Moreh in Manipur State, providing better link from the India–Burma border to central Burma. India will undertake responsibility for the maintenance of the road for the first six years by providing the services of an Indian Road Maintenance Force, along with the necessary material and manpower. India also built a friendship bridge on the Mizoram–Burma border to facilitate a new border trade route. The 170-foot long bridge, built by India with Rs 146 lakhs (about US\$ 3 lakhs), connects Zokhuthar village in Mizoram and Rih village in Chin State of Burma.

Moreover, India is currently building the Monywa– Kalaywa road together with two major river bridges in Burma.¹⁶⁷

That economic factors are important in India's foreign policy clearly outlined back in 1947 by Jawaharlal Nehru in his statement that: "Foreign policy is the outcome of economic policy, and until India has properly evolved her economic policy, her foreign policy will be rather vague, rather inchoate and will be groping".

When the world entered into the new era after the cold war and "globalization" started having impact in India, particularly after 1990, economic factors became more important in India's foreign policy.

The economic struggle had become far more crucial than ever before, with palpable consequences for foreign policy...In the new era no country could hope to play a meaningful international role if it did not manage well its economic problems and was not demonstratively registering economic progress. The economic dimension became the most important dimension of foreign policy.

V.P. Dutt

A section of Indian businessmen in Burma have also been pushing the two governments for increased economic relationship. They obviously want to exploit the opportunities offered by the ruling regime in Burma for Indian business and investments although many of themselves were victims of Ne Win's rigid nationalization measures in the late 1960s.

¹⁶⁷ It also provided a credit line of US\$ 15 million to Burma (a line of credit US\$ 10 million to Burma in 1997) for purchase of Indian goods during the Jaswant Singh's visit to Burma. Both countries jointly set up a remote sensing and data-processing center in Rangoon.

In this vein, G. L. Goenka, President of Mumbai-based Indo-Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industries declared:

I have one quotation on opportunity, which reads thus ‘Open the door when opportunity knocks or it will knock at your neighbour’s door’. Some of our neighbouring countries are very active in Myanmar and we should surge ahead before we are left with no opportunity.¹⁶⁸

V. Indo-Burmese trade relationship

- The balance of trade is in Burma’s favour and India has emerged as Burma’s largest export market accounting for US\$ 163.4 million, i.e. one-fourth of Burma’s total exports.¹⁶⁹
- Bilateral trade between India and Burma was around US\$ 216 million in 1999/2000 (April–March).¹⁷⁰
- Exports to India in 1999–2000 were to the tune of about US\$ 141.14 million while imports from India were worth US\$ 75.36 million.¹⁷¹
- The trade turn over, which was just US\$ 13 million in 1980–81, touched US\$ 194 million in 1999–2000.¹⁷²

At least from the first century, a trade route from India to China crossed North Central Burma down the Chindwin Valley up the Irrawaddy to Bhamo and the border of China. However, due to the difficult nature of the land routes, trade developed largely by sea.

When Burma became a part of British India, Burma played an important part in India’s economy. India obtained most of her rice, mineral oils and teakwood from Burma: in 1938–39, these three commodities accounted for 87% of her imports from Burma. Moreover, Burma was an important source of supply of food and raw materials.

For example, in April 1954, India agreed to buy 900,000 tons of rice from Burma over three years, at a relatively high price of 48 pounds sterling per ton. In May 1956, the Indian government concluded yet another agreement to purchase from Burma two million tons of rice for a period of five years, beginning from 1 June 1956. The purpose of this agreement was to achieve a balance of trade in favour of Burma. In return for Burmese teak, timber, rice and lead, India would supply Burma with cotton and woolen textiles, cotton yarn, jute manufactures, fish, sugar, coal, coke, machinery, engineering goods and choir products, drugs and medicines. In another agreement signed on 30 September 1959 India consented to purchase from Burma 150,000 tons of rice over and above the 350,000 tons already contracted for, and made firm commitment to take another 350,000 tons of rice from Burma’s 1960 crop.

Table 4.1: Percentage of India’s Share in Burma’s Trade

<i>Year</i>	<i>Imports</i>	<i>Exports</i>
1938–39	80	66
1947–48.....	56	60
1948–49.....	57	44
1949–50.....	32	34

¹⁶⁸ In its *Indo-Myanmar Business Bulletin*, Volume 1, No. 2, 1998.

¹⁶⁹ Arun Bharat Ram, President of CII, on 17 Nov. 2000 in New Delhi.

¹⁷⁰ Reuters. 17 Nov. 2000, New Delhi.

¹⁷¹ *Asian Age*, 17 Nov. 2000, New Delhi.

¹⁷² *Hindustan Times*, 17 Nov. 2000, New Delhi.

1950–51.....	40	33
1951–52.....	38	38
1952–53.....	53	23
1953–54.....	24	23
1954–55.....	17	38

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. *Report on the economic and Commercial Conditions in Burma for 1955*, p. 19

There was a general decline in trade between India and Burma after 1960, although trade relations continued and there were many trade agreements. This was because of various factors, such as the improvement of food production in India, the economic policy of the Ne Win government in Burma, and the existence of new rice markets elsewhere. But by 1968–69 trade began to increase again. This was partly due to a trade decline in Sino-Burmese relations after 1967.

After 1983 there was again a sharp increase in India's imports with a purchase of 3,000,000 tons of Burmese rice besides pulses, timber and gemstones. The two-way trade turnover during 1987 was about Rs. 36 crores. There was a lull in the period between 1988 and 1992.

On 21 January 1994, the two countries signed a Border Trade Agreement to legalize the trade that had been going on for centuries along the border areas of the two countries. There were two Indian trade exhibitions held in Rangoon: one in February 1995 and another one in November 1997.

According to available figures, during the first 10 months of 1998, India's imports from Burma increased to US\$ 124 million from US\$ 114 million during the same period in 1997, showing an increase of nearly 10%. However, India's share in Burma's total exports during the first 10 months of 1998 declined to 14.5% compared to the share of 16.2% during the same period in 1997. India's exports to Burma fell sharply from the level of US\$ 89 million in first 10 months of 1997 to US\$ 59 million during the first 10 months of 1998, showing a decline of 34%.

During 1996–97, exports of primary and semi-finished iron and steel comprised 36% of the total Indian exports to Burma while miscellaneous processed items comprised 22% of the exports. 10% of the exports to Burma were engineering goods and iron and steel bars/rods etc. The major items imported from Burma were pulses (49%), wood and wood products (26%) in 1996–97.

India's Major Exports to Burma

- Misc. processed items
- Chemicals, cosmetics drug pharmaceuticals etc.
- Engineering goods
- Iron and steel bars/rods etc.
- Primary & semi-finished iron and steel
- Glass, glassware, paints ceramic, enamels, varnishes, cement, etc.

India's Major Imports from Burma

- Pulses
- Wood & Wood products
- Sugar

- Fruits & nuts including cashew nuts

Table 4.2: The Total trade between India and Burma during 1997–98

	<i>Imports</i> (US\$ Million)	<i>Exports</i> (US\$ Million)
April 1997–March 1998	218.20	46.45
April–December 1998	123.40	22.77

Source: *Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry*

The total volume of bilateral trade across the border from 12 April 1995 till 15 June 1996 was Rs. 25.77 crores with exports totaling Rs. 16.71 crores and imports totaling Rs. 9.06 crores. (Source : CII)

In October 1998, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the apex industry association of India with a direct membership of over 3,800 companies, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Union of Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UMCCI) and Myanmar Industries Association (MIA). CII also signed in February 1999 a MOU with Myanmar Computer Federation (MCF). The MOUs agreed to exchange professional experiences relating to services rendered to their respective members and agreed to provide full cooperation to each other in the promotion of Trade Fairs and Exhibitions in India and Burma.

The two countries have been cooperating in exchange of technologies and in development of their resources. Gas Authority of India Ltd. (GAIL) signed a MOU in 1998 with Brown & Root, Cairn Energy and Shell to bring in 28 million cubic metres per day of natural gas from Burma to India. The Navratna Company (a GAIL subsidiary) has plans to bring gas to Orissa State of India through a sub-sea pipeline.

In a visit to India in June 1999, Burmese Science and Technology Minister U Thaung invited Indian industrialists to come and invest in his country. He also invited Indian companies to invest in the agricultural sector of the country; a private company would be allowed to export half its produce.

Indo-Burmese border trade

Border trade has been through Tamu–Moreh and efforts have been made by both governments to open an additional route: Champhai–Hri. Burmese authorities have also suggested the possibility of opening a third border point at Paletwa township in Rakhine State in Burma and South Mizoram in India.

Under the Border Trade Agreement signed on 21 January 1994, 22 items are identified for exchange by residents living along the border between India and Burma.¹⁷³ However, out of 22 items identified as exchangeable items, it is learnt that only 12 items are practically viable for import and export across the border. Border trade suffered abrupt downfall during the years 1997–1998 and 1998–1999.

¹⁷³ These 22 items are: Mustard /Rape seed, Pulses and Beans, Fresh Vegetables, Fruits, Garlic, Onion, Chillies, Spices (excluding nutmeg, vace, cloves, cassia), Bamboo, Minor forest products excluding Teak, Food items for local consumption, Tobacco, Tomato, Reed Broom, Sesame, Resin, Coriander Seeds, Soybean, Roasted Sunflower Seeds, Katha, Ginger.

Table 4.3: Volume of Trade

EXPORT		
Year	Value	Cess
1995–96	Rs. 10,45,32,984/-	Rs. 5,23,682/-
1996–97	Rs. 29,79,96,037/-	Rs. 22,64,112/-
1997–98	Rs. 25,16,67,199/-	Rs. 26,64,985/-
1998–99	Rs. 4,88,42,680/-	Rs. 4,51,289/-
IMPORT		
Year	Value	Duty
1995–96	Rs. 5,39,05,477/-	Rs. 46,04,421/-
1996–97	Rs. 16,17,12,506/-	Rs. 1,37,54,666/-
1997–98	Rs. 37,19,55,314/-	Rs. 3,11,96,155/-
1998–99	Rs. 3,74,56,152/-	Rs. 37,80,194/-

Source: *Moreh Chamber of Commerce*

To boost border trade, the Government of India has agreed to equip better communication facilities in Moreh and also to sanction necessary funds to the government of Manipur State for organizing seminar-cum-awareness programmes/workshops on border trade. Moreover, the Central government was considering a 100-crores budget proposal of the Manipur government to set up an "Export Promotion Industrial Park" in Manipur State.

VI. Indo-Burmese military cooperation

During the independence struggle of both countries, Burma hosted Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army in World War II. As early as 1944, one Indian historian Sardar K.M. Panikkar had focused attention on the strategic significance of Burma to India. He said, "The defence of Burma in fact is the defence of India and it is India's primary concern no less than Burma's to see that its frontiers remain inviolate. In fact, no responsibility can be considered too heavy for India when it comes to the question of defending Burma."

Nevertheless, India and Burma do not have much military cooperation. India provided arms and ammunition to the Rangoon government when the U Nu regime was surrounded by Karen rebellions in 1949. Apart from this incident, there has been almost no arms transfer from Burma to India.¹⁷⁴

The military cooperation between India and Burma has been basically limited to intelligence sharing and occasional joint operations against the insurgent groups, which are operating along the border areas against both countries. The Burmese government has been more or less cooperative whenever India has information regarding the Indian insurgent groups, which from time to time set up bases inside Burma. Sometimes, the authorities in Burma have captured or killed some of the leaders of Indian insurgent groups.

¹⁷⁴ Although some media reports suggested in September 1998 that India had offered to supply arms and intelligence equipment to Burmese junta, Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes denied the reports as baseless.

From 1951 to the early 1960s, at the request of the Burmese government, members of the Burmese armed forces were given training in India. Members of armed forces from both countries have been exchanging regular visits since 1994. In June 1999, a 16-member delegation from the Indian National Defence College visited Burma.

Worried about China's apparent attempts to access the Indian Ocean through Burma, India has lately been making efforts to increase some strategic cooperation with Burma and has helped with strategically important road building.

In particular, increased cooperation has involved crackdown on insurgency in border areas, as described above.¹⁷⁵ Indian security forces started pressurizing the armed Burmese ethnic groups, particularly Chin National Front (CNF) to enter into a cease-fire with the Government of Burma. In April 1995, two senior CNF leaders died while in custody of the (Indian) Assam Rifles in Mizoram State. In January 1999, a CNF member, Mang Duhtling, was arrested and handed over to the Burmese army by the Assam Rifles in Mizoram. In July 1999, Assam Rifles attacked some mobile camps of CNF along the Indo-Burmese border.

In 1996, the Indian authorities secretly handed over a Burmese student activist along with 11 defectors from the Burmese army to the Burmese military government. The student activist, who is a recognized refugee of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in India, was jailed in Burma and the fate of the 11 army defectors in the hands of Burmese authorities is not known.

India has not protested when Burmese soldiers have entered its territory chasing Burmese insurgent groups. For example, in the first week of August 1999, the Burmese army entered 300 metres inside Indian territory while chasing an Arakan Muslim group in the India–Burma–Bangladesh triangle. The local commanders in the border areas have mutual understanding on these incidents and allow the “accidental” intrusion.

Apart from “Operation Golden Bird” launched in May 1995 (mentioned above) the Indian armed forces launched an operation in February 1998, code-named “Operation Leech”, against so-called gunrunners and seized huge amount of arms and ammunition; 73 people were arrested and 6 shot dead.¹⁷⁶

In conclusion, India has agreed to sign the protocol for a South-East Asia Nuclear Free Zone in which Burma will take part. In the Sixth National Level meeting of India and Burma Home Ministry officials held in Delhi on 28–30 July 1999, the two countries agreed to enhance cooperation on issues like “cross border terrorism”, sharing of intelligence on real-time basis and setting up of better communication links. The Burmese side assured the Indian authorities that it would take action whenever it came to know of any activities or movements of Indian insurgents groups inside Burmese territory. India drew the attention of Burmese delegation to the fact that some Bodo insurgents, Ulfa and NSCN (Khaplang) groups are shifting their camps from Bhutan to Burma.

¹⁷⁵ Moreover, through regular meetings and discussions, India hopes to be able to influence Burmese leaders to increase economic and military cooperation between the two countries as the military personnel usually lead the Burmese delegates in the meetings.

¹⁷⁶ In reality, this is a case of one Indian army intelligence officer who conspired and shipped arms of the Arakan Army (armed wing of National United Party of Arakan) and Karen National Union from the Thai-Burma border to an island in the Andaman Sea on the pretext of providing an island base for the groups. The same officer, Colonel Grewal, had handed over the 11 Burmese soldiers in 1996. During Operation Leech, six Arakan leaders of the group were shot dead and 73 people were arrested with a large number of arms and ammunition.

VII. India's support to the Burma democracy movement

India's support to the democracy movement since the 1988 people's uprising has been scaled down as the relationship with the military government has improved. Indian government officials have become cautious in speaking about the Burma democratic movement and rarely comment on the political situation in Burma under the military regime. Lately, there has been almost no official statement from the Government of India in support of the Burma democracy movement although individual MPs say privately that India is still committed. Burmese democratic activists in India are disappointed that the Indian government is not even giving lip service to their movement.

Indian authorities have, for example, barred some of their political programmes in Delhi by canceling or not allowing them to have particular venues such as Constitution Club, which is a politically influential place in Delhi. On two occasions, the police arrested Burmese activists in Delhi while they were demonstrating against the Burmese military regime.

Mr Deenadayalan from Friends of Burma organization, was very critical of the present position of the Government of India towards Burma. In an interview he said:

Though the Indian state is supposed to be the largest democracy in the world, its expression and manifestation in terms of its relationship with neighbouring countries has shown that it has also been undemocratic in promoting forces which are not democratic. This is very clear from its support to the Burmese Government.

Initially, about 1000 pro-democracy political and student activists came to India with hopes and expectations that they would receive support and assistance from the government and the people of India. During the heat of the nation-wide uprising in 1988, the Indian Embassy in Rangoon openly supported the pro-democracy activists and the Indian Embassy in Rangoon turned its library into clinic for injured demonstrators. Dr I. P. Singh was the Ambassador to Burma and Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister in India at that time.

Indian Embassy officials even tried to mediate between U Nu and Aung San Suu Kyi to agree the formation of a provisional government headed by Aung San Suu Kyi. The Embassy worked with other foreign Embassies to extend recognition to the provisional government if it was formed.

In October 1988, at the United Nations General Assembly, the then External Affairs Minister of India (later Prime Minister) P.V. Narasimha Rao said: "India had watched with growing concern the trials and tribulations faced by the people of Burma with whom the people of India are bound by close ties of history and culture". When the Burma pro-democracy activists reached the Manipur and Mizoram states of India towards the end of 1988, the Government of India announced that it would not turn back the student refugees from Burma and that it would give them shelter as long as their lives were in danger in Burma.

The government of Manipur on its part set up the "Burmese Refugee Camp" (BRC) at Leikhun in Chandel district. The camp is about 64 kilometres away from the Indo-Burmese border. The government of Mizoram also established a refugee camp at Champhai, which is about 24 kilometres from the border. Although the refugee camps established were virtually concentration camps surrounded by barbed wire and armed soldiers, the local people extended whatever assistance available to them to the Burmese activists.

When some of the activists tried to leave the camps, they were arrested by the police and put into jail for months. At that time, Indian human rights lawyers such as Nandita Haksar in Delhi and Shelley Chara and Koteswar Singh in Manipur helped them in their release from the illegal detention.

India was initially hesitant to allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to extend refugee status to the Burmese activists when they moved to Delhi from the border areas after 1989–90. But, with the intervention of some intellectuals and pressure groups, the Indian government did not object when the UNHCR office in Delhi started recognizing the Burmese activists as “person(s) of concern” and issued refugee certificates in early 1990.

On 10 November 1990, two Rangoon University students hijacked a plane of Thai International Airway from Bangkok to Calcutta to draw the international attention to the plight of the Burmese people. After the nine-hour hijacking drama, the two students gave themselves up to the Indian authorities. They were arrested under the Anti-Hijacking Act and sent to the Dum Dum Central Jail in Calcutta. However, the people of West Bengal extended their unconditional support to the Burmese students and the People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) provided two High Court lawyers to fight the case. Besides providing legal assistance, the PUCL extended moral and material support to these young students while they were in jail. After three months in the jail, these two Burmese students were released on bail with the support of the people of India. Many called for their release, and 38 Members of Parliament signed the letter requesting the Prime Minister of India give them political asylum in India.

With the advice of Rajiv Gandhi, some political leaders and intellectuals formed an India–Myanmar Friendship Society in late 1988 with an aim to strengthen the people-to-people relationship between India and Burma. It was led by K.R. Narayanan, a former Ambassador to Burma (later President of India).

Leaders of the various political parties and statesmen of India expressed solidarity with the struggle for democracy in Burma at a meeting of the India–Myanmar Friendship Society held at New Delhi on 20 June 1990. In his inaugural address, the eminent statesman P.N. Haksar, former Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission of India, characterized the Burmese people’s struggle in the context of a “century of turbulence and massive awakening to the cause of human liberty”. “Tied not only by history but by geography and common aspirations, Indians should rejoice in the fact that the people of Burma are overwhelmingly asserting their desire for liberty and political democracy”, Haksar said.

The All India Radio (Burmese Service) was notably supportive of the Burma pro-democracy movement in this period and even criticized Ne Win by name in its broadcasting. When the Supervisor of AIR (Burmese Service) asked Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi about the Burma democracy movement in 1988, Rajiv Gandhi responded that: “We have to strengthen the aspirations of the people of Burma”. And from then onwards till mid-1991, AIR Burmese Service broadcast 10-minute “Burma Current Affairs” which were so popular in Burma that the Burmese government retaliated with furious attacks against AIR and Government of India in its state-controlled media.

When Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1991, India was among the first countries to convey its congratulatory message to her:

The news has been greeted with joy and pride throughout India. It is a most timely and an apt recognition of the non-violent struggle launched by the people of Myanmar for democracy and respect for human rights under the able leadership of Ms. Suu Kyi.
Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao.

The India–Myanmar Friendship Society organized a function to felicitate Aung San Suu Kyi *in absentia* in New Delhi on 6 November 1992. Speaking at the function, Minister of External Affairs Natwar Singh (later responsible for foreign affairs in the Congress Party of India) said that if the Burmese government continued to debar the elected representatives from running the country, the Indian government should recall its Ambassador from Myanmar. He urged the Indian government to

snap diplomatic relations with the Burmese government if the latter continued the incarceration of Aung San Suu Kyi.

In fact, the government demanded unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi when she was put under house arrest on 20 July 1989. On 15 March 1993, Dinesh Singh, the Minister of External Affairs, stated in the Indian Parliament:

We have repeatedly called upon the Government of Myanmar both on our own and in consonance with other like-minded countries, to release immediately and unconditionally the Nobel Laureate Mrs Aung San Suu Kyi. The latest instance of our efforts in this direction was the support extended by us by a UN resolution on the situation in Myanmar in December 1992, calling on that country to restore democracy and release Mrs Suu Kyi.

However, the real attitude of the government seems to be ambivalent. The Indian government does not give financial assistance to Burma pro-democracy activists in India, although Indian intelligence personnel occasionally give money and materials to Burmese democracy leaders more or less in exchange for information.

Genuine support and solidarity with the Burma democratic movement does come from many of the Indian people, such as lawyers, musicians, journalists, political and human rights activists, women activists, trade union leaders, Members of Parliament and students as well as from some non-governmental organizations.¹⁷⁷ In 1993, a Friends of Burma organization was formed by concerned citizens to create an awareness of the need in India for supporting the cause of democracy in Burma and Burma pro-democracy activists in India in particular. It consisted of people from different walks of life, such as journalists, human rights activists, social and political activists, trade union leaders and professors.

Apart from the support from political and intellectual quarters, Burma democracy activists received help from the Indian immigrants who were driven from Burma to India by nationalization measures. Thousands of these Indian immigrants settled down at Janta Quarters of Janak Puri in New Delhi, and they extended help and assistance to the Burmese activists on their arrival.

In February 1992, when the new Ambassador of Burma presented his credentials to the President of India, Mr Venkatraman “expressed concern over the delay and uncertainty in forming a popular government in Myanmar and he hoped for an early and peaceful transition to democracy in the country”. It was against this background that India decided to allow the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) to open its office in New Delhi in July 1992.

India conferred the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding for 1993 to Aung San Suu Kyi. Describing her as a “symbol of peace and friendship as well as symbol of challenge to injustice the world over”, the Vice-President of India K.R. Narayanan said that Aung San Suu Kyi has emphasized the importance of human values in today’s world obsessed with economic and materialistic values.

The Citation of the Award said,

¹⁷⁷ For example, on 30 November 1992, a meeting entitled “Indian students in solidarity with the struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma” was jointly organized by the various Indian students organizations in New Delhi. At the meeting, Indian students adopted a resolution in which they expressed “deep concern” over the continuation of the military rule in Burma and violation of human rights by the junta. They urged the Burmese military government to free all political prisoners and demanded the restoration of democracy. Many well-known political leaders including Members of Parliament and Cabinet Minister V.C. Shukla attended the meeting and delivered speeches.

Amid the turbulence of an era in transition, Aung San Suu Kyi adhered strictly to a peaceful struggle in her espousal of democracy in her country Myanmar. Her belief in Mahatama Gandhi's philosophy has sanctified the campaign for democracy in her own country. By conferring the Jawaharlal Nehru Award on Aung San Suu Kyi, India pays tribute to a courageous torchbearer of this tradition of peace and non-violence; and to a luminous example of the indomitable human spirit that can change the course of history.

Although some members of the government in later years played down the award to Aung San Suu Kyi as "an award to an individual for her contribution to the cause of liberalism and human rights",¹⁷⁸ the award was seen as a clear message to the Burmese government in particular that India stands with democracy movement in Burma.

On 8 August 1998, at a joint meeting in New Delhi, six political parties of India re-committed their support to the Burma struggle for democracy. More than 75 MPs, in the same month, signed a letter urging the Burmese government restore democracy in Burma.

On 17 February 1999 Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh confirmed that "India is committed to the security and freedom of the Burmese who are taking shelter in India".

The most active support has come from George Fernandes, a trade unionist-turned Member of Indian Parliament. He has allowed a Burmese student organization to function from his official residence, i.e. 3, Krishna Menon Marg in New Delhi, since 1992. In January 1996, he organized an International Convention for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma in New Delhi to bring together those involved in or supporting the struggle of the Burmese people from all over the world.

In conclusion, India has faced and continues to face a dilemma over its policy towards the democratic movement of Burma. The Indian foreign policy establishment believes that India must have normal relations with whosoever is in power in Burma. On the other hand, India has not abolished totally its hope for restoration of democratic government in its neighbour and maintains that it is committed to it.

VIII. Suggestions for Burma pro-democracy activists

As one Indian journalist noted, the ASEAN policy of constructive engagement with the Burmese military regime has now given the international community some leeway in dealing with the junta, and ASEAN policy has encouraged India to promote the idea of engagement with the ruling government in Burma. It can be assumed that the Burmese regime will be more and more acceptable in the international arena even if the United States and European Union continue to isolate the junta.

Many Indian policy-makers have a perception that the Burmese democratic movement is highly influenced by "Western interests and powers". They think that the NLD and democratic movement is closer towards the Western countries in their approach than to India and other Asian countries. If Burma pro-democracy groups want to get India's active support, they will definitely have to convince the Indian political leaders that the Burma democracy movement needs India's support as well as the support of other countries in the region.

When we talked with Indian political leaders and NGO personnel, they mentioned that the NLD/NCGUB leaders seldom communicated with them. For example, Former Prime Minister Chandra Sheikhar, who was sympathetic to the Burmese democratic movement, told us that he did not receive any communications from the NLD/NCGUB leaders in India. He only received communications from the Burmese student groups based in India. Hence, it is important for the

¹⁷⁸ Foreign Minister Pranab Mukharjee on 1996 Singapore trip.

leadership of the democracy movement to maintain regular communications through occasional meetings with the political leadership of India.

In fact, it is useful to approach the Indian political leaders while they are in opposition and bureaucrats while they are out of service. Support from the opposition political parties and leaders is crucial for any resolution on foreign policy matters in the Indian Parliament.

It is clear that the governments of India and Burma, in their own interests, will work together even more closely in the future. India's urgent interest at the moment is not the restoration of democracy in Burma but to get cooperation from the ruling military regime in Burma in military and economic fields. Burma pro-democracy groups must be aware of this fact. They should, from time to time, ask the Indian authorities to use bilateral and multilateral meetings to talk with the Burmese leaders for implementing concrete measures towards the restoration of democracy in Burma.

In India, many people who are aware of the Burma situation, including bureaucrats and politicians, are sympathetic to Aung San Suu Kyi and the democracy movement. But the Burma pro-democracy activists have not been able to translate this sympathy into an action-oriented solidarity movement to support either the democratic movement in Burma or their campaigns and activities in India. Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD party should maintain a direct communication link with some of the important political leaders in India.

At one level, the pro-democracy groups have to carry on campaigning to increase awareness and support from the people of India in general and the people in the border states of India, such as Manipur and Mizoram States, in particular. The governments of these border states are important as seen in 1988–89. When Burmese student activists entered into India after the military crackdown in Burma, the Central Government directed the two state governments to house the activists in refugee camps.

Although the Government of India is now engaging a "working relationship" with the military regime in Burma, there is a section of government, notably India's external intelligence wing – Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) – which keeps working with Burma pro-democracy groups for better cooperation. The democracy activists need to utilize this channel to influence the policy of the Government of India towards active support of the democracy movement.

Moreover, it is important to widen the campaigns of pro-democracy groups to other South Asian countries and Southeast Asian countries to support the democratic movement because what other countries think or do with the military regime in Burma naturally influences the policy-makers in India.

Apart from these, Burma pro-democracy groups should themselves find some kind of unified approach in articulating their demands for a democratic Burma. There is a widespread apprehension among the political circles in India that Burma democracy groups are highly divided.

Generally speaking, in India at this moment, there is no strong movement to fight for moral values and idealistic politics. Hence, there has to be a conscious and very clear campaign creating solidarity with the struggle for democracy in Burma. For example, creating solidarity with women groups, trade unions, student groups is important.

The Indian public will be more active if they consider that Burma's democracy and the issues relating to Burma are important for India. In mobilizing public opinion in India, pro-democracy groups should highlight the fact that establishment of a democratic government in Burma will serve India's interests in the long term.

To get support and solidarity from the government and the people of India the pro-democracy groups of Burma could:

1. Maintain regular communications with Indian political parties and their leaders, policy research institutes and experts on Burma, intellectuals and NGOs in India, and organize occasional meetings with them on the situation of Burma;
2. Organize campaigns and programmes to increase awareness among the general public on the democracy movement in Burma and mobilize the public opinion;
3. Keep in regular touch with the media personnel and journalists, as the media in India tend to be sympathetic to the democratic movement of Burma;
4. Keep in regular contact with the embassy in Rangoon; the Indian Ambassador in Rangoon plays quite critical role in India's policy towards Burma;
5. Use the two Burma support groups formed by interested individuals in mobilizing Indian public opinion. The two groups are: a) Friends of Burma organization and b) Friends of Democracy in Burma. The Indo-Myanmar Friendship Society is not functioning any more.
6. Lobby the members of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs as the committee plays a role in making India's foreign policy;
7. Approach the Indian Embassies in foreign countries and make them aware of the ongoing political situation in Burma;
8. Lobby the regional and small parties for their support; India is entering into a coalition politics era and regional parties play quite important role in forming the government in the centre.
9. NLD (LA)/NCGUB in particular should strengthen itself by getting other Burma activists involved in its activities and organization; NLD (LA)/ NCGUB in India is a weak political force although it has more financial strength compared with other pro-democracy groups.

IX. Conclusions

The major shift in India's foreign policy towards Burma in the 1990s is related to some of the following factors:

- The country's insurgency problem in the Northeast has increased.
- India wants to conform with ASEAN rather than the Western countries.
- Economic aspects have become a more important factor in its foreign policy.
- India thinks that by increasing cooperation with the regime in Burma, it can partly detach the junta from Chinese influence.

India's Burma policy must also be seen in the context of the evolution of India's foreign policy and the changes in the foreign affairs establishment in India.

In Nehru's era, both globalism and regionalism were present in India's foreign policy. India was active in international affairs and it took a stance in moral and political questions around the world. However, through the years, a trend has emerged where the relative importance of globalism has slowly declined

while regionalism and interest-oriented nationalism have acquired a much larger and decisive place in India's foreign policy preoccupations. This became forceful in the 1990s.

Moreover, the changing political leaders and unstable political governance in India contribute much to India's leeway in international affairs. The leaders after Nehru did not really have the vision to plan the framework of a new international role that would take into account the new situation. Although Indira Gandhi did make some attempts to seek a more global role, her personality and particularly her Emergency Rule in India did not convince the world leaders that she was a peacemaker. While orienting India's policy even more in a regional direction, Rajiv Gandhi evinced a far greater interest in global affairs than his mother did. It was Rajiv Gandhi who helped the campaigns against the apartheid regime in South Africa, and who was actively involved in supporting Burma democracy groups in his last days of power.

But international role-playing and involvement virtually disappeared in India foreign policy after Rajiv Gandhi. The successive Prime Ministers after him were either not interested in international affairs or were too encumbered with domestic politics. The governments after 1989 were either minority governments or coalition governments, and they were generally preoccupied with making the government survive or were heavily involved in internal affairs. The political attention naturally shifted to what was happening within the country from what was happening outside.

A coalition government, by its very nature, makes it exceedingly difficult for the Prime Minister or Foreign Minister to exercise the same degree of authority as in a one-party government.

The growing lack of interest in international affairs among political leaders and in the manifestation of political parties contributes to India's non-active foreign policy. Although the Indian Parliament is important in foreign policy-making, the majority of members are not really exposed to foreign affairs and their basic interests are tied to their constituency and region.

Not surprisingly, the Indian external intelligence organization – Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) – has played a crucial role in India's foreign policy as it has the task of monitoring all aspects of foreign intelligence. While formally holding an important diplomatic position in the Indian missions abroad, RAW officials collect information not only on the country where they are stationed but also on all important international developments. The Director has easy access to the Prime Minister and RAW played a crucial role in training members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) when India decided to use them against the Sri Lanka government.

Moreover, after Rajiv Gandhi, the decision-making process in the foreign ministry of India was changed. It was decentralized with most of the routine, visible and macro decisions taken principally by the bureaucrats in the Ministry of External Affairs, to which the minister generally gave a stamp of approval. Bureaucracy has now become more active than ever before in making foreign policy. It gathers and accesses the information, highlights the problems, frames the alternative solutions and operationalizes the actions.

Although the task and importance of the Ministry of External Affairs remains crucial, the increasing globalization of India's economy has added the need for greater coordination among the ministries in policy-making, particularly between the Foreign Ministry, Commerce Ministry, Defence Ministry and Finance Ministry.

The Political Affairs Committee of India is usually comprised of Prime Minister, Defence Minister, Commerce Minister, Finance Minister and Food and Agriculture Minister. Policy Planning and Review Committee under the Cabinet is comprised of the Foreign Secretary, Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee and Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce.

In India, a new coalition government led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the general elections in September 2000. George Fernandes' Samata Party is a key coalition partner in the government. The current government is continuing the previous government's policy of having a "working relationship" with the Burmese military government.

However, there is overwhelming support found among the Members of Parliament in India towards the Burma democracy movement and Aung San Suu Kyi. In a petition launched by Burmese student activists in India in November this year, more than 50 MPs belonging to various political parties (both ruling and opposition parties) have signed in expressing their support for a "MP Declaration on Burma" which calls upon the Burmese military government to release imprisoned Members of Parliament and political prisoners in Burma.

The signed declaration, a worldwide MP declaration, also calls upon the Burmese junta to recognize the right of the duly elected representatives of Burma to convene the parliament and immediately cease all restrictions against them. The petition, which is still underway at the time of writing this addition, is expected to be endorsed by more than a hundred Members of Parliament in India.

Bibliography

1. Dutt VP, *India's Foreign Policy In a Changing World*; TOWN: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1999.
2. *Indian foreign policy in the 1990s*; Edited by K. Raman Pillai, TOWN: Radical Publishers, YEAR.
3. Bajpai US, *India and its Neighborhood*; Lancer International in association with India International Centre, YEAR
4. *South East Asian Affairs*, 1980; Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Heinemann Asia.
5. *Indian Defence Review*, Jan.–Mar. 1999, Vol. 14 (1).
6. Khin A, *Burma 1979: Socialism with Foreign Aid and Strict neutrality*, TOWN: Publishers, YEAR.
7. Pakem B, *India Burma Relations*, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, OMSONS Publications, 1992.
8. Singh US, *Burma and India: 1948–1962*, TOWN: Oxford & IBH Publishing Company, 1979
9. Desai WS, *India and Burma*, TOWN: Orient Longmans Ltd., 1954
10. *Asian strategic Review: 1995–96*; Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA)
11. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, in *S.E. Asia and India's liberation War in 1943–45*; by Dr Motilal Bhargava, TOWN: Vishwavidya Publishers, YEAR.
12. Sareen TR Dr, *Japan and the Indian National Army*, TOWN: Agam Prakashan. 1986.
13. Dixit Kumar R, *South East Asia in India Policy, 1966–77*, Radha Publications, YEAR.
14. *India and South East Asia, 1947–60*; Librairie Droz, 1963.
15. *Indian Foreign Policy – Agenda for the 21st Century*, Vol. 2; Foreign Service Institute in association with Konark publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1998.
16. Kapur H, *India's foreign policy, 1947–92 Shadows and Substance*, TOWN: PUBLISHER, 1994.
17. Khana VN, *Foreign Policy of India*; Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1997.

18. Dutt VP, *India's Foreign Policy*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1984.
19. Josh HS, *India's Foreign Policy*; Surjeet Publications, 1989
20. Dixit JN, *My South Block Years; Memoirs of a foreign secretary*; UBS Publishers' distributors Ltd., 1996.
21. *Views on Indo-Burma relationship*, MIZZIMA News Group, 27 September 1998
22. Indo-Myanmar Business, Volume 1, No. 2, July to September 1998
23. Indo-Burma Bilateral Trade, MIZZIMA News Group, July 1999.
24. *Free Suu Kyi, Free Burma*, The Burma Students Movement in India, 20 July 1994; All Burma Students League.
25. Myint S, Will India continue to stand for democracy in Burma?, in *Irrawaddy Journal*, April 1999.
26. Strategic Analysis, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) Vol. XVIII, No. 1; April 1995.
27. Treaty of Friendship between India and the Union of Burma, Rangoon, 7 July 1951.
28. Boundary Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of the Union of Burma, Rangoon, 10 March 1967.
29. *Times of India*, 12 December 1995.
30. *Times of India*, 31 January 1992.
31. *The Hindu*, 7 November 1997.
32. *The Hindu*, 8 November 1997.
33. *FIST News Bulletin*, All Burma Students League, December 1995.

In addition information has come from the following interviews with the authors:

34. Interview with Ms. Jaya Jaitely, Samata Party on 26 June 1999.
35. Interview with Mr Sumit Chakravarty, Friends of Burma on 5 July 1999.
36. Interview with former Prime Minister Mr Chandra Sheikhar on 7 July 1999.
37. Interview with former foreign secretary Mr Eric Gonselvet on 21 July 1999.
38. Interview with former foreign secretary Mr J.N. Dixit on 13 July 1999.
39. Interview with former foreign secretary Mr Muchkund Dubey on 17 July 1999.
40. Interview with Prof. G.N. Jha, JNU on 27 July 1999.
41. Interview with Dr Udai Bhanu Singh, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) on 13 August 1999.

5. Thai–Burma relations

Kavi Chongkittavorn

I. Thai perceptions of Burma

To comprehend the nature and complexity of Thai-Burmese relations is to understand the transformation of their friendship over the past 431 years. Thais have a range of perceptions about Burma, from a historical notion of a devilish nation, to a more recent nostalgic view of the “good old Burma”. Thais describe such nostalgia as “hooi-ha-adeed”.

The view of Burma as a devilish nation can be traced back to the fall of Ayudhya. In 1569, Burmese troops invaded Ayudhya and occupied it for 34 years before the Siamese King Naresuan won the decisive battle in Nong Sarai and retook the capital city from Burma. But then again in 1767, the Burmese King Bayinnaung ransacked Ayudhya. After a prolonged fight, the city fell miserably to Burma. It was this defeat and the huge damage the Burmese victors inflicted on the Thai losers that has been etched in their memory since then. Literally, every valuable in Ayudhya was either torched or taken away by the Burmese troops. While Thais remember Naresuan’s heroic victory, they have not forgotten the aggression and barbaric acts of the Burmese invaders, and the name of King Bayinnaung, has continued to be a source of hatred. To rub salt into Thai wounds, the Burmese junta in 1996 erected a statue of King Bayinnaung opposite Ta Songyang, Tak, as if to remind Thailand of the bitter history of the two countries. Ask any Thai student who Thailand’s enemy Number One is. The answer will inevitably be Burma. This historical memory further complicates Thai-Burmese relations.

It was not until the fall of Ayudhya in 1767 that Siam’s political and intellectual leaders started to realise the unbridled violence of the Burmese and the resultant perils to Thailand, and showed more concern for investigating and reconstruction the past circumstances of their hostilities with this neighbour.

Dr Sunait Chutintaranond, 1995.

Despite this view of Burma as a devilish nation, the two countries managed to co-exist without major wars before Britain colonized Burma in 1826.¹⁷⁹

While Thailand was consolidating its statehood between 1850 and 1970, the nation, its leaders in particular, viewed Burma as a symbol of failure for being unable to combat the forces of colonization. They put the blame on the Burmese leaders. Prominent historian Somdet Kromphraya Damrong used this theme to explain Burma in his writings. “Thieu Muang Phrama” or “Travelling inside Burma” was a typical work. He praised the ability of Thai rulers over the Burmese as they could protect the country from the West’s control. He viewed the Burmese leaders as corrupt and selfish, without any leadership. In most of his work related to Burma, he used this theme to highlight the differences between Thailand and Burma. Some of these views were taken from Western authors, such as James Scott. Other Thai authors, such as Luang Vichitvathakarn and Kukrit Pramoj, also entertained this negative perception in their writings about Burma. Such stereotyping of Burma has also been perpetuated through popular TV period-dramas, which recycle characters and scripts that belittle Burmese leaders. During World War II, the Thai government used nationalism as a theme and as

¹⁷⁹ The colonization pushed Thailand and Burma to redefine their common border. Thus the 1909 treaty was established, which currently serves as a legal instrument to demarcate the 2400-kilometre long border.