



India's prime Minister Narendra Modi visit to Myanmar: Renewing Relations

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to explore new beginning of Indo- Myanmar relationships which reached of its peaks during India's prime minister Narendra Modi visit to Myanmar, where he signed Eleven agreements and also agreed in varied areas such as HRD, election commissions maritime cooperation, culture, health, police, and press councils. Discussions between the two sides focused on issues concerning to security, terrorism, boundary, trade and investment ,defence collaboration, HRD, infrastructure-development projects, and energy. The paper also attempts to explain to political and economic prospective of Indo- Myanmar relations. This paper also attempt to highlighted neighborhood policy of Narendra Modi.

Index terms Narendra Modi, Indo- Myanmar relations

Introduction

Myanmar had approach to accomplish critical significance in Asian strategic concerned in the since its origin. A series of developments, both internal and external, had escalated concerns about the long term security, stability and independence of mainland Southeast Asia's largest country. Myanmar's strategic value was situated of its geographical location, a country having an area of approximately 678,500 square kilometers and a population of over 48.8 million, lying at the point of three regions within Asia-East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia, Myanmar also had the undesirable situation of being straddled by two Asian giants viz. India and China. It had a significant coastline in the South along the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea,



which provided exit to the Indian Ocean. It was also placed in a region which had witnessed wonderful economic growth since self-government.

Objectives

1. To study Indo- Myanmar relations in context of Narendra Modi visit.
2. To explain political prospective and Economic and prospective in context of Narendra Modi visit

Methodology

The methodology undertaken in this research work entitled: “India’s prime Minister Narendra Modi visit to Myanmar: Renewing Relations” includes historical and analytical methods. The historical records and official document are examined: primary as well as secondary sources that are available on the subject have been used. A primary source includes policy documents, reports, official statements and interview of policy makers. In the secondary sources, the major works of different distinguished authors in the field have also been included and analysed.

Discussion

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came into power in May 2014 after defeats the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in the general elections, marks the new era of India’s approach towards her neighbours. The Indian general election of 2014 was held to constitute the 16th Lok Sabha, electing members of parliament for all 543 parliamentary constituencies of India. The National Democratic Alliance won a sweeping victory, taking 336 seats and Narendra Modi becomes prime minister of India. ⁱ

After Narendra Modi’s wave, some media members called Narendra Modi the “Shinzo Abe of India” while the westerners fear him as the “Indian Putin.” Many believe that he might emerge as



the “Indian Deng Xiaoping.” Time would tell which name suits Modi’s best. However, Modi have a proactive foreign policy, possibly one driven by economy. Modi promised ‘development and governance’ to the peoples of India during his election campaign and he promised the peoples of India for the development and goverances. The Myanmar economy too can harvest the benefits because it was closely linked with the Indian economy.ii

On 19th May, 2014 Narendra Modi was congrulated by president Thein Sein during the Lok Shaba elections. The Government of Myanmar and the general public, offered best wishes to Modi and his party (Bharatiya Janata Party) for the outstanding victory and urged him to work together to strengthen the bilateral ties between the two countries india and Myanmar I. Thein Sein hoped that India will develop under the leadership of Modi. "We are ready to welcome you here," said Thein Sein to Modi. While accepting the congratulatory message and invitation, Modi replies, Thein Sein that he was also interested to work with the Myanmar leadership to further strengthens the relationship between the two countries. iii

Modi’s Neighbourhood Policy

The Prime Minister has persecute, anticipatory, and innovative foreign policy that was aligned with our Government's main goal of accelerating national economic development; and to fulfill India’s global responsibilities as the world's most populous youth nation and largest democracy. Samman – dignity and honour; Samvad – greater engagement and dialogue; Saiddhi – shared prosperity; Suraksha – regional and global security; and Sanskriti evam Sabhyata – cultural and civilizational linkages; these five themes have become the Panchait - new pillars of our foreign policy.iv

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government under the Prime Minister Narendra Modi had invited the head of states from the neighbouring countries at its swearing in ceremony. The move had been welcomed and seen as a beginning of a new era in the India’s policy towards neighbours and later Prime Minister also made a proposal for setting up a SAARC Bank, and SAARC satellite.



The manifesto of BJP is to assure that they would make friendly ties with all of India's neighbours but would not hesitate from taking stances and strong stride. There should be no compromise on the issues of national security and territoriality. It is a crystal clear signal to all neighbours. Modi's image as a determined leader and his party's 'nationalist' stand that Modi would be different from the previous governments India has had.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi embarks on an official bilateral visit to Myanmar from September 5, 2017

Prime Minister Narendra Modi embarks on an official bilateral visit to Myanmar from September 5. This follows upon his earlier ASEAN-related visit in November 2014 and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit in May 2012. Though overdue, taking into account Mr. Modi's 'Neighborhood First', 'Act East' and diaspora policies, international and domestic developments since then have clarified the political context of the visit to an extent not possible earlier. These include the impact of elections in Myanmar in November 2015 and in the U.S. in late 2016 that brought Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) to power in Myanmar and Donald Trump in the U.S.; the finalization of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its assertiveness in the South China Sea; the India-China border stand-off; and Myanmar's travails over the peace process, the Rohingya issue and the economy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and 9th East Asia Summit (Nov 11-13, 2014, Nay Pyi Taw). During the visit, PM called on then President U Thein Sein, met Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and interacted with over 300 members of the PIO community. EAM Sushma Swaraj attended 4th East Asia Summit FMM and 21st ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial Meeting (August 08-10, 2014, NPT) and visited on August 11, 2014. In a demonstration of India's support to the peace process NSA attended the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement ceremony as signatory witness on October 15, 2015.

The State Visit to Myanmar of Prime Minister Narendra Modi (5-7 September 2017), when he visited Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Bagan, further led to strengthening of political relationship as well as enhancing people to people ties. Eleven agreements were signed in varied areas such as



maritime cooperation, culture, health, police, HRD, election commissions and press councils. Discussions between the two sides focused on issues pertaining to security, terrorism, boundary, defence cooperation, HRD, infrastructure-development projects, energy, and trade and investment. He addressed the Indian community in Yangon, where is highlighted the historic ties as well as unveiled initiatives of interest to the community. India's commitment to Myanmar's development stands at over US\$ 1.726 billion, which is more than the assistance offered by many other countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 6 announced that India will grant gratis visa to Myanmarese citizens wanting to visit the country. Mr. Modi made the announcement during his joint press statement with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi after the two leaders held wide ranging talks in Nay Pyi Taw. "I am pleased to announce that we have decided to grant gratis (no-cost) visa to all the citizens of Myanmar who want to visit India," Mr. Modi said. He also announced that India has decided to release 40 Myanmar citizens, currently lodged in various jails in India. "We hope that they will soon be able to meet their families in Myanmar," the Prime Minister said.

Modi also asserted that India stands by Myanmar amid the challenges the country is facing. "I am confident that in future we will work together to create a strong and close partnership for mutual benefits," Modi said. Earlier, during the delegation-level talks, Mr. Modi said, "We would like to contribute to Myanmar's development efforts as part of our Sabka saath sabka vikaas initiative." He said deepening the relationship with Myanmar was a priority for India, as a neighbour and also in the context of the 'Act East Policy'.vi

he prime minister said he will have the opportunity to meet leaders bilaterally on the sidelines of the BRICS meet. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday left on a three-day visit to China to attend the BRICS Summit which he hoped would support the agenda for a stronger partnership among the member countries, amid strain in Sino-India ties over a host of issues. On the second leg of his five-day tour, Mr. Modi will travel to Myanmar for his first bilateral visit with an aim of charting a roadmap for closer cooperation between the two countries in areas which include security and counter-terrorism. In a statement yesterday, the prime minister said he was looking forward to productive discussions and positive outcomes at the BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-



China-South Africa) Summit in Xiamen city, building upon the results of last year's Goa Summit between him and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The visit comes days after India and China managed to end the 73-day-long Doklam standoff. From Xiamen, he will travel to Myanmar on September 5 before returning to the country on September 7. A possible meeting between Mr. Modi and Chinese leader Xi on the margins of the Summit will be a major focus at a time when ties between the two major powers have nosedived over a number of issues including the Doklam stand-off. "I look forward to building upon the results and outcomes of the Goa Summit. I also look forward to productive discussions and positive outcomes that will support the agenda of a stronger BRICS partnership under the chairmanship of China,"

The prime minister said he will have the opportunity to meet leaders bilaterally on the sidelines of the BRICS meet. Replying to a specific question, the Ministry of External Affairs on Friday did not rule out a possible meeting between Modi and Chinese president on the margins of the Summit, saying it is a common practice to arrange bilateral meetings on the sidelines of such multilaterals..

"India attaches high importance to the role of BRICS that has begun a second decade of its partnership for progress and peace. BRICS has important contributions to make in addressing global challenges and upholding world peace and security,"

The prime minister said he was looking forward to engaging with leaders of nine other countries, including BRICS partners, in an Emerging Markets and Developing Countries Dialogue, being hosted by Mr. Xi on September 5 "We will also interact with the BRICS Business Council represented by captains of industry from all the five countries," he said. About his first bilateral visit to Myanmar, Modi said both countries will look at strengthening existing cooperation in areas of security and counter-terrorism, trade and investment, infrastructure and energy, and culture. He hoped his visit will help in charting a roadmap for closer cooperation between the two countries. The prime minister said both countries will review developments in bilateral ties with a focus on "extensive" programme of development cooperation and socio-economic

assistance India is undertaking in Myanmar. Both sides will also explore new areas of cooperation, the statement said. Mr. Modi said he was looking forward to paying a visit to the famed heritage city of Bagan, where the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has done a “stellar work” in renovating the Ananda Temple. The ASI will be undertaking further restoration work on a number of pagodas and murals that were damaged in an earthquake last year, he said.vii

Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrapped up his Myanmar trip on Thursday, visiting to the ‘mazar’ of the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar and the 2,500-year-old Shwedagon pagoda and performing puja at the Kalibari Temple here. On the last day of his three-day visit to the Buddhist-majority country, Mr. Modi visited the pagoda, considered the pinnacle of Myanmar’s cultural heritage. He planted a Bodhi tree sapling in the complex. “Delighted to visit Myanmar’s cultural landmark, the Shwedagon Pagoda,.

The 2,500-year-old pagoda, located west of the Royal Lake, enshrines strands of Buddha’s hair and other holy relics. It is covered with hundreds of gold plates. The top of the stupa is encrusted with 4,531 diamonds, the largest of which is a 72-carat diamond. Modi also visited the Bogyoke Aung San Museum where he was accompanied by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

“I thank Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for the special gesture of showing me around the Bogyoke Aung San Museum. Paid tributes to General Aung San,” Mr. Modi said. He also visited the grave of Bahadur Shah Zafar and paid floral tributes. He tweeted a picture of himself at the Mughal Emperor’s grave. Bahadur Shah Zafar, also a prolific Urdu poet and calligrapher, died aged 87 in the then Rangoon, where he was exiled by the British after the 1857 revolt. Modi paid his respects at the Martyrs’ Mausoleum and performed ‘puja’ at the Kalibari Temple. “ Performed Puja at Yangon’s Kalibari Temple. Feeling extremely blessed,” he tweeted, along with a picture of himself at the temple. , the Prime Minister visited the 12th-century Ananda Temple in the ancient city of Bagan. The temple is being renovated with India’s assistance after it was damaged in a tremor last year viii



The visit is taking place amidst some of the worst violence involving Rohingya militants and the Myanmar security forces ever resulting in a full-fledged international crisis triggered by large-scale, coordinated attacks by Rohingya militants under a recently formed Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA, now designated as ‘terrorists’) against government and security outposts in northern Rakhine state on August 25-26. The attacks and clearance operations against it have resulted in some 400 (and mounting) deaths, mostly Rohingya; widespread arson and burning of villages allegedly by both sides; displacement of thousands within Rakhine state and across the river to Bangladesh; and severe disruption in food and humanitarian supplies. The Modi government has unequivocally condemned the “terrorist” attacks at a time when the security forces and Ms. Suu Kyi herself face heightened international criticism on the handling of the issue. This is likely to resonate in Mr. Modi’s favour in Myanmar.

The visit is also taking place against the backdrop of uncertainties in the future India-China relationship caused by the now defused Doklam stand-off and the BRICS summit. Sensitive to its location between the two Asians giants, Myanmar is keen to leverage the growth potential of good relations with Asia’s two fastest growing economies. But it is also wary of its economic dependence on China, characterized by a largely extractive relationship focused on natural resources and access to the Bay of Bengal where it already has an oil and gas terminal, concession to build a Special Economic Zone and seeks a possibly controlling stake in a natural deep sea harbor at Kyaukpyu that could form part of its ambitious BRI. The shadow of China is thus likely to loom large over the visit. Myanmar would welcome closer economic ties with India to balance and offset its domineering ties with China. Characterizations of a ‘Great Game East’ between India and China are, however, greatly overstated.

Beyond these topical issues, and the issue of Indian insurgent groups in Myanmar, which remain a matter of concern, the optics of Modi’s much anticipated visit will most likely be taken up by the fundamentals of the bilateral relationship: the substantive development partnership, trade issues, and revival of cultural and people-to-people ties. Defence relations too have been growing steadily, especially between the two armies and navies. Security related talks have been taking place at the National Security Adviser (NSA) level.



A number of bilateral agreements in the areas of capacity building, health, culture, and development, and one on maritime security are on the anvil, building on India's nearly \$2 billion development partnership with Myanmar so far. These cover large directly funded and executed connectivity infrastructure projects like the Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan Multi-modal Transport and Transit Project; high value capacity and human development projects like the Myanmar Institute of Information Technology in Mandalay; more modest ones in industry, IT, health, entrepreneurship and language training; small border area development projects in Chin and Naga areas of Myanmar; and soft lines of credit for other infrastructure projects amounting to nearly \$750 million. Much of this still remains to be utilized.

Though this may not be adequately realized even in Myanmar, few countries are undertaking such large infrastructure and human development projects out of government funds as India is. When they are all completed and fully operational by about 2020, they will amount to a substantial mass and base for an expanded relationship.

Lamentably, the same cannot be said of commercial trade and investments. Both stand on narrow bases, primary agricultural and forest products from Myanmar in the case of trade, and oil and gas in case of investments, underlining a strong need to expand, diversify and upgrade commercial ties in ways that also contribute to Myanmar's development needs and meet India's \$3 billion trade target set in 2012.^{ix}

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Myanmar President Thein Sein, at their meeting at Nay Pyi Taw, also discussed other economic ties and cooperation in the oil and gas sector, as well as the need for more cultural contacts, including sending Myanmar students to Nalanda University. The meeting was one of more than 20 bilateral ones Mr. Modi is scheduled to have during his 10-day, three-nation tour during which he will attend the ASEAN-India summit, the East Asia Summit and the G-20 and Pacific Island Leaders-India summits. During the tour, he is expected to engage with leaders of 40 countries. On Wednesday, Mr. Modi will meet Myanmar democracy icon and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as well as leaders of Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea and Singapore.



He will also attend the ASEAN-India summit with 10 other countries, where a free trade agreement is being discussed. “ASEAN is at the core of our Act East Policy and at the centre of our dream of an Asian century, characterized by cooperation and integration,” Mr. Modi said in a statement earlier.x

Conclusion

The new government’s policy of ‘first priority has produced goodwill however; there was no need to flow with tides of hope. Almost all Prime Ministers in the past had something or other for the region in India’s bilateral tensions with its neighbours that the most of the proposal could not be yield any result.

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