



# India-Myanmar Connectivity Diplomacy And The Act East Policy: Opportunities And Challenges

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Abstract- In today's global world order the connectivity played a significant role for establishing a better relations among countries which gives a new dimension to the contemporary diplomacy. Particularly in Asia where connectivity plays an important role for strengthening relations with the neighboring countries, it is an important part of the foreign policy of ever countries. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century India tried to strengthening his power at the global level, for that its need to establishing a close relationship with his neighboring countries. For strategic point of view Myanmar occupies an important position its geographical position work as a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asian Nations, so strategically Myanmar is important for India's Act East Policy at the Southeast Asian region. This research article analyzed the connectivity diplomacy between India and Myanmar and how it important for the India's Act East Policy. This study also highlights the importance of the bilateral relation in today's global world order.

Keywords- India, Myanmar, Act East Policy, Southeast Asian Nations, Connectivity Diplomacy, China, Northeastern States of India, Look East Policy.

Introduction- Myanmar occupies a significant position in the India's foreign policy perspective. In today's world one of the defining feature of the modern economy, which reflected its linkages with communities and economy of the nations. Both India and Myanmar shares about 1,643 km long boundary with each other, Myanmar shares boundary with India's four north-eastern states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram which is important from the strategic point of

view for India<sup>1</sup>. The cultural, historical and political ties between both the countries shapes their contemporary relation in the today's geo-political order. In recent times India trying better their connective diplomacy for strengthening its engagement with Myanmar<sup>2</sup>.

In today's global world order connective diplomacy is a way of establishing better relation with other nations through infrastructure development, transport communication, economic integration and regional influence. For investing in roads, railways, ports not only give a boost the economic relation but its create a way for better socio-cultural ties among the nations. For India Myanmar is the gateway to the Southeast Asia and its important from the security point of view<sup>3</sup>. India relationship with Myanmar also significantly influences the landscape and developmental prospect in the Northeast region which is strategically important for India<sup>4</sup>, because it helps in countering the presence of the China in the Northeast region. So strategically, politically and economically Myanmar is important for India for established as a global power in the today's world order.

In 1991 under the priministership of P. V. Narsimha Rao the government of India introduced the Look East Policy for better economic integration and diplomatic relation with its neighboring countries mainly focusing on the South East Asian Nation<sup>5</sup>. However in 2014 this Look East Policy replaced by Act East policy<sup>6</sup> which had a broader concentration on establishing cordial relations with the South East Asian nations not only on economic perspective but also from the socio-cultural perspective. It is a strategic move by the government of India for fostering cultural, economic and political ties with the South East Asian Nations<sup>7</sup>. As Myanmar is a gate way to the South East Asian Nations and it also share a long land border with the India's Northeastern state, so through Myanmar India can established its relationship with the South East Asian Nations which is one of the important aim of the India's Act East Policy. Because Myanmar played a pivotal role in the India's Act East Policy India tries to strengthening its relationship with Myanmar through infrastructure development, road and railways connectivity<sup>8</sup>. Several major infrastructure projects have been initiated among both the countries for better connectivity, among them The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Sittwe deep sea port and inland waterways, Imphal-Mandalay projects are important which strengthen the economic and connectivity relation between these two countries<sup>9</sup>. Through better connectivity in the Northeast region of India it also significantly contributed for the development of the Northeastern states of India, which is economically underdeveloped due to its

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<sup>1</sup> Khaing, K.T., and Tun, T. (2022). Myanmar-India Relations: Focus on India's Act East Policy (2014-2020). Yadanabon University, 22(2).

<sup>2</sup> Haacke, J. (2018). Myanmar and the Geopolitics of Asia. *International Affairs*, 94(2).

<sup>3</sup> Tun, N.T., (2025). Strategic Interplay and Regional Dynamics: Analyzing the Geopolitical Implications of Myanmar-India Relations on Northeast India's Security and Development. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(5).

<sup>4</sup> Tun, N.T., (2025). Strategic Interplay and Regional Dynamics: Analyzing the Geopolitical Implications of Myanmar-India Relations on Northeast India's Security and Development. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(5).

<sup>5</sup> Sumi, T.H, (2024). Connectivity Projects of Nort-East India Under Act East Policy. *Dimapur Government College Journal*.

<sup>6</sup> Sumi, T.H, (2024). Connectivity Projects of Nort-East India Under Act East Policy. *Dimapur Government College Journal*.

<sup>7</sup> Sumi, T.H, (2024). Connectivity Projects of Nort-East India Under Act East Policy. *Dimapur Government College Journal*.

<sup>8</sup> Mohan, C.R. (2015). *Modi's World: Expanding India's sphere of influence*. HarperCollins.

<sup>9</sup> Kanta, C. (2025). Myanmar's Role in India Act East Policy Analysis of Economic and Strategic Dimensions: 2014 to 2024. *International Journal of Creative Research Thought*, 13(3).

geographical constraints<sup>10</sup>. Despite cordial relationship between both the countries and initiation of several projects for better economic and connectivity development but in the recent years both the countries faces different types of challenges such as political instability in Myanmar, slow progress of different connectivity project and the China's factor in the Myanmar and the Northeast region somewhat weaken the relationship between both the countries.

Conceptual Framework of the Study-In this studies the conceptual framework focusing on the connective diplomacy in the present international scenario. In today's world politics the use of connectivity diplomacy is important instrument of country's foreign policies, where many country trying to develop their economic integration and political relation with other countries through the connectivity diplomacy. It is a strategic use of infrastructure development, better transport communication and economic corridor to strengthen its foreign policy. This infrastructure development such as roads, ports and railways play a significant role in shaping the economic relation between the countries<sup>11</sup>. In Asia the strategy of connectivity diplomacy shapes the regional politics, due to growing competition among major powers all the countries want to create a connectivity structure with other countries for strengthening their economic networks. So in Asia the connectivity diplomacy has become a significant feature for economic and political development<sup>12</sup>. Though India wants to maintain its position in Asia so the connectivity diplomacy is very important for India to maintain its healthy relation with his neighboring countries particular with south Asia and south east Asian countries. For that Myanmar play an important role in India's strategic diplomacy, with the help of Myanmar India can established better relation with the South East Asian Nations<sup>13</sup>. Another important dimension of the connectivity diplomacy is economic development at the economic level. Through infrastructure development with Myanmar India can also work for the development of the North Eastern States because its shares land boundary with Myanmar. These types of cross-border connectivity can develop relation between central government and the regional states which create long-term economic development at the domestic level<sup>14</sup>.

Major Connectivity Projects between India and Myanmar- As connectivity initiatives one of the important components of India's Act East Policy, so India trying to use this connectivity diplomacy with Myanmar for strengthening the regional integration and facilitate economic cooperation. Several connectivity projects have been undertaken by both the countries in recent years. Some of the major connectivity projects between these two countries are

- 1) Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project(KMMTP)- The Kaldan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project is one of the important project which was initiated by both the countries for better connectivity between North Eastern states of India and Myanmar's southwestern

<sup>10</sup> Baruah, D.M. (2018). India's Connectivity initiatives in Southeast Asia. Carnegie India.

<sup>11</sup> Chanda, R. (2017). Connectivity and regional integration in Asia. Asia Economic Papers, 16(3).

<sup>12</sup> Pant, H.V. (2016). India's Act East Policy and regional connectivity. Observer Research Foundation Issue Brief.

<sup>13</sup> Haacke, J. (2018). Myanmar and the Geopolitics of Asia. International Affairs, 94(2).

<sup>14</sup> Baruah, D.M. (2018). India's Connectivity initiatives in Southeast Asia. Carnegie India.

coastline<sup>15</sup>. This project was launched in 2008 for creating an alternative route for better economic trade between both the countries. This project involves road, sea and river for better connectivity to enhance regional trade and transportation efficiency. This initiative provides a better way of transportation and reduces time and cost, and provides alternative routes through the northeastern states of India to Myanmar<sup>16</sup>.

- 2) India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway- another important connectivity project between both the countries is India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project. It is one of the important project for India through this project India can smoothly trade with the Southeast Asian countries through Myanmar. It is a road connectivity project that approximately cover 1,360 km road from Manipur states of India to Thailand and Myanmar. The main objective of India for this project is to better trade and transportation with Myanmar and Thailand, and strengthening its strategic and economic presence in Southeast Asia<sup>17</sup>. So this project is an important component of India's Act East Policy<sup>18</sup>.
- 3) India-Myanmar Rail Link (Moreh-Kalay-Mandalya Project)- This project is also an important connectivity project between both the countries that tried to strengthening connectivity and transport between both the countries and with other Asian nation. This rail connectivity expanded from Imphal of India to Moreh of Myanmar<sup>19</sup>.
- 4) Sittwe Port Project- This project is one of the important components of the Kaldan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. That aims to improve better communication between both the countries in the maritime sector for facilitating trade and transportation. The Sittwe Port project is help achieve India's objective under Act East Policy in the maritime sector and enhances regional connectivity<sup>20</sup>.

All these connectivity projects between India and Myanmar develop regional integration and strengthening economic cooperation between both the countries. It also supports India's Act East Policy for creating a close relation with the Southeast Asian nations.

India's Act East Policy and Myanmar's Strategic Role – In India's foreign policy mainly in the Modi government era the Act East Policy occupies a significant, through this policy India want to strengthen its relationship with the Southeast Asian countries and also want to develop its power in this region. This policy emphasizes deeper regional cooperation through trade, connectivity and security collaboration. For successfully implementing the Act East Policy in the Southeast Asian region, its necessary for India to establishing a close and cordial relationship with Myanmar, because for India Myanmar is the gate way for the Southeast Asian region and its also share a long land boundary with

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<sup>17</sup> Sumi, T.H, (2024). Connectivity Projects of North-East India Under Act East Policy. *Dimapur Government College Journal*.

<sup>18</sup> Pant, H.V. (2016). India's Act East Policy and regional connectivity. *Observer Research Foundation Issue Brief*.

<sup>19</sup> Sumi, T.H, (2024). Connectivity Projects of North-East India Under Act East Policy. *Dimapur Government College Journal*.

<sup>20</sup> Yhome, K. (2015). Myanmar and India's Act East Policy. *Observer Research Foundation Issue Brief*.

the India's northeastern states. So Myanmar emerged as a key partner for India to implementing its Act East Policy in the Southeast Asian region<sup>21</sup>. This Act East Policy not only focusing on the economic cooperation but also stress on security collaboration and better connectivity with the Southeast Asian countries<sup>22</sup>. In the Asian region the regional organizations such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, and ASEAN played an important role for not only improved multilateral relation but also improve the bilateral relation with his membering states. Both India and Myanmar are members of different regional organizations such as BIMSTEC and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation<sup>23</sup> by developing connectivity projects and enhancing diplomatic relation with Myanmar India can strengthen its bilateral relation with Myanmar<sup>24</sup>. The relationship with Myanmar for India not only for creating a path way to the Southeast Asian countries but also through Myanmar India can established good relationship with northeastern states which are the underdeveloped states in India. As previously we discussed that Myanmar shares its long borders with the northeastern states of India. So through different connectivity projects India not only improve its trade and transportation with Myanmar but also work for the development of the northeastern states of India. This strategic location of Myanmar in the northeastern region of India plays a crucial role for India's engagement with the northeastern states<sup>25</sup>. Another important aspect of Myanmar in India's Act East Policy is the Indo-Pacific region. As we witnessed growing competition among major power in the Indo-Pacific region, Myanmar became an important partner for enhancing its regional stability in this region. So we can say that Myanmar occupies a central position for India's Act East Policy due its geographical location and role as a gateway to the Southeast Asia. So enhancing connectivity diplomacy, economic cooperation with Myanmar India can also promote its regional integration with the Southeast Asian countries<sup>26</sup>.

**Challenges to India-Myanmar Connectivity Diplomacy-** Despite the strategic importance of both the countries and better economic cooperation but still both the countries faces many types of challenges for creating a better connectivity diplomacy 1) One of the major concern for both the countries is delay in different connectivity project. For that a trust deficit emerged in the India-Myanmar relation. The projected such as Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project and India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project created for better connectivity between both the countries but due to some political and security concern between these countries there is a slowed down in the progress of the project, which also creates challenges for the India's Act East Policy. 2) One of the major challenges for both the countries the ongoing political instability in Myanmar which hampers the connectivity project between both the countries. In 2021 there is a drastic change in the Myanmar political scenario which is turning point for not only Myanmar foreign policy but also for its neighboring countries such

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<sup>22</sup> Mohan, C.R. (2015). Modi's World: Expanding India's sphere of influence. HarperCollins.

<sup>23</sup> Saraf, V. (2024). Overcoming a Strategic Blindspot: India's Turn Towards Myanmar. Takshashila Institution.

<sup>24</sup> Pant, H.V. (2016). India's Act East Policy and regional connectivity. Observer Research Foundation Issue Brief.

<sup>25</sup> Haacke, J. (2018). Myanmar and the Geopolitics of Asia. International Affairs, 94(2).

<sup>26</sup> Haacke, J. (2018). Myanmar and the Geopolitics of Asia. International Affairs, 94(2).

as India<sup>27</sup>. The political transition in Myanmar creates armed conflict, humanitarian crisis and political instability that not only affect the domestic policy of Myanmar but it also affect the states of India whose shares border with Myanmar such as Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh<sup>28</sup>. 3) another important factor that hamper the India-Myanmar relation is the growing relation of Myanmar and China. As a Major power in Asia China wants to show its presence in this region mainly in the Indo-Pacific region therefore they want to create a good relationship with Myanmar through infrastructure project, defense cooperation and economic integration which creates an obstacle for the India-Myanmar relationship<sup>29</sup>. China wants to develop their infrastructure project with Myanmar through the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) which is a counter part to the India's Act East Policy<sup>30</sup>. So for India to maintain its Myanmar cordial relationship with Myanmar and counter the China's Belt Road Initiatives there is a need of better diplomatic efforts, security cooperation and economic integration between both the countries<sup>31</sup>. Lastly one of the major challenges between both the countries growing cross-border refugee movement. Because both the countries shares border with each other there shown a significant amount of refugees movement between both the countries which creates a political and security concern among both the countries<sup>32</sup>. So we can say that while connectivity diplomacy between both the countries holds a significant potential for strengthening regional integration and better economic cooperation, but these political instability, security concern and financial limitation limiting the relations of both the countries<sup>33</sup>.

**Conclusion-** In conclusion of this research article we can say that the Act East Policy play an important role in the India's foreign policy. And with the help of connectivity diplomacy its role became significant for India to develop its power and network in the Southeast Asian region. This policy emphasis on the improving regional connectivity and economic cooperation with the Southeast Asian nations. For this Myanmar played an important role because Myanmar as a gateway to the Southeast Asian nations. For that India's tries to develop its relationship with Myanmar through different connectivity project. This research article focusing on different connectivity projects between India and Myanmar such as Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, the Sittwe Port project, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project have been undertaken by both the countries for better transportation and connectivity. Another important finding of the research study is that the connectivity initiatives between both the countries also significantly contributed for the development

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<sup>29</sup> Tun, N.T., (2025). Strategic Interplay and Regional Dynamics: Analyzing the Geopolitical Implications of Myanmar-India Relations on Northeast India's Security and Development. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(5).

<sup>30</sup> Tun, N.T., (2025). Strategic Interplay and Regional Dynamics: Analyzing the Geopolitical Implications of Myanmar-India Relations on Northeast India's Security and Development. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(5).

<sup>31</sup> Brewster, D. (2019). *India and China at Sea: Competition for Naval Dominance in the Indian Ocean*, Oxford University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Tun, N.T., (2025). Strategic Interplay and Regional Dynamics: Analyzing the Geopolitical Implications of Myanmar-India Relations on Northeast India's Security and Development. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(5).

<sup>33</sup> Pant, H.V. (2016). *India's Act East Policy and regional connectivity*. Observer Research Foundation Issue Brief.

of the India's Northeastern states because Myanmar shares a long land boundary with the Northeastern states of India. Improved connectivity is expected to enhance access to international markets, stimulate local economic activity and encourage cross-border trade and investment<sup>34</sup>. At the same time this article also discussed about different challenges such as political instability, lack of financial resources and China's factor which are affect the connectivity projects between both the countries. Despite these challenges connectivity diplomacy remains an important instrument for India and Myanmar relations.

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<sup>34</sup> Haacke, J. (2018). Myanmar and the Geopolitics of Asia. International Affairs, 94(2).