

Politics of Sub-Regional Connectivity: A Comparative Study of the India-Myanmar and Myanmar-China Multisectoral Cooperation Initiatives

Abstract

The post-Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation era in the discourse of International Relations has overly emphasised the idea of interstate integration for mutually beneficial economic development especially in regards to the least developed and developing cartographies. This idea of interstate integration—geo-economics, could not completely replace the notion of military warfare and territorial contestation—geopolitics. Countries, today are cooperating to contain each other in several theatres of global politics. As a result, region, sub-regions or micro-regions that are based on the idea of cooperation are gradually transforming into theatres of competition. One such theatre is the ‘space’ formed by India’s Northeast, Myanmar and China’s Southwest.

Of late, both India and China has been trying to engage with Myanmar through cross-border connectivity initiatives, infrastructural development and trade to accrue dividends that would augment development in India’s underdeveloped pocket of Northeast and China’s Southwest. For Myanmar, engaging with two of her powerful neighbours—India and China, is a crucial foreign policy decision as the country has remained a victim of economic deprivation that ensued from western sanctions, its own policy of isolationism and decades of military rule. Even though this cartography is far from becoming a ‘region’ any time sooner, both India and China are using cooperation and integration as a means to create a pliant neighbour to offset each other. The mutual apprehension of India and China has barred them from engaging with each other in this theatre through any institutionalised concerted initiatives. Therefore, the already existing competition between these two Asian powers is unfolding through their interactions with Myanmar at bilateral level only.

Keywords: Integration, Connectivity, Infrastructure, Development, Competition