

Synopsis of the Thesis

Background

Many scholars of International Relations have made attempts to define India's and China's relations through the derivations of cooperation, competition and confrontation. In doing so, some conclude that India—China relation is that of 'competition' while others state that it is beyond mere competition. This is because the two nation-states cooperate in several areas like climate change or the promotion of multilateral world order while they confront each other along the border and on the maritime front. India-China equation of late has taken shape that looks like that of cooperation but underneath lies calculations of outdoing each other (competition). One such theatre of interaction between India and China is Myanmar.

As a consequence of its relative geographical distance from Beijing, China's landlocked southwestern province of Yunnan which borders Myanmar remained devoid of development. This, coupled with the challenges ensuing from immigration and the presence of rebel outfits further inhibited development in Yunnan. For India, the Northeast region which borders Myanmar has remained a conflict-prone theatre. The authority of the Central Government of India could not reach the rugged terrains of the region due to relative isolation. Consequently, poverty, underdevelopment, and unemployment coupled with rebellion against political impositions and coercions have given rise to ethnic conflict, illegal trading, and insurgency. Against this backdrop, all three countries- India, Myanmar and China perceive cross-border integration as a means of development.

The idea behind such integration has been derived from the notion of 'regionalism' under which opening backward areas to the forces of the market and connecting them with the backward areas (at times the economic centres and capitals) of other countries generate dividends in form of improvement of infrastructure, industrialization, employment, improvement of trade relations, people-to-people connectivity and much more.

Regionalism as a concept has two conspicuous facets; one; Regionalism as an end—the process of integrating markets across territorial borders of the country to distribute the economic benefits (connectivity, infrastructure, sectoral investment, trade) equally amongst the member states. Two; Regionalism as a process—a means through which the features of regionalism, for instance, cross-border connectivity, investments, cross-border infrastructure, and trade, are

deliberately undertaken as a means to promote development in the under-developed areas within the geography of such operation. In both the scenarios, development as the outcome of integration remains at the centre of the argument. In some geographies, regionalism both as the end and as the process might work out simultaneously at alternative intervals. However, due to the highly competitive and interdependent global and national political environment, integration is gradually becoming more complex. As such, provinces within nations are attempting to integrate with provinces of the adjacent nation-states, with whom they share boundaries. This, in fact, is creating several micro-regions within a region, all interacting to generate outcomes that add to development at micro as well as macro levels.

South Asia has been a theatre of ethnic conflicts, political confrontations, illegal immigration, and insurgency. Besides these challenges, the presence of China has compelled India to engage in several regional and sub-regional groupings, which include the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Sub-Regional Groupings like the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM EC) or Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). China's presence in south is driven by one; her ambition to exact compliance from the smaller and weaker nations of South Asia to contain India and two; the expansion of her naval presence in the Indian Ocean to counter the United States of America. In order to do so, China has connected the historical Silk Road with its newly conceived notion of 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. This has given rise to a power game between India and China. This power game, however, is not being played only in the broad theatre of South Asia but is also visible in several micro-regions. One such micro-region is the geographical tri-junction constituted of India's Northeast, Myanmar, and China's Southwest province Yunnan.

The cartographical position of Myanmar has proved to be immensely strategic for the landlocked Northeast of India and Southwest of China. Any transnational connectivity that connects these two sub-territories with Myanmar can provide, both nation-states, access to the Indian Ocean. Myanmar's isolation ensuing from more than fifty years of military dictatorship and western sanctions makes it inevitable for the country to engage with these two neighbours for economic and diplomatic support. Thus, the unravelling of the 'New Great Game' between India and China, is prevised to benefit Myanmar, as it serves as a crossroad between the two far-flung nation-states, engaged in a competition to outrun each other.

Rationale and Scope of the Study

Most of the existing literature, concerned with this cartography has centred the study at the bilateral level. The nuances of the cartography, however, lie in the simultaneous engagement of both India and China in Myanmar. Even though China entered Myanmar much earlier, India being a late entrant has tried to make similar investments as undertaken by China. For instance, China has tried to build a transnational corridor; 'The Irrawaddy Corridor' that connects Kunming with Yangon and is proposed to be expanded to Kyaukphyu. This corridor is multimodal, where one section is a four-lane motorway, another section is a waterway through the Irrawaddy River, and certain sections are connected by railways. India, on the other hand, has made robust investments in developing cross-border connectivity in Myanmar. India has undertaken the India-Myanmar Friendship Road, which is a part of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. India has also undertaken the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project under which a seaport, an inland waterway along the Kaladan River, and a road connecting Myanmar's Paletwa with Mizoram's Zorinpui is under construction. India has also proposed to connect India's Northeast with Myanmar through railways. This is only one of the various sectors of Myanmar where such competition between India and China is unfolding.

Over the years, Myanmar has become a theatre of geopolitical competition and rivalry where several Asian economies are engaged in interaction, cooperative schemes and investment. These engagements aim to promote growth and development of Myanmar but in doing so, the geo-economic considerations are unfolding in a way that shows how these nation-states are trying to outdo each other in the country. The study essentially takes into account the bilateral dynamic but analyzes the relations in the backdrop of 'regionalism as a process'. The study considers the 'India-Myanmar-China' as a 'space' and tries to understand how 'flow' (investments, connectivity, and trade) across the border is creating a situation of competition and containment between two Asian powers. The study tries to deconstruct the term 'Client State', a narrative that exists in the literature on Myanmar-China relations, and also tries to break the understanding that India's footholds are weak in Myanmar when compared to that of China. By negating these two dominant narratives, the thesis tries to analyze how Myanmar is benefitting from this interplay of geo-economic and geopolitics between India and China. It further tries to understand how Myanmar is strategically balancing both these rival countries to accrue larger dividend for itself.

The study is mostly analytical, where the focus is to have a nuanced understanding of the efforts of India and China in establishing a concerted initiative. The study also tries to understand whether such initiatives are aimed at making inroads to exercise their influence by exacting compliance from smaller and less powerful nations in order to achieve their ambitions of countering and constraining each other. However, the study also looks into the perspectives of development. The anti-geopolitical strategies consider cooperation and integration to be the new narrative of International Relations. They focus mostly on the aspects of development. This notion of development includes an array of ideas, for instance, socio-economic development, politico-security development, and development through cultural assimilation. The policymakers of this sub-region, at the initial stages of framing policies, deliberately focused on developing the region. Therefore, this particular thesis maps the rate of development that has ensued from such a concerted initiative and at the final stage, tries to analyze whether such a sub-regional integration is culminating in a win-win game for both India and China or whether it just remains an interplay of geopolitics and geo-economics.

Research Questions

- Can the geopolitical space created by India-Myanmar-China be defined as a region?
- Will connectivity and the developmental initiatives undertaken at the transnational level augment cooperation and empowerment at the micro level?
- Will investments in Myanmar's ports and energy sector provide India and China a theatre, conducive enough for bolstering their Indian Ocean strategies?
- Are the investments in Myanmar undertaken by India and China bringing about any constructive development for Myanmar? Or is it aimed at accruing greater benefits and leverage for themselves?
- Will such a concerted initiative culminate into a win-win game for India and China? Or will it remain an interplay of geopolitics and geo-economics?

Research Methodology

The study uses a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Discourse analysis on the main, in combination with content analysis in certain cases, has been used. This method has been used as a technique to review and analyze secondary data sources which include books, academic journals, lecture series, and reports. The study uses the historical analytical method as well. Initially, it was decided that field visits would be conducted in Myanmar and China to tease out information and data through interviews and unobtrusive participation. But field visits could not be conducted, primarily due to the outbreak of Covid-19 and secondly, due to Myanmar's political turmoil resulting from the military coup on February 1, 2021. A field visit was conducted in New Delhi in August 2019, mostly to access the libraries and to have discussions with scholars who have studied Myanmar and China. Understanding of the area was initially developed from two consecutive field visits to Moreh-Tamu and Rhi-Zhowkhatar in 2015 conducted as a part of a project titled, 'Peace, Development and Community: The Look East Imagination of India with Special Reference to North East India' supported by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata. As primary sources government reports, policy papers, aggregate data, and Detailed Project Reports have been consulted in this study.

Chapter Contents

1. **Geography and Sub-regionalism: A Theoretical Exploration:** In this chapter, theories of regional integration and how the narrative of integration has changed in the Post-Cold War era has been studied. The section also dealt with the process of integration in the Third-World in great detail. The second part of the chapter delves deep into the understanding of the notion of 'space' in politics. In this section, the concepts of geopolitics and geo-economic have been studied, referring to the ideas of critical geographers. The last part of this chapter has tried to sketch the pattern of interaction and engagement in the India-Myanmar-China sub-region.
2. **Connectivity and Development in Myanmar:** In this chapter, a comparison has been drawn between the cross-border connectivity initiatives undertaken by India and China in Myanmar. The first part deals with the theories related to economic corridors, regional corridors, and transport corridors. An attempt has been made to understand the relation

between these three types of corridors. The second part of this chapter tries to understand the perception of cross-border connectivity that exists in India and China. The chapter also tries to bring out the underlying causes of both India's and China's engagement in developing cross-border connectivity in Myanmar. In the third part, each connectivity project undertaken by India and China has been studied in detail. Finally, the chapter ends with an analysis of the prospects and challenges of the BCIM EC.

3. **India and China in Myanmar's Rimland: Maritime Strategy and Contestation.** This chapter measures the gains and losses incurred by both India and China in engaging in Myanmar's hydrocarbon sector and sea-port infrastructure. Myanmar's geo-strategic location has been one of the major reasons that has driven both India and China to cooperate with Myanmar. In the first part of the chapter, an attempt has been made to review the literature that deals with the relevance of sea power and the importance of the Indian Ocean in global politics. The second part deals with India's grand Indian Ocean strategy and how Myanmar is important in ensuring its strategic ambitions in the Indian Ocean Region. The section also studied India's investments in hydrocarbon exploration, seaport building, and naval infrastructure development. The third part tries to analyze China's grand vision via-vis the Indian Ocean, the relevance of Myanmar's location in China's Indian Ocean strategy, China's investments in hydrocarbon exploration, sea-port building, and China's cooperation with Myanmar in developing naval infrastructure. The concluding section of the chapter deals with an understanding of whether such competitive engagement in Myanmar's rimland is culminating in a win-win situation for both these powers.
4. **Sectoral Development and Investment in Myanmar: India and China Compared:** Development has been the primary mover behind India's and China's engagement in Myanmar. The chapter tries to study the notion of development. The second part of the chapter deals with development financing, emphasizing mostly on Third-World development funding and South-South cooperation. In the third part of the chapter, an attempt has been made to compare India's and China's investments in various sectors of development in Myanmar.
5. **India and China in Myanmar: Congagement and Estrangement:** The first section of this chapter tries to analyze Myanmar's foreign policy from independence to the

contemporary era. The second part deals with Myanmar's relations with China and India. The section also deals with Myanmar's perception regarding the competitive engagement of India and China. In the third part, the chapter tries to address whether such engagement is resulting in cooperation or competition or whether it is an interplay of cooperation, competition and outmaneuvering.

Research Findings

The research questions have been analysed in detail in the five chapters of this thesis work. The research findings are summarized below:

- I. *Can the geopolitical space created by India-Myanmar-China be defined as a region?*

Three key facets emerged while analyzing the theories of regional integration. One; regions as market, two; regions as community and three; regions as power entities. The definition of regions as markets emerges from the functional and neo-functional theories of integration. Proponents of functionalism proposed a model of integration where weaker nation-states were placed in the periphery and developed nation-states were considered as the core. The interaction was essentially two-way in the sense that the peripheral nations depended on the core for economic assistance and the core sympathetically responded. Integration, in the form of cooperation, began in one sector, (mostly trade) and spilled over to other sectors crafting an interaction based on cooperation. However, such integration was institutionalized as it required constant monitoring. Regions as community—emerged from the expositions of the Socio-causal school which considered cultural affinity as one of the main driving forces behind integration. However, both these connotations are only partially applicable to the cartography comprising India, Myanmar, and China. This is because, first; integration begins with connectivity and spills over to other areas and sectors. Where the nature of integration in this 'space', however, is more bilateral. Furthermore, the geopolitical tension between India and China is impeding the process of institutionalizing integrational initiatives. Second; cultural affinity remains one of the driving forces but integration in this part is mostly driven by the participant countries' urge for development. This makes the theory of 'Developmental Regionalism', a more appropriate basis for studying this cartography. But, 'flows' could not

replace 'contention' in this theatre. Even though both India and China are cooperating with Myanmar to promote the development of the cartography as a whole, the mutual apprehension at the borders, the quest to expand influence and power, the urge to outdo each other, and the timely strategies adopted by both to exact compliance from Myanmar, have only widened the existing fissure between India and China. This has constricted the integration within the parameters of bilateral engagement. As a result, this cartography cannot be designated as a 'region'. Rather 'micro-region under process' can be used to have a better understanding of the interactions taking place within this space. This cartography portrays 'space as power' where India and China are cooperating with Myanmar to bolster their capabilities and power, as a means to outdo each other.

II. Will connectivity and the developmental initiatives undertaken at the transnational level augment cooperation and empowerment at the micro level?

Corridors comprise of Economic and Transport Corridors that connect two or more countries intending to link economic nodes with economic hubs. Economic and Transport corridors exist either exclusive or inclusive of each other but are not constricted only to land but also include maritime domain provided that such maritime corridors connect economic growth poles. Corridors are meant to connect economic hubs and nodes with economically backward areas to spatially distribute economic growth and development. Therefore, connectivity remains the keyword in the analysis of transnational corridors. In other words, connectivity and development are directly proportional and for any region or integration, connectivity forms the base. For this particular 'space', connectivity forms the preliminary step towards integration. Both India and China have heavily invested in connectivity projects intending to connect Northeast India and Southwest China with the markets of Myanmar to enhance trade and people-to-people contact. For New Delhi, Myanmar remains the launching pad for Look (Act) East Policy; a strategy undertaken to connect India's Northeast with the markets of South East Asian countries. In this direction and as the first step towards integration, New Delhi and Yangon cooperated to construct the India-Myanmar Friendship Road as a sub-part of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. There are several other connectivity projects undertaken by India, one of the most ambitious being the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project. Besides these two, India has also undertaken the construction of the Rhi-Tiddim-Falam Road which is yet to be completed. The Chennai-Dawei Maritime Corridor—is partially operational. The Jiribam-Kalay rail link project has also been proposed. The Stilwell

Road—existed since the British period. This road connects Ledo in Assam with Kunming in China, China has already upgraded the portion that falls within its territory and provided financial assistance to Myanmar for the upgradation of the road. However, India is not willing to upgrade this road, as New Delhi believes that opening Northeast to China through any such connectivity projects would give Beijing direct access to India's fractured frontiers of Northeast.

Even though most of these projects are ambitious and beneficial for both India and Myanmar, India's bureaucratic complexities and lack of interest in implementing these projects on a fast-track basis have placed India much behind China, at least in terms of connectivity. However, comparing India's and China's investments in connectivity would be misleading as most of the Indian projects have been conceived in the late 2000s. China has been in this sector since the mid-1980s. One of the major challenges that India faced in the faster implementation of these projects, ensued from the lack of proper connectivity and infrastructure within Northeast India. Despite these shortcomings and bottlenecks, India enjoys an advantageous position in its cooperation schemes with Myanmar in connectivity and infrastructure development vis-à-vis China. This is because the terms and conditions laid against these projects are not harsh. India extended financial assistance to Myanmar in the form of soft loans that were well accepted by the leadership of the country. Most of the projects aim at inclusive development for both India and Myanmar. India recruited Myanmar's youth as laborers for most of these projects which raised India's image as a responsible partner. Finally, India's benevolent diplomacy with Myanmar assured the leadership in Yangon that engagement with India will not push the country into any debt trap.

China's cross-border connectivity initiatives in Myanmar were conceived, and the initial mapping of its sole project, the Irrawaddy Corridor, began in the mid-1980s. As a result, China was much ahead compared to India in the area of transnational connectivity projects in Myanmar. The Irrawaddy Corridor consists of three sub-parts, one; is the Burma Road. This section of the Irrawaddy Corridor has been completed and is currently operational. Two; Inland Waterway on the Irrawaddy River. Most of the sections under this project is operational, however, a part of this project was forestalled by the military junta in 2004. Three; Railway Connectivity. By 1989, railway connectivity from Kunming to Dali was completed and operational. However, the Ruili-Yangon connectivity was forestalled in the face of a lack of commitment from Myanmar. China, in 2011 again thought of extending rail connectivity from

Ruili to Kyaukphyu under BRI but the plan was not acceptable to Myanmar based on the country's apprehension of getting trapped under a huge debt burden. In 2020, during Xi Jinping's visit to Myanmar, fresh attempts were made under which a series of MoUs were signed in the area of railway connectivity.

China's connectivity projects in Myanmar aim towards opening Yunnan to the Indian Ocean through the ports of Myanmar in order to bypass the Malacca chokepoint and open a second route for importing oil from the Middle East. Few of China's connectivity projects have been forestalled due to China's realpolitik ambitions and debt trap diplomacy. This coupled with rising xenophobia in Myanmar has been the reason behind China's failure to complete a few of its projects in Myanmar. Therefore, in terms of projects on connectivity, neither India nor China is a net loser. Rather engagement in the connectivity sector has resulted in a variable sum game for all these three countries.

The only multilateral institutional connectivity project undertaken in this this 'space' is the BCIM EC. However, the project that includes these three countries and Bangladesh has witnessed little progress since its launch in 1999. In 2013 a car rally from Kolkata to Kunming was arranged and even though regular forum meetings have been held, India's response has remained inconsistent and ambivalent. This was partly because the forum smacked of leadership of Beijing something not acceptable to New Delhi. Secondly, New Delhi apprehended that any institutional arrangement that will link Northeast with China would have serious security implications for India. Finally, there was a lack of clarity regarding the idea of the BCIM forum as to whether it is an Economic Corridor, or a Growth Quadrangle or a Growth Polygon. Furthermore, the lack of a logistic and infrastructure along the national frontiers, the presence of insurgents, and the tense relations between the participating countries (India-China, India-Bangladesh, and Bangladesh-Myanmar) posed other challenges to the successful implementation.

III. Will investments in Myanmar's ports and energy sector provide India and China a theatre, conducive enough for bolstering their Indian Ocean strategies?

Cooperation in one sector 'spills over' to other sectors thereby creating regions, is what the Neo-functional theory argues. However, connectivity as an area of cooperation in this

'space' is still under process. As a result, 'spill over' from this sector is not yet possible. But for India-Myanmar-China, cooperation in other sectors does not ensue from 'spill over'. Rather cooperation is a compulsion for these three nation-states. The national interests of these countries make, 'cooperation' a necessity rather than a choice. One such theatre where India and China have been engaging is, Myanmar's hydrocarbon sector. But any analysis of these countries' attempts at hydrocarbon exploration brings to the fore, their interest in Myanmar's littoral and maritime domain. This interest evolves from; one, expanding influence as a part of both these countries' Grand Indian Ocean strategy. Two, engaging in the exploration of Myanmar's huge hydrocarbon reserves to meet the energy demand required for development. What underlines these two factors is the geopolitical dissension between India and China that of late, has shifted to the maritime domain of the Indian Ocean. The constant struggle to secure the Sea Lanes of Communication has made it inevitable for countries to increase their naval capabilities, build overseas naval bases and initiate naval cooperation with other maritime countries.

Beijing's interest in Myanmar has been crafted through its, longstanding ambition of bypassing the Malacca chokepoint; accessing the Indian Ocean through the ports of Myanmar; transporting oil and natural gas from the Middle East directly through a pipeline via Myanmar; and to explore Myanmar's huge reserves of hydrocarbons to meet her energy requirement. New Delhi aims to enjoy a predominant position in the Indian Ocean and counter China's expanding presence. New Delhi is highly concerned about China's overseas port-building strategy in the Indian Ocean littoral countries under its 21st Century Maritime Silk Route Initiative. Furthermore, China's aggressive footprints in Myanmar, its port-building activities, and naval cooperation coupled with India's rising energy demands compel New Delhi to make her presence in Myanmar's maritime frontier, even more pronounced.

In this area of engagement and cooperation, there are three sub-sectors; seaport building, naval cooperation, and hydrocarbon exploration. Both India and China have completed the construction of ports. Both, Sittwe built by India, and Kyauakphy built by China are operational. The Sittwe port is a part of India's ambitious Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project. Both these ports are situated in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. China, however, showed interest in several other ports but failed to secure a commitment from Myanmar. Kyaukphyu has an oil and natural gas refinery where the crude oil imported from the Middle East is refined and transported to China through pipelines. China is one of the

largest stakeholders in Myanmar's hydrocarbon sector. However, there are other players as well, for instance, South Korea, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, and India. India could not yield comprehensive results from its engagement in Myanmar's hydrocarbon exploration in the face of its failure to come to terms with Bangladesh in building an underground pipeline. As a consequence, Yangon sold natural gas at a higher rate to China. This gas is transported through another pipeline from Kyaukphyu.

In terms of defence and naval cooperation, India's presence is predominant compared to that of China. China has been an early entrant in this sector but the poor quality of defence equipment, and her tacit support to insurgents operating in Myanmar and using them against Myanmar's government, forced Nayapyidaw to balance China with India in this sector. India's defence forces cooperated with the *Tatmadaw* to secure the India-Myanmar border from rebel outfits. India restrained itself from intervening in Myanmar's domestic politics and never adopted any 'carrot and stick' diplomacy against the leadership. Taking into account the security implications of cooperating with China in defence sector, Myanmar agreed to accept India's assistance in bolstering Myanmar's defence capabilities. Today, India and Myanmar have robust naval cooperation and both countries conduct joint naval exercises. Myanmar tactfully balanced both India and China by allowing each of these countries to gain only in one avenue; either defence or hydrocarbon. For both India and China, having access rights in both the hydrocarbon and defence sectors was the ambition but Myanmar's strategy has always remained that of neutrality and non-alliance. This balancing act of Myanmar has created a win-win situation for India and China. After all, China's primary objective was to transport oil and natural gas from Kyaukphyu through pipelines via Myanmar and India's ambition was to expand its military presence in Myanmar to counter China's footprints. The objective of both these countries have been realized but in specific terms only.

IV. Are the investments in Myanmar undertaken by India and China bringing about any constructive development for Myanmar? Or is it aimed at accruing greater benefits and leverage for themselves?

Myanmar emerged as a space of geopolitical tiff only because it opened the theatre for neighbouring countries to invest in various sectors. Myanmar wish to bring itself out of destitution, poverty, and underdevelopment. The repeated imposition of western sanctions pushed the country into economic isolation. Moreover, the Junta's craving for survival required

a partner strong enough to provide economic as well as diplomatic support. China was emerging as an important power centre and was trying to create a world order under which the countries of the global south, despite depending on the traditional donors of the west for financial assistance could look up to the emerging donors from the global south. This created the backdrop for Myanmar's entente with China since the 1980s. India was not far behind. Being another important member of the South-South cooperation movement, India too was emerging as a responsible power and was extending soft loans and grants for the development of the global south countries. This 'vie' for influence between India and China as economic partners for underdeveloped countries got reflected in Myanmar as well. Even though India entered the theatre much later than China, India has evolved as a responsible player in various sectors of Myanmar's development.

Besides assisting in developing transport networks, both India and China invested in developing Myanmar's financial and banking sector, telecommunication sector, health care sector, agricultural and industrial technological know-how, and power sector (hydropower on the main). Besides these common sectors, India has also invested in human resources development and reconstruction and rehabilitation of Rohingyas in the Rakhine state. China, on the other hand, made robust investments in developing Special Economic Zones and mining industries. China has also extended its assistance toward the rehabilitation of Rohingyas in the Rakhine state. However, there exists a stark contrast in the approach of both these countries' investments in Myanmar. India's approach has been that of mutual benefit. Inclusive growth has remained the agenda behind India's investment in Myanmar and this is visible through India's cooperation in areas of agricultural research, development of skills, and rehabilitation for Rohingyas. As a result, India's acceptance within Myanmar's social circles has been much better than that of China which has made huge investments mostly in areas of mining and SEZs from which it can earn revenues and extract raw materials for its development. These, coupled with China's negligence towards obtaining environmental clearances, lack of projects on corporate social responsibilities, and rising xenophobia led to the suspension of multiple Chinese projects in Myanmar, for instance, the Myitsone Dam and Leptadaung Coppermine. Beijing's repeated efforts to pursue these projects could not yield constructive results. In the case of Indian projects, the Tamanthi Hydropower project was suspended in the face of protests undertaken by the environmental protection organizations. India's and China's investment in the same sectors reflect their intent to outdo each other but the result is a variable sum, bringing

slightly more gains for India. However, the volume of China-Myanmar trade is far better than the India-Myanmar trade.

V. *Will such a concerted initiative culminate into a Win-Win game for India and China? Or will it remain an interplay of geopolitics and geo-economics?*

Despite Myanmar's inclination towards China for economic and diplomatic assistance, it has also tried to maintain neutrality and non-alliance in its foreign policy orientation. Although Beijing provided assistance and support to Myanmar, its tacit support to the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in the early years and insurgent outfits like Wa State Army in the later years, made it a compulsion for Naypyidaw to adopt a hedging strategy. Naypyidaw believed that maintaining cordial relations with Beijing would not only help in the economic revival of the country but would also provide the leadership an opportunity to cajole Beijing to withdraw its support from CPB. Beijing's agenda behind maintaining relations with insurgent outfits was, to use them against the Myanmar government whenever the leadership in Naypyidaw would try to mend relations with the US. Furthermore, Chinese projects in Myanmar are mostly targeted to bring in raw materials and economic benefits for Beijing. China has never aimed towards inclusive growth and development of Myanmar and therefore has always tried to adjust with the governments in Naypyidaw accordingly. China's realpolitik ambition and consequent rise in xenophobic sentiments in Myanmar pushed Naypyidaw to establish relations of cooperation and engagement with India, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and the other ASEAN nations. Countering China has been one of the diplomatic strategies of these countries.

Resultantly, Myanmar emerged as a theatre of geo-political competition involving outdoing China. India, although a late entrant in this space, has gained popularity for supporting the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar. Its welfare diplomacy and the idea of promoting inclusive growth for Myanmar and India's Northeast have been well accepted by the policy circles in Naypyidaw. Apart from the Tamanthi Hydel Power project, no other Indian projects have been suspended by the Myanmar government. The military junta that took over power in February 2021, has also tried for rapprochement with New Delhi. Considering all these, India enjoys leverage and advantage compared to China.

Myanmar has been trying to accrue the greatest benefit from this competitive engagement between India and China. The country has balanced both India and China in such a way that neither could expand their footprints to the extent of influencing Myanmar's domestic and foreign policy to a degree uncomfortable for Myanmar. This act of balancing and counterbalancing results in a win-win situation, bringing relative gains for all three participating countries. However, the creation of a sub-region or a concerted transnational initiative is not going to happen anytime soon. This cartography will remain a space of constant interaction between India-Myanmar and Myanmar-China. India and China would continue to outdo each other with Myanmar at the centre. In other words, geo-economics will remain the basis of all interactions and exchanges, while geopolitics will remain the underlying principle.

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Date:

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