

Road to Mandalay

J.N. DIXIT

Two significant developments occurred in India's relations with Myanmar in November. The first was a visit by General Maung Aye, vice-president of the Myanmar government, accompanied by a 16 member delegation to India. The second was a seminar organized by the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, and the Centre for Strategic Studies of Myanmar in November. The visit of Myanmar's vice-president attracted some controversy in segments of Indian public opinion. The point being made was that the military government of Myanmar having refused to respect the election results of 1990, has no legitimacy and, therefore, India, as a democracy, should not have contacts with the military government.

The point to remember is that Myanmar is an important neighbour and that the nurturing of relations with that country is of political, strategic and security interest to India. India's relations with Myanmar had been ambiguous and distant for nearly three decades. They are reviving just now. Recalling more recent history of our relations with this country is important. Indo-Myanmar relations went into a negative spin in 1990, when the military authorities of Myanmar refused to accept the 1990 electoral verdict of the Burmese people in which Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy, emerged victorious.

India's commitment to democracy created distances with Myanmar as a result. In any case, the V.P. Singh and Chandra Sekhar governments were so enmeshed in domestic political uncertainties that they were not able to structure a cohesive foreign policy with a clear sense of priorities. It must be underlined that the government of Myanmar dealt with India's critical reaction to their assuming power with sobriety and without any polemical reactions. Nor did they react to Indian public and media criticism, and to our government's attitude by doing anything negative against India during the period 1989-91. It would be relevant to mention here that important Western powers like the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan, tried to generate political pressure on the military regime of Myanmar at the political level to give up power to Aung San Suu Kyi.

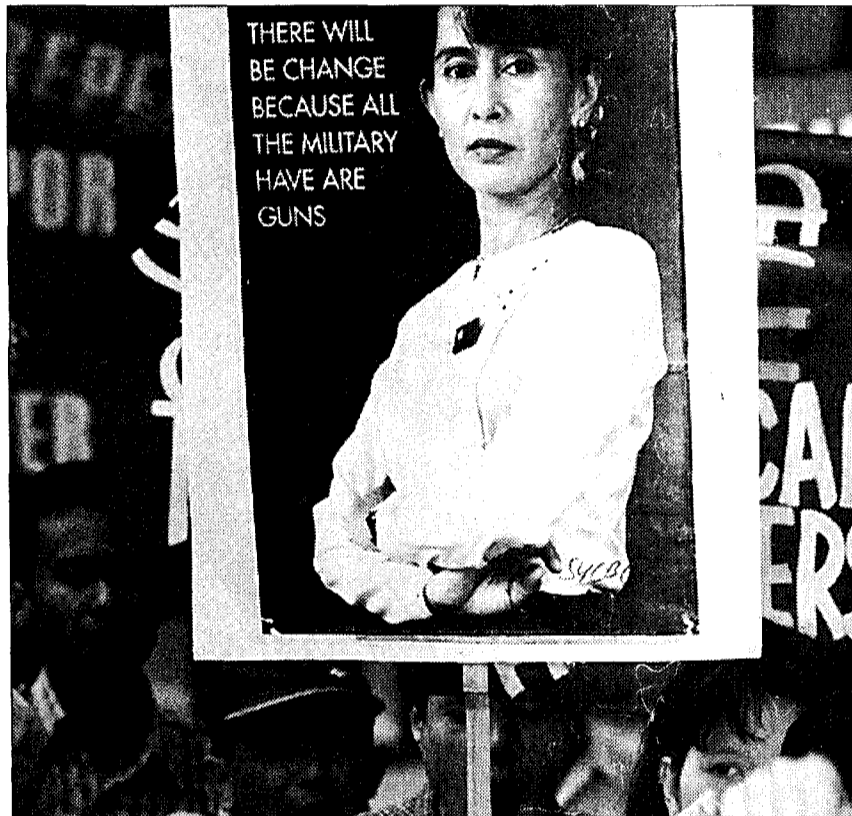
These powers also formally requested India to join their embassies in Yangon to present a formal protest to the military regime for its not respecting the results of the elections. The industrially advanced powers were hypocritical in this exercise because while indulging in general political opposition to the military regime, they continued their investments in Myanmar and their export trade to Myanmar. While India did not join them, India did convey its disappointment at the negation of

The author is former foreign secretary of India

democracy in Myanmar through bilateral diplomatic channels.

The considerations which influenced India to revive relations with Myanmar were, first, Myanmar's geo-strategic importance for India, Myanmar abuts on our sensitive northeastern states and portions of Bangladesh. Myanmar shares an equally significant border with China. Thus the northern frontiers of Myanmar constitute a tri-junction

mar regardless of the kind of government in power there. The third factor was clinically rational. While India remains committed to democracy and related values, there was no reason for India to unilaterally assume responsibility of creating democracies in other countries. This had to be the choice and responsibility of the people of the country concerned, in this case the people of Myanmar.



with Bangladesh, China and the eastern frontiers of India. Myanmar is also an important country on the rim of the Bay of Bengal, lying astride India's southeastern trade routes. The southeastern coast of Myanmar is close enough to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India, so developments in that area could affect our security interests in the Bay of Bengal.

Indo-Myanmar cooperation to counter drug smuggling, narcotics crimes, insurgency and security threats to our northeastern states was acknowledged as imperatives for our foreign policy. It was equally important to ensure that Myanmar does not become part of an exclusive area of influence of other powers in the region with whom India has uneasy relations. China, for instance. This is an objective which would be shared by the people and governments of Myanmar also with a view to maintaining their independence and freedom of options in dealing with their foreign policy and security concerns.

It was, therefore, considered necessary to normalize relations with Myanmar

India should focus on strengthening its own democracy instead of moralizing about it to other countries

Preliminary discussions were held between the government of India and the Myanmar foreign office between February and August, 1992. I was a participant in these discussions, which ultimately led to the visit of the vice-foreign minister of Myanmar, U. Baswa, to India between August 11 and 13, 1992. The Myanmar delegation made three points during this visit. Myanmar respects India's commitment to democracy and hopes India would be patient about the revival of democracy in Myanmar. Second, Myanmar acknowledged that security and political concerns existed which are shared by both countries. Myanmar was therefore willing to coop-

erate with India in taking joint action to meet the security and strategic interests of both countries. The third point which Baswa made was that Myanmar will be willing to increase economic and technological cooperation with India. Another important anxiety of India was the increasing strategic linkages between Myanmar and China.

The Chinese had already built an all-weather road from Kunming in China to Mandalay in Myanmar, which they were planning to extend to Yangon. There were also reports of the Myanmar government providing some visiting and berthing facilities to the Chinese navy. When these points were raised with the Burmese authorities they responded by saying that they would be ready to accept India's assistance in building up the transportation network in their country. They indicated that they would like India making the road from Imphal and Mandalay and then on to Yangon as a parallel to the Chinese road-building activities.

They denied any military facilities being given to China and added that they would be willing to give general facilities to the Indian navy also in their ports and on their coast. There have been visits of the home secretaries, the controller of drugs and the ministers of commerce between the two countries between 1993 and now. Myanmar becoming a part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Asian Regional Forum over the last five years adds to the legitimacy of the Myanmar government in the eyes of other governments in the region and lends validity to our having relations with that country.

The visit of General Maung Aye, is, therefore, timely and strengthens our bilateral relations. The visit will increase Indo-Myanmar cooperation to prevent insurgency along the 1,600 kilometre sensitive Indo-Myanmar border. Myanmar has problems with Kachins, and we have problems with Naga separatists. There is an extensive complementarity of needs in the economic, commercial and technological spheres between Myanmar and India. Activating economic and technological cooperation was an important objective of this visit. If India speeds up the building of the Imphal-Tamu-Kalemayo road, a true beginning would be made to consolidate Myanmar as a land bridge between India and the southeast Asian countries.

The visit of General Maung Aye is a timely step. Dealing with a government in effective control in Myanmar which is recognized by all the important powers in the region, need not imply any dilution of India's commitment to democracy. It is sufficient if India focuses on strengthening its own democracy instead of moralizing about it to the other countries and other people. The overriding consideration in our relations with our neighbours should be safeguarding our interests and contributing to the stability and well-being of the region.

Pak set to woo Myanmar with weapons, soft loans

Shishir Gupta

New Delhi, December 17

WARY OF warmth in ties between India and Myanmar, Pakistan's Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf is all set to woo Yangon with weapons and soft loans.

Highly-placed Government sources indicate that General will arrive in Myanmar on January 4 on a two-day official visit. Javed Hassan, who is in-charge of weapons and equipment in the Pakistan government, will accompany the General. New Delhi will be watching the visit keenly as External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh is also scheduled to visit Myanmar in late January.

Yangon watchers believe that Pakistan wants to run a reality check on its relations with Myanmar following latter's growing multi-faceted bi-lateral engagement with India. General Maung Aye, vice-chairman of Myanmar's State Peace and Development Council, visited New Delhi in November and requested

for assistance in the infrastructure development. Gen Aye also sought assistance in development of deep sea ports and offered to sell natural gas.

It is understood that during his visit, Gen Musharraf will offer small arms such as assault rifles and mortars to Myanmar. He is also expected to offer soft developmental loans and assistance in human resource development.

Since 1989, Pakistan has tried to work for closer ties with Myanmar. After an initial low-key phase, by 1995, Pakistan had established intelligence links with Yangon and had trained Myanmar's Air Force and Army personnel. Under the on-going defence cooperation between the two, Pakistan had supplied 2.5 million dollars worth arms and ammunition, in two consignments, in March-April last year.

Given the fact that both the countries have a lot of Chinese equipment, the ties on this front are expected to get a boost with the General's visit, defence analysts believe. The Indian percep-

tion of a political interaction between Yangon and Islamabad is that Pakistani interest is oriented towards keeping insurgency alive in the North-East.

However, India is not unduly bothered about Musharraf's visit as it has already offered co-operation to Myanmar on all fronts, including defence.

Analysts feel that Jaswant Singh's trip will go a long way in "correcting Yangon's tilt" towards Islamabad. During his visit, Singh is expected to inaugurate 160-kilometre long road stretch from Tamu (on Manipur border) to Kalewa (close to Mandalay). This road is a part of the ambitious Asian Highway project.

New Delhi in the recent past has adopted a pragmatic approach towards Myanmar's military junta. At the heart of this policy is its desire to develop the northeastern states and curb insurgency along its eastern borders. New Delhi has already indicated to Yangon that as long as its security concerns are addressed it has no problems in Myanmar warming up to Pakistan.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 DEC 1998

'Singapore must ensure Indo-ASEAN contacts'

By Amit Baruah

FD-14

S/12

SINGAPORE, DEC. 4. The Confederation of Indian Industry president, Mr. Arun Bharat Ram, today said Singapore should take the lead in ensuring that India had greater contact with the Association of South-East Asian Nations.

Talking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Bharat Ram, who is heading the CII delegation for its annual meetings with the Singapore Government, said there was need for contacts at the heads of state level between India and the ASEAN. Asked about Singapore's suggestion for a free trade area (FTA) with India, he said, "we look at it very positively."

The CII delegation, which will call on the Singapore Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, tomorrow, is interacting with a cross-section of business leaders, during the two-day visit. "We will ask Singapore to use its good offices to ensure this Summit-level meeting," Mr. Bharat Ram said adding that they would raise the matter with Mr. Goh.

Admitting that he did not expect such a meeting to take place in the near future, he said there was a need to "keep working" at the idea. (It may be recalled that at the just-concluded ASEAN Informal Summit such contacts were ruled out for some time to come).

Referring to the CII mission this year, he said it was important to reach out to the large Chinese community in Singapore and interest them in investing in India. "One of our goals is to interact with the Chinese business community."

Mr. Bharat Ram said they would inform their Sin-

gaporean interlocutors about the economic reforms in India. There was a possibility that foreign direct investment (FDI) may be allowed in the housing sector (an area in which Singapore has considerable expertise). Singapore should, once again, look at infrastructure projects, including construction of airports in India.

Welcoming projects such as the Singapore Telecommunications tie-up with Bharti Telecom for the \$650 million under-sea cable link between Chennai and Singapore, the CII chief said there was need for cooperation in medium-size projects as well. "We are seeing signs of that happening."

Another member of the CII delegation and chairman of Bharti Enterprises, Mr. Sunil Mittal, said the French firm Alcatel, had already started work on the construction of the Chennai-Singapore submarine cable. It would essentially be to carry data but would cater to voice needs as well.

THE HINDU

5 DEC 2000

'Look East' policy to get boost with Vajpayee's Vietnam visit

Udayan Nambodiri
New Delhi, December 3

IT'S "LOOK EAST" time again. After the President's visit to Singapore, it's now Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee who will be travelling to bolster India's ties with South-East Asia. In January, he will visit Vietnam and in February, Malaysia and Japan.

India sees Vietnam as a strong partner for economic and strategic partnership. In the past few years, Vietnam has been one of the countries most actively engaged by India outside the US-Russia-Japan-EU sphere. Defence Minister George Fernandes visited Hanoi in March. In fact, former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao first opened the doors for contact in September 1994.

Malaysia is a liberal Islamic

country and India's single largest trading partner in the ASEAN. However, politically, it is a "difficult customer". Malaysia has been cold to the idea of giving India the status of a summit-level dialogue partner in ASEAN. Along with Indonesia, it holds the stand that India can be accommodated if Pakistan too is.

Recent visits to the country by the commerce and tourism ministers of Malaysia have led to the signing of agreements on civil aviation and tourism. This, insiders say, is a way of preparing ground for Vajpayee's trip.

Malaysia is analysed as a country bogged down by domestic compulsions which stop it from openly siding with India. So a visit at the highest level may lead to the opening of new vistas in economic opportunity for the Malaysians in

India.

Malaysia also has a strong Indian-origin population, whose emotions will undoubtedly be stirred by the visit of Vajpayee. Incidentally, Pakistan's military CEO, General Pervez Musharraf, visited Malaysia earlier this year. But Kuala Lumpur made it clear that the visit was made at the caller's insistence.

Japan's Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori made a three-day visit to India in August. In bilateral relations, the visit was significant as it marked Japan's closure of its Pokhran-induced policy of boycotting India. An Indo-Japan Security Dialogue framework was also established. Most importantly, Japan wanted India as a "global partner". Vajpayee's trip will see to the further strengthening of this bond.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

4 JAN 2000

5 8 9 9 2 000

Security alert along Myanmar border

Moreh, August 7

SECURITY HAS been beefed up along the Indo-Myanmar border to prevent smuggling of arms and drugs through Moreh in Chandel district, police said on Monday.

There were reports of arms and goods such as narcotics being smuggled into the region through Moreh and several other unguarded border points, mostly in thick jungles, police said.

The Chandel district alone shares about 230 km of international boundary with Myanmar.

Five pistols, two carbines and a large quantity of ammunition for AK 47 and .9 mm pistols had been recovered in the area during operations between 1998 and 2000.

Customs, Assam Rifles and Border Security Force (BSF) personnel have also seized about 8,100 tablets of Speed, a new nar-

cotic drug, between 1998 and 2000.

The sub-divisional police officer of Moreh, P Ranjit, said police and security agencies were active in the border town and along the National Highway 39.

That the militants operating in the region were using sophisticated weapons was proof enough that large quantities of arms were being smuggled from across the border, sources said. Some Mani-pur-based

militants had set up camps at Kondong village, interior Nam-phalong and Tamu in Myanmar, sources added.

Col H S Pathania, commandant of the Seventh Assam Rifles battalion operational in Thoubal and interior Chandel districts, said

security personnel were aware that some underground outfits were being sheltered in Myanmar. They were also aware of the 'inflow' of arms to the region, he said.

Narcotic substances, including heroin and amphetamine type of tablets, were also being smuggled through Moreh and some "unguarded" border points. Tablets manufactured from amphetamine and synthetic sub-

stances were in great demand in some areas. While the tablet costs Rs 100 in Moreh, the same is worth Rs 400 in cities and it fetches about Rs 1,000 in foreign countries, sources said.

Infiltrators arrested: Mizoram police arrested 190 foreigners, mostly Myanmar nationals, in the last one week as part of its anti-illegal settlers drive. Aizawl SP Zoramawia said several Myanmar nationals, mostly with a criminal background, had been arrested since July 30.

The arrested, many of whom were women, have been convicted under the Foreigners' Act and sent to prison for terms ranging between seven and fourteen days. After completion of their sentences they would be pushed back, the SP said. Zoramawia said though no new arrests had been made the drive would continue for the next few days. (Agencies)

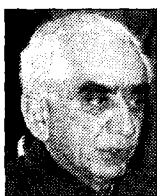
That militants operating along National Highway 39 are using sophisticated weapons is proof enough that large quantities of arms are being smuggled from across the border, sources say

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

38 AUG 2000

Jaswant discusses terror with UN

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 458



Jaswant Singh

NEW DELHI, Aug. 17. — Peacekeeping, international terrorism and the proposed restructuring of the UN Security Council were the major issues discussed by the president of the UN General Assembly, Dr Theo-ben Gurirab, and the external affairs minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, today.

Dr Gurirab, also the external affairs minister of Namibia, commended India for its role in the Sierra Leone operations. He felt that the UN would be better able to discharge its peacekeeping obligations in the future after India's role in Sierra Leone. The UN mandate on Sierra Leone is apparently going to be reviewed again when the Secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan, submits his report on peacekeeping in the country next month.

Dr Gurirab and Mr Singh discussed the UN Security Council restructuring in gener-

al terms, officials said. An open-ended working group is already discussing the way restructuring could take place, and India has already suggested it could be a claimant to a permanent seat in the Security Council.

Maldives President: The President of the Maldives, Mr MA Gayoom, will be here on a four-day visit next week. He will meet the President, Mr KR Narayanan, Vice-President, Mr Krishan Kant, the Prime Minister, and Cabinet ministers. Bilateral issues will be discussed.

THE STATESMAN

18 AUG 2000