General Studies – 2; Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations

India-Myanmar Relations

1) Introduction
   • Myanmar is one of India’s strategic neighbour and shares long border with north-eastern states of Nagaland and Manipur.
   • India has “historical ties and traditional bonds of friendship and cooperation” with Myanmar
   • Five Bs are the base of India-Myanmar relations – Buddhism, Business, Bollywood, Bharatnatyam and Burma teak.

2) Economic Relations
   • Bilateral trade between the two countries has, for long, remained at around $2 billion.
   • Chinese, Singaporean, Korean, Japanese, Thai and Vietnamese businesses have actively seized business opportunities in Myanmar.
   • Pulses form the single largest item in Myanmar’s limited export basket.
   • Indian businesses could invest in the power, steel, automobiles and even textile sectors in Myanmar.

3) Defence Relations
   • India and Myanmar have been trying to strengthen their defense ties over the past few years.
   • Over 200 Myanmar military officers have been trained in the medical, airforce and navy fields in India.
   • Myanmar has acquired rocket launchers, night vision systems, radar and engineering equipment, including $37.9 million worth of torpedoes, from India.

4) Cultural Relations
   • The 11th-century Ananda Temple in Myanmar was damaged during an earthquake last year and is being renovated with India’s assistance.
   • People to people ties are the strength of India-Myanmar relations
   • No other country has committed as much in grant-in-aid to Myanmar as India. These include:
     a. Kaladan multi-modal corridor
     b. Repair of 69 bridges on the Tamu-Kalewa road
     c. Construction of the 120-km Kalewa-Yargyi corridor
     d. Rhi-Tiddim road in the Chin state bordering Mizoram.
   • Unfortunately, the projects have not been completed in time. As a result, India has not got due credit.

5) India’s assistance in Capacity Building
   • Capacity building in Myanmar with six centres imparting training in diverse subjects, from English language to industrial skills.
   • Myanmar Institute of Information Technology set up in Mandalay with the collaboration of IIIT Bangalore has been a success with all its graduates finding ready employment.
   • The Advanced Centre for Agriculture Research and Education set up in collaboration with India’s ICAR is a fine example of pooling research efforts on pulses and oilseeds.
6) **India’s primary interests in Myanmar**
- To build an economic and security relationship that prevent Myanmar from slipping into the orbit of China.
- Ensure the Myanmar military’s cooperation in preventing Northeastern militants, most notably Naga insurgents, from using Myanmar as a safe haven.
- Support the country’s transition into a full-fledged federal democracy.
- Ameliorate the plight of the Rohingyas as well as ensure the tense relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar do not spiral out of control.

7) **Concerns / Challenges**
- The Indian government is concerned about Rohingya immigrants in the country
- Around 40,000 Rohingyas are said to be staying illegally in India.
- Negotiations on the deportation of Rohingya to Myanmar are a point of contention.
- Lack of basic infrastructure and low trading volume at the Indian border.
- The India Intelligence Agency stated that the smuggling of light arms, drugs and counterfeit currencies have been spotted along the border.
- Beijing is investing in projects to improve the Sittwe–Kunming route.
- Momentum of the Belt and Road Initiative may end India’s East Act Policy like Obama’s pivot to Asia.
- Both sides share a long maritime boundary and land border, which has led to concerns around transnational issues.

8) **Way Forward**
- Strengthening existing cooperation in areas of security and counter-terrorism, trade and investment, infrastructure and energy, and culture
- Boosting cooperation in areas like training and capacity-building of Myanmar’s military.
- Implementing the recommendations of Kofi Annan Advisory Commission report on Rohingya refugee issue.
- India can help in improving the socio-economic conditions in the Rakhine state and also create employment opportunities.
- The two countries must start negotiating for the smooth movement of goods and vehicles
- With Myanmar’s government emphasising higher education and vocational training, more Indian-assisted institutions can be setup in the country.
- Border trade need to become more formalised with single-window clearances and easier currency arrangements.
- The border haats can energise exchange of local produce.
- Cross-border bus services can promote people-to-people connectivity.
- Cross-border trade in services can be boosted in sectors like medicine, diagnostics, education and training for which there is a large market.
- All this will mean that the Northeast will gain from the Act East policy.