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

**India-Myanmar Relations**

**Introduction**
- India and Myanmar recently carried out a comprehensive review of their multi-faceted relationship that is underpinned by **deepening cooperation in areas of trade and investment, power, energy and healthcare.**
- **Myanmar is one of India's strategic neighbours** and shares a 1,640-km-long border with a number of northeastern states.
- India attaches its partnership with Myanmar in accordance with its ‘**Neighborhood First**’ and ‘**Act East’** policies.

**Background**
- The political logic that has shaped India’s Myanmar policy since the 1990s has been to support democratisation driven from within the country.
- This has allowed Delhi to engage with the military that is still an important political actor.

**Recent Developments**
- Both Delhi and Naypyidaw have been collaborating in the **development of border areas** under the India-Myanmar Border Area Development.
- The recent announcement that India was **transferring a Kilo-class submarine to Myanmar** demonstrates the depth of their cooperation in the maritime domain.
- India has reiterated its **support for “ensuring safe, sustainable and speedy return of displaced Rohingya refugees” to Myanmar.**
- Recently India announced the import of 150,000 tonnes of pulses from Myanmar till March 2021.
- India also announced a grant of $2 million for building a bridge at Byanyu-Sarsichauk to ramp up economic connectivity between Mizoram and Myanmar.
- The **coastal-shipping agreement** will allow Indian ships to reach Mizoram via Sittwe Port on the Bay of Bengal and through the Kaladan river multimodal link.
- Myanmar appreciated India’s decision to provide debt service relief under the **G-20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative.**

**key pillars of India-Myanmar relationship**
- **Cooperation on political and diplomatic levels** exists in ample measure resulting in numerous agreements and deepening of mutual understanding.
- **Security and defence cooperation** registered progress.
- **Development cooperation** valued at $1.4 billion (through grants) is substantive.
- **People-to-people exchanges** occupy a special place, considering the invaluable connect of Buddhism and the presence of a nearly two million strong Indian community in Myanmar.
- Counter-balance China’s rising influence.

**India’s assistance to Myanmar**
- New Delhi is assisting Myanmar in areas such as **information technology, agriculture, and infrastructure.**
- India and a few Asian countries have engaged Myanmar keeping in mind the need to reintegrate it with the region and world.
- By engaging Myanmar, India provides alternative options to Myanmar and to **reduce dependence on China.**
India has also proposed to build a petroleum refinery in Myanmar. This is an indication of Myanmar’s growing significance in India.

With the expansion of training facilities and supply of defence equipment needed by the Myanmar military, India has consistently strengthened defence ties.

Capacity building has been accorded priority, with several new institutions set up for agricultural education, information technology and industrial training that have benefited Myanmar youth immensely.

India’s assistance in restoration of the Ananda Temple in Bagan and two temples in Bodh Gaya has been widely appreciated in Myanmar.

India’s timely help of medicines and equipment to fight the corona pandemic.

A number of Indian companies have also set up operations in Myanmar, including oil and gas players like the ONGC Videsh and GAIL.

India has also agreed to train Myanmar army officers and allow them to study at military academies in India.

Why Myanmar is important for India

- The strategic location of Myanmar is beneficial for India’s economic engagement as well as physical and social connectivity.
- For India, Myanmar is key in linking South Asia to Southeast Asia and it becomes the focal point for New Delhi’s regional outreach.
- To connect and develop India’s Northeast.

Concerns / Challenges

- India suffers from an image of being unable in making its presence felt on the ground.
- The inauguration of the liaison office of the Embassy of India in Naypyidaw may seem a routine diplomatic activity.
- However, establishing a permanent presence in the capital does matter.
- For India, the balancing act between Bangladesh and Myanmar remains one of the keys to its overall approach to the Rohingya issue.
- Economic cooperation has developed, but it still stays at a sub-optimal level.
- A significant part of India’s Kaladan multimodal project (KMMTP) passes through the Rakhine state. There is delay in the completion of the project.

Way Forward

- India’s total investment in Myanmar needs to be increased. Investment in energy cooperation deserves a further push.
- While the region’s geopolitics changes, India’s ‘Neighbourhood First’ and ‘Act East’ policy and Myanmar’s deep-seated instinct for a balanced and independent foreign policy must ensure that the two countries journey together as ‘companion souls’.