

BANGLADESH-MYANMAR BILATERAL RELATIONS AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS



By

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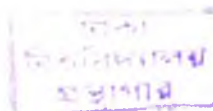
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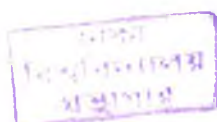
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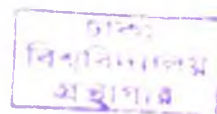
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Abstract

Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations have a great significance in our foreign policy. Myanmar is the next door neighbour of our country. Bangladesh shares land border, maritime boundary, river, political and economic issues, and many other things (such as culture, religion etc.) with Myanmar. The geo-strategic location of Bangladesh and Myanmar signify that without establishing strong bilateral relations both countries will suffer in many ways. National interests will also be hampered. It is reminded that we can change our friend but we cannot change our neighbour. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar need to solve bilateral problems (such as Rohingya refugee issue, land border management, illegal trade and trafficking, small arms and drug supply etc.). Recently Myanmar opens up its door to international community. At present, High Officials have visited Myanmar for this purpose. Eastern and Western countries are showing their interest to Myanmar. It is the greatest changes of Myanmar foreign policy. Bangladesh should take this opportunity. In foreign policy, national interests are the key points which drive other forces for achieving goals. And thus security issues (Land border security, maritime security, economic security etc.) become high lights in foreign policy. In this study, realist approach is applied to conceptualize Bangladesh-Myanmar relations on the basis of national interest and national security perspective. I have tried to find out the current nature and magnitude of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations in terms of Myanmar's recent political and economic reforms for democratization. I have also tried to find out the key players and issues which are responsible for hampering Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations. It is a matter of regret that Myanmar is our far near neighbour. Lack of connectivity (people to people, state to state, Government to Government, road link, air and rail way etc.), lack of knowledge about Myanmar, misunderstanding and mistrust, information gap, long time military rule and restrictions in Myanmar are the main obstacles to establish a cooperative and strong bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Now Bangladesh needs to take Myanmar as a country full of potentials. Therefore, it is our national interest to establish strong friendship with Myanmar based on diplomatic, strategic, economic and social considerations.

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To

My Father: Md. Matiur Rahman

My Mother: Fatema Begum

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Acronyms

| | |
|---------|---|
| ACARE | Advance Centre for Agriculture Research and Education |
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| AEC | Asian Economic Community |
| AIS | Association for Information System |
| ALP | Arakan Liberation Party |
| AMHS | Automatic Message Handling System |
| ARF | ASEAN Regional Forum |
| ARIF | Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front |
| ARNO | Arakan Rohingya National Organization |
| ARSO | Arakan Rohingya Solidarity Organization |
| ASEAN | Association of South East Asian Nations |
| BCIM | Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional |
| BCIM-EC | Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor |
| BGB | Border Guard of Bangladesh |
| BIMSTEC | Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation |
| BRO | Border Road Organization |
| BSPP | Burma Socialist Program Party |
| CS | Continental Shelf |
| CLCS | UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf |
| DNC | Department of Narcotics Control |
| DPA | Democratic Party of Arakan |
| EEZ | Exclusive Economic Zone |
| EU | European Union |

| | |
|-------|---|
| FDI | Fixed Deposit Investment |
| FOC | Foreign Office Consultations |
| FY | Fiscal Year |
| ICAO | International Civil Aviation Organization. |
| ICJ | International Court for Justice |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| IMU | Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan |
| INCB | International Narcotics Control Board |
| ISO | International Organization for Standardization |
| ITLOS | International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea |
| JTC | Joint Trade Commission |
| LC | Letter of Credit |
| LTTE | Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam |
| MET | Metropolitan Museum of Art |
| MISIS | Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs Think Tank. |
| MOU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| NGO | Non-Government Organization |
| NLD | National League for Democracy |
| PBS | Performance Based Navigation |
| RAB | Rapid Action Battalion |
| RNA | Rohingya National Alliance |
| RSO | Rohingya Solidarity Organization |
| R2P | Responsibility to Protect |
| TAR | Trans Asian Railway |
| TCF | Trillion Cubic Feet |

| | |
|---------|--|
| TKK | Tamu-Kalewa-Kaleymyo |
| TNI-BCN | Transnational Institute, Burma Centrum Nederland |
| TS | Territorial Sea |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCLOS | UN Convention on the Law of the Sea |
| UNFC | United Nationalities Federal Council |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| USDP | Union Solidarity and Development Party |
| US | United States |
| VHF | Very High Frequency |

Introduction

Objectives of the Study

Research Questions

Research Methodology

Theory Selection

Significance of the Study

Structure of the Study

Introduction

Bangladesh-Myanmar relations have a great historical and geo-strategic significance. Myanmar is our next door neighbour country. There are geographical, economic, religious, social and cultural affinities in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. In historical context, the current phase of relations began when, as a result of the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), Arakan became the first territory of the old Burmese Kingdom to come under British rule. This laid the foundation for the close economic and social interaction between the old Chittagong Division of Bengal in British India (now in Bangladesh) and the Arakan region of Burma, which strongly conditions the dynamics of Bangladesh-Burma relations to this very day.¹ Officially Bangladesh-Myanmar relation began on 13 January 1972. Bangladesh shares land border, river, and maritime boundary with Myanmar. Bangladesh and Myanmar share 271 kilometers land border. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar are the members of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional) etc. Myanmar can provide certain strategic advantages to Bangladesh. It is the potential gateway for an alternative land route opening towards China and South-East Asia other than the sea. Such road link has the potentiality for a greater communication network between Bangladesh and South-East Asian countries including Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Moreover, with a rich natural resource base, Myanmar is a country with considerable potential. Myanmar's forests and other natural resources like gas, oil, stones are enormous from which Bangladesh can be benefited greatly. On the other side, unfriendly relations with Myanmar can benefit small insurgent groups living in the hilly jungle areas of the Chittagong hill tracts which can cause some degree of instability in the area and become a serious concern for national security.² However, the relation between these two close neighbor has never been smooth and has undergone frequent ups and downs over the last 40 years on a few issues (such as Rohingya refugee issue, illegal trade and investment, trafficking, land border management, maritime boundary issue etc.). Both countries have not been able to build a pragmatic relationship with each other despite having a lot of potentials.³

Since the very beginning Myanmar has been ruled by military junta for decades remaining aloof from maintaining any bilateral or multilateral trade relations with other countries except China and Thailand. The country had trade relations with a few partners and a

majority of the trade was undertaken through informal channels. After five decades of isolation, Myanmar has come to the attention of the global leaders for the country's reformist steps taken by the newly elected government in April 2011. Since then Myanmar has opened the door to work with all investors and development partners. The country is already going through some dramatic shifts.⁴

According to Morten B. Pederson, Myanmar is in the midst of momentous political change, which has seen the country emerge from decades of repressive military rule and international isolation to be lauded by western leaders as a model of political development. While not a democracy yet, the new quasi-civilian government has brought the opposition into parliament and revitalized the country's political life. It has also reached ceasefires with all but one of the Sceptics believe change was forced upon the military leadership by western sanctions and fear that political foment in North Africa and the Middle East might spread to Myanmar, and that reforms are intended simply to shore up the regime and protect military interests. This line of reasoning is unconvincing country's main insurgent groups, undertaken major economic reforms, and launched a campaign for 'clean government'.⁵

However, Myanmar's military rulers have a proud record of resisting external pressure, which goes to the heart of their self-legitimizing, and there have been no clear and present threats to the regime's power base in recent reforms have gone much further than a conservative agenda would have warranted, and have come to pose a significant threat to many vested interests.

As in any transition, the motivations for change are complex and vary among different individuals and factions. But the new government is undertaking reform because it wants to (and can afford to), not because it had to. Five factors in particular are critical for understanding the timing content and speed of the ongoing reform process.⁶

First, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military) has never seen itself as a ruling class. Its self-image is that of a "guardian", which steps in at times of crisis to save the union and restores law and order. In the 1970s, Ne Win ended 12 years of direct military rule by introducing a socialist one party system. By 1988, however, the world zeitgeist had

changed, and the only legitimate system of government was multiparty democracy. Thus, there was never really any doubt that the military would hand back the reins of government to a, nominally at least, elected government.⁷

Second, it had taken two decades for the military to transfer power to civilians was due, in large part, to a deep concern with political stability and personal security. By the late 2000s, however, both the democratic and the ethnic opposition had been decimated, and with the 2008 constitution the military had a critical tool in hand to manage the peace of change. Far from bending to external pressure, the military leaders thus entered into reform from a position of strength.

Third, compared to Senior General Than Shwe, who ruled Myanmar from 1992 to 2011, President Thein Sein is a very different leader. He takes advice; he is not corrupt; and he is genuinely concerned not just about the country in some abstract sense but also about the welfare of ordinary people. Along with fellow reformers like the speaker of the lower house, Shwe Mann, he has demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to reach out to old enemies and make them partners in the pursuit of peace and development.⁸

Fourth, while the Tatmadaw has traditionally been preoccupied with national security, there has always been an underlying concern with economic development and modernization. Failure in this area prompted significant reforms in the mid-1980s, as well as in the early to mid-1990s, and has been the source of significant and growing internal military criticism since the Asian economic crisis in particular. The fact is that, aside from a few hundred generals and crony businessmen, economic system under the previous regime served no one in the country. On the contrary, there was a growing sense that Myanmar was being left behind and exploited by its neighbors. This not only explains what is driving Thein Sein and his reform faction, but also goes a long way towards explaining why there has been relatively little and economic elite⁹

Fifth, the decision by the opposition, both democratic and ethnic to work with the new government to promote peace and democracy has greatly enhanced confidence in the reform process and encouraged the government to “go all in”. Similarly the rapid

normalization of relations with the west has been immensely important in helping lock in the reforms and build momentum for further change.

Transitions are invariably periods of high uncertainty and it is far too early to judge how far the current democratization process will go. Establishing genuine civilian supremacy and making the reform process invertible will be a long -term project. Yet as long as no new threats to political stability arise and civilian governments forgo any attempt to exact retribution or seriously curtail the professional interests of the military as an institution, the *Tatmadaw* is likely to accept a diminished political role.¹⁰

In the light of these developments, the forthcoming visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from 5 December 2011 to Myanmar is of immense importance for Bangladesh. Myanmar, with its geo-strategic location and vast natural resources, has gained a strategic importance among the countries in the entire region. Earlier, in pursuit of improving its relations with other countries by warding off western pressure, the military regime in Myanmar had left no stone unturned to utilize its strategic leverages. Realizing, the geo-strategic and geo-economic importance of Myanmar, China and India have already ensure their presence in the development process of Myanmar where Bangladesh remains 'nowhere'. Though Bangladesh is aware about the potential of its look-east policy, it has, to date, failed to achieve anything pursuing this policy with Myanmar. Despite having a close geographic proximity with Myanmar, there is no air links, no direct road connectivity, and no shipping link between the two countries.¹¹Therefore it is the high time to strengthen the economic and political interactions with that country. Bangladesh needs to understand Myanmar in the context of recent changes which have been undertaken by the present government in Myanmar.

There are a number of seemingly intractable issues, affecting the bilateral relations between the two countries; these are, repatriation of the remaining Rohingya refugees, land border insurgency, smuggling of narcotics and illegal trade. According to different sources, there are more than 300,000 unregistered Rohingyas living among the local population, in slums and villages mostly in Cox's Bazar district but also in smaller numbers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It is a major concern for Bangladesh that the Myanmar is reluctant to accept this person as there citizens.¹²The smuggling of narcotics

in the Bangladesh-Myanmar border has become a critical issue between the two countries. Media reports revealed that Myanmar's businessmen have set up many factories in the Shan province, near Thailand border, to produce YABA targeting the domestic market of Bangladesh. Bangladesh has already given a list of businessmen to Myanmar who is involved in the smuggling of narcotics in the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. Given the existing challenges between the two countries, it would be a challenge for Bangladesh to its relationship with Myanmar. However, Bangladesh needs to inculcate a sense of trust into the mind of the present government of Myanmar that these longstanding unresolved issues would no longer create hindrances in promoting economic prosperity between the two countries. The policy makers in Bangladesh need to address some common areas of concern where both the countries can strengthen their cooperation.¹³

Objectives of the Study

The basic purpose of the thesis paper is to investigate current nature and magnitude of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. It aims to examine recent political and economic reforms in Myanmar. It explains challenges and opportunities of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. The specific objectives include:

- Identifying the key interests of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.
- Explaining the basic information about Myanmar (like its history, population, language, government system, culture, religion, economy, geo-strategy, state policy, domestic political culture, national interest, ethnic conflict, challenges, opportunities, natural resources, energy, connectivity, regional power etc.) to understand Myanmar as our neighbour country.
- Investigating the contribution of non-state actors (regional and sub-regional organizations like BIMSTEC, BCIM, ASEAN, ARF etc.) in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.
- Exploring future directions for strengthening Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

Research Questions

The central research question is to what degree are political and economic reforms in Myanmar attributable to democratization and what are the key interests of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations? The study seeks to answer three principal questions:

1. How can national interest and national security play a vital role to increase challenges?
2. What is the current nature and magnitude of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations?
3. What are the opportunities and challenges of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations in terms of positioning Myanmar for democratization?

Research Methodology

The methodology of the research paper is analytical in nature. Both primary and secondary data have been used for this research paper. Relevant books, journals, newspapers, published articles, survey reports, working papers, and internet sources are used in order to make this research paper informative and descriptive. Interviews are conducted with the experts of foreign ministry, NGOs, and the scholars of University.

There are three hypotheses in the research paper. These hypotheses are: National interest of Myanmar is very much colored by its security centric approach; Recent political and economic reforms in Myanmar signify a favorable environment for Bangladesh-Myanmar cooperative relations; Regional and sub-regional organizations play an important role in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

At the first stage of the study I have collected relevant literature about Bangladesh and Myanmar. Then I have study. Then I have prepared questionnaire for the survey. Then I have conducted interview of selected persons randomly. Then I have computed and analyzed everything logically. I have followed theoretical framework to describe key points of the study.

Theory Selection

Realist theory is used as a theoretical tool. Realist argued that the pursuit of power and national interest were the major forces driving world politics. In the research paper, I have focused national interest and national security as the key concepts that drive Bangladesh-Myanmar relations in different times in different moods. From the very beginning state security gets the highest priority in Myanmar. Myanmar's military rulers always pursuit for power and they show themselves as "Guardian" of the state. Myanmar's national security highlights state security. There are many ethnic groups in Myanmar those are involved with conflict with each other for wealth and power. Myanmar's Military rulers never consider them as an important part of national community. Myanmar's ethnic people are deployed in various sectors. They feel insecure themselves. And thus thousands of Rohingya flee from Myanmar and come into Bangladesh for seeking better livelihood. But Rohingya refugees are excessive burden for Bangladesh. They hamper our national security. They involve with illegal activities. As a result, serious tension has arisen in many times between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar try to secure their national interest. In this perspective, I have focused that national interest and national security play the key role to enhance new challenges in state to state relations. In the research paper, I have examined Bangladesh-Myanmar relations on the basis of key points (national interest, national security, power etc.) and key players (state actor, non-state actor, military ruler, democratic authority etc.) reflecting realist view.

Significance of the Study

Myanmar is our next door neighbour country. But we know very little about Myanmar. There is a lack of knowledge about Myanmar (like its history, culture, religion, government system, economy, geo-strategy, nature of population, language, natural resources, domestic policy, foreign policy, challenges, opportunities, national interest, security dilemma, alliances etc.). The thesis paper attempts to gather knowledge about Myanmar as a country of potential. It will also help to identify key concepts (national interest, national security, state security, power etc.) and key players (state actor, non-state actor, military ruler, democratic authority etc.) in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations .It explains Challenges and opportunities of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations for future directions. Strategically, Myanmar has a great significance for Bangladesh. These two countries are placed in the epicenter of the global happenings. Both Bangladesh and

Myanmar can work as a bridge among India, China and ASEAN countries. Myanmar has extensive natural gas deposits and liberal policy of leasing land for agro-based industries. It is a great opportunity for Bangladesh to supply manpower for infrastructural development work. Current economic and political reforms in Myanmar open a new chapter for bilateral trade and investment. In this view, the thesis paper has a great economic significance for exploring economic aspect of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. The thesis paper will also help to understand the role of regional and sub-regional organizations as non-state actors for increasing connectivity and regional integrity.

Structure of the Study

The study is organized into six chapters. Chapter one introduces a theoretical analysis of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. It conceptualizes Bangladesh-Myanmar relations on the basis of national interest and national security. Chapter two examines current nature and magnitude of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. It touches Rohingya issue, maritime boundary issue, trade and investment, energy and natural resources, connectivity, land border management etc. Chapter three investigates domestic political change in Myanmar. It explains political and economic reforms and ethnic conflict in Myanmar. Chapter four identifies challenges of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. It explains challenges are emerged on the basis of national interest and national security. Chapter five investigates prospects and opportunities. It touches economic aspects, connectivity, natural resources, role of regional and sub-regional organizations etc. Chapter six explains geo-strategic and economic interests of great powers in Myanmar. It also touches its impact on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

Chapter I
Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations: A Theoretical Analysis

Chapter I

Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations: A Theoretical Analysis

National Interest is the key concept in any discussion of foreign policy. Here, realist theory is applied to conceptualize Bangladesh-Myanmar relations by considering national interest and national security. At the same time, changing domestic political culture of Myanmar is examined. In the study, there are three assumptions explored. Firstly, national interest of Myanmar is very much colored by security approach. Secondly, Bangladesh-Myanmar relations take different faces in different times on the basis of national interest and national security. Thirdly, non-state actors create a suitable environment for sharing common interest of states.

What is the national interest of the people of Myanmar? National interest is a broad concept. National interest can describe the aspirations of the state; it can also be used operationally, in application to the specific policies and programmes pursuit; it can be used polemically in political argument, to explain, rationalize, or criticize. In Myanmar, 'National Interest' is used operationally to establish Military's security-centric policy for power.¹⁴ State power and the role of military get the highest priority in Myanmar by its constitution. Due to 50 years military rule, constitution is military dominated. Myanmar's military rulers always adopt a state-centric national security policy approach.¹⁵

The notion of 'National Interest' is based on the values of national community, values which can be regarded, as the product of its culture. Values reach their full political significance only in actions, when the statesman actively applies them.¹⁶ As a multi-ethnic society, Myanmar is split into eight major ethnic races which compose 135 distinct ethnic groups. They fight with-each other for distributing power and wealth. According to survey maps from the Ministry of Mines (MoM), the energy belts of hydrocarbons (oil, gas and coal) are centered in Myanmar's ethnic areas. Myanmar's military rulers never consider ethnic people as an important part of national community.

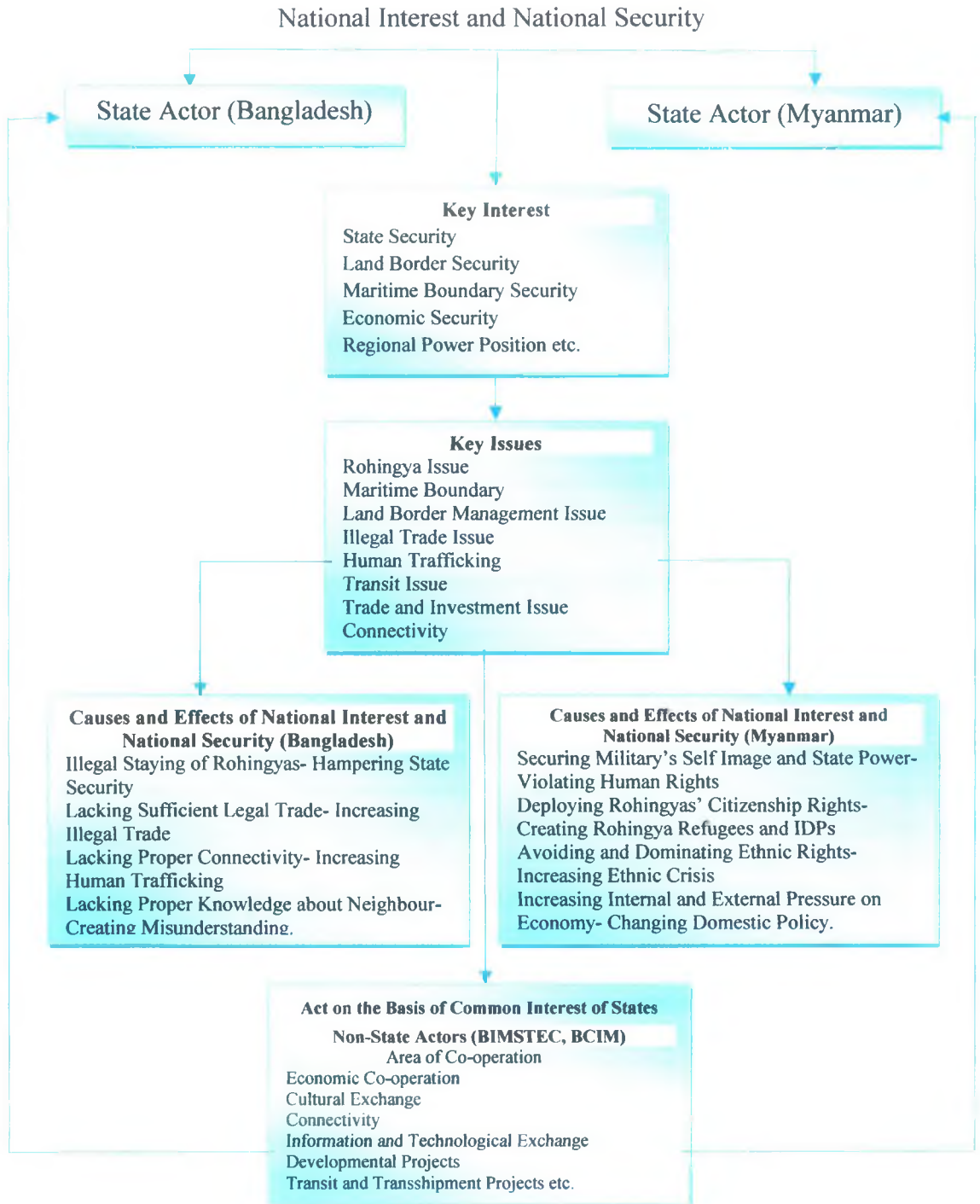
The values of ethnic people are neglected in Myanmar. In addition, Myanmar's military rulers reduce the economic development of ethnic areas. Ne Win's government brought Burma into a strong centralized socialist state under the monopolized control of the Army. Ne Win denied the citizenship of Rohingya refugees. As a result thousands of Rohingya

came into Bangladesh for economic and political shelter. The problem was, formally recognized for the first time after a mass exodus from the other side of the border as the then Burmese military junta conducted Operation Dragon in 1978. About 200,000 Rohingya people had crossed the border. The problem erupted on a large scale once again as about 250,000 Rohingya people crossed the border in 1991 and 1992. A majority of them were repatriated with support from the UNHCR. Residual 30,000 persons have been staying in two refugee camps in bordering Cox's Bazar. At least 300,000 more Rohingyas, who are now identified as 'undocumented Myanmar nationals', have crossed the border. However, Myanmar has been buying time for years to get its people repatriated.¹⁷ For Bangladesh Rohingyas are extra burden and security threat. They are extra pressure on our political and social life. They destroy our cultural distinction. Rohingya issue is emerged as a big challenge for Bangladesh and Myanmar on the basis of national interest. Myanmar has no intention to stop the daily continuous trespassing of the Rohingyas from Arakan to Bangladesh. Bangladesh government has no obligation to bear the extra pressure. The Bangladesh government should now extensively engage in all diplomatic levels with Myanmar without any delay for some positive outcome, especially on Rohingya issues.¹⁸ There are some other issues which are responsible to increase tension between Bangladesh and Myanmar. These are land border management, maritime boundary issue, trafficking, illegal trade etc. All these issues are causes and effects of national interest and national security. Each issue generates less or more security threat for state. In these circumstances, non-state actors (BIMSTEC, ASEAN, BCIM etc.) produce a suitable environment for mutual understanding and sharing common interests in state to state relations.

Recent political and economic reforms in Myanmar open up a new opportunity for Bangladesh to establish a cooperative relation. Both internal factors and external factors are responsible to bring a dramatic change in Myanmar's domestic political culture. In the light of this change, national interest of Myanmar is reshaped and balanced. President Thein Sein has taken a great step to comprehensively modernize the economy. International community is showing interest to Myanmar. Bangladesh is also seeking key interest in Myanmar. Bangladesh-Myanmar relations have taken a new turn for mutual benefit on the basis of national interest. In this study, it is highlighted that every policy and

change is occurred in a state due to national interest and national security which define state to state relations in world politics.

Figure-1: Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations



Source: Prepared By Author

Figure-1 shows that Bangladesh-Myanmar relations act on the basis of national interest and national security. Here, non-state actors act on the basis of common interests of states

for strengthening relations, establishing peace and progress. Here, it is presented that key interests and key issues of Bangladesh and Myanmar are bounded by national interest and national security perspective. Bilateral act and policy of both countries are considered as the causes and effects of national interest and national security.

To strengthen Bangladesh-Myanmar relations through connectivity bilaterally (state to state level) and Multilaterally (BIMSTEC, BCIM, ASEAN, ARF, SAARC etc.) can be a great opportunity for both countries. In this perspective, different kinds of development activities (seminars and conferences on economic issues, cultural exchange and social outreach programmes, programmes on sustainable environment and sound health for all etc.) should be organized by both countries. Though it is unavoidable to national interest and national security for both countries, new suitable environment should be found out for common interests in order to strong bilateral relations and regional power position.

Chapter II

Nature and Magnitude of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations

2.1 The Rohingya Issue

2.2 Maritime Boundary Issue

2.2.1 Issues before the Tribunal

2.2.2 Delimitation of territorial sea

2.2.3 EEZ and Continental Shelf within 200 nm

2.2.4 Jurisdiction to delimit Continental Shelf beyond 200 nm

2.3 Land Border Management

2.4 Trade and Investment

2.5 Connectivity

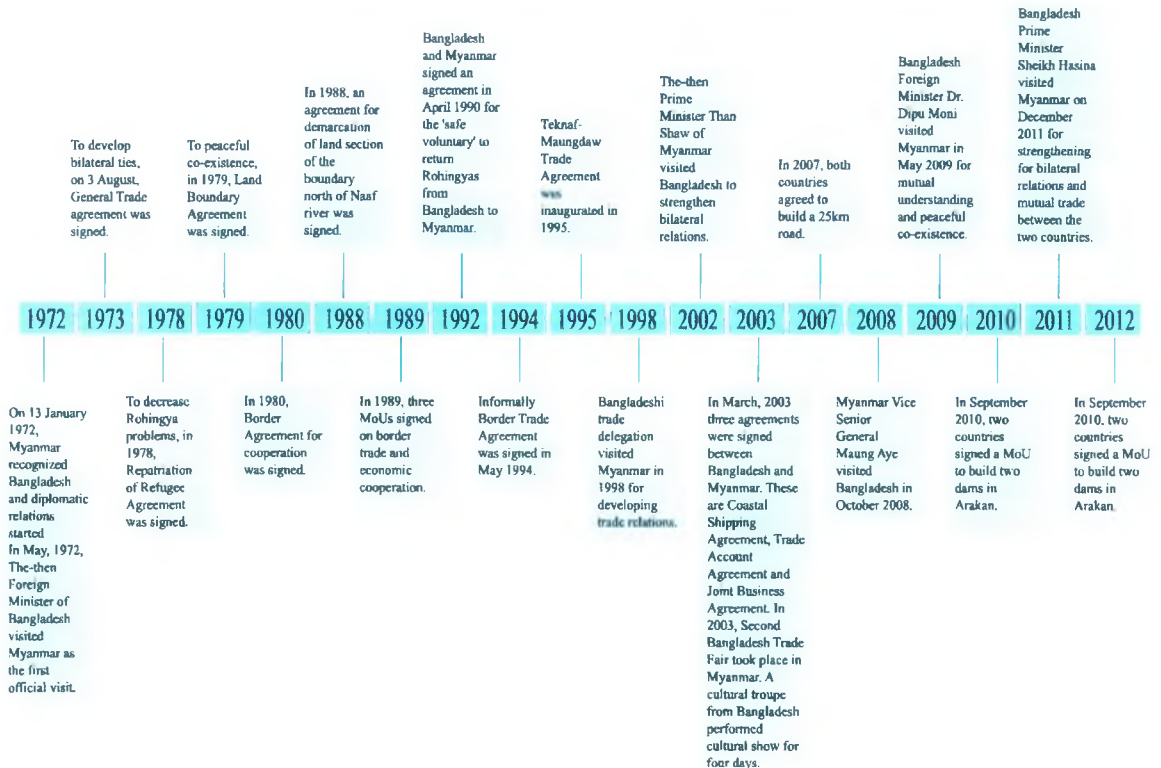
2.6 Energy and Natural Resources

Chapter II

Nature and Magnitude of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations

Bangladesh and Myanmar share 271 kilometer of land border. Both the countries have a long history of sharing political, cultural and economic affairs prior to their emergence as modern nation states. They have also common legacy of British colonial experience. Relation between these two nations linked more by demography than proximity.¹⁹The states have had “cordial” relations since Bangladesh achieved independence from West Pakistan in 1971.²⁰Myanmar has been one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh. However, the relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar over the last nearly four decades have been marked by chequered developments.

Figure 2: Historical Chronology of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations.



Source: Prepared by Author

Despite the persistence of certain issues of dispute and resultant occasional Luke-Warm bilateral relations, Bangladesh and Myanmar also enjoyed a rather dynamic process of cooperation. In addition to bilateral cooperation, the two countries are also developing cooperative relations under the framework of a number of regional and sub-regional organizations/ initiatives. Bangladesh and Myanmar are the founding members of the sub-

regional grouping called Bay of Bengal initiatives for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Both the countries are also involved in the process of Track-II Kunming initiative that includes Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar and also known as BCIM. More importantly, Bangladesh is moving towards developing a closer formal relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) of which Myanmar is a member. Bangladesh has already joined the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and it is moving towards Dialogue partnership with ASEAN.

Notwithstanding persistent efforts on the part of both the countries, the process of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations have also been, at times, overshadowed by contentious issues.²¹In this backdrop, the main issues of bilateral relations are considered as follows:

2.1 The Rohingya Issue

Though the political and economic relationships among the countries of the sub-region of Eastern South Asia have been strengthened since 1990s, the ties between Burma (Myanmar) and Bangladesh have often been disrupted by the Rohingya issue. The Rohingyas are a Muslim ethnic group residing in the Buthidaung and Maungdaw Township of the northwestern part of the Arakan State, Burma. This area, which is adjacent to the Naaf River as boundary from Bangladesh, is also called the Mayu region. They live here as the majority together with the Buddhist Arakanese and Burmese. Since no accurate census has ever been taken, the population of the Rohingyas is unknown.²²

Map1: Rohingya (Arakan state, Burma and Cox's bazaar, Bangladesh)



Source: www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/uploads/9/1/8/4/9184764/8125225_orig.png

In 1974, the Ne Win government denied their citizenship officially. In 1978, when around 200,000 members of this ethnic group escaped the country, due to Myanmar army's operation Dragon King Under an agreement of 1978 both the countries Bangladesh and Myanmar agreed to solve the issue. However, there was always a debate between Bangladesh and Myanmar about the total number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. With the collaboration of international community, however, Myanmar took back almost all the Rohingya migrated to Bangladesh during 1978-79. But, again in 1991 and 1992, almost 250,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution.²³

Bangladesh took initiative to repatriate the Rohingya refugees and the Government of Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an agreement in April 1992 for the "safe voluntary" return of Rohingyas from Bangladesh to Myanmar started by the end of 1995, but many of the repatriated refugees returned to Bangladesh between 1996 to 1998 with thousands of new arriving Rohingyas. The most recent incident took place in June 2012, when a large number of Rohingyas tried to enter Bangladesh after riots pitted Buddhists against Muslims in Myanmar's state of Rakhine. This time, however, the government of Bangladesh has refused to accept any Rohingyas. At present, it is estimated that 28,000 Rohingya people are registered and living in the refugee camps in Bangladesh and more than 200,000 unregistered are living in the surrounding towns and villages outside of the camps.²⁴

The Rohingya issue remains as a security concern for Bangladesh. It is alleged that undocumented Rohingyas are engaged in the unlawful activities like smuggling arms trafficking, drug trafficking.²⁵ The conflicts between Rohingyas and Bangladeshis are threatening social cohesion in the region. Moreover, the Rohingya refugees are collecting Bangladeshi passport and going to third country, where their activities are affecting image of Bangladesh.²⁶ We find in the UNHCR's version, eight unregistered Rohingya refugees to every registered one. In contrast, government's ratio between listed and unlisted refugees stands at 15 to 1. This demographic pressure on an already densely populated part of Bangladesh is headed for snowballing with severe repercussion in the horizon.

Given that 30,000 were afflicted in the latest eruption of ethnic violence in Rakhine state capital Sittwe, this may have been just a stalling operation. Since no media is allowed in

the troubled zone there does no way know whether those sent back by us are safe. Perhaps, Bangladesh's stern approach has gone down well with the Myanmar authorities. For once, we could bite the bullet and let them float into the elements of nature, or shove them into the tunnel of uncertainty. Clearly, all this is a palliative, and not a cure of the disease. Because the fundamental issue of statelessness of the Muslim minority in the Rakhine state of Myanmar remains intact. Persecution and ethnic cleansing of varying intensity follow from this non-existent status of note even second class citizens. So long as this seminal question of nationality is not resolved, Rohingyas in boatloads or trickles would keep coming in through the 200km long porous border between Bangladesh and Myanmar.²⁷

When a country is at the receiving end of fallout from either a willful persecution of Rohingyas by the military as in 1978 and 1991 and internal ethnic violence as erupted lately, it has to defend its national interest. Bangladesh has every right to address the problem bilaterally, and if necessary, internationally.²⁸

The violence against the Rohingyas in Myanmar now threatens to affect the entire Muslim community in Myanmar-about 4 percent of the total population. The threats to Myanmar's security are taking a more complex form, and could begin to affect the peace and stability of the region as a whole. The plight of the Muslims in Myanmar is being exploited by jihadist groups, their supporters and their sympathizers.²⁹

First, the violence has triggered a massive outflow of Rohingya refugees to countries in South and Southeast Asia. Most of these refugees now live in terrible conditions. They feel marginalized and victimized by Myanmar and think a double standard is being applied by the international community-especially the United States-because it has failed to persuade the Myanmar government to address violence against Muslims. This feeling of abandonment is creating a pool of potential recruits for militant and radical groups.³⁰

Second, several radical groups operating in South Asia, Central Asia and Southeast Asia-including the Tehreek Taliban Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban, the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Jama'ah Ansharut Tauhid-are using the Rohingya issue to incite members of the Muslim community to carry out armed jihad Bashir's statements

and visual imagery in social media platforms depicting the plight of the Rohingyas have heightened the zeal of those intent on conducting armed jihad in Myanmar. A sizable Rohingya community lives in a part of Karachi in Pakistan, and some of its members were actively involved with the Rohingya Solidarity Organization, a militant group that ran a training camp in Myanmar-Bangladesh border areas before 9/11.³¹ There has been a re-emergence of Rohingya militant groups who are publishing radical materials in Arabic and Urdu that urge Muslims to join armed jihad in Myanmar. In the aftermath of attack on Rohingya villages in June 2012, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, which is known for suicide terrorism, threatened to attack Myanmar to avenge crimes against the Muslim Rohingya. But the networking and the operational capability of the Rohingya groups is still not known.³²

Abu Zar Al-Burmi, a leader of the IMU, has also called for an armed jihad against Myanmar as the solution to the ‘occupation’ of Rakhine State. The IMU’s Jundullah media network is actively spreading radical materials on the internet, and the video of al-Burmi’s speech ‘The Lost Nation’ is a case in point: it targets not only Myanmar but China for its support for the Myanmar government.³³

The Rohingya issue is becoming a rallying point for radicals and militants. The calls for jihad in Myanmar have already been effective: in Indonesia there have been attempted attacks against the Myanmar embassy and mass demonstrations, while Malaysia witnessed a series of deadly clashes between Buddhist and Muslim expatriate groups from Myanmar. As a response the Malaysian police detained more than 900 Myanmar nationals.

The spreading violence in Myanmar might not make Southeast Asia a new jihadist front but there will be a significant resurgence in radical activities. The repression of the Rohingyas makes jihadist narratives more attractive to disaffected Muslims: it could trigger radicalization and revive terrorist groups that have not been active for years.³⁴

Asia has long waited for Myanmar to open up and recent reform should be greeted with cautious optimism. But among Myanmar’s political and economic problems, the repression of its Muslim minority needs special attention. Communal and religious tensions in Myanmar are not a new phenomenon. Successive governments have

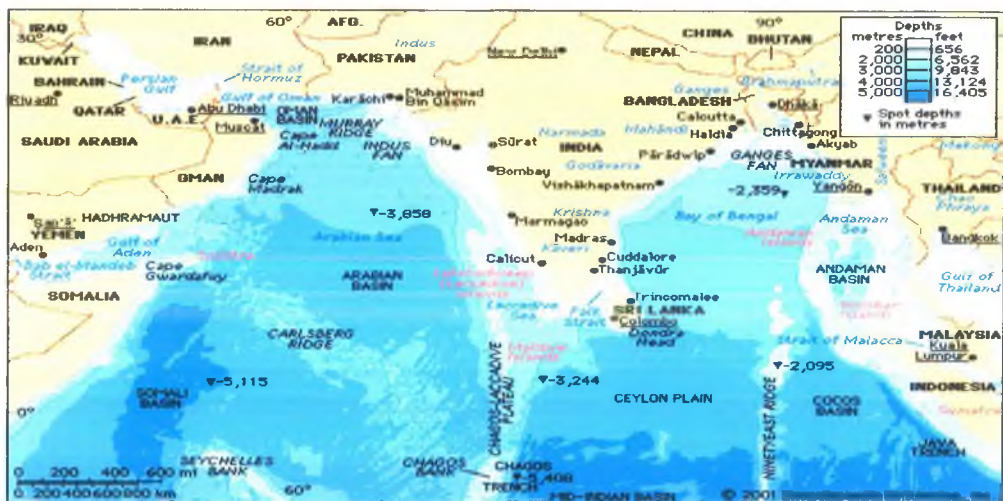
marginalized minorities and negatively stereotyped different communities. There have been violent riots and forced migration. While the current government, led by the reformist President Thein Sein, is trying to address these problems, the deterioration of inter-communal relations is a major challenge. In many ways the success of Myanmar's ongoing reforms will depend on how communal relations are managed and how tensions are diffused.³⁵

Now, Bangladesh can strengthen diplomatic endeavors with Myanmar to discuss political issues and to solve bilateral disputes like Rohingya repatriation and border management. It needs to emphasize the Rohingya issue remains most important political debate between the two countries. Bilateral solution of the problem should get priority over other political concerns. Bangladesh's approach, in this connection, should be to link up Rohingya problem with regional security concerns and how a stable border can improve bilateral friendship and goodwill.³⁶

2.2 Maritime Boundary Issue

The longstanding debate between Bangladesh and Myanmar over maritime dispute came to an end after the verdict of International Tribunal of the law of the sea on 14 March 2012. Bangladesh gained 111000 square kilometers of exclusive economic zone in the Bay of Bengal. The Tribunal also awarded Bangladesh a 12-miles territorial sea round St. Martins Island. It is a positive development for both countries.³⁷

Map 2: Bay of Bengal



Source: <http://southasiajournal.net/2012/10/de-limitation-of-the-bangladesh-myanmar-maritime-border/>

The debate over maritime boundary was affecting Bangladesh-Myanmar relations, when both the countries were inviting foreign companies to explore natural resources in the maritime area. The solution of the problem opened new opportunities for both the countries. Beyond the EEZ (200nm), Myanmar can go for fishing while Bangladesh have right to explore sea-bed resources. In case Bangladesh finds resources in that area, it may have to consult with Myanmar for the exploration.³⁸

The first talks on delineating the maritime boundary between Bangladesh and Myanmar were held in 1974, shortly after Bangladesh's independence. At this time, offshore energy prospects were severely constrained by the lack of energy investment and insufficient deep water drilling technology. With few other incentives pushing either side to quickly resolve the boundary dispute, talks occurred only sporadically before ceasing altogether in 1986. After a hiatus of over two decades, talks finally resumed in November 2007 and continued throughout 2008, generally as an important but not central item in bilateral discussion. Progress was limited because neither side was willing to compromise on the fundamental principle of boundary delimitation. Bangladesh's legal argument used the principle of equity, whereas Myanmar employed the principle of equidistance.³⁹

Myanmar never considered to equidistance, for which an agreement for equitable delimitation of maritime zones between the countries was never reached. The disagreement created a deadlock in the negotiations which eventually obstructed the exploration of natural resources in the Bay by both the countries.

Having failed to resolve the issue bilaterally, the government of Bangladesh took a bold and timely decision for settlement of this issue through compulsory dispute settlement procedures under UNCLOS. On 08 October 2009, Notice of Arbitration was issued with Myanmar under part XV of the UNCLOS for delimitation of TS, the EEZ and the continental shelf in accordance with international law. Both parties therefore accepted the Jurisdiction of ITLOS for resolution of the dispute and transferred the case to the ITLOS. On 14 December 2009, the case entered the docket of ITLOS as the 16th case. It was not an easy choice for the government given the unpredictability of the compulsory decision of a neutral adjudicating body i.e., the Tribunal.⁴⁰

2.2.1 Issues before the Tribunal

Bangladesh requested the Tribunal to delimit the maritime boundary of the TS (12nm), EEZ and CS up to 200nm and the Continental shelf beyond 200nm between Bangladesh and Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal. According to the international law, a coastal country does not automatically enjoy any rights by just claiming the maritime areas; the claims to such maritime areas are subject to delimitation either by agreement or by judicial settlement.⁴¹

The main issues before the Tribunal in the present case were as follow: Delimitation of 12nm TS as per Art 15 of UNCLOS (provides for delimitation to be effected by equidistance adjusted for special circumstances/historic titles (if any)). Delimitation of EEZ and Continental shelf up to 200 nm as per Art 74 of UNCLOS (provides for delimitation to be effected to achieve an equitable solution; which is practically done by drawing a provisional equidistance line from the selected base points from the coastline of the parties and then adjusting the line for relevant circumstances to ensure ‘equity’).⁴² Delimitation of Continental shelf beyond 200 nm as per Art 83 of UNCLOS (provides for some provision like Art 74). Determination of Tribunal’s jurisdiction, in general, to delimit the Continental shelf beyond 200 nm pending recommendations from the UN commission on the limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) under Art 76 of UNCLOS with regards to entitlement; in particular, in the present case, whether Bangladesh’s maritime area could be stretched beyond 200 nm given “cut off” by lateral boundaries with Myanmar and India. Finally, determination of ‘equitableness’ by proportionality test (done in the light of the ratio between the relevant coasts of the two states and the ratio between the areas attributed to each).⁴³

2.2.2 Delimitation of Territorial Sea

In the delimitation of TS, Bangladesh made two alternative proposals, first to consider the boundary agreed by the delegations of Bangladesh and Myanmar in 1974 and practiced by the parties for last 34 years, or alternatively, in the case the ‘agreed minutes’ fails to meet the international standard to be constituted as a legally binding treaty, to delimit the territorial sea by a equidistant line (under Art 15 of UNCLOS) between Bangladesh and Myanmar giving full effect to the St. Martin’s Island. Bangladesh proposed 8 points delimiting the maritime boundary around St. Martin’s starting from the mouth of Naaf

River up to the 12 nm of TS. While proposing two alternative arguments, Bangladesh knew it very well that; the results of any of the proposal would be the same.⁴⁴

Myanmar on the other hand, came up with multiple arguments first, they rejected presence of any agreement between the parties. Regarding Bangladesh's second proposal, Myanmar argued that, in the absence of any balancing Island in Myanmar side vis-à-vis St. Martin's Island should be considered a 'special circumstances' within the meaning of Art 15 of UNCLOS and argued that since the Island is in front of their mainland, it should be accorded only 6 nm of TS. Myanmar proposed 7 points to delimit the boundary and cited many cases like Anglo-French Continental Shelf Case, Tunisia-Libya case. Apart from that, they also made attempts to equate Oyster Island Bangladesh opposed saying that the instances referred by Myanmar has been used for delimitation of Continental Shelf and not for delimitation of TS.⁴⁵

Here, the tribunal although refused to accept 1974 agreed minutes as a binding treaty, however accepted Bangladesh's argument about the status of Islands but and delimited the TS on the basis of Bangladesh's alternative proposal. Rejecting Myanmar's argument, the Tribunal also gave full effect to St. Martin's (i.e.12 nm) vis-à-vis Myanmar's main land. The arguments of Myanmar to equate Oyster with St. Martin's also failed and Oyster did not get even an inch-effect in the whole case. If ITLOS boundary is superimposed on the 1974 agreement it can be clearly seen with a fresh eye that the boundary is the same as agreed in 1974.⁴⁶

2.2.3 EEZ and Continental Shelf within 200 nm

During the whole period of negotiations, Bangladesh made continuous efforts to achieve an 'equitable solution', whereas Myanmar always insisted on the rigid application of 'equidistance method' without paying any attention to relevant circumstances that the law provides for Bangladesh. Due to the unique geographical position of Bangladesh, (the concave coastline of Bangladesh situated in the overall concave northern part of Bay of Bengal with a double concavity at Meghna Estuary), equidistance method cuts off Bangladesh's maritime limits within 130 nm. This has been the reality for last 38 years, when Bangladesh tried relentlessly to impress upon its neighbors and they continuously disregarded. To establish our sovereign rights over the maritime resources against such

unfair and inequitable reasoning, Bangladesh resorted to the international law. The neighbors never agreed to give any special attention to the concavity of Bangladesh's coast for which equidistance formula could be abandoned.⁴⁷

In case of delimitation of EEZ, Bangladesh maintained its previous position and argued that, the equidistance method does not ensure an equitable result, as required by art 74 of UNCLOS. It considered all options available under the law and jurisprudence so far developed to reach to 200 nm and beyond removing cut off effect at 130 nm produced by applying strict equidistance lines drawn by India and Myanmar. Bangladesh calculates the coastal facade of both countries and proposed an Angle bisector having produced an angle of 215 inch from the mouth of Naaf River as the delimitation lineup to 200 nm. This was the only way to maximize Bangladesh's claim based on law and international jurisprudence.⁴⁸ This, in fact, allows Bangladesh to enjoy the full 200 nm of EEZ and Continental Shelf. Angle bisector was applied in the case of Honduras-Nicaragua (ICJ) and Guinea and Guinea-Bissau Arbitration. Bangladesh put forth three factors justifying relevant circumstances: (1) Concavity and the cut off effect of such concavity, (2) Presence of St. Martin's Island and, (3) The Bengal Depositional System. While arguing for these, the principal focus of Bangladesh's argument was 'concavity', other two were supporting strategic arguments.⁴⁹

Myanmar selected two base points on Bangladesh's coast and three base points on Myanmar's coastline and opted for Equidistance/relevant circumstances formula. However, Myanmar argued that, the equidistance line should not be adjusted there existed no 'relevant circumstances' to do so. Regarding concavity of Bangladesh's coast, Myanmar's argument was, concavity or any other geographical feature which is given by the nature cannot be a special factor as that will constitute 'refashioning of the geography'. They referred to cases like Cameroon/Nigeria Case (ICJ) where arguments to consider concavity but the Court did not consider it as a relevant circumstances and delimited giving only 30 nm of sea areas to Cameroon.⁵⁰

For double concavity at our coast, Bangladesh never considered that the equidistance line would be producing equitable solutions in Maritime boundary delimitation and according did not propose any base points since those are required to draw an equidistance line.

Thus, there is no point in saying that all base points of Myanmar were accepted and Bangladesh has lost in this segment. Tribunal on its own selected base points for Bangladesh. Moreover, in TS segment, all 08 base points of Bangladesh were accepted by the Tribunal.⁵¹

In the judgment, the Tribunal, after drawing a provisional equidistance line checked whether they produce any cut-off effect. After that, while deciding on the relevant circumstances, the Tribunal accepted Bangladesh's argument of concavity and declared that the concavity of Bangladesh's coast that produces the cut-off effect is relevant. Then it decided to modify the equidistance line, by drawing a geodetic line starting at an azimuth of 215 inch, in the same azimuth proposed by Bangladesh in the angle bisector method. The Tribunal rejected Myanmar's argument that the equidistance line without adjustment was equitable as it prevented Bangladesh from reaching out to 200 nm. However, a secondary argument like Bengal Depositional System was not considered relevant in this case, because the delimitation of a single maritime boundary is to "be determined on the basis of coastal geography".⁵² What some critiques are purposely not mentioning the Myanmar opposed any adjustment of equidistance line. Had the court accepted Myanmar's contention and Bangladesh would have remained cut-off at 130nm and its EEZ up to 200 nm would not have extended. The judgment of the Tribunal ensured Bangladesh's full access to 200 nm of EEZ and Continental Shelf. Myanmar had been content with a method that limited Bangladesh's maritime area within 130 nm. After the North Sea Continental Shelf case in 1969, never in the history of the law of the sea, concavity was considered to be a relevant circumstance. But Bangladesh was successful to convince the Tribunal that concavity of its coast establishes "relevant circumstance" requiring adjustment of equidistance line. The Tribunal also mentioned that, like North Sea Continental Shelf case, Bangladesh is a classic example of concavity where equidistance cannot be applied.⁵³

2.2.4 Jurisdiction to delimit Continental Shelf beyond 200 nm

In the delimitation of Continental shelf beyond 200 nm, the Tribunal had to first decide on the jurisdiction. Myanmar raised two-step objections to the jurisdiction of Tribunal-(a) the Tribunal lacks jurisdiction, (b) even if had jurisdiction, it should not be applied in the present case.⁵⁴

Bangladesh requested the Tribunal to delimit the continental shelf beyond 200 nm in addition to TS and EEZ. On the other hand, Myanmar strongly opposed the idea of delimiting the continental shelf beyond 200 nm arguing that, the entitlement as well as the outer limit of such continental shelf is subject to recommendations from the CLCS, where Myanmar lodged its submission on 16 Dec 2008 and Bangladesh on 25 Feb 2011. Myanmar referred to the decision in the *St. Pierre and Miquelon Case (Canada vs. France)* and *Nicaragua vs. Honduras Case (ICJ)*, where jurisdiction to delimit the continental shelf beyond 200 nm was denied due to the absence of recommendations from CLCS. Deciding outer continental shelf before the recommendations from the CLCS would constitute ‘putting the cart before the horse’- argued Myanmar. In the second step, Myanmar argued that, even if the Tribunal decides that, it has jurisdiction to delimit the continental shelf beyond 200 nm, it should not apply such jurisdiction in this particular case.⁵⁵ The reason raised by them was, since the strict equidistance lines from Myanmar and Indian side meets at a tri-junction point and terminates Bangladesh’s maritime limit well before 200 nm, and thus, the question of continental shelf beyond 200 nm does not arise for Bangladesh. Bangladesh defended its position stating that, the role of CLCS is to define the outer limit of the continental shelf, not the lateral boundary limits. Regarding delimiting Bangladesh’s maritime limits well before 200 nm, Bangladesh argued, it is on the Tribunal to decide whether the relevant circumstances referred to by Bangladesh are accepted by the Tribunal so as to deflect the delimitation line and ensure access of Bangladesh to the continental shelf beyond 200 nm. The significance of this decision is enormous as far as the rights of Bangladesh are concerned.⁵⁶

The demarcation of maritime boundary between Bangladesh and Myanmar has been welcomed in both the countries. However, much remains to be seen once the parties start exploring Bay of Bengal resources (both living and non-living) after the verdict of ITLOS. Both the countries should come forward out of their past hang-over, in particular over the Rohingya issue. The issue needs immediate resolution in order to generate a spirit of cooperation, mutual trust and understanding between Bangladesh and Myanmar.⁵⁷ Once this is achieved, their move for cooperation in the marine domain will not be a farfetched one. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar should approach their oceanic space from a much broader perspective. Oceanic management requires cooperation of holistic nature. It is an

arena where peace is to be maintained in perpetuity so that the oceanic resources can be harnessed in cooperative rather than conflictive manner. This realization should prevail upon both Bangladesh and Myanmar soon.⁵⁸

2.3 Land Border Management

Bangladesh-Myanmar shares 271 kilometer of land border. To achieve a stable relationship of bilateral relations, an effective and cooperative management of the common border is necessary. Moreover, the security management in the border region is important to ensure bilateral trade and investment. Border security is also necessary for developing connectivity. In 2009, when Myanmar government started fencing 40 kilometers of border, Bangladesh government expressed its reservation on such construction. Latter, both the countries discussed the issues and the government of Myanmar confirmed that fencing is only for preventing illicit networks in the border. Both the countries agreed that the “construction of the barbed wire fence will not affect relations between the two nations”.⁵⁹ Myanmar has completed fencing of 40 kilometers in 2011. On the other hand, Bangladesh-Myanmar border region has been identified by the Bangladesh Department of Narcotics Control as important point for illegal drugs that are imported to Bangladesh.⁶⁰ The Rohingya are recruited as carriers, intermediaries or traffickers. The Rohingya militant groups are major security concerns for Bangladesh.⁶¹ Among the groups the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF), Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), Rohingya National Alliance (RNA) and Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO) are considered to be the major groups posing a threat to Bangladesh’s internal security. The other groups like the separatist Democratic Party of Arakan (DPA) and the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) are reportedly still around. The ALP often coerces Bangladeshi local communities into growing Poppy in the interior of Chittagong Hill Tracts. The RSO and RNA are in league with the DPA and beyond the control of any government.⁶²

Smuggling of arms and ammunitions is considered another area in which both Myanmar and Bangladesh need to cooperate. Factors like recovering of arms and ammunition of the insurgent group Arakan Rohingya Solidarity Organization (ARSO) by the Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in September 2005 and the recovering of a large amount of heavy weapons from the Naikhangchari sub-district in Bangladesh in the last

eleven months clearly indicate lack of cooperation between Myanmar and Bangladesh is tackling smuggling issue.⁶³

In this respect, arms and drug trafficking in Bangladesh-Myanmar border have emerged as a concern for both the countries. The countries need to cooperate to dismantle such illicit networking. A secured border will stabilize bilateral relations and will make their relations trustworthy.⁶⁴

2.4 Trade and Investment

Being close neighbors, trade relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar are not reached in an expected level.⁶⁵ At present there are three types of trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar (a) official trade, (b) border trade, and (c) informal trade. The figures for official trade and border trade are given below but no figures are available for informal trade, which probably accounts for the most substantial commercial exchanges between the two countries. In 1996, a border trade agreement was signed between the two governments. This allows businessmen to open letters of credit up to US\$ 5000 dollars per day. This modality probably encourages widespread under-invoicing and the real value of this trade therefore is probably not reflected in the available figures.⁶⁶

Historically, the bilateral relationship between Myanmar and Bangladesh, two next-door neighbors, was not encouraging enough despite enjoying shared values, culture, history and ancient trade due to primarily some disputes, e. g. closed economy of Myanmar, military rule, maritime dispute, and long decades Rohingya conflict and ethnic violence. Despite these, Bangladesh and Myanmar are progressing toward effective bilateral relations and trade between the two countries has started a new way since 2012.⁶⁷ Specially, the recent peaceful settlement of maritime dispute in the Bay of Bengal as well as the victory of Aung Sang Suu Kyi has opened up a prospect of further cooperation between the two countries. For a good start of economic relations, Myanmar has already started inviting investment from Bangladeshi businesses and industrialist in different fields. The country now also plans to set up a wholesale market and hold trade fairs along the Bangladeshi border to increase the bilateral trade. Myanmar is looking forward to host the next Bay of Bengal initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit in early September 2013, as its current chair.⁶⁸ Recently Commerce

Ministry officials of Myanmar discussed with Bangladeshi counterparts to boost trade between the two countries. Both the countries are now conducting useful dialogues to help strengthen bilateral trade relations. After the win of Aung Sang Suu Kyi, the prime minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, visited Myanmar immediately after the visit of United States' Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in late 2011 and called for boosting old border trade with Myanmar. It evolved a fresh era in the bilateral relations with the southeastern neighbor particularly in the area of trade and business.⁶⁹ During the visit, both the countries agreed for a joint commission for bilateral cooperation between the two governments and signed a memorandum of understanding to establish a joint business council between the Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and its Bangladeshi counterpart. The June 14-15 consultation meeting of 2013 reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral political, economic and security cooperation between the two countries.⁷⁰ The two sides agreed to address jointly and comprehensively the entire range of trans-boundary crimes along the borders, including illegal trafficking in persons, drugs and arms as well as money-laundering and discussed Bangladesh's proposal for a "security dialogue" within the framework of the Foreign Office Consultations (FOC). During the 7th round of FOC meeting, held in Naypyidaw on June 2013 delegations from both the neighboring countries reviewed various bilateral issues related to political, economic and security cooperation between Burma and Bangladesh. In July, 2012, newly appointed Myanmar ambassador to Bangladesh U Myo Myint Than meet with Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni in her office.⁷¹ During the meeting, they discussed on bilateral issues of Bangladesh and Myanmar. The sixth round of FOC between Bangladesh and Myanmar was held in Dhaka on 1 July, led by the Deputy Foreign Minister U Maung Myint. Bangladesh delegation was headed by ambassador Mijarul Quayes, Foreign secretary of Bangladesh. Discussions covered the whole range of bilateral issues between Bangladesh and Myanmar which included repatriation of Myanmar refugees and undocumented Myanmar national, direct road link/direct air services and coastal shipping line, Joint Trade Commission cooperation in agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock sectors, regular consultations between heads of the two Border guards etc.⁷² In this respect, Saida Muna Tasneem, director general (UN) of Foreign Ministry, said official visits between the two countries from 2009 onwards are taking the trajectory of relationship to a new level and Dhaka wants to keep it up. During the 5th Joint trade commission meeting in Naypyidaw, 2011, both the governments agreed to raise the ceiling for transaction value

from \$30000 to \$50000 per consignment that have already come into effect. The 6th Joint Trade Commission (JTC) meeting, held in Dhaka from November 11-12 in 2012, boosted bilateral trade and connectivity between the two next door neighbors. Direct air and shipping links between the two countries and cooperation in energy and agriculture sectors were the top agenda at the joint commission meeting.⁷³ Bilateral trade relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar are likely to enter a new phase as the road and air communications are likely to start within the next few months. For Bangladesh, Myanmar has also become an attractive field of trade and investment.⁷⁴ The bilateral trade between the two countries is also improving. During the fiscal year of 2011-2012, Bangladesh exported goods to Myanmar worth US \$ 13.45 million and imported goods worth \$ 65 million. In the 2012-2013 fiscal years, the average amount of border trade was US \$ 6.3 million. The export amount was \$ 6.2 million and the import amount was \$87000. Even though trade volumes are low, the potential is very high. At present, though the balance of trade between the two countries is heavily in favor of Myanmar as Bangladesh imports many food items from the neighboring country, the trade gap is expected to be narrowed down as Myanmar has started to import some new materials from Bangladesh from early 2012, following visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Yangon in late 2011.⁷⁵

Myanmar has added cement, medicine, biscuit, iron, tin and soft drink to the import list. Now, Bangladesh also started exporting steel products, light engineering machinery, cement, dry foods, cosmetics etc. to Myanmar and imports fish, timber, spices, synthetic footwear, pickles etc. from there. In this case, Bangladesh has huge potentials to imports food items like rice and lentils, fish and timber from Myanmar while exporting cement, pharmaceuticals, condensed milk and electric cables to Myanmar.⁷⁶

There is a need to observe Bangladesh-Myanmar trade statistics in different times, in different moods to understand their trade relations and to identify the basic obstacles which are hampering a balanced trade relations. To develop our trade relations with Myanmar it is necessary to understand the nature and magnitude of trade and transshipment. Here, trade statistics from 2005-2013 are examined to justify the relations of both countries.

Table 2: Bangladesh-Myanmar Bilateral Trade Statistics

| Year | Export | Import | Trade Ratio (Value in million Tk. Value in million US \$) |
|---------|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| 2005-06 | 346.13 (5.14) | 1983.6 (29.57) | 1:575 |
| 2006-07 | 409.35 (5.93) | 1419.4 (20.56) | 1:3.46 |
| 2007-08 | 658.56 (9.6) | 7944.5 (115.81) | 1:12.06 |
| 2008-09 | 632.96 (9.2) | 4885.5 (71.01) | 1:7.72 |
| 2009-10 | 693.87 (10.03) | 4818.9 (69.65) | 1:6.94 |
| 2010-11 | 688.14 (9.65) | 12847 (180.51) | 1:18.67 |
| 2011-12 | 1063.97 (13.45) | 5161.5 (65.25) | 1:4.85 |
| 2012-13 | 1092.51 (13.67) | 6703 (84) | 1:6.14 |

Source: Import Payment, Bangladesh Bank and & Export Statistics, Export Promotion Bureau & Bangladesh Bank.

On June 07, 2013, a Burma navy ship named 'UMS Mahar Thihathurahas' began its first four-day good will visit to its neighboring country, following an invitation from Bangladesh Navy since Bangladesh got independence in 1971. The visit was launched to promote bilateral relationship and mutual respects between the two neighboring countries. In earlier 2012, both the countries had revised the Air Services Agreement 1977 to operate a number of airlines instead of one. Once flight operation starts, the trade and investment between the two next door neighbors will increase significantly.⁷⁷ Even, it will also help reduce the existing trade gap through gearing up trade and regular visit of businessman of both the countries. Additionally, the proposed construction of a new highway linking Teknaf, Bangladesh, to former Arakan State capital Akyab is already in progress and new flights routes from Dhaka to Yangon as well. There are also some prospects of cooperation in the energy sector through importing gas from Myanmar, especially at the time when, Bangladesh is short of energy and needs to get them from any source at the fastest as India may not have sustainable surpluses to sell to Bangladesh in the long run.⁷⁸ In September

2010, it was announced that two countries would sign a MOU to build two dams in Arakan state, in the Marmchaung (Michuang) and Laymro (Lemro) areas. The dams will supply power to Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar. The total quantity of electricity is expected to be around 575 megawatts, with one dam providing the bulk 500 MW and a second smaller one 75 MW. No timetable for the hydro projects has been disclosed, nor how they will be financed.⁷⁹ Myanmar's geography and natural resources as well as Bangladesh's emerging middle class and potential market indicate the prospect of bilateral relations between the two neighborly countries. The Arakan Mountain Range separates Rakhine and Chin states bordering Bangladesh from the rest of Myanmar. These two Myanmar states possess almost infinite natural resources which include limestone, timber, bamboo, marine products and a variety of valuable minerals. The discovery of estimated 16 TCF of proven gas reserves in Rakhine state has opened up a new corridor of possibilities for industrial development for Myanmar's future generation. Reserve of proven natural gas of Myanmar can also be beneficial for Bangladesh.⁸⁰

The setting up of a gas pipeline between Myanmar and Bangladesh and a fertilizer factory based on this gas could on one hand fulfill energy security for Bangladesh and on the other hand facilitate the opening of a market for Myanmar and secure the much needed urea fertilizer for their agricultural need, thus ensuring their agricultural need, thus ensuring a win-win situation for both.⁸¹ Myanmar's land lease policy is quite attractive and Bangladeshi investors may take advantage of this offer, which will in turn lead to increased trade with Bangladesh because many of the products of these agro based industries will find a good market in Bangladesh. In 2004, both countries signed a MOU on cooperation in the field of agriculture and allied sectors. Nonetheless, Bangladesh missed the gas pipeline (Myanmar-Bangladesh-India) opportunity that was initiated in 2004. Myanmar also had vast potentials for producing hydroelectricity; it had 200 rivers and could be able to produce 1,00,000 megawatts of hydroelectricity (World Bank estimations) of which Myanmar would get about 15 percent.⁸² Myanmar made a similar survey that revealed its realistic ability to generate 50 thousand MW of electricity. Thailand, China and India- all had invested in this sector of Myanmar. Bangladesh missed the opportunity as it could have ensured nearly 2, 000 MW of electricity through this project.⁸³ On the other hand, due to the present undeveloped state of its economy, while enriched with surplus of both gas and power; the country is also ready export in

Bangladesh. The matter of hope is that recently with regard to Bangladesh's willingness to import natural gas, Myanmar Deputy Minister apprised about the ongoing process of floating bids for offshore and onshore gas blocks and assured to give priority to Bangladesh after meeting their domestic demand.⁸⁴ Thus, mutual relationship of exchange can be coast-efficient as well as strategically sound for Bangladesh in all respects and will also bring about win-win satiation and immense trade potential for both the countries as well. From this above scrutiny, it can be undoubtedly said that stronger business ties between the two countries now have become a new demand from both sides as there are great potentials in utilizing natural resources in both the countries through mutual investment and exchange of expertise. Though there are some challenges due to Rohingya conflict and other border issues, both the countries should expand the helping hand toward each other.⁸⁵

2.5 Connectivity

Connectivity is always considered as an important dimension for bilateral cooperation.⁸⁶ The Myanmar Government has prioritized physical infrastructure building to boost its economy through state monopoly at least since 1988. Over the years, due to shortfall in foreign exchange reserves, the scenario has changed. Power and communication sectors remained state monopolies while private enterprise was allowed to control road transport.⁸⁷ The Government's policy shift towards a market economy is further loosening up state control to attract investment. It is estimated that Myanmar has only 0.005 km of road per square km while neighboring Thailand has 0.17 km of road per square km. Myanmar has metre gauge railway tracks, as does most of Southeast Asia. China has a standard gauge. When it becomes unviable to change the national gauges, the Trans Asian Railway (TAR) would have to resort to mechanized facilities to move shipping containers from one train to another at the break of gauge.⁸⁸ While its rail tracks have slowly increased to 3,798 miles (6,110), there has been a decline in the rolling stock. The main line runs north-south from Myitkyina-Mandalay-Yangon with lines branching east and west between. One line branches off at Thazi eastwards to Shwenyaung (Inle Lake) and then to Bago and Mottama, A second branch extends from Yangon to Pyay on the western side.⁸⁹ Myanmar has not yet realized the full potential of railways with only one-third of domestic freight being carried by rail, which is far below the figures for river transport, but more than the 20 per cent carried by road. There are plans to equip the Yangon-Mandalay

line with VHF communication system. Myanmar has constructed 1048.95 miles (1687.76 km) so far and there are plans 'to build 250 miles [402.25 km] of railroads yearly with a view to establish a National Railroad Network. Myanmar has three international airports (Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyidaw), and 30 domestic aerodromes.⁹⁰ The Naypyidaw International Airport was opened on December 19, 2011. It covers an area of 111,500 sq m, has a 3.6 km long runway, and it is designed to receive 20 million passengers annually. The country has some half dozen domestic airlines and 15 international airlines operate in the country. Myanmar has also ratified seven aviation related conventions and five protocols.⁹¹ They have plans for Automatic Message Handling System (AMHS) by 2011, Performance Based Navigation (PBN) in line with ICAO guidelines by 2012, AIS implementation by the year 2016, and a plan to get ISO 9001 certification for quality management in AIS and MET fields in the near future.⁹²

Myanmar has huge hydro-power potential which is still untapped. Most rivers run north to south—the Ayeyarwaddy (Irrawaddy), Chindwin, Sittaung and Salween. According to the Director General of the department of Hydroelectric Power and Dams, U Win Kyaw, “With eight major schemes under construction and 16 more planned, Myanmar is on a major programme of hydropower development. The Government regards hydropower as a priority, both to meet domestic needs and to export to neighboring countries. With only about 2 per cent of hydro resources currently developed, there is much work ahead”. The total potential is estimated to be a gargantuan 100,000 MW and Naypyidaw understandably has plans for a big target of 35,000 MW for the future.⁹³

At present, road links and passenger shipping links between the countries are not strong enough for communication. To facilitate trade and investment, strengthening historic routes is necessary. In this respect, in 2007 both countries agreed to build a 25 km road. The construction of the road is near to complete.⁹⁴ According to the agreement; Bangladesh would finance construction of approximately 23 km of the road between Taungbro and Bawlibazar in Myanmar including bridges and culverts. The engineering cores of the armies of both countries would jointly implement the construction. From the Myanmar side, at the end of 25 km there is another stretch of 100+ km that needs to be upgraded. The road can link with Kunming in China through Myanmar's internal road links. There was also a proposal to construct a bridge over the Naaf River. In spite of deal

to construct the overland road, the bridge over the Naaf River can still be pursued. It will make connectivity stronger between the countries.⁹⁵

Bangladesh consented to a request of Myanmar government to allow initially, plying of 25 small capacity non-conventional vessels between Sittwe and Teknaf. Bangladesh also proposed to establish links between the two sea ports of Chittagong and Sittwe.⁹⁶

Moreover, during Bangladesh's Prime Minister's visit to Myanmar in 2011, both countries wished to launch direct air flight between Dhaka/Chittagong and Yangon and between the commercial routes of both countries.⁹⁷ In addition, Bangladesh planned deep sea port at Sonadia that could be a regional hub and of tremendous importance to Myanmar and other Asian nations. Bangladesh submitted another alternative route, Teknaf-Maungdw-Sittwe link road on the plain land across the coast of Bay of Bengal, to Myanmar authority to consider. If Myanmar authority agrees to this new proposal, both will be benefited economically as well as strategically.⁹⁸

President Xi Jinping of China called for joint development of an "Economic Belt along the Silk Road" and a "Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century" (the "Belt" and the "Road"). These are two major initiatives that China has made to deepen reform and opening-up and advance its neighbourhood diplomacy, which have been enthusiastically received both at home and abroad.⁹⁹

At the same time, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) is put on fast track since the first inter-governmental meeting took place in Yunnan, China; BCIM-EC is located at the intersection of the "Economic Belt along the Silk Road" and the "Maritime Silk Road" and should be treated as priority direction to materialize the "Belt" and "Road" initiatives,

(1) The 'Belt' and 'Road' initiative are the continuation and development of the spirit of the ancient Silk Road. Over 2,000 years ago, the industrious and brave people on the Eurasian continent opened several trade routes connecting major civilizations across Asia, Europe and Africa. Together, they were referred to as the 'Silk Road' by succeeding generations. Countries large and small along the routes had all reaped considerable

benefits from the Silk Road. Such links of mutual emulation via the Silk Road made exchanges cultural and social progress in the various countries, facilitated dialogue and integration of different civilizations, and left behind brilliant pages in human history.¹⁰⁰

Facing a complex international and regional landscape, the Silk Road has become all the more important and precious as a symbol of peace, cooperation, openness, inclusiveness, mutual learning and resilience.. It is all the more crucial for the international community to embrace, the spirit of the ancient Silk Road, bring it to date, instill greater dynamism, and realize its value in this new age, thus creating a new material and cultural wealth for humanity.¹⁰¹

(2) Promoting the ‘Belt’ and ‘Road’ initiatives meets the trend of the times for regional cooperation. Asia, known as the engine of global growth and a key driver for world multi-polarization and economic globalization, plays a critical and increasingly important role in the shaping of international landscape. The flourishing cooperation in Asia has boosted peace and development in the region. However, compared with those in Europe and North America, regional cooperation in Asia remains inadequate, as evidenced in particularly by the uneven development and poor connectivity among Asia’s sub-regions posing a considerable obstacle to deeper regional cooperation.¹⁰² The two initiatives, by linking Central Asia, south Asia, Southeast Asia and West Asia, will contribute to greater connectivity and complimentarily across the sub-regions, and help the establishment and improvement of Asia’s supply Chain, industrial Chain and value chain, thus bringing Pan-Asian and Eurasian regional co-operation to a new level.¹⁰³

The ‘Belt’ and ‘Road’ initiatives forces infrastructure development and systemic innovation, which conduces to an improved business environment in relevant countries and the region as a whole, to an orderly and unimpeded flow of production factors and their improved distribution, to the development of landlocked countries and the remote areas of various countries, to lowering costs and trade and investment barriers, and to providing greater drive for reform and opening-up in the various countries.¹⁰⁴

Map 3: BMIC project: Bangladesh-Myanmar-India-China.



BMIC project: Bangladesh-Myanmar-India-China corridor

Source: <http://www.tourguizhou.net/archives/tag/bangladesh-myanmar-india-china-corridor>

The ‘Belt’ and ‘Road’ initiatives will bring out the profound cultural achievements of ancient times; strengthen people-to-people exchange among all countries across a spectrum of areas, strata and faiths, give scope to the potential of ‘soft’ exchanges geared to expanding the groundwork of friendship among peoples and contribute a positive energy to peace and development in Asia.¹⁰⁵

(3) The ‘Belt’ and ‘Road’ initiatives feature ‘five links’ and focuses on result-oriented and project-based cooperation, all aimed at bringing tangible benefits to the people in the region.

The first ‘link’ is policy. Countries can discuss strategies and policies on economic development and in the spirit of seeking common ground while shelving differences, formulating corresponding plans and measures for cooperation and giving policy and legal ‘green light’ for economic integration.¹⁰⁶

The second ‘link’ is road. There is need for China and its neighbouring countries to improve on their cross-border transportation infrastructure, put in place a transportation

network within Asia and connecting Asia with Europe and Africa, and effectively address the existing inadequacies of connectivity and transportation.¹⁰⁷

The third 'link' is trade. We should study issues of trade and investment facilitation while making proper arrangements accordingly, remove trade and investment barriers, promote economic circulation and improvement in the region, unleash still greater trade and investment potential of participating countries and make the regional cooperation 'pie' still bigger.¹⁰⁸

The fourth 'link' is currency. We should promote greater trade settlement in local currencies and more currency swap schemes, strengthen bilateral and multilateral financial arms for regional development, and make the region's economy more competitive globally.¹⁰⁹

The fifth 'link' is people. China and the neighbouring countries need to shore up popular support for their state-to-state relations, promote inter-civilization dialogue, and enhance exchanges, understanding and friendship among different peoples.

(4) BCIM Economic corridor should be put on the top of agenda of the 'Belt' and 'Road' initiatives. Bangladesh, china, India and Myanmar, connected by the Southern Silk road and Maritime silk road since ancient times, share commonalities in terms of history and culture.¹¹⁰ The four countries will carry this legacy forward by construction of BCIM-EC. The most heart-stirring event in the first half of 21st century is linkage of the two growth poles of Asia, namely East Asia and south Asia, with the concept of BCIM-EC. As China and India are two largest emerging economies and Bangladesh and Myanmar boast rich natural and human resources, this economic corridor could enable the four countries to work with each other's advantages, accelerate economic growth, and open wider to the outside world.¹¹¹

During the first joint group meeting of BCIM countries, the four countries agreed that the priorities of BCIM-EC should focus on, among other things, the following areas: regional connectivity, including transportation, telecommunication, and power and energy, trade and investment, sustainable development and people-to-people exchange. The BCIM-EC

will advance multi-model connectivity, break down trade barriers between countries, harness the economic complementarities, promote investment and trade and facilitate people-to-people contacts.¹¹² The Economic corridor will also help dovetail China, Bangladesh, India and Myanmar on the issue of development strategies, build an even closer network of common interests, and bring interaction of respective interests to a higher level. These would enhance mutual understanding and trust and further unlock vast economic potential, and secure lasting peace, stability and prosperity for the people in the region.¹¹³

The priorities of the BCIM-EC embody the ‘five links’ of the ‘Belt’ and ‘Road’ initiatives. Once the BCIM economic corridor is established, it will combine the China. ASEAN Free Trade Area and ASEAN Indian Free Trade Area, shape the biggest free trade area in the world, and contribute to the free flow of goods, services and people throughout the region, thus setting a good example for broader regional cooperation between Pacific and Indian Ocean.¹¹⁴

We can dream of a world where one can have breakfast in Kunming, lunch in Dhaka, and dinner in Kolkata. BCIM-EC is designed to translate advantages of political relations, geographical proximity and economic complementarity into strengths of practical cooperation and sustained growth, with the aim of achieving mutual benefit and common development. As a champion of regional cooperation, BCIM-EC should be treated as the premier mechanism in this region and put on the top of the agenda of the ‘Belt’ and ‘Road’ initiatives.¹¹⁵

2.6 Energy and Natural Resources

Myanmar’s progress since the 2010 general elections has been astounding, with political transition greatly encouraging citizens and international diplomatic and investment communities. Myanmar has changed dramatically as a result and sanctions have been eased progressively. Not surprisingly, many international investors have cast their eyes on Myanmar’s abundant natural resources for commercial exploitation.¹¹⁶ This has prompted international pundits and commentators to speak about a “Gold Rush” unfolding in the country formerly known as Burma. Other experts clearly state that there is “no treasure trove waiting to be released here”, and highlight the difficulties facing investors due to the

lack of high-quality geological and geophysical data. Since ancient times, the land known today as Myanmar has been famous for its wealth in natural resources of all kinds. The Sanskrit name *Suvarnabhumi*, meaning “Golden Land” has been associated with Myanmar for over two millennia.¹¹⁷ Today, Myanmar’s natural resources include oil and gas, various minerals, precious stones and gems, timber and forest products, hydropower potential etc. Of these, natural gas, rubies, jade, and timber logs are the most valuable and currently provide a substantial proportion of national income. To date, there has been a very low level of systematic exploration of Myanmar’s natural resources due to lack of modern survey techniques. Although all resource sectors have different development strategies, an overall strategy-particularly in the energy sector-might be described as “more and quickly”.¹¹⁸ Since it was clear that reform was in process after the 2010 election, potential investors have flocked to Myanmar looking for opportunities, particularly in the energy and mining sectors. Late in 2012, a new foreign investment law was finally passed, after much debate, on the extent of possible foreign ownership and investment law was finally passed, after much debate, on the extent of possible foreign ownership and investment restrictions. The 1994 mining law has yet to be reformed, and many investors consider that a change of signature bonuses and the terms of production-sharing contracts will be necessary before investment can be attractive in this sector.¹¹⁹

According to official data, recent foreign direct investment in Myanmar has been concentrated in the oil/gas and hydropower sectors, with mining coming in third position by value. Investment commitments made in the 2010/11 financial year were approximately 30 times the rate of commitments made on average for the previous 22 years. The main investors by country were Myanmar’s neighbors China (including Hong Kong) and Thailand, followed by South Korea, Singapore, and others.¹²⁰ While the vast majority of people in the national workforce are subsistence farmers, the gas industry and the precious/semi-precious stone-mining industries have provided the largest incomes, with gas earning of \$3.6 billion for 2011-12 and precious stone earning of approximately \$3.4 billion in 2010 from auction sales. Estimates of informal revenues from this sector are much higher. Some believe that sectors of the trade may be undervalued by a factor of 9. The \$3.4 billion official figure is believed to vary between \$5.5 and \$ 15 billion, but quality data is scarce.¹²¹ Myanmar’s energy ministry lists proven crude oil reserve estimates of \$3.2 billion barrels and gas reserves of 11.8 trillion cubic feet (placing it

about eight in the world), yet the numbers are open to debate. Myanmar is one of the world's oldest oil producers, having first exported its first barrel in 1853 while under British colonial rule. Oil and gas exploration activity have been at its highest and most advanced levels in recent years. Large-scale gas development started in the 1990s and the first natural gas pipeline to Thailand was finished in 1998.¹²²

Myanmar can export energy from its hydropower projects to Bangladesh. In September 2010, it was announced that two countries would sign a MoU to build two dams in Arakan state, in the Marmchaung (Michuang) and (Lemro) areas. The dams will supply power to Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar. The total quantity of electricity is expected to be around 575 megawatts, with one dam providing the bulk 500 MW and a second smaller one 75 MW. No timetable for the hydro projects has been disclosed, nor how they will be financed.¹²³

Myanmar's geography and natural resources as well as Bangladesh's emerging middle class and potential market indicate the prospect of bilateral business relations between the two neighborly countries. The Arakan Mountain range separates Rakhine and chin states bordering Bangladesh from the rest of Myanmar. These two Myanmar states possess almost infinite natural resources which include limestone, timber, bamboo, marine products and a variety of valuable minerals.¹²⁴ The discovery of estimated 16 TCF of proven gas reserves in Rakhine state has opened up a new corridor of possibilities for industrial development for Myanmar's future generation. Reserve of proven natural gas of Myanmar can also be beneficial for Bangladesh. The setting up of a gas pipeline between Myanmar and Bangladesh and a fertilizer factory based on this gas could on one hand fulfill energy security for Bangladesh and on the other hand facilitate the opening of a market for Myanmar and secure the much needed urea fertilizer for their agricultural need, thus ensuring a win-win situation for both.¹²⁵

Myanmar's land lease policy is quite attractive and Bangladeshi investors may take advantage of this offer, which will in turn lead to increase trade with Bangladesh because many of the products of these agro based industries will find a good market in Bangladesh. In 2004, both countries signed a MoU on cooperation in the field of agriculture and allied sectors. Nonetheless, Bangladesh missed the gas pipeline (Myanmar-Bangladesh-India)

Opportunity that was initiated in 2004.¹²⁶ Myanmar also had vast potentials for producing hydroelectricity; it had 200 rivers and could able to produce 1, 00,000 megawatts of hydroelectricity (World Bank estimations) of which Myanmar would get about 15 percent. Myanmar made a similar survey that revealed its realistic ability to generate 50 thousand MW of electricity. Thailand, China and India-all had invested in this sector of Myanmar. Bangladesh missed the opportunity as it could have ensured nearly 2,000 MW of electricity through this project.¹²⁷

Chapter III

Domestic Political Change in Myanmar

3.1 Political and Economic Reforms in Myanmar

3.2 Political Reform in Myanmar and Ethnic Conflict

Chapter III

Domestic Political Change in Myanmar

Over the last year, Myanmar has embarked on an ambitious set of reforms.¹²⁸ After independence from Britain in 1948, the communist party of Burma and various ethnic groups soon took up arms against the central government, despite the introduction of parliamentary democracy. The military has sought to achieve national unity, but has done so by coercion and without achieving a viable political solution to deeply rooted ethnic conflicts. When the military took power, it abolished democratic institutions and replaced them with the Revolutionary Council, chaired by General Ne Win.¹²⁹ The Army led the country insulation, cutting off all contacts with the outside world, driving foreign companies out of the country and nationalizing all private enterprises. In 1974, the junta pushed through a constitutional referendum to transition from direct military rule to indirect military rule. Thereafter, a socialist planned economy and one-party rule by Ne Win's Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) resulted in the resources rich country becoming one of the world's least-developed countries.¹³⁰

When the country began experiencing serious economic problems, Ne Win stepped down as President and was succeeded in office by his confident, retired General San Yu. However, Ne Win remained chairman to the country's only political party and continued to play a decisive behind the scenes role in formulating governmental policies. In 1988, continued economic problems led to country-wide demonstrations and the collapse of the ruling party. However, the military staged a coup on 18 September 1988, killing thousands of people. General Saw Maung, then commander-in-chief of the defense forces, led the military junta while Ne Win remained influential behind the scenes.¹³¹

The new military junta promised to hold free elections, which took place in May 1990. The opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, was placed under house arrest while the electoral campaign was underway. However, the elections resulted in her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), winning more than 80 of the parliamentary seats. Despite this clear victory for the opposition, the army refused to recognize the election results and continued to rule the country.¹³²

On the economic front, the new junta formally embraced market economic principles, but in practice continued to control the economy with poorly managed policies. Foreign investors have hesitated to invest in the country because of the unstable political situation there (e. g., violent minority conflicts and legal uncertainty) and because of concerns about their public image (e. g., fear of boycotts associated with the regime's human rights violations and repression of the democratic oppositions).¹³³ Investments are primarily concentrated in the natural-resource extraction sectors, especially oil, gas, timber and gems, while other industries have received little attention. While Western countries have imposed sanctions on Myanmar for the regime's refusal to democratize and for its systematic human rights abuses, neighboring Asian countries (including Thailand, China and India) have invested heavily.¹³⁴

In 1995, Aung San Suu Kyi was released for the first time, but the authorities repeatedly prevented her from leaving the then capital, Yangon (formerly Rangoon), to undertake political activities elsewhere in the country. The opposition leader was placed under house arrest again at the end of 2000 and was only released 19 months later. However, escalating tensions eventually led to another clampdown on the NLD and the re-detention of Aung San Suu Kyi in May 2003. The renewed house arrest triggered another outcry of criticism from the international community. The United States and the European Union have further tightened their sanctions on Myanmar and demanded that all political prisoners be released.¹³⁵

In response to the international criticism, in September 2003, the military announced its roadmap to democracy, which envisions a 'disciplined democracy' for the future. The government resurrected the constitution-drafting process, which had come to a halt in 1996. The national convention, which convened from 2004 to 2007 in order to draft a new constitution, was given detailed guidelines so as to safeguard the military's dominant position.¹³⁶ According to the new constitution promulgated in late 2007, the military will select the head of state and important state ministers, receive 25% of the seats in both houses and have the right to declare a state of emergency and seize power at any time. In May 2008, even during the cyclone crisis, the new constitution was ratified with a (consent of 92.4% in a rigged) referendum, and elections were announced for 2010. Although these elections will bring a transition to civilian rule, the new government will

be very much influenced by the military.¹³⁷ Since the military is restricting participation and contestation, it cannot be called a genuine transition to democracy but, instead, must be viewed as an attempt to give the military regime a higher legitimacy through (probably rigged) elections as well as to shield it from the international criticism of its change of leadership in 1988, which ushered in a new phase of economic transformation. In order to avoid becoming direct victims of the country's economic distress and the mass demonstrations it might trigger, Myanmar's leaders formally embraced a market economy, but this strategy failed for three reasons.¹³⁸ First, foreign investors hesitated to invest in the country because of the uncertain political situation there (e.g., violent minority conflicts and legal uncertainty) and because of concern about their public image (e.g., fear to boycotts because of human rights violations and the repression of the democratic opposition). Second, Myanmar received lower levels of international assistance of its reforms than other comparable countries. Moreover, the European Union and the United States had imposed comprehensive sanctions against the military junta in response to its bloody repression of mass protests in 1988.¹³⁹ After the re-arrest of Suu Kyi in 2003, the sanctions have become more severe. The United States has imposed an embargo against goods from Myanmar, and the European Union has further tightened its travel bans. As a result, investments are concentrated in the oil and gas sectors while other industries have been seriously hurt. At the same time, however, neighboring Asian countries have invested heavily and thereby helped stabilize the current military regime.¹⁴⁰

3.1 Political and Economic Reforms in Myanmar

The authorities aim to comprehensively modernize the economy and integrate it with the world, and are developing a national economic plan to guide medium-term policies. They have also taken steps to improve their macroeconomic management capacity, especially with regard to exchange rate and monetary policies.¹⁴¹ Partly as a result, economic performance has improved. In FY 2011/12, growth accelerated slightly to 5 and ½ percent bolstered by foreign investment in energy and exports of commodities. Installations sold to 5% (y/y0), about half of that in the previous year, mainly due to declining food prices, supported of the budget deficit¹⁴²

Myanmar recently floated its currency (818 local Kyat=\$1) with a view to attracting foreign investment. Yangon's approximately 270 hotels are full with foreign investors, and

the price of the land and rents of offices or business accommodations are raising steadily.¹⁴³

Myanmar political and economic changes occur in the midst of Asian economic integration and regional change. The Asian Economic Community (AEC) is scheduled to be completed in 2015 which is based on the pillars of a single market and production base, a competitive region, a region of equitable development and a region connected to the global economy.¹⁴⁴ Since the inception of the AEC blueprint in 2007, a great deal of integration measures have been agreed and implemented trade liberalization in services investment and free movement of capital have made significant progress while liberalization of trade in goods is practically completed. This liberalization and deregulation have been accompanied by trade and investment facilitation, standardization of customs procedures towards ASEAN single window, standards and conformance and mutually recognized agreement (MRAs). As a member of ASEAN, Myanmar has agreed and initiated the required measures and domestic change as required by the AEC blueprint to achieve the AEC by 2015.¹⁴⁵

Myanmar President Thein Sein signed a new foreign investment law on 2 November 2012. Further to our legal update dated 9 November 2012 (Myanmar's Foreign Investment Law: Summary of Amendments). We have now had sight of an unofficial translation of the long-awaited new Foreign Investment Law, signed into law by President Thein Sein on 2 November 2012.¹⁴⁶

Certain activities are designed as restricted or prohibited, and the Myanmar Investment Commission may only permit these activities with the permission of the Union of government when doing so would be deemed to be in the best interest of the state and its citizens, Other than these, the commission may allow foreign Ownership of any level in its discretion. The restricted and prohibited activities include: Any that would adversely affect public health or the environment or that would involve bringing hazardous or toxic waste material into Myanmar.¹⁴⁷The use of production of hazardous chemicals. Service and manufacturing activities reserved for Myanmar Nationals under foreign investment rules (Rules) to be promulgated within 90 days of the date of the new law (2 November 2012).The use of technologies, medicines, or accessories (as well as any activities) that are

still at the tasting stage or are not yet permitted to be used abroad; Agriculture and livestock breeding. Activities within 10 miles of the national boundary except in designated Economic Zones.¹⁴⁸

The new lays down objectives and basic principles, and any activities that promote these objectives and follow these principles are more likely to be approved. the promotion of exports, import substitution, large investment projects, the development of advanced technology, energy-saving, the development of modern industry, environmental conservation, the exchange of information and technology, energy-saving, the development of modern industry, environmental conservation, the exchange of information and technology, improving knowledge and technical know-haw, developing banking services, promoting modern service provision, securing energy resources.¹⁴⁹The commission has the discretion to set the minimum investment amount with the approval of the Union Government. The amount will depend on the nature of the business activity. In the case of a JV between a foreign investor and a Myanmar citizen in a restricted activity, the foreign ownership ratio may be proposed according to a ratio to be prescribed in the rules. The law no longer specific that the foreign investor must supply a minimum of 35% of the capital of the J.V. The law contains a guarantee against nationalization, and a guarantee that approved investment activities will not be terminated during the contract period “Without sufficient cause”. It also guarantees that after the expiry of the investment period, the investor can remit overseas its investment gains in the same foreign currency that it brought in at the outset. The law permits investment contracts to stipulate a dispute resolution procedure. The law imposes duties on foreign investors, which should be carefully reviewed before any investment is made.¹⁵⁰A five-year tax holiday is included, as expected other forms of teas relief may be available. Where the foreign investment is in the high-tech sector, foreign companies are required to hire local employees with the relevant skills. Locals must make up at least 25% of the work force in the first two years, 50% in the next two years and 75% in the third two-year period. Such companies must also provide training to locals. (What is regarded as “High-tech” for this purpose will require definition).¹⁵¹

Foreign investors will be able to lease land from the government or from authorized private owners for a period of 50 years, with two 10-year extensions also being possible.

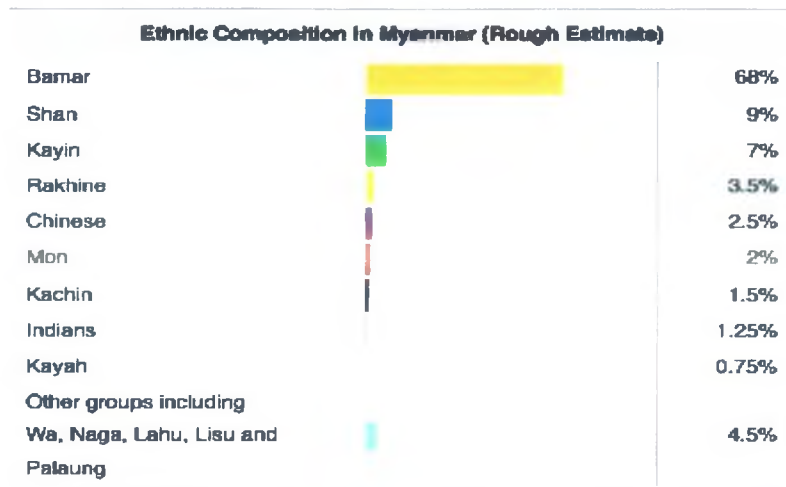
This is also as expected. In underdeveloped and remote areas, the commission may, with the consent of the Union Government, allow a longer period. Until the rules are promulgated, it will not be possible to form a complete picture of the new foreign investment environment in Myanmar.¹⁵²

Other changes included: Vote in parliament in favour of amnesties for political and other prisoners, followed by the release of more than 6,500 prisoners of conscience; Financial assistance to farmers; Easing of media censorship-with the head of the censorship authority calling for it to end in the near future; Establishment of human rights commission to “promote and safeguard fundamental rights of citizens”. Proposed changes to electoral laws, designed to encourage the NLD to contest future elections.¹⁵³

3.2 Political Reform in Myanmar and Ethnic Conflict

There are more than 135 different ethnic groups in Myanmar, each with its own history, culture and language. The majority Burman (Bamar) ethnic group makes up about two-thirds of the population and controls the military and the government. The minority ethnic nationalities, making up the remaining one-third, live mainly in the resource-rich border areas and hills of Burma, although many have been forcibly removed from their homes by the military backed government as it confiscates land for development projects and resource exploitation. As a result, millions of people from the minority groups have become internal displaced people (IDP) within Burma, or Refugees in neighbouring countries.¹⁵⁴

Chart 1: Ethnic nationalities of Myanmar



Source: <http://www.myanmar-embassy-tokyo.net/about.htm>

A certain political era has begun, bringing both opportunities and new challenges in quick order. Many needs can be listed and, ultimately political solutions must be agreed. But for this to be achieved, it is vital that ethnic issues are prioritized at the centre of national politics; activities are broadened at the community levels to strengthen the participation of civil society; and transparency about peace strategies and initiatives is made a bedrock for all political military and economic actions by the different sides.¹⁵⁵

In February, TNI-BCN hosted a two-day seminar, involving ethnic groups from different regions of Myanmar, on the theme “Political reform and consequences for ethnic conflict”. Those participating included 28 representatives from Burmese civil society, Parliament and armed opposition groups. The seminar took place at a critical time. The reform agenda under the quasi-civilian government of President Thein Sein has continued to gain domestic momentum and international approval. The socio-political landscape is undoubtedly more dynamic and open than in March 2011 when President Thein Sein assumed office. Over the past year international leaders, including US President Barack Obama, have visited Burma, while Thein Sein has been received in countries around the world, including China, Belgium, Norway and other European states.¹⁵⁶

On the ground, reform is at an early stage, and livelihoods and security remain unstable in many communities’ ethnic conflicts and military practices from the past continue. While new upheavals are during a time of uncertain political and economic change. Hopes remain that Burma faces a better future. But over a thousand lives have been lost in violence since the Thein Sein government came to power, and a further 200,000 civilians have been internally displaced.¹⁵⁷ As in other political eras since independence in 1948, the main casualties are ethnic minority peoples.

The seminar focused on four main areas: Peace talks and ethnic conflict; political parties and civil society; economic developments in the borderlands; and the international community. In addition, it was recognized that state failure continued during previous times of constitutional change (1948, 1962, 1974 and 1978). Transition from decades of military rule remains uncharted territory for all parties and stakeholder groups. For these reasons, frank and inclusive discussions are considered vital if needs and grievances are to be addressed and Burma is to achieve a democratic era of peace and justice for all.¹⁵⁸

The spread of ethnic ceasefires with the government was welcomed. But confidence in peace initiatives and reform is being tested by worrying trends and events. These include offensives by government forces (Tatmadaw) in the Kachin and northern Shan states; continued militarization in many ethnic borderlands; Buddhist Muslim communal violence in the Rakhine state and other areas; and land-grabbing on a disturbing scale. In consequence, humanitarian needs remain immense and, in several areas, internal displacement has continued to rise.¹⁵⁹

Criticisms are not always publically expressed by government, opposition and international representatives involved in peace talks. But difficulties are deeply felt among communities and civil society groups on the ground. Sentiment has been growing that peace initiatives are top down, military based non-transparent and often excluding the voice of the local people.¹⁶⁰

As a result, there is little consensus about the prospects of peace initiatives underway for while the notion of an “inclusive process” under the “Union-Peace-Making” initiatives of President Thein Sein is being promoted, the reality is rather more complex in the field. Ceasefire talks have taken place through different government approaches to different ethnic groups; there is no over-arching strategy or national agreement on reform schedules and goal the Myanmar Peace Centre is regarded a government project that does not reflect non-Burman peoples; business rather than politics and communities is the focus of many ceasefire activities; international agencies have different interests and priorities; and in several ethnic regions, Tatmadaw officers appear to be continuing long-term strategies of military pacification and “regional dearances” of their own.¹⁶¹

Again this backdrop, two different tracks have emerged toward a nationwide peace-process; a government initiative, co-ordinate by U Aung Min, and an ethnic-based initiative by armed members of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC). A first meeting between the two sides was held in February 2013. But many difficulties lie ahead. Controversial issues include political dialogue, national inclusion, Tatmadaw agreement, economic policies, demilitarization, humanitarian access and the resettlement of displaced

people, including an estimated 150,00 refugees (mostly Karen and Karenni) stylizing in Thailand.¹⁶²

To improve understanding, a popular suggestion is that there should be an ethnic peace centre as part of efforts to broaden civil society involvement and national focus on the ethnic cause. Any successful peace process must be anchored in the community. But, for the moment, the perception remains that government and Tatmadaw leaders are in no hurry, with a “hidden agenda” as they bid to strengthen central control; they prefer to continue dealing with different ethnic groups differently; and with few exceptions, officials are more focused on bedding in the existing political system and status quo before the next general election in 2015.¹⁶³

A similar sense of frustration over ethnic progress exists among ethnic political parties in the new parliamentary system. In general greater unity is being achieved through ethnic parties in such networks as the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation. A consensus is growing towards federal goals similar to those of the UNFC. There has also been increasing interaction between ethnic parties, armed ethnic groups and civil society in many parts of the country, especially in the Karen and Shan states.¹⁶⁴ All support the ideal of parliamentary politics. However the criticism is widespread that the present political system and state legislature do not represent ethnic needs or causes; ethnic parties are unable to promote real discussion or decision making on critical challenges facing their peoples; and there is no indication as to how armed ethnic groups, their territories and goals can be incorporated in the new political system. Federalism remains a controversial issue.¹⁶⁵

A further concern is that Burman-majority parties, which dominate the parliamentary system, do not adequately understand or reflect the aspirations and requirements of ethnic minority peoples who make up an estimated third of the population. Ethnic groups are especially critical that Burman-majority parties whether the pro-government Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) or opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) have appeared reluctant to speak up or independently intercede on the violence in the Kachin state and other ethnic borderlands. To try and rectify these failings, proportional representation or the agreement of the NLD to single ‘ethnic democracy’

parties standing for elections in the ethnic states is being mooted. For the moment, however, both the USDP and NLD appear to count on ‘split’ votes among parties in ethnically diverse areas. This greatly favors the prospects of nationwide Burman-majority parties in the ‘first past the post’ system in the country’s elections.¹⁶⁶

Despite these differences all sides recognize that constitutional amendments are essential if the present political system is to be made to work and truly represent all peoples. In particular, ethnic political parties want to establish a federal system that guarantees their political, economic, social cultural and religious rights. Furthermore, the reservation of a quarter of all seats in the legislatures for Tatmadaw appointees is an undemocratic anomaly that requires reform agreement between political and military leaders.¹⁶⁷ But there is presently little expectation of major constitutional change before the next general election in 2015. In the meantime, there are concerns that ethnic politics will continue to be eclipsed on the national stage. This would be a historic mistake. As in previous political years, the marginalization of ethnic interests will only sustain grievance and conflict, further perpetuating the risk of state failure.

In this reform vacuum, ethnic groups and local communities have become extremely concerned over the peace and style of economic change under the Thein Sein government.¹⁶⁸

Derek Tokin, chairman of the UK-based Network Myanmar NGO, working on reconciliation issues in Myanmar, said while the peace of change could alarm conservative elements in the government, “the President is showing great confidence, which seems to be based on general support in the military and civilian hierarchies”. But Sein Win said, the situation was still totally unpredictable during this stage of sensitive transition. Much depends on Thein Sein’s “Leadership capacity, wisdom and tolerance of diverse opinions” headed, warning there ‘could again be a U-turn involving a military coup to counter an ultimately opposition challenge to the government’.¹⁶⁹

U.S. President Barak Obama welcomed President Thein Sein of Myanmar to the white house, praising Thein Sein’s leadership in moving his country ‘down a path of both

political and economic reform'. That progress Obama said, has allowed for the recent "shift in relations" between the U.S. and Myanmar.¹⁷⁰

Suu Kyi has described the recent reforms in Myanmar as a positive sign. But she warned that the world must not be excessively optimistic about how rapidly Myanmar is changing. She said, "Fires of suffering and strife are raging around the world. In my own country, hostilities have not ceased in the north. To the west (meaning Rakhine state) communal violence resulting in arson and murder were taking place just several days before I started out on the journey that has brought me here today".¹⁷¹

Chapter IV

Major Challenges of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations

4.1 The Rohingya issue

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Chapter IV

Major Challenges of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations

4.1 The Rohingya Issue

Myanmar with its geo-strategic location and vast natural resources, has gained a strategic importance among the countries in the entire region.¹⁷² Under the transition process led by U Thein Sein, the Myanmar government is seeking to simultaneously pursue complex economic and political reforms as well as resolve ethnic conflicts and achieve national reconciliation. These challenges are intrinsically related-reforms will pave the way for reconciliation but increased violent conflict has emerged as a key threat to continued reform.¹⁷³ In an article published on 2 May 2013 on the Voice of al Islam website, radical Indonesian ideologue Abu Bakar Bashir called for jihad to end the ‘genocide’ of the Rohingyas in Myanmar. Bashir’s call was made earlier on 23 April 2013. This demonstrates the growing sensitivity about the Rohingya issue among the wider Muslim community especially those with a more radical tinge.¹⁷⁴ It is the greatest challenge of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. Because of Rohingya refugee Bangladesh faces security threat (economical security, food security, health security etc.) on its national life, culture and image building.

On the other side, geographically a big neighbor India surrounds Bangladesh, which often causes it to formulate India-oriented policy thinking. Such policy thinking sometimes limits the scope of decision-making at both national and international levels. Still Bangladesh has the potential to play a crucial role because of the significant strategic and geo-economic advantage due to its proximity to the Southeast and East Asian countries. As Bangladesh is handicapped by a number of outstanding issues with India, many of which are critical to its survival, stability and development, Bangladesh must diversify its relationship with ASEAN and East Asian countries and engage itself into ASEAN’s comprehensive regionalization process as a whole.¹⁷⁵ ASEAN, as a comprehensive regional organization, provides a venue for the exchange of views and a tentative understanding with the member countries of Southeast Asia. The expansion of ASEAN to a grouping of 10, the inclusion of Myanmar and the emergence of the ASEAN’s regional process including Japan, China, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, means that Bangladesh now stands directly at ASEAN’s western door and is being drawn still closer

to China's strategic periphery. It is therefore the gateway between the ASEAN and South Asian states.¹⁷⁶

The strengthening of ASEAN-Bangladesh relations seems to be a natural development as these two are part of the global economies that are becoming rapidly interlinked through more open trade regimes in the era of globalization. Regionalization is often driven by economic motivation (Christopher, Hughes and Philippe, 2008). The development dynamism has driven ASEAN to seek external relations with many countries, both developed and developing ones. Bangladesh was added to ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as the 26th member, starting from July 28 2006 (Hindustan Times, 2006).¹⁷⁷

There is a need for widening and deepening economic cooperation between ASEAN and South Asian states like Bangladesh based on mutual advantage that might, in turn, lead to greater share of global trade. In addition, there exists a commonality of economic and security interests between Bangladesh and ASEAN countries, including the expansion of trade and investment, agriculture, tourism, communications and the transfer to technology. Bangladesh needs to pay greater attention to creating economic linkages between South-East Asian nations through the Asian highway and its immediate neighbors-Myanmar and Thailand. The long awaited Asian-highway project, if implemented through Chittagong, Coxes Bazar of Bangladesh and Myanmar, would ease heavy pressure on Chittagong Port and businessmen would immensely benefit from it. The easier communication between Bangladesh and Myanmar under the Asian highway framework would definitely help reduce transportation cost, time, price of goods, increase reliability of deliveries and mobility, attract tourist, and restore people-to-people interaction.¹⁷⁸

4.2 Illegal Trade in Arms, Drugs, People, Counterfeit Goods across National Border

In mainland Southeast Asia, as Mya Maung stresses, history teaches us that most of the trading routes Between Burma and Thailand are old historic roads, some of them being “the ancient trails used by the Burmese Kings they invaded Thailand”. Mya Maung describes precisely the routes and trading points that allowed black markets to flourish along the Sino-Thai-Indo-Burmese borders: he accounts for “ten different major black market routes between Burma and its three neighbors of China, Thailand, and India”.¹⁷⁹

The most active illegal border trade between Burma and Thailand occurred and still occurs at three points: Mae Sai, Mae sot and Ranong. Goods traded illegally across the Thai-Burmese border were and are still extremely diverse: according to Mya Maung, it was reported that, in the 1970s, Thailand's major exports through the border outposts were "pharmaceutical products, aluminum, wadding rope-coated fabric, boiler machinery, synthetic rubber, and man-made fiber," while in the 1980s, the dominant exports of Thailand were "edible preparations, organic chemicals, iron and steel, manufacturing articles and wadding rope". The dominant imports of Thailand from Burma have been wood and wood articles, especially teak, and gems".¹⁸⁰

As for the trade between China and Burma, it developed considerably in the 1990s along the famed Burma Road, across Burma's Shan State toward China's Yunnan Province. Once again, of course, this road and the majority of the Shan trading posts "were not really new, their existence dating back to the days of the Burmese kings". In the thirteenth century, "Chinese trading caravans and the invading army of Kublai Khan from China travelled that route". As with Thailand, goods illegally traded between Burma and China are manufactured in one direction and natural products in the other. Another major trading route between Burma and China lies in Kachin State and was, until the Kachin Independence Army lost control over the jade mines, "the main route for smuggling famous Burmese jade and gems".¹⁸¹

These old trading routs of mainland Southeast Asia, some of them also linking China to India, have been plied by merchants even when international boundaries were officially closed. Because clandestine border crossing are illegal, the increased risk of such actions raises the value of both the people and goods that accomplish it; having to deal with closed borders, and as some rarefied goods became more expensive and interesting to trade, merchants turned into smugglers and, or, traffickers. Indeed, as many have acknowledged, "making borders engenders illicitness, or in Janet Roitman's words, transgression is productive".¹⁸²

The evolution of drug trafficking in the golden Triangle has forged new transport routes in the region and has brought abandoned routes back into service, such as those previously

used by communist guerrillas. Other pathways were never abandoned. Traditional caravaners such as the Haw of Thailand and Hui (Panthay) of Burma are very active in the regional illicit drug trade, and still use routes today that their forebears used at the end of the 19th century.¹⁸³

Bangladesh has become an attractive transit point for narcotics destined for international markets. Bangladesh's long and porous borders have made the country vulnerable to trans-border smuggling. Drug trafficking mainly of heroin, hashish, opium, phensidyl, pathedine or other psychotropic substances like methamphetamines and precursor chemicals like acetic anhydride-poses a real challenge to the nation. A host of factors have contribution have contributed to Bangladesh becoming a lucrative narco-transit-zone for the transnational drug trade. Easy access to international air and sea links, and modest detection and interdiction capability are responsible for large-scale drug trafficking activities in the country.¹⁸⁴

Bangladesh customs officials seized 23.5 kg of low-quality heroin at Dhaka's international airport on November 12, 2007. A month earlier, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) recovered three kg of heroin from a village in Sylhet district. The heroin, according to RAB, came from an unknown location in India to Bangladesh. In October, 2007, RAB made one of the largest drug busts in the country. In a raid, RAB seized about 130, 000 Yaba tablets, with a street value of more than \$1 million. Large amounts of drug-making equipment and raw materials were also recovered.¹⁸⁵

December, 2009, a joint team of RAB and the Department of Narcotic Control (DNC) seized a kilogram of heroin and arrested four suspected drug traffickers, including three foreigners, at Uttara in the capital. These instances demonstrated that drug trafficking in Bangladesh has direct transnational connection. 'Yaba' currently one of the most popular forms of methamphetamine abuses in South Asia, including Bangladesh. 'Yaba' contains a mixture of caffeine and about 30 percent methamphetamine. Law enforcement agencies have reported large seizures of 'Yaba' tablets in Bangladesh.¹⁸⁶This drug is smuggled in Bangladesh from neighboring countries such as Myanmar. According to UNODC, 1.2 million methamphetamine tablets originating in Myanmar were seized in Bangladesh in 2007.

INCB also blamed a lack of resources and training of law enforcement agencies for Bangladesh's failure to 'properly implementation' its drug control policy. INCB has identified the Chittagong seaport as the "main exist point for drugs leaving the country", while the remainder is smuggled out through Sylhet and Chittagong airports. This is a major transnational security threat in Bangladesh. There is no way to avoid it. There is a need of collective initiative to face this challenge.¹⁸⁷

According to Bangladesh's DNC, international drug barons and the mafia network often find "Bangladesh as a safe and alternate trafficking route when the Indian and Myanmar routes become risky". Bangladesh has a long, remote and porous border with India on three sides and with Myanmar to the Southeast.¹⁸⁸

Table 3: Narcotic Seizure Statistics in Bangladesh.

| Name of Drug | Unit | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 (April) |
|----------------------|--------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| Heroin | Kg | 16.288 | 20.856 | 29.013 | 21.190 |
| Charash | Kg | 0.26 | - | 0.125 | 240 |
| Popy Plant | No | - | 60038 | - | 1450210 |
| Illicit Distillation | Liter | 23582.200 | 22959.400 | 23597.600 | 22671.050 |
| Codeine (Phencidyl) | Bottle | 46995 | 28241 | 53239 | 58875 |

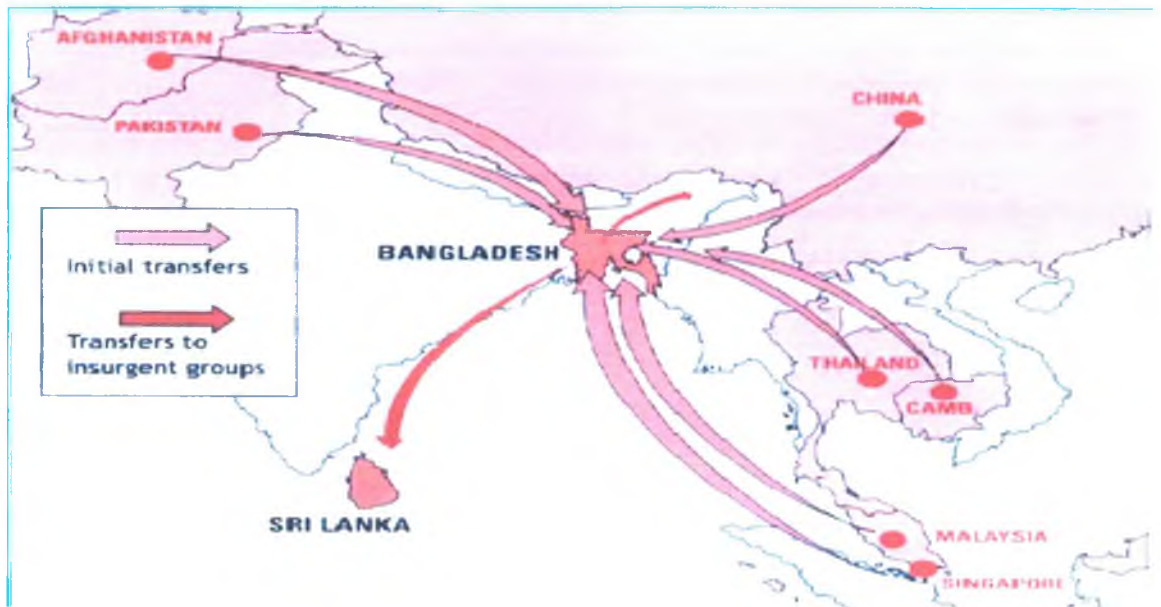
Source: BIPSS Publication, Issue 8, June 2010.

Since drug trafficking in Bangladesh is a transnational issue, Bangladesh cannot fight against this in isolation. A joint and collective (both multilateral and bilateral) mechanism and legal regime are equally important to stopping drug trafficking in this region.¹⁸⁹

Various examples of smuggling and trafficking activities show that these drug trafficking. Mainland Southeast Asia has experienced decades of wars and conflicts, from the Indochina wars, including the Vietnam War, to the internal conflicts in Burma and Cambodia. The armed violence and numerous human rights violations of the Rangoon junta and its army in Shan State, for example, have increased an already constant inflow of Burmese refugees into Thailand. During the past four decades Thailand has become a major country of asylum, receiving some 1.3 million refugees.¹⁹⁰

Yet, armed conflicts have not only thrown waves of refugees on the roads and across international borders, they have also spurred an international and regional trade in small arms that is still very active and regionally integrated. In the 1990s Cambodia had emerged as a regional market for small arms: “Myanmar rebel groups, secessionists from Sri Lanka and supporters of Acehese independence movements in Indonesia were among those groups that have were buying weapons from Cambodia’s well-established black market”.¹⁹¹

Map8: Arms trafficking routs through Bangladesh.



Source: BIPSS Publication, Issue 8, June 2010.

Arms shipments from Cambodia could reach all the way to India, as well allegedly the case in the late 1990s when arms consignments comprising “AK series rifles, mortars, landmines, Stenguns and high-powered explosives”, meant for various insurgent groups in northeastern India, were said to be coming from Bangladesh, where illegal drugs from Burma and arms from Cambodia crossed their paths: “The drug shipments head towards Jaffna and from there to various destinations in West Asia for entry into the European and US markets. According to intelligence sources, Ranong Island off the coast of Thailand is the staging point for arms shipments that originate from Cambodia and take the sea route through the Andaman Seato the major receiving point at Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh’s southernmost tip”.¹⁹² While this route has been used by arms dealers and their end-users for a number of years, the alleged “drug trafficking by the LTTE has added a new

dimension". This maritime route has also clearly been used for trafficking drugs as the January 2001 seizure of heroin and methamphetamine off Surin Island (Thailand) has shown: via the Irrawaddy River Burmese heroin reached the Andaman Sea where fishing boats took it to Ko Surin and unloaded it south of Ranong. Ranong is thus not only one of the main trading points for the Burmese black market; it is also a drug-trafficking node and a well-known passage for human smuggling, as testified by its rampant prostitution.¹⁹³

But India's eastern borders with Bangladesh and Burma have also "witnessed smuggling incidents-some of which involved nuclear material of indigenous South and Southeast Asian origin-which since the late 1990s have led authorities to suspect the operation of organized nuclear smuggling rings in the India-Bangladesh border area". Indeed, "cesium-137, a radioactive material that could fuel a potent Radiological dispersal Device, was smuggled into Bangkok, Thailand, in 2003. The material was reported to have entered Thailand across the Laotian border and was said to have been of Russian origin. In 2001, equipment stolen from a public works facility in Bangkok contained radioactive material, including cesium-137. In addition, in 1993, police in Hanoi, Vietnam, arrested a Vietnamese man for smuggling 10kg of uranium from his former workplace in the former Soviet Union".¹⁹⁴

In the end seems that while national governments, ASEAN, UNODC, and NGOs have made and keep making efforts against trafficking and smuggling, no significant achievement will be reached without addressing corruption and its causes.¹⁹⁵

4.3 Myanmar: The Next Great Economic Power

It was not a long ago that a visitor to Yangon would have to navigate the city's largest market, weighing up which whispering street banker one trusted the most, just to change money. The currency, the Kyat, was pegged by the then government to the ludicrous rate of 6.4 Kyat to the dollar, when in actual fact, the market rate fluctuated around 1,000.¹⁹⁶

The government, which is now nominally civilian, accepted the folly in this charade and floated the currency. This move, economically at least, breaks with a half century of destructive denial. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) attributed Myanmar's progress

to an “ambitious reform program” that is now “bearing fruit”. Despite Myanmar’s new-player status, its economy bears significant resemblances to that of Bangladesh, though there are important differences that give Bangladesh Plc. reason for concern.¹⁹⁷

Both countries have GDP growth rate of around 6%, which is generally healthy in a global context. Myanmar’s, however, appears to be rising while Bangladesh’s has fallen in the short term. This could be a cyclical issue: Myanmar is “novel, and constitute[s] for a while, a more attractive narrative to sell to shareholders” according to Professor Sean Turnell of Australia’s Macquarie University. Bangladesh is currently plagued by what Turnell describes as an, “increasingly insufferable ‘governing’ apparatus”.¹⁹⁸

4.4 The 5-year cycle

Bangladesh has weathered storms before, or, as Shadab Sajid of W&W commodities traders describes, “We weather them every five years”. It is cycle whereby every time there is an election, political instability causes Bangladeshi economy to slow in growth as investors take fright at the sight of our leaders’ attempts to grab power for whatever financial or political gain it can offer.¹⁹⁹

4.5 Garments

Bangladesh, of course, has a trump card: the garments sector. The tragedies of Rana Plaza and Tazreen fashions, however, raise fears that investors may be wary of the image that brand Bangladesh’ gives to their products. This is especially so as Bangladesh labors with implementation of regulations and basic legal cases; there have been no arrests made in either the case of the murder of labor organizer, Aminul Islam, or in the case of the owner of Tazreen Fashions, Delwar Hossain. While orders for garments were, according to the Financial Express, down by 30-35% for the spring/summer season, the EU has awarded Myanmar GSP status. The EU is Bangladesh’s single biggest export destination for RMG. Myanmar also possesses extremely low labor costs, which is possibly the single biggest consideration for the international trade. Moreover, there is concern that with expected wage rises and new compliance obligations, prices in Bangladesh will soon start to rise, as savings are not added as wages go up.²⁰⁰

4.6 Infrastructure

The garment sector cannot set up in Myanmar overnight, and many of the challenges that plague Bangladeshi manufacturers similarly plague Myanmar, namely, as Turnell states, “infrastructure (the world having decided it can live with the country’s politics). Electricity is the big issue here, of course. The cost of generating it privately (very necessary to maintain the production lines required) fast erodes labor cost advantages”.²⁰¹

In essence then, both countries now have a challenge: to provide their countries with electricity and transport. As a result, the Padma Bridge experience is worrying. Corruption is a major issue in Myanmar too, but foreign stakeholders have not had their fingers burnt yet, since the Myanmar government stopped servicing loans from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the late 1980s (which resulted in a freeze in lending from the major multinational financiers such as the World Bank and the ADB).²⁰²

The enthusiasm for Myanmar has meant that a slew of foreign governments and corporations have stepped in to look at infrastructure, a move that could see Myanmar not only possessing similarly cheap labor costs, but also working systems and services. It is early days yet for Myanmar, but a comparison between a proposed Tata industrial estate in Bangladesh, which was shelved in 2008, and projects such as the Thilawa port near Yangon, is worth making.²⁰³

The Tata project would have been one of Bangladesh’s largest foreign direct investments, with a steel plant, two power plants and a fertilizer plant. It was shelved, allegedly, because of an anti-India bias here. The Thilawa port and the proposed Dawei project are two foreign-led port and industrial estate projects that aim to produce transport hubs in Myanmar. Thilawa is Japanese-led and Dawei Thai-led, with potential Japanese funding. While Myanmar and Thailand share neighborly rivalries and a troubled history, Dawei is not being stifled by such animosities, but rather the over ambition of its Thai creators.²⁰⁴

4.7 Tourism

Tourism is another sector where Myanmar will likely see double-digit growth while Bangladesh will lag. Myanmar’s tourism sector has boomed since the country had its apparent opening to the world. The country is far less densely populated than Bangladesh,

and so has more of the rural idyll to offer. Though Myanmar has bigoted politicians, it does not have parties or mass movements that call for men and women not to mingle in public: which would be an obvious joy kill for any family holiday. The country's acceptance meanwhile of leisure activities such as drinking or peacefulness, also gives it an edge over Bangladesh. Tourism may not seem like a decisive industry but can be extremely potent for developing economies, offering it, mass, low-skilled employment and export earnings with little complex planning needed.²⁰⁵

4.8 Remittances

Bangladesh, of course, has an answer in the form of remittances which keep Bangladesh's current account rosy, even as we experience capital flight equivalent to about double yearly FDI inflows, partly result of our five-year cycle of political instability. Remittances also help Myanmar, but are, until now, largely off the books, partly as a result of the lack of financial institutions which say the IMF is another sector in which Myanmar will experience double-digit growth. However, the Bangladeshi tradition of exporting labor will take some catching up to, particularly given the strong and organized links that the country has to the Middle Eastern petro states; relationships that Myanmar has still to foster.²⁰⁶

However, the picture for Bangladesh can at times appear gloomy, but there are bright spots. Arguably, Bangladesh has been through the worst of its troubled birth. The World Bank notes, for instance, "remarkable progress", in eliminating extreme poverty. The same apolitical efforts must now be applied to attaining middle-income status. There are green shoots in this respect; in the diversification in manufacturing, ships have quietly left Bangladeshi shipyards, heading to foreign buyers, while the pharmaceutical sector shows growing promise, and the prospect of electronics assembly also rears its head. Success in manufacturing is a tribute to the country and its workers, and this must be built on to move up the 'food chain' and has been the classic route that Asian economies have developed to reach the top. This will be the best way to face stiff competition from our neighbors.²⁰⁷

4.9 Transit Issue

A high-point of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's recent visit to Myanmar was undoubtedly the decision to strengthen rail, road and waterways connectivity between the

two countries. The two sides also agreed on expediting the existing projects and working out new ones. Taken together, these go beyond bilateralism and set the stage for a sub-regional connectivity between India, Myanmar and Thailand and a later possibility China.²⁰⁸

During talks with sing, Myanmar President Thein Sein sought India's financial and technological assistance in construction and up gradation of the 120 Km Kalewa-Yargi segment of a highway in that country, which also constitutes part of the proposed Asian Highway network. On its part, Myanmar will take up the construction of Yargy-Monywa road segment off the highway which would help establish connectivity between Moreh, a small town in Manipur bordering Myanmar, to Mae Sot in Thailand, passing through Myanmar. The project, which will provide seamless transit connectivity, is expected to be completed by 2016.²⁰⁹

India Border road Organization (BRO) has already built a 132 Km road link between Tamu-Kalewa-Kaleymyo (TKK), in Myanmar and remaining 28 Km is expected to be completed by later this year. Myanmar has also requested India to rebuild and upgrade 71 bridges over TKK road, which are in poor condition, a project that would help not only connectivity but also operationalise a proposed passenger bus service between Imphal, capital of Manipur, and Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest town close to border with Bangladesh.²¹⁰

The two countries also discussed the possibility of Indian participation in development of key infrastructure projects like Dawei port off Bay of Bengal in southern Myanmar, very close to Thailand, which will give India much easier access to south East and East Asia. It was, in fact, Thailand Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra who had, during her visit to India in January last year, proposed the link between the Indian city of Chennai and Dawei by building a deep-sea port and a massive industrial complex in Dawei. What Shinawatra had said is revival of a moribund tri-nation project first talked about a decade ago. During Singh's visit, the Myanmar's government sent clear signals about its interest in developing Dawei with India's help.²¹¹

The countries also agreed to set up a joint working group which will examine enhancing cross-border rail links and cooperation in railway sector, and signed an agreement that will allow airlines of India and Myanmar to cover more destinations in each other's territory and pick up passengers from there on way to third countries. India also engaged in building a multi-modal transport project over the Kaladan River in Myanmar and road and water-way linkages between Sittwe port in Chin state of that country and southern part of Mizoram, another northeast Indian state with which Myanmar shares a border. Both the projects have suffered some delay and Prime Minister Sing and President Sein have asked their officials to expedite them. The projects will give India easier access to its north eastern states and an additional opening to Bay of Bengal.²¹²

Where does the emerging scenario of connectivity between India, Myanmar and Thailand leave Bangladesh, which too holds the potential of being a gateway to South East Asia and a transit hub through Chittagong and Mongla ports? While India and Myanmar move ahead in right earnest to improve connectivity between each other, the transit between Bangladesh and India remains non-starter because it has been highly politicized by main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party. The question that Dhaka must ask itself is whether it would be willing to be squeezed out of a larger picture. There is no doubt that once the Kaladan multimodal project is completed, India will get much easier access to its northeastern states than through the "Chicken's Neck", a narrow corridor through West Bengal and Assam states. This could reduce India's dependence and hence importance of transit through Bangladesh to its northeast.²¹³

For Bangladesh transit with northeast India will facilitate its connectivity with Myanmar. This has acquired more important after, as The Daily Star reported recently in a front-page story, China gave up plan to build a rail link between Chittagong and eastern China's city of Kunming through Myanmar following opposition from Myanmar.²¹⁴ Myanmar's opposition to Chittagong-Kunming link is not surprising considering that the country is reaching out to the West and India at a time when it is travelling down the democratic path in which China will be of little help. One of the reasons why India financed the multi-modal transport project over Kaladan and developed Sittwe port, and is going after other road links with Myanmar, is that India-Bangladesh transit has so far failed to take off even though Bangladesh was much more strategically placed than Myanmar. Once India-

Myanmar connectivity is completed in four years down the line, Bangladesh could face the risk of being left by the road side.²¹⁵

What is more important is that there is a bipartisan consensus in Myanmar-among the government as well as National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi-about multi-modal connectivity with India. It is that for this reason that Manmohan Singh had, during his speech at the banquet hosted by President Sein, said that Myanmar was a “critical partner” in India’s “Look East” policy and that Myanmar and “is perfectly situated to play the role of an economic bridge between India and China and between South and South East Asia. We should work together to create a regional economy that can become a hub for trade, investment and communication in the region”.²¹⁶

As Myanmar moves down the path of political and economic opening up after decades of diplomatic isolation, it appears ready to seize the opportunity of an economic resurgence by making full use of its strategic location by leveraging it’s with both regional powerhouses-India and China. With Myanmar having chosen that path, can Bangladesh, which is no less advantageously located geographically, be far behind? If Bangladesh and northeast India can establish seamless multimodal transport links, it will be a win-win situation for both by integrating with India-Myanmar-Thailand connectivity network. If Myanmar can use its geographic position to become the economic hub of the region, does Bangladesh not also deserve to be so? Dhaka needs to make up its mind²¹⁷

Chapter V

Prospects and Opportunities

Chapter V

Prospects and Opportunities

The recent political and economic reforms in Myanmar are appreciated by the international community. The USA and EU already lifted many of their sanctions against Myanmar considering that the political reforms in the country could start new era of democratization. The neighboring countries are also keen to extend their engagement with Myanmar to forge long term relations. ASEAN has adopted constructive engagement policy which has been very productive in the opening up of Myanmar and in addressing the international community's concern over the country's democracy and human rights condition.²¹⁸

On the other side, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's recent visit to Myanmar has a great concern. India and Myanmar signed 12 MoUs (Memorandums of Understanding) on matters of mutual concern, where in development and connectivity were the key watch words. The understanding is that improved connectivity would lead to greater access between the two countries. While co-operation in fields such as agriculture trade, education and information technology would address Myanmar's developmental needs. One of the important agreements reached was regarding cooperation between a Myanmar and an Indian University and cooperation between a Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs think tank (MISIS) and two Indian think tanks, one of which is the institute for defense studies and analyses. Cooperation among strategic studies think tank is especially welcome because while MISIS is connected with the ASEAN network of think tanks, it has no such link on an institutionalized basis with the think tanks of India or of the South Asian region.²¹⁹

Bangladesh must not lag behind in seizing the opportunity in Myanmar at a time when the country has opened up for business and investment.²²⁰ An important development in trade between Myanmar and Bangladesh took place in 2011, when both the governments introduced direct LC opening for more trade. Earlier, only 50,000 were allowed from Bangladesh from a branch of Sonali Bank at Teknaf land port for each consignment.²²¹

But now, businessmen of both the countries can open an LC (Letter of Credit) for any quantity of dollars as the restriction has already been removed through mutual

understanding. Interestingly enough, there is no formal, shipping agreement between the two countries; although both the country is trying to negotiate.²²² Bangladesh should improve negotiation capability with Myanmar.

With the changes of political situation in the South Asian regions some new regional trade opportunities have lately been created for most of the countries in the region. Bangladesh is already enjoying some benefits of overseas trade due to those changes. However, it has vast opportunities to draw more trade benefits given that regional cooperation continues to grow. A new opportunity of regional cooperation (Bangladesh, India and Myanmar cooperation) is opening up in South Asia for the ongoing political reforms in Myanmar under the administration of Thein Sein. As a result, Myanmar is becoming more and more accessible to other countries and Bangladesh, being a neighboring country, has an extraordinary accessibility to this resourceful country. After a long period of military rules, Myanmar is now opening its door for foreign trade and investment.²²³

Many countries are now in negotiation with Myanmar for establishing trade links. Even the US Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton paid an official visit to Myanmar last December, which has a great significance for the country and its neighbors. Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina also paid an official visit to Myanmar last year mainly to open up the business opportunities.²²⁴

It is not surprising that India, a very influential neighbor of Myanmar, launched a \$70 million project for establishing people to people contact especially through establishing physical infrastructures between the countries. According to Indian Foreign Minister SM Krishna, most of the amount will be spent on road network between India and Myanmar mainly for more trade and investment. Of course, Bangladesh has a very important stake in this tri-national linkage for its geographical location.²²⁵

Currently, there is no separate trade umbrella exclusively for the three nations. Each country has a separate bilateral trade arrangement with each other. But the three nations are members of some wider trade associations like Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multi-spectral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and Kunming Initiative. Kunming Initiative comprising china, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar was formed for

having more interactions and connectivity among the participating countries in all spheres like business and infrastructural development.²²⁶

Ideally, the tri-nation trade umbrella is needed mainly to have a balance in regional trade. Being closest neighbors having considerable stretches of common border, the trio can hardly ignore the importance of one another. “The trades initiatives among the trio will also help reduce regional poverty for having a mutual understanding. Such understanding in turn will help establish peace and security in this region. India, being the largest country having more than one billion population and an emerging economic power, will enjoy majority of the trade benefit from the regional trade.²²⁷

Such unilateral benefit enjoyed by India might create an imbalance in trade facilitation regionally. But, if the trade could be shared among the regional countries, all three nations will be benefited in a balanced way. It is worth-mentioning here that ASEAN-India trade has already reached the target of \$70 billion and the next target is set at \$80 billion mark. The ASEAN-India trade grew by 37 percent in 2011-12 fiscal, thanks to different media reports. So, the trade between ASEAN-India is growing at a faster rate, which has a significant value regionally.²²⁸

Particularly, since the trio is a group of economically emerging nations and has common bordering areas, there should have a very vibrant trade net-works also for future development. Moreover, if India joins the 10-nations ASEAN league in future, Bangladesh will be in isolation at least in terms of-trade, with the South-Eastern countries. Negotiation is underway for India joining the ASEAN. If the trio can form a separate trading umbrella, all the three countries will be able to enjoy trade benefits jointly.²²⁹

For Bangladesh and India, Myanmar is a gateway to enter into other East Asian countries. The trade facilitation among the three nations might bring good business potentials for the area. Construction of road network among the three nations will reduce trade costs significantly. If a new trade umbrella could be formed, all the three nations could use the seaports, which will reduce the trade costs. Myanmar is a resourceful country and it is also rich in food production. If the three nations could link a cooperative deal, they will be able to share energy and could ensure food security for the people of this region. In view of all

the prospects, the three nations should join hands with one another so that a peaceful region could be established.²³⁰

However, Bangladesh and Myanmar in many cases share a common political and economic legacy. Historically, the communication between the countries was always very close and strong. Hence, any political and economic reform in either of the countries always bears significance for the other. In this view, reforms in Myanmar would help to increase communication between the countries in the diplomatic as well as political levels.²³¹ It would help to address bilateral political problems and to explore new economic opportunities. Considering such realities, both the countries need to adopt more wide-scale diplomatic and political engagements. The negotiation and exploration of new ways out would promote mutual trust and understanding and would help to develop sustainable relations beneficial for both countries. Both countries can open up untapped potentials in the areas of trade and investment, connectivity and energy cooperation. In addition, the engagement with regional arrangements can benefit both the countries politically, strategically and economically.²³²

It is notable that the 3rd BIMSTEC summit is being held at the Myanmar capital Naypyitaw from March 1-4. The Three agreements were signed in the summit: (1) a memorandum of association (MoA) on establishing climate change in India, (2) a memorandum of understanding on setting up a Cultural Industries Observatory in Bhutan, and (3) a memorandum of understanding (MoA) was also linked for setting up a permanent secretariat in Bangladesh.²³³

The BIMSTEC is a regional grouping of seven members from South Asia and South East Asia. They are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Established in 1997, BIMSTEC held its first and second summits in 2004 and 2008 in Bangkok and New Delhi respectively. The main objective of this organization is to create an enabling environment for rapid economic development through identification and implementation of specific programmes in the 14 identified areas of cooperation, which include trade and investment, energy, transport and communication, tourism, agriculture, environment and disaster management, people to people contact, counter terrorism and transnational crime and climate change. Bangladesh is the Lead Country for the areas of

trade and investment and climate change.²³⁴ It is new hope for Bangladesh to enhance its economic corridor with its neighbours.

Chapter VI

Geo-Strategic and Economic Interests of Great Powers in Myanmar

6.1 U.S.A's Interest

6.2 China's Interest

6.3 India's Interest

Chapter VI

Geo-Strategic and Economic Interests of Great Powers in Myanmar

6.1 U.S.A's Interest

After the recent diplomatic visit of US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, the topic of Myanmar and its importance in Asia has been reopened. The republic of the Union of Myanmar (also identified as Burma, its colonial name) is located in Southeast Asia and is a bordering country with Bangladesh, China, India, Laos and Thailand. As a result of this, we can say that the geographic location of Myanmar makes it extremely important to the West. The presence of the West in this country would be strategic and could enable them to have political leverage among the other nations in Asia, which are growing rapidly both economically and militarily.²³⁵

The democratization of Myanmar has constituted an important US policy objective for all recent US administrations. However, the embrace of pragmatic engagement in 2009 was an acknowledgement by the Obama administration that relying solely on sanctions in pursuit of political reforms and change in Myanmar made for a poor and failed strategy, and that better foreign policy instruments were available to the US to achieve this goal.²³⁶ Under Obama, dialogue thus became an important complement to sanctions. State Department Officials in particular have played an important role both in the lead up to and since the initiation of the political process involving the new Myanmar government and Aung San Suu Kyi. These officials have communicated to Naypyidaw US expectations of the necessary steps and reform measures to advance the bilateral relationship. They have also closely interacted with Suu Kyi regarding political developments and her possible options in the context of political transition and the generational change at the top of Myanmar's (ex)-military leadership.²³⁷ US officials as such also seem to have played a key part in Suu Key's reassessment of how to approach those former military leaders now at the helm of the new civilian government. Similarly, US officials have discussed both with the government and ethnic groups the issue of national reconciliation.²³⁸

Beyond the goal of promoting political freedoms and democratic governance in Myanmar, the adoption of a more pragmatic Burma policy also served other objectives. One was the strengthening of US relations with ASEAN. Although the George W. Bush administration

had not overlooked Southeast Asia, Washington was soon primarily preoccupied with operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to the perceived detriment of its ASEAN ties. Bush's critics within the US had pointed to significant long-term policy drift that put at risk American economic, political and security interests, and called for a comprehensive ASEAN strategy that recognized both Southeast Asia's interest in global free trade and its important role in structuring regional security dialogue.²³⁹ The Obama policy team had also appreciated the President Bush's hard-edged Burma policy had to some degree complicated relations with the Association as a whole because, Washington had applied pressure on ASEAN countries to advance political change in Myanmar. Though promoting such change was to some extent shared by regional countries, ASEAN government generally thought that a policy focused on sanctions and ostracism was counterproductive. They preferred economic and diplomatic engagement. Worrying though from a Southeast Asia perspective was that Washington seemed prepared to hold the further development of ties with ASEAN hostage to the situation in Myanmar.²⁴⁰ Such perceptions and assessments, not least those from within ASEAN required a response. The review of US Burma policy and Washington's decision to embark on a more pragmatic approach can thus be seen as part of an attempt not only to be effective in bilateral relations with Myanmar, but also to refashion US ties with ASEAN. When the policy adaptation was announced, ASEAN countries welcomed it.²⁴¹

The Obama administration's focus on strengthening ties with ASEAN as an organization, as well as with its member-states cannot, however, really be considered outside the context of China's rise as a great power and its deepening ties with Southeast Asia. China's relations with the ASEAN states had greatly improved on the back of the China-ASEAN free-trade agreement and Beijing's offer of Chinese aid, especially to countries in continental Southeast Asia, not least Myanmar? It seemed that even countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia were susceptible to China's charm offensive and associated economic carrots. When the East Asia Summit, organized and nominally led by ASEAN, held its inaugural leader's meeting in 2005, Washington was excluded, much to its concern.²⁴²

To be sure, the United States has for some time generally welcomed China's growing military capabilities and it has sought to influence China's foreign policy choices by

shaping the latter's regional environment, not least by revitalizing relations with alliances partners and friendly states. The Bush administration suggested in 2005 that China should become a 'responsible stakeholder' in regional and international society, while simultaneously hedging against the possibility that Beijing would not. The Obama administration advanced a similar official position vis-à-vis China by emphasizing the need for 'strategic reassurance', while continuing a dual strategy of engagement and balancing.²⁴³

The Obama administration has not only been prepared to counter and offset China's earlier charm offensive in southeast Asia, but also to confront, for instance, what has been perceived as renewed Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. This has involved emphasizing the importance of the freedom of navigation and diplomatically challenging Beijing regarding its actions and claims in the South China Sea. In November 2011, for instance, Hillary Clinton made clear that while Washington did not take a position on any territorial claim, the claimants should not resort to intimidation or coercion to pursue the latter. That month, the United States also announced the deployment of a rotating contingent of 2,500 troops to Darwin, Australia.²⁴⁴

Notably, the Obama administration continues to argue that it wants a 'strong progressive partnership' with Beijing, while asserting that the US is 'destined to play a strong critical, primary role in the Asia Pacific Region for decades to come'. To secure America's leadership role in the Asia-Pacific, the administration has identified six lines of action: (1) Strengthening bilateral security alliances; (2) Deepening US working relationships with emerging powers; (3) Engaging with regional multilateral institutions; (4) Expanding trade and investment; (5) Forging a broad-based military presence; (6) Advancing democracy and human rights. These lines of action all form part of what has been referred to as Obama's 'pivot' towards the Asia-Pacific.²⁴⁵ In substantive terms, this involves, for instance, promoting the Trans-Pacific Partnership and joining the East Asia Summit. However, what Hillary Clinton called 'forward-deployed-diplomacy' aims to make use of the full range of US diplomatic resources to 'every country and corner of the region'. These diplomatic efforts to advance the security and prosperity of the region are underpinned by the US military's 'rebalancing' towards the region. Similarly Ambassador Derek Mitchell, who in 2011 became the special representative and policy coordinator for

Burma and then took up the long vacant post of US Ambassador to Burma, may have had a longstanding interest in Myanmar, but he also remains known for his very significant expertise and contributions on developing strategy towards Southeast Asia and the wider East Asia-Pacific.²⁴⁶

The problem is that until earlier this year, the country has been under a military rule, dissolved by the installation of a civilian government after the general election held in 2010. Since then, the Myanmar government has been tentatively loosening the restrictions that have been present in the country for the past decades. This is what the US has said has made them take this step and offer to ease certain restraints on international development assistance and possibly enhance relations and cooperation, among others. But everything has a price. The offer will require Myanmar to release remaining political prisoners, halt army violence and break ties with North Korea.²⁴⁷

Myanmar has been in one of the longest running civil wars that has still not been resolved and the consistent reports of human rights violations, including child labor, human trafficking and a lack of freedom of speech do not help at all. After the 1988 military coup in the country and violent suppression of pro-democracy demonstrations many sanctions were imposed on Myanmar. It is important to note that, among others, the European Union, the United States and Canada have enforced strong economic sanctions.²⁴⁸ Not all countries agree on this matter. Russia, who holds one of the strongest bilateral relations with Myanmar, along with China, opposes the imposition of these sanctions on Myanmar. Both of them support a policy of dialogue and as a part of the UN Security Council, they have managed to occasionally shield Myanmar from global pressure and criticism.²⁴⁹

If we go on to mention the relationship with Russia, we can outline the controversial nuclear research deal that was held between the two countries in 2007 that held to the accusation of the international community of the existence of a program to develop nuclear weapons. This is not the only time these claims have been made, as there is a UN report that said there was evidence that North Korea had been exporting nuclear technology to Burma, Iran and Syria. The ties with North Korea were also mentioned in Hilary Clinton's visit last month, defining these "illicit military ties" and calling for a fight against the spread of nuclear weapons.²⁵⁰

It is not the first time that the US tries to gain strategic influence in the region. After the September 11 attacks in the United States, under the argument of defense against a possible terrorist attack, they managed to create an airbase on the northern tip of Indonesia. Myanmar is in a strategic position in the Andaman Sea, shared with India, and is near major Indian Ocean shipping lanes from the Persian Gulf to the South China Sea; so naval access is also something we must not forget about.²⁵¹

Both India and China also seek influence in Myanmar and many analysts have said that the visit of Mrs. Clinton can be seen as part of a larger plan of the US to gain influence over the region at the expense of China. With the sanctions imposed from the West, it has been China who has filled the empty place left in the country and, as a consequence, China has felt attacked by this approach of the United States, saying that they will not let the US “stomp on its interests” in the country. So this approach, as we can see, could easily produce a negative reaction from China and other Asian states towards the US.²⁵² On the other hand China holds good relations with the government, but not with the people and there is a growing anti-Chinese sentiment in Myanmar, a sentiment that could be beneficial for the US, but not for China or its relations with this western country. This also allows us to see the added concern of China with the approach of the US, possibly influencing the area more than we imagine.²⁵³

If we take a look at all of this, we can reach to the conclusion that, despite the uncertain government of Myanmar, their importance is obvious in the Southeast Asian region. What is left now is to see how the current government moves in the near future and determine how they will allow those around them to influence them, especially when we look at the United States and China. The internal situation of Myanmar is not optimal, but they have many things to offer when we look at geopolitics so we must keep an eye on what happens, as Myanmar could possibly be very important for the future of East-West relations.²⁵⁴

6.2 China's Interest

As India and China have emerged as major powers in Asia, their interests and concerns have transcended their geographical boundaries. There is particularly the case in Myanmar, where those interests have converged. This is largely due to the fact that

Myanmar shares common borders with both the countries. Myanmar shares a 2,185 Kilometer border with China, and 1,643 Kilometer border with India. It has long been argued that Myanmar has always been a strategic concern for governing the dynamics of India-China relations. Myanmar's strategic location is considered as an important asset for India and China that offers tremendous opportunities for the countries of the region. Therefore, recent developments in Myanmar are a matter of concern for both India and China.²⁵⁵

For China, Burma is an important strategic pivot, a land region over which China can gain direct access to the Indian Ocean through its Southwestern hinterland, so as to avoid the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca. Myanmar's security and stability is thus directly related to China's own domestic security, as well as the security of its energy supply channels.²⁵⁶ The US already has strategic political, economic and security partnerships with South East Asian nations including Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines and Singapore. With its goal of controlling political influence and leadership in the Asia-Pacific region, the US will naturally not just 'abandon' an important strategic asset in Myanmar.²⁵⁷

China's role in Myanmar is decisive as it is one of the country's largest trading partners (India stands at fourth) and its biggest source of foreign investment. There has been an enormous growth in China's influence in Myanmar, significantly, after Western sanctions were implemented in 1989. China is investing heavily in developing ports in Myanmar, gaining greater access to the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, support from China has been crucial to Myanmar in diplomatic flora such as the United Nations Security Council. Beijing is investing heavily in infrastructure, mining projects, hydropower dams and oil-and-gas pipelines to help feed southern China's growing energy needs.²⁵⁸

It is noteworthy that Myanmar occupies a critical space on China's south-western flank. It is important as a trading outlet to the Indian Ocean for its landlocked inland provinces of Yunnan. Yunnanese companies are big investors in mining, rubber and other industries in the bordering state of Kachin in Myanmar. Thus, officials in Yunnan have a keen interest in Myanmar keeping the ethnic clashes in its Border States calm. Hence, China's Myanmar policy has been dictated to a large extent by what will help Yunnan's economy

move forward.²⁵⁹ China and Myanmar have also agreed to continue to strengthen communication and coordination to accelerate the formulation of mid-term and long-term goals of bilateral exchanges in politics, economy, trade, culture, security and other areas to steadily push forward comprehensive cooperation.

Despite the recent setbacks to Chinese investments in Myanmar, Beijing's economic presence in the country continues to grow with the inauguration of the gas pipeline. The pipeline will be transporting about 12 billion cubic meters of gas across Myanmar and into the southern Chinese province of Yunnan.²⁶⁰

It also plans to build a highway and a high speed railway line by 2015 that would allow people and cargo to travel from Kyaukpyu passing through Mandalay to Yunnan. This would later be connected to Chittagong in Bangladesh, thus joining up Yunnan to Bangladesh via Myanmar through a tri-nation highway.²⁶¹

Chinese companies are also developing special economic zones and power plants and devising strategies for building a deep water commercial seaport at Kyaukpyu's natural harbor. The two sides have also conducted feasibility study for construction of Ruili-Kyaukpyu road that would act as China-Myanmar corridor. This would satisfy China's need for energy security as well as link to Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean and beyond.²⁶²

Meanwhile, however, the new reformist regime in Myanmar considers India as a land of opportunity. It has been characterized as a benign power and an alternative force, given the competitions that exist from the existing players and other potential stakeholders.

6.3 India's Interest

The key drivers of the India-Myanmar strategic relationship are cooperation in counter-insurgency operations and the need for India to ensure that Myanmar is not driven into "area of influence" of any other power in the region through Indian neglect of its security concerns.²⁶³ Myanmar's Strategic importance for India arises from these factors: Myanmar is the second-largest of India's neighbors and the largest on our eastern flank; Myanmar provides the Eastern littoral of the Bay of Bengal. An unfriendly Myanmar hosting foreign naval presence would be a grave threat to India's security; Myanmar has a big border with China in the North, contiguous with the Sino-Indian disputed border. Military analysts can

gauge the various strategic complications that arise from such a configuration in case Myanmar is under unfriendly influence; Myanmar bridges South Asia and India with South-East Asia. It also acts as a buffer between India's North Eastern States and the Southern provinces of China.²⁶⁴

Geo-politically, with a friendly Myanmar, India could add more substance to her 'Look East' policies of building up relationships with South East Asia, as Myanmar shares common borders with Laos and Thailand. With no contentious issues looming over India-Myanmar relations, a viable strategic partnership is more easily achievable. This can counter-act the negative image being propagated that India is unfriendly with her neighbors.²⁶⁵

Indian insurgent groups from the northeastern states consider Myanmar a safe haven. Similarly, the rebels from these areas in Myanmar take refuge in the bordering areas of Indian Territory. Therefore, it is in the interests of both countries to cooperate with each other to fight these insurgent groups in a coordinated manner similar to China's approach of solving its problem of the Yunnan province in its southwest border.²⁶⁶

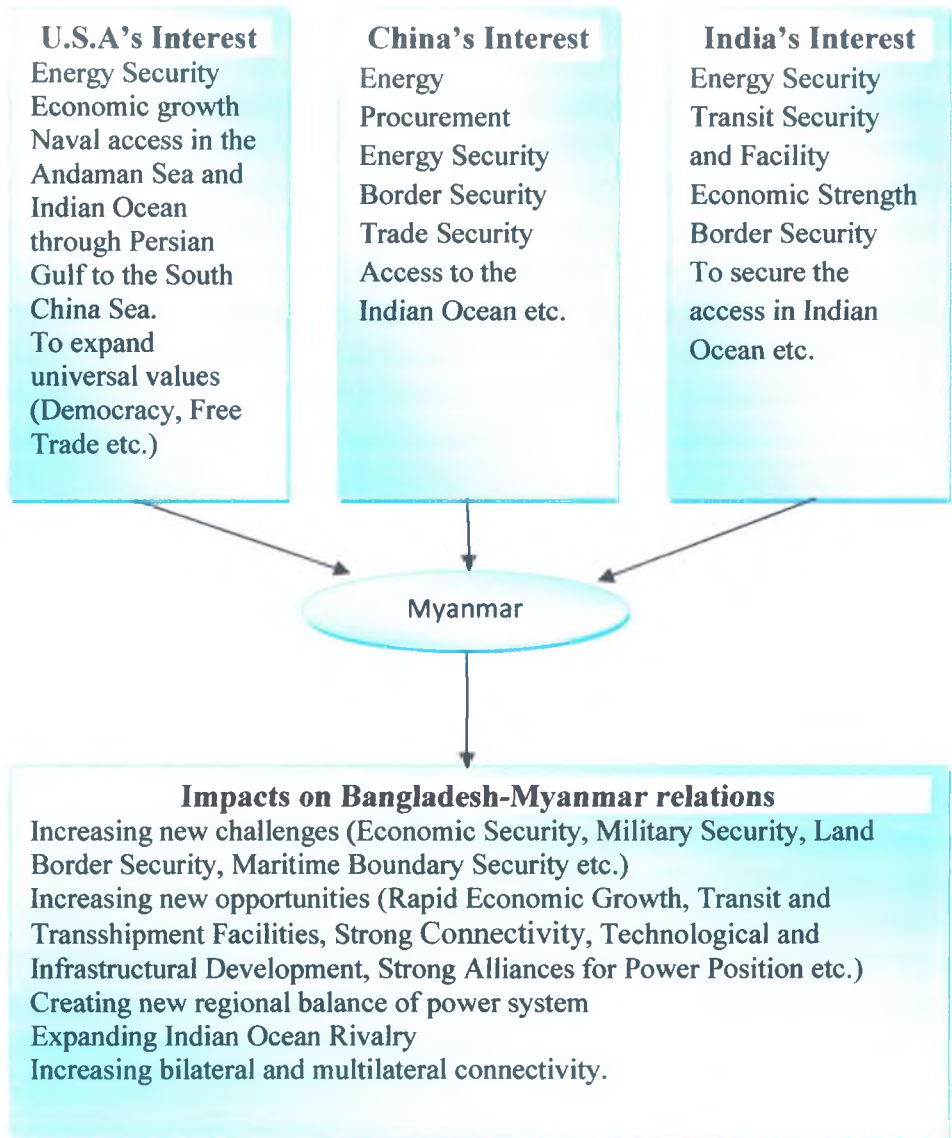
Given that Indian and Chinese interests overlap in Myanmar, building up the rail-road connectivity is high in the priority lists of both the countries for their land locked provinces as the borders. Myanmar acts as a major source of energy for the rising population of both the countries.

Though China and India have competing security and economic interests in Myanmar, there has not been any direct confrontation or threat to national interest of both the countries there. Nevertheless, since the Southeast Asian country's first elections in November 2010, both Chinese and Indian officials have strengthened their hand with a deep confidence of gaining much more from the new regime. Strategically, India and China both believe that strengthened ties with Myanmar are the Key to dominance in the Indo-Pacific region.²⁶⁷

In this perspective Chinese Premier Li Keqiang is wise when he observes that "China and India should not seek cooperation from after with a ready partner at hand". He further

adds, “Political trust is the precondition for friendship and cooperation... But a few clouds in the sky cannot shut out the brilliant sun-rays of our friendship”. Bridging the trust deficit and recognizing the convergences may new potential for development for both India and China in Myanmar.²⁶⁸

Figure-3: Great Power’s Interest in Myanmar and Its impacts on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.



Source: Prepared by Author

To consider the above circumstances (referred in figure: 3), Bangladesh needs to be more strategic and more diplomatic in order to its power position in this region. Here, connectivity is the best opportunity for Bangladesh-Myanmar cooperative and competitive

relations. Otherwise, Bangladesh will lose its power position in the new regional balance of power system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion and Recommendations

Bangladesh-Myanmar relations are a much broader issue and content in its foreign policy dimension of Bangladesh.²⁶⁹ In the thesis paper, it is empirically observed that Myanmar's domestic political culture and policy are very much colored by its state-centric security approach. Myanmar's constitution is military dominated, which creates anarchy. National interest of Myanmar is used operationally to fulfill military's self-interest and power. The rights of ethnic people are ignored in Myanmar. Specially, Rohingyas are not considered as an ethnic group. They are victims of Myanmar's domestic policy. They have been spending an insecure and uncertain life. Sometimes they are IDPs in Myanmar and sometimes they are refugees in neighbour countries of Myanmar. This Rohingya refugee is one of the main issues of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. But it is a matter of thinking that recently Myanmar's domestic political culture has been changed dramatically. Myanmar's economy has opened for international community. A democratic reform is going on in Myanmar. That is why world attention is on it. Now we have an opportunity to open up Myanmar. We must have good relations with Myanmar because of our own interest.²⁷⁰

Among the two neighbors we have relatively less problem with Myanmar but we have very little information about Myanmar. We have tremendous opportunities to expand our bilateral relations with Myanmar because it is a potential market for our products.²⁷¹ The economic and trade relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar are being hampered due to the Rohingya crisis. Our trade is about 100 million dollars but we export not more than 3-5 million dollars. It is expected that the bilateral trade between the two countries could be as high as \$ one billion by the year 2013. There is a lot of militancy associated with this issue. It is a big challenge because this list of militancy includes supporters of Islamic political groups. Nexus among arms, drugs and frustrated groups could lead to the recruitment of Islamic fundamentalist groups and criminal networks. Now in this circumstances US and ASEAN are the key players including US, China and Russia. They must think of the new doctrine that is called R2P (Responsibility to Protect) and need to put pressure on Myanmar government to stop the atrocities.²⁷²

It has to be noted that the United States has leverage to help genuine democratic transition in Myanmar for two important reasons. The first is because of the unparalleled U.S. economic and military power and its pioneering role in championing democracy and

human rights. The second is the wide acceptance of the U.S. engagement policy by the Myanmar's people. John McCain's visit should be viewed as a positive development. The U.S. government needs to continue its diplomatic pressure for genuine democratic reforms and protection and promotion of human rights. One effective way of engagement for the senator is to urge his colleagues to confirm the nomination of Derek Mitchell as a U.S. special envoy of Myanmar.²⁷³

Myanmar's decades-old problem is not entirely a question of democracy. The root cause is about denying rights to ethnic minority groups. In the process of engaging Myanmar, the U.S. government, either Democratic or Republican, should involve more representatives and experts from ethnic minorities.²⁷⁴

The concerns or imperatives perceived by the U.S. government in its Southern Asian role are sometimes mutually contradictory. One big part of this strategy that doesn't get discussed much is the effort to integrate Southeast Asian countries, which are not thrilled about China's rising influence but need some help uniting against the neighboring giant. Given the strategic relevance of both China and Myanmar, it is important that the United States shape the China-Myanmar relationship to the advantage of U.S. interests. Ultimately, this memo recommends a hedging policy focused on promoting Myanmar's neutrality toward both China and the United States.²⁷⁵

On the other side, New Delhi's recent initiatives have positively begun to address three broad issues with the potential to impede India's deep engagement with Myanmar. The First, and perhaps most important dilemma, has been deciding whether to support the Aung San Suu Kyi-led democratic movement. Secondly, to improve economic engagement while India aspires to emulate China's levels of engagement in Myanmar—partially motivated by fear of Chinese encirclement of India—restoring ties with the military junta did not bring about the desired economic results India had hoped for. Thirdly, ethnic separatism and insurgency in northeastern India and Myanmar are as old as independent India itself. A calibrated policy needs to be developed to address the issues of the 'ethnic melting pot'. India cannot connect with Myanmar without addressing pressing problems in its own northeast.²⁷⁶

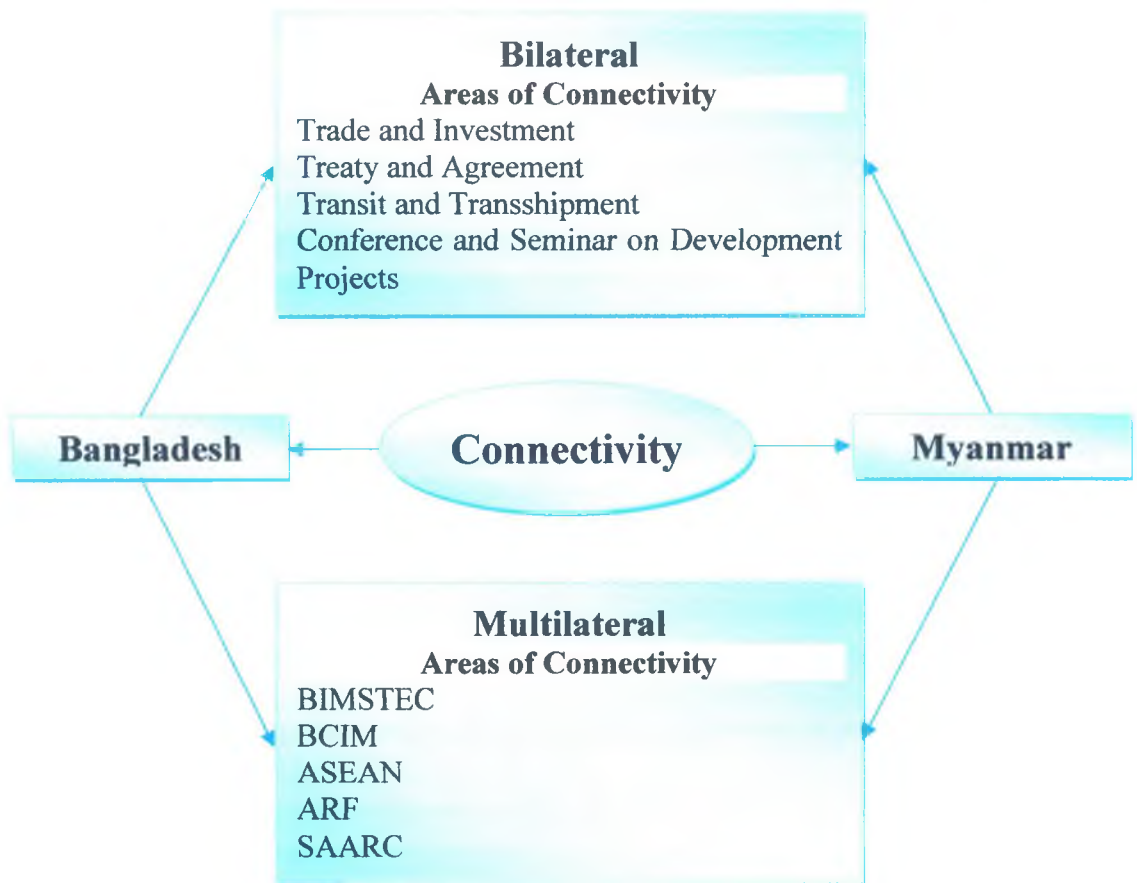
In the context of the present situation, we should strengthen our bilateral trade and cultural relations with Myanmar, and the Rohingya should not be allowed to come to the front.²⁷⁷ To create a constructive relation with Myanmar we should learn from China, India, and Singapore who have been maintaining good relation with Myanmar. We should not make our bilateral relations contingent upon the Rohingya issue.²⁷⁸ If we can develop other sectors of cooperation then the Rohingya problem would be subsided.²⁷⁹

We should give more concentration to develop our relations through regional organization like BIMSTEC. It will bring opportunity for member countries. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC) is constituted by countries of South and Southeast Asia. Infrastructure projects like the Trans-Asian Rail network, the Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project, etc., and the BIMSTEC Tourism initiative and Regional Resource Co-operation Agreements (for oil and gas) could be developed for mutual benefit. Despite many obvious advantages, the full potential of intra-regional trade presently remains unrealized because of tariff and non-tariff barriers, weak communication links, and lack of information regarding the supply capabilities and other barriers, and the fact that some SAARC member states still think locally rather than regionally.²⁸⁰

However, The BIMSTEC growth zone has a combined population of 1.3 billion people and a combined GDP of \$550 billion. It can derive great benefits from the geographical proximity of South and South-East Asian countries and their complementarities in trade, investment and production.²⁸¹ The BIMSTEC 3rd summit offered a real opportunity to combine the 'look east' and 'look west' policies of South Asian and Southeast Asian countries in a spirit of new regionalism. In all respects, Bangladesh is well placed to advance this process through bilateral and multilateral initiatives. The country is a natural partner for any initiative in the direction of deepening cooperation on trade, energy and connectivity. Ironically, bilateral irritants pose roadblocks to these much-needed multilateral initiatives at sub-regional and inter-regional levels. At the BIMSTEC level, the member nations are in advantageous positions to resolve bilateral disputes efficiently and amicably. The establishment of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka will contribute in bringing the East and the West together for mutual benefit in the region.²⁸²

Bangladesh-Myanmar relations need a strong connectivity. Both bilateral and multilateral connectivity are essential to expand Bangladesh-Myanmar co-operative and competitive relations. State to state level and people to people level connectivity can bring a positive impact on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. In this perspective, government can negotiate with Myanmar bilaterally to solve bilateral problems. At the same time, government can strengthen its negotiating power through multilateral connectivity (such as creating alliances with regional and sub-regional organizations).

Figure-4: Strengthening of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations through Connectivity



Source: Prepared by Author

Figure-2 shows that Bangladesh and Myanmar are connected both bilaterally and multilaterally for strengthening relations. Here, bilateral areas of connectivity are explored that bilateral treaty and agreement can help to solve bilateral problems. For this perspective, Bangladesh can arrange conference and seminar on bilateral issues for state to state level understanding. And at the same time, Bangladesh can accept international support to solve problems (like Rohingya refugee problems) through multilateral connectivity.

In order to decrease illegal trade Bangladesh needs to increase legal trade. Well transit and transshipment facilities are the precondition of trade and investment. And connectivity between Bangladesh and Myanmar is the key force for transit and transshipment facilities. Bilaterally Bangladesh can take infrastructural project in Myanmar and can produce man power in order to utilize Myanmar's land. Myanmar is rich in hydropower energy. Bangladesh and Myanmar can jointly open up two-country base energy research and utilize project to reduce energy crisis for both countries.

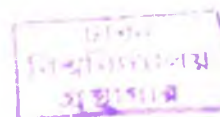
To stop human trafficking Bangladesh and Myanmar's land border management should be developed. In this sector, Bangladesh can utilize both bilateral and multilateral connectivity power. Bangladesh should build up its negotiation power through increasing relations with ASEAN countries, SAARC countries, BIMSTEC countries and ARF countries.

Bangladesh-Myanmar relations act on the basis of national interest and national security. Both countries want to save their national interest and national security. There is no doubt that bilateral problems are emerged on the basis of national interest and national security. Especially Rohingya refugee problems in Bangladesh have become a security threat on our national interest. Myanmar is responsible to create Rohingya IDPs and Refugees. So it is Myanmar's responsibility to take proper decision according to international law and rules in order to minimize this problem. Bangladesh is not bound to bear the extra pressure of Rohingya refugees. Bangladesh should bilaterally solve the Rohingya problem with Myanmar and apply multilateral connectivity power for strengthening its position against Rohingya.

The enduring pursuit of regionalism and sub regionalism has an underpinning thrust on peace, security and development through exploration, identification and gradual intensification of trade, economic and cultural ties among the members. The Kunming Initiative or what has come to be known as the BCIM Forum (track-II initiatives), came into effect more than a decade back on August 17, 1999, and with the Conference on Regional Cooperation and Development among China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh held in Kunming the capital of Yunnan province in the south-western region of China. It is one such sub-regional venture that explores the prospects of cooperation by clustering

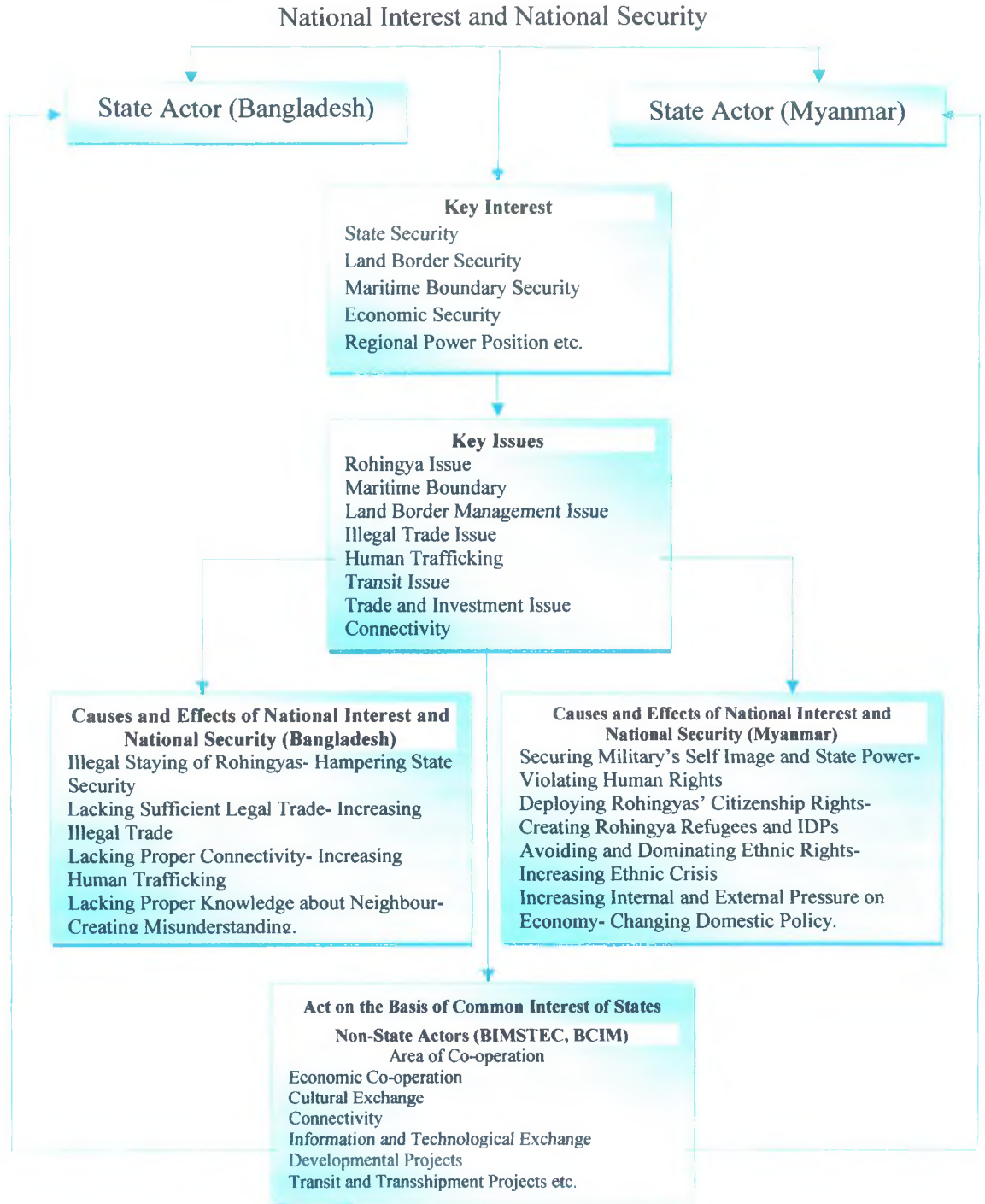
parts or the whole of Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar, specifically the land-locked frontier areas.²⁸³ The BCIM concept draws its inspiration from the idea of ‘growth zones’ which has been a relatively new introduction in the vocabulary of development economics. The potential aspects relating to economic integration in the BCIM sub-region: (a) market access in Myanmar; (b) investment opportunity; (c) connectivity problems; (d) contract farming; and (e) energy cooperation.²⁸⁴ These initiatives will bring a great opportunity for Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

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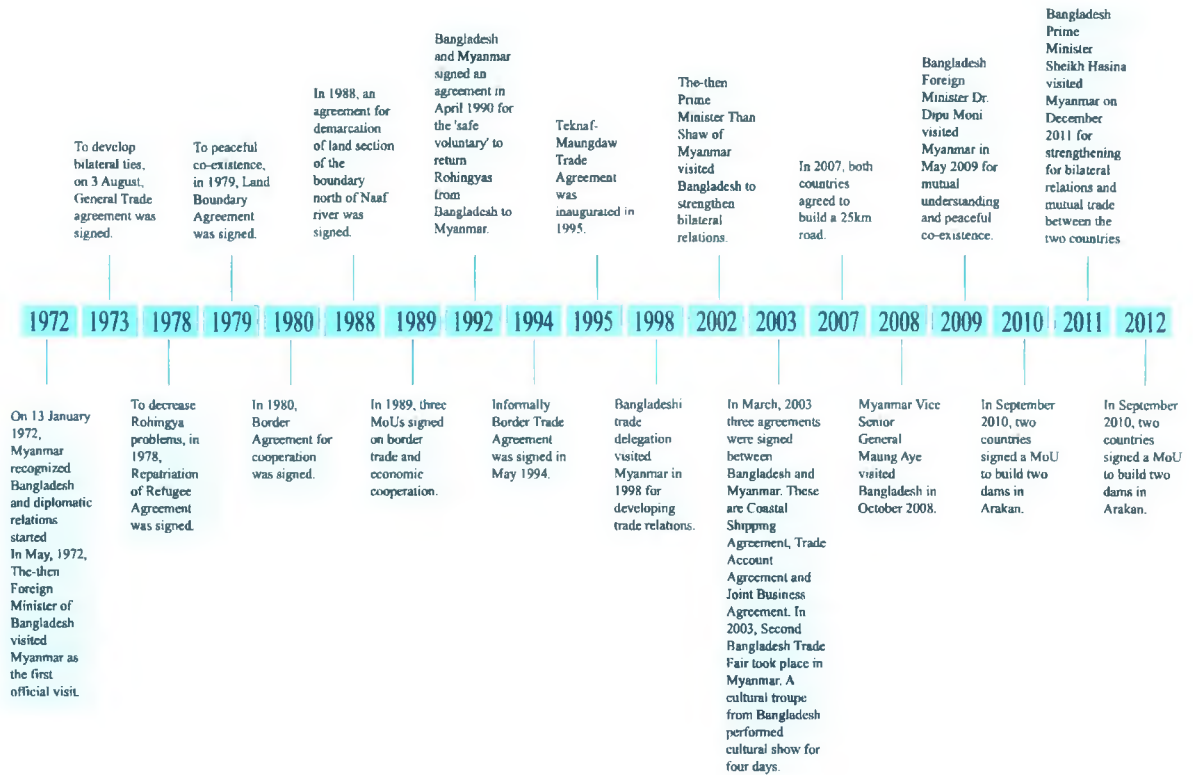
APPENDICES

Figure-1: Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations



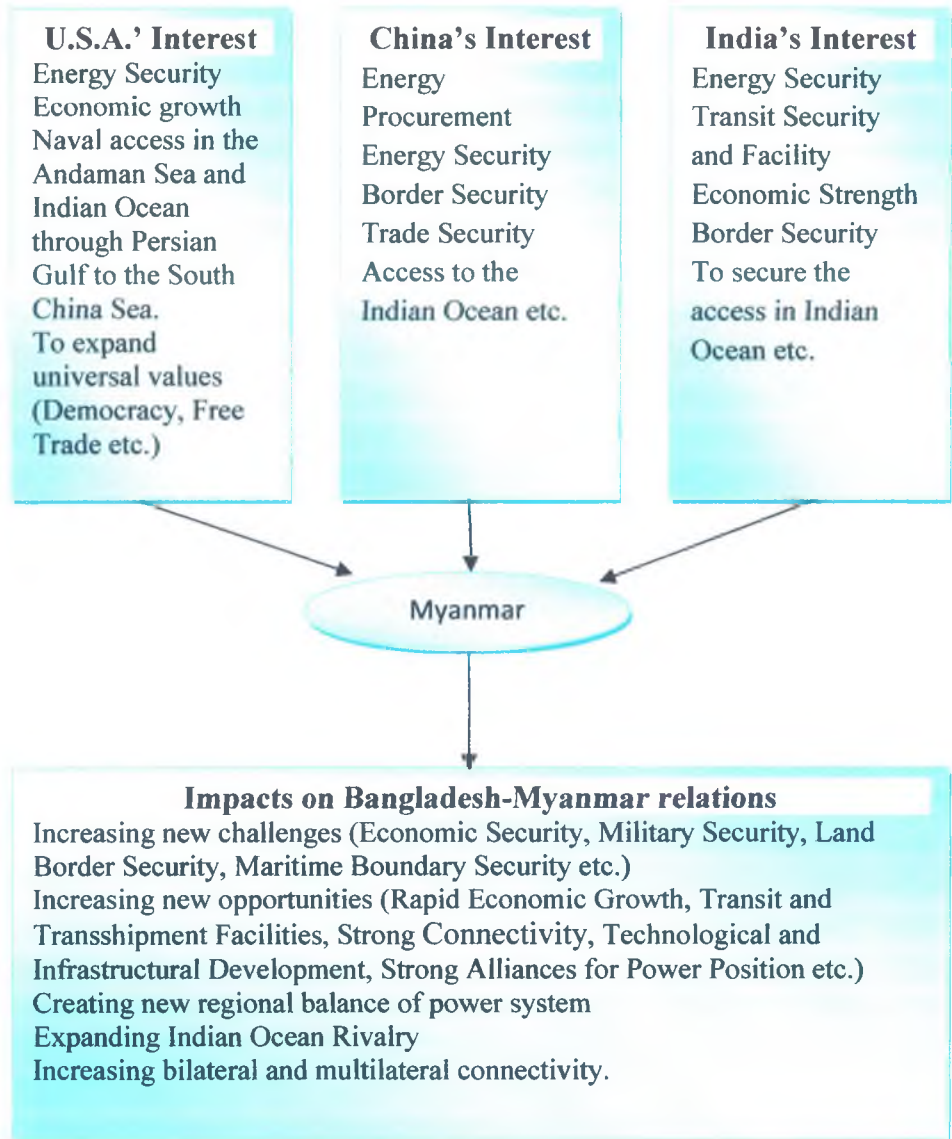
Source: Prepared by Author

Figure 2: Historical Chronology of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations.



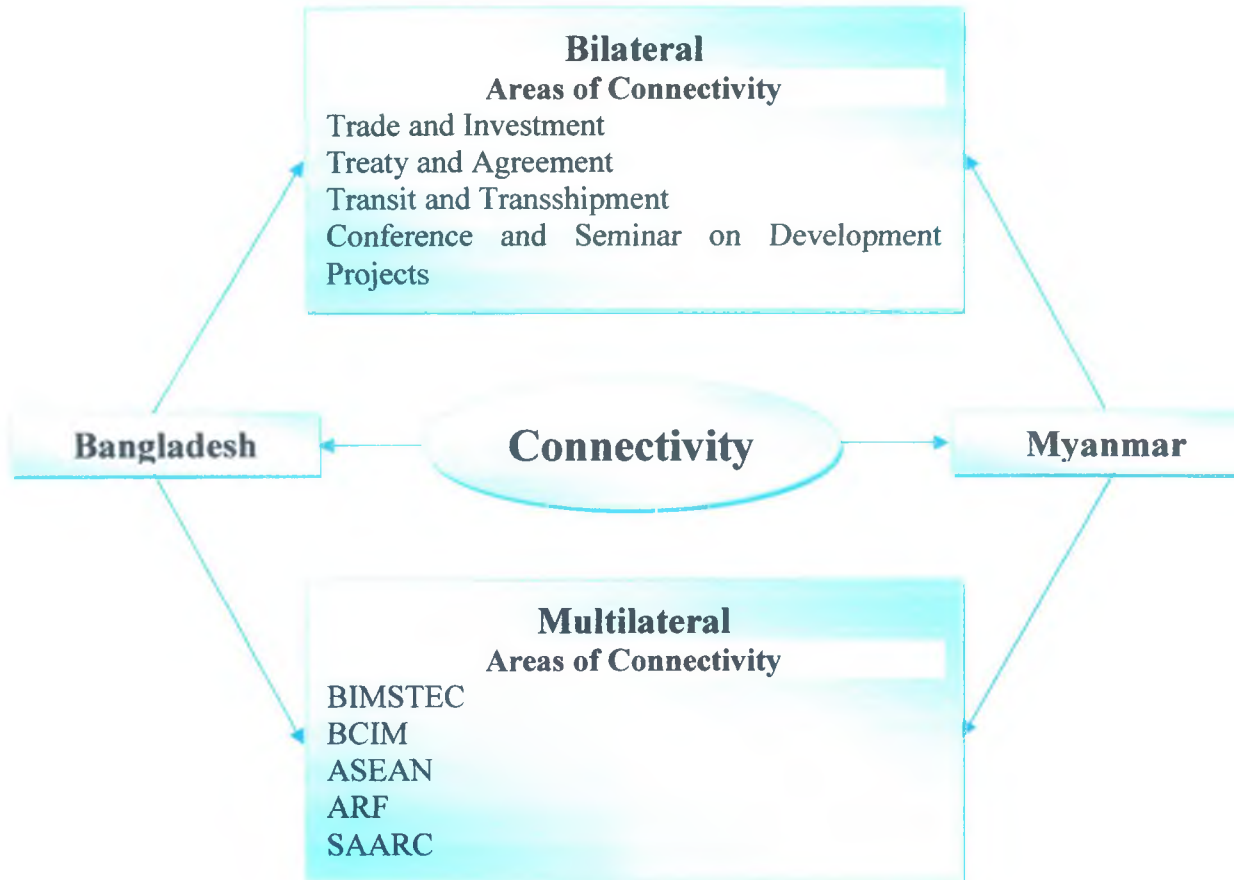
Source: Prepared by Author

Figure-3: Great Power's Interest in Myanmar and Its impacts on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations



Source: Prepared by Author

Figure-4: Strengthening Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations through Connectivity



Source: Prepared By Author

Maps:

Map1: Rohingya (Arakan state, Burma and Cox's bazaar, Bangladesh)



Source: www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/uploads/9/1/8/4/9184764/8125225_orig.png

Map 2: Bay of Bengal



Source: <http://southasiajournal.net/2012/10/de-limitation-of-the-bangladesh-myanmar-maritime-border/>

Map 3: BMIC project: Bangladesh-Myanmar-India-China corridor.



BMIC project: Bangladesh-Myanmar-India-China corridor

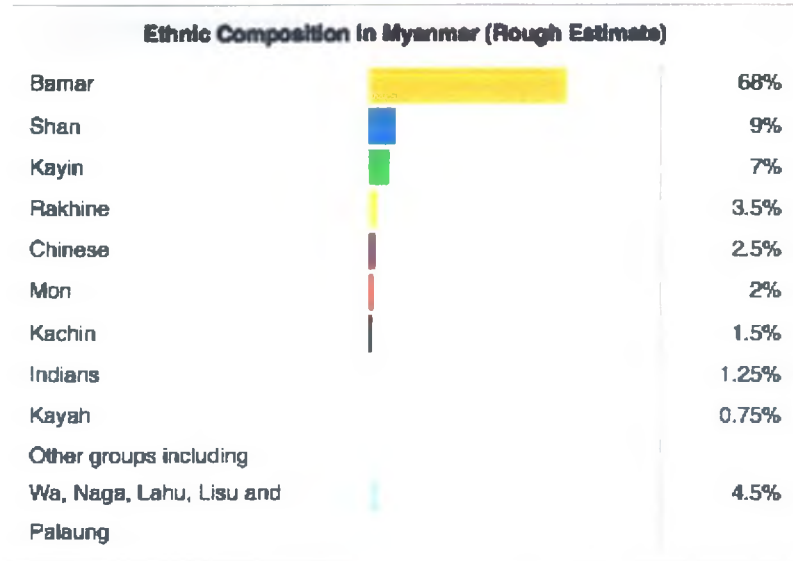
Source:<http://www.tourguizhou.net/archives/tag/bangladesh-myanmar-india-china-corridor>

Map 4: Arms trafficking routes through Bangladesh.



Source: BIPSS Publication, Issue 8, June 2010.

Chart 1: Ethnic nationalities of Myanmar



Source: Constitution of Myanmar

Tables:

Table 1: Bangladesh-Myanmar Bilateral Trade Statistics

| Year | Export | Import | Trade Ratio (Value in million Tk. Value in million US \$) |
|---------|----------------|----------------|---|
| 2005-06 | 346.13(5.14) | 1983.6(29.57) | 1:575 |
| 2006-07 | 409.35(5.93) | 1419.4(20.56) | 1:3.46 |
| 2007-08 | 658.56(9.6) | 7944.5(115.81) | 1:12.06 |
| 2008-09 | 632.96(9.2) | 4885.5(71.01) | 1:7.72 |
| 2009-10 | 693.87(10.03) | 4818.9(69.65) | 1:6.94 |
| 2010-11 | 688.14(9.65) | 12847(180.51) | 1:18.67 |
| 2011-12 | 1063.97(13.45) | 5161.5(65.25) | 1:4.85 |
| 2012-13 | 1092.51(13.67) | 6703(84) | 1:6.14 |

Source: Import Payment, Bangladesh Bank and & Export Statistics, Export Promotion Bureau & Bangladesh Bank.

Table 2: Narcotic Seizure Statistics in Bangladesh.

| Name of Drug | Unit | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 (April) |
|----------------------|--------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| Heroin | Kg | 16.288 | 20.856 | 29.013 | 21.190 |
| Charash | Kg | 0.26 | - | 0.125 | 240 |
| Popy Plant | No | - | 60038 | - | 1450210 |
| Illicit Distillation | Liter | 23582.200 | 22959.400 | 23597.600 | 22671.050 |
| Codeine (Phencydyl) | Bottle | 46995 | 28241 | 53239 | 58875 |

Source: BIPSS Publication, Issue 8, June 2010.

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Interviews

In addition information has come from the following interviews:

1. Interview with Former Secretary and Ambassador ATM Nazrul Islam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh on 7 April 2014.
2. Interview with Former Secretary and Ambassador Anwar Ul Alam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh on 7 April 2014.
3. Interview with Former Ambassador Ashfaqur Rahman, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh, Director, Centre for Foreign Affairs on 8 April 2014.
4. Interview with Dr. A.S.M. Ali Ashraf, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh on 10 April 2014.
5. Interview with Dr. Rashed Uz Zaman, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh on 16 April 2014.