

India cannot take a black-and-white approach to Myanmar

Given the regional complexities, as well as India's own concerns, a more nuanced approach is needed.

Myanmar: Indian Options

1. Foreign Secretary was in Myanmar this week to assess the ground situation and to nudge various sides to seek mutually acceptable solutions to the multiple crises marring one of India's most important neighbours.



2. New Delhi, of course, has vital interests in Myanmar that it would like to protect and enhance. While the West has made democracy the sole prism of its Myanmar policy, India doesn't have that luxury.
3. Much like most other immediate neighbours of Myanmar, India has been keen to push back against the Myanmar military's authoritarian tendencies even as its multiple interests have ensured that it keeps its channels of communication open with all stakeholders.

Myanmar turmoil:

1. Myanmar has been in turmoil since February 2021 when the military seized control of the country in a coup and detained Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders of her National League for Democracy (NLD).
2. India had been categorical from the very beginning that the gains made by Myanmar over the last decades on the path towards democracy should not be undermined.
3. After Suu Kyi was sentenced to four years (later reduced to two years) in jail for provoking dissent against the military and breaching Covid-19 rules, New Delhi responded by expressing its "deep concern" over "any development that undermines these processes and accentuates

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differences” and expressed its hope that “keeping their nation’s future in mind, efforts would be made by all sides to advance the path of dialogue.”

Complex Challenges

1. Last month’s deadly attack on an Assam Rifles convoy near the Myanmar border in Manipur was a reminder about the proclivity of China for creating trouble in the Northeast, especially at a time when border tensions along the LAC remain high.
2. The Covid-19 pandemic has also had an impact because of the porous border between India and Myanmar.
3. For India, a humanitarian crisis as a result of the pandemic-induced economic crisis in Myanmar would be a lose-lose situation and it should be prevented with the utmost urgency.
4. Marginalising the army will only push it into China’s arms, which only has its economic and defence interests to secure from Naypyidaw.
5. While the West continues to condemn and sanction, China is investing and pulling Myanmar into its orbit. The US has continued to use the overused threat of ever more sanctions, though to little avail.

Way Forward:

1. India as the only major democratic country bordering Myanmar, should insist on demonstrable progress on the road to democratic transition, but being a neighbour, it is also aware that Myanmar has never responded well to international pressures.
2. The role of Myanmar’s army would be key to the unfolding of any democratic transition there, so an active engagement would be needed.
3. Myanmar’s army seems to have ceased bothering about the rhetoric from the West. It is the neighbouring countries that have to shape the behaviour of the military junta in a constructive manner.
4. It is not surprising that countries like Japan, South Korea and most ASEAN members have all moved forward with engaging the military junta in Myanmar.
5. Even as it continues to call for a restoration of the democratic process, both bilaterally and at various multilateral fora, New Delhi has to engage with the army in Myanmar to address Indian concerns as well as to make it a stakeholder that can deliver on the democratic front, including the release of political prisoners.

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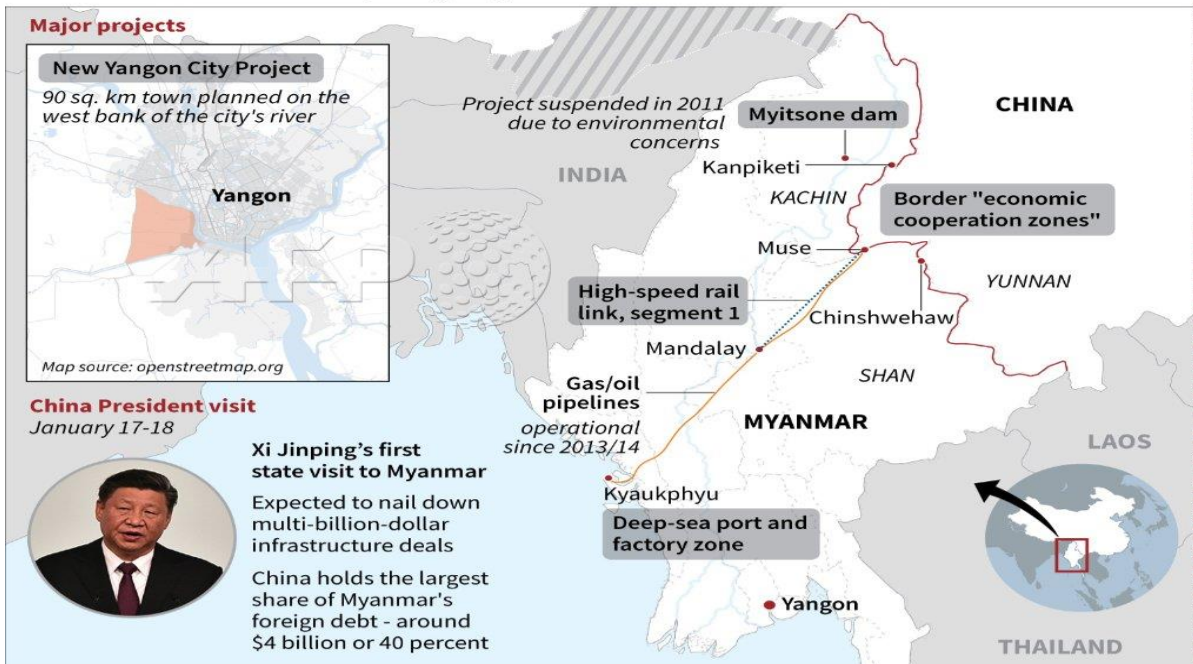
Kaladan Multi-Model Project of India in Myanmar



China Myanmar Economic Corridor

China-Myanmar Economic Corridor

Aims to connect the Middle Kingdom to the Indian Ocean, a key route in Beijing's 'Belt and Road' vision for infrastructure and influence spanning the globe



China President visit January 17-18



Xi Jinping's first state visit to Myanmar
Expected to nail down multi-billion-dollar infrastructure deals
China holds the largest share of Myanmar's foreign debt - around \$4 billion or 40 percent

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