

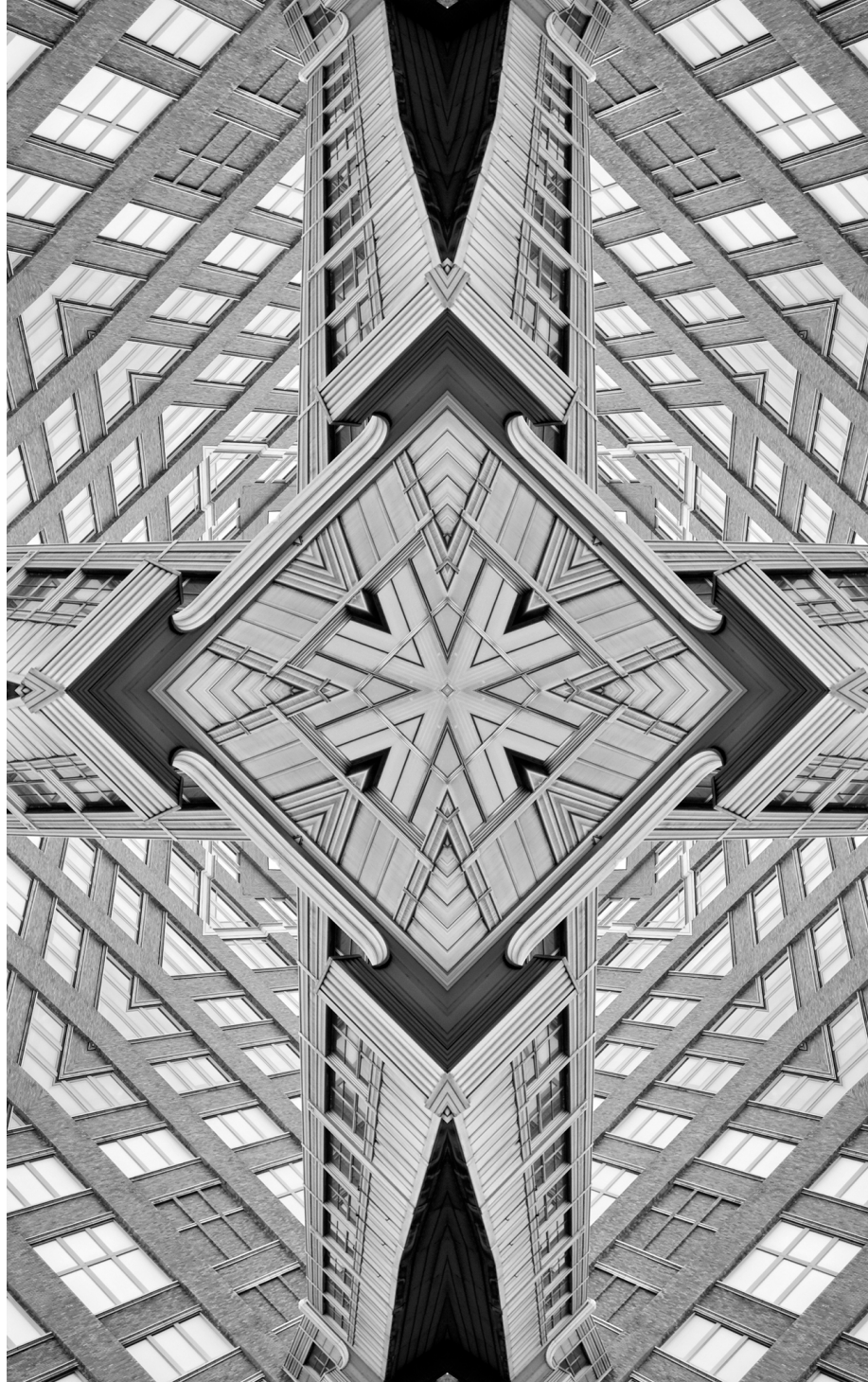
# Issue

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# Brief

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# India's Connectivity Projects with Myanmar, Post-Coup: A Stocktaking

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## **Abstract**

Myanmar, which shares a border with four of India's north-eastern states—Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland—is crucial to the country's 'Act East' policy. India has a number of projects with Myanmar in the pipeline, seeking to improve physical connectivity through transport links, which in turn can assist in both countries' development goals. Since the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021, the country has been experiencing political instability, increased incidence of violence, and an economic slowdown. This brief evaluates the repercussions on the country's physical connectivity projects with India. It highlights the Chin state, which is pivotal to the projects.

India's 'Act East' policy makes it a priority of the government to develop the country's relations with its immediate neighbours. Premium is placed on connectivity, which will help make South Asia a stronger sub-regional force. Indeed, connectivity is key to promoting economic cooperation, cultural ties, and strategic relationships.

Better connectivity with the countries on India's eastern border will also help transform the landlocked north-eastern states. This will link the northeast with the rest of India, and open up its access to the sea. An ocean route connecting crucial economic centres such as Kolkata to the northeast through Myanmar, will ease the pressure on the strategically important Siliguri corridor, which serves as the only land link between the northeast and the rest of the country. The geographical isolation of the northeast has historically been one of the biggest constraints to its development.

Connecting the northeast by land and sea to the neighbouring countries—especially to Myanmar, with which India shares a 1,700-km border—will increase economic activity and generate jobs in the region. This, in turn, could help in finding pathways to long-term stability, peace, and prosperity in the strategic border areas. India's willingness and capacity to invest in infrastructure projects in the neighbourhood, especially in Myanmar, can be leveraged for diplomatic gains as well.<sup>1</sup>

Connectivity infrastructure within Myanmar is still underdeveloped.<sup>2</sup> It lacks multimodal transport infrastructure and most goods travel by road, which increases transport costs.<sup>3</sup> Myanmar's logistics performance lags behind its neighbours in the region. The lack of transparency and predictability in border procedures further increases the cost of doing business. Stakeholders also complain of the numerous formal and informal toll gates across important routes, such as the road from Yangon to Hpa-An (part of the East-West Economic Corridor), which add to costs and delays.<sup>4</sup> Improving Myanmar's physical connectivity can strengthen its economic and physical corridors and help augment the country's bilateral relations with India.

**Table 1:  
India's Projects in Myanmar (2015 –  
present)**

Name	Year of Inception	Cost (in US\$)	Region covered	Sections Incomplete	Status
Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project	2008	484 million <sup>5</sup>	Will connect Kolkata port to Sittwe port in Myanmar's Rakhine state; link Sittwe port to Paletwa along the Kaladan river, and finally connect Paletwa to Zorinpui on the India/ Myanmar border by road	Paletwa to Kaletwa road link; Kaletwa to Zorinpui road link	River component completed: 158 km Sittwe seaport to Paletwa inland jetty river boat route Road component ongoing: Paletwa inland jetty to Zorinpui road route in Myanmar
India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral highway project	2002	170 billion <sup>6</sup>	Will connect Moreh (Manipur, India) to Mae Sot (Thailand) via Myanmar.	(a) 120.74 km stretch from Kalewa to Yagyi in Sagaing region (Myanmar) (b) Approach road from Tamu to Kalewa via Kyigone-(TKK) on which 69 bridges have to be built (c) Road from Zokhawthar-Rih border to Tedim in Chin State	Ongoing

# Introduction

Name	Year of Inception	Cost (in US\$)	Region covered	Sections Incomplete	Status
Rakhine State Development Program	2018	25 million	Pre-fabricated housing for displaced Rohingyas; development of schools and roads	250 prefabricated houses that India was supposed to provide were handed over in 2019. Development of school and road ongoing (total targeted numbers are not specified in government documents)	Ongoing
India-Myanmar Border Area Development	2017	25 million	Roads, bridges, and schools in Chin State and the Naga Self-Administered Area <sup>7</sup>		Benefitted section in Chin State - 9 townships, 82 villages; Naga self-administered - 3 townships, 80 villages  Completed (till 2020): 48 schools; 41 roads and bridges; 18 health centres <sup>8</sup>

Source: Author's own, using various open sources.

The rest of the brief will discuss the importance of the Chin state as host to, or hub of major connectivity projects; and analyse challenges in the post-coup environment that hamper the connectivity projects.

Myanmar's Chin state lies in the western part of the country and borders India's Mizoram. The region is mountainous, with an average elevation of 5,000-8,000 feet (1,500-1,800 metres). Of its sparse population, the poverty rate is 58 percent.<sup>9</sup>

In Chin State, the monthly rainfall in July measured at a weather station in Hakha was equal to 1-in-1,000-year rainfall.<sup>10</sup> The combination of heavy rainfall, strong winds, high soil saturation, and unstable soil in hilly areas cause widespread landslides. This affects the transport network required to support livelihoods.<sup>11</sup>

India and Myanmar have plans for a number of connectivity projects that either pass through Chin or run close to it. These projects will not only build new routes of connectivity but also upgrade existing infrastructure. Once completed, the projects will help generate jobs and develop this region that has been beset by the repercussions of a long-running insurgency. There is little inflow of investments in Chin, given the challenges in transportation and lack of other adequate infrastructure such as regular power supply.<sup>12</sup>

After Myanmar opened up in 2011, both the quasi-military and the (post-2015) democratic governments that followed realised the need to improve regional connectivity. An Asian Development Bank (ADB) report in 2016 suggested increasing transport investment from 1-1.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) to 3-4 percent, raising the additional finance through private sector participation, providing concessions and using the public-private partnership (PPP) route.<sup>13</sup>

Two of the most crucial projects are the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP) and the trilateral highway; they are both vital for Chin state. The KMTTP comprises a waterways component of 158 km on the Kaladan River from Sittwe Port to Paletwa in Myanmar, and a road component of 109 km from Paletwa to Zorinpui in Mizoram on the India-Myanmar border. The India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway is an East-West corridor that will connect India's northeast with Myanmar and Thailand; it can be extended to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Both of these projects have been delayed (see Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 2:  
Overview of the KMTTP**

Components	Status
<p>The project was to be implemented in four phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of a deep-sea port at Sittwe</li> <li>• Dredging and modernising of a 158-km section of the Kaladan waterway between Sittwe and Paletwa in Myanmar, and construction of a jetty at Paletwa;</li> <li>• Construction of a 109-km stretch of road from Paletwa to Zorinpui on the India-Myanmar border</li> <li>• Extension of National Highway 54 on the Indian side by 87 km to reach the Myanmar border.<sup>14</sup></li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed by India and handed over to Myanmar</li> <li>• Completed by India and handed over to Myanmar</li> <li>• Incomplete. Work has been affected by the pandemic, security challenges, and the contractor’s bankruptcy.<sup>15</sup></li> <li>• Almost complete, but the eight bridges remain unfinished</li> </ul>

*Source: Author’s own, using various open sources.*

**Table 3:  
Overview of IMT Trilateral Highway**

Particulars	Status
<p>India will construct two sections of the highway in Myanmar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The length from Kalewa to Yagyi, comprising 120.74 km</li> <li>• The approach road from Tamu (on the India/Myanmar border) through Kyigone to Kalewa, comprising 149.70 km and including 69 bridges</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-fourth of the road completed.</li> <li>• Work held up after the contractor was terminated in December 2018. Contractor appealed, but in August 2020 the Manipur High Court dismissed it. Work on the first bridge between Moreh (in Manipur) and Tamu (in Myanmar) expected to restart soon.</li> </ul>

*Source: Author’s own, using various open sources*

India agreed to undertake the task of repairing and/or upgrading 69 bridges along the Friendship Road<sup>a</sup> linking Moreh-Tamu-Kalmeyya-Kalewa which forms part of the trilateral highway, along with the approach roads at Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa.<sup>16</sup> India also agreed to extend assistance to upgrade the 120-km Kalewa-Yargyi road segment to the standard of highways, while Myanmar took on the responsibility of building the 65-km Yargyi-Monywa segment at the same ‘highway standard’.<sup>17</sup>

The following paragraphs outline the biggest challenges to the completion of both the KMTTP and the IMT trilateral highway.

**Lack of coordination:** The implementing agencies on both sides of the border have failed to coordinate and monitor the projects effectively. For a long time, India had no access to the project sites through the land border, which delayed work on the road component. The necessary clearances to move workers and equipment came only in early 2020, but thereafter the pandemic and the subsequent coup in Myanmar caused further disruptions.

**Difficult terrain:** Given the mountainous terrain, feeder roads to the construction areas are usable only for some months of the year.

**Security concerns:** Roads linking India with Myanmar run through insurgency-affected regions and often meet with security challenges. In November 2019, for example, five Indian workers were abducted by the Arakan Army—an insurgent group in Myanmar’s Rakhine state—and led to further delays.<sup>18</sup> One of the workers died of a heart attack while being held, and the others were later released. In June 2020, the Arakan Army clashed with Myanmarese soldiers close to the project site near Zorinpui.<sup>19</sup>

India and Myanmar have enhanced security measures to protect workers. They also jointly carried out a military operation in 2019 and 2020 to flush out the insurgents.<sup>20</sup> The first two phases of the operation focused on pushing back the Arakan Army and securing the Kaladan project, and another two were aimed at insurgent groups from India’s Nagaland and Manipur who were hiding in Myanmar.

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a The 160-km India-Myanmar Friendship road was built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and inaugurated on 13 February 2001.



# Focus: Chin State

**Flawed feasibility studies:** India's feasibility studies suffered technical issues, including underestimating the lengths of the roads that would have to be built in Chin. They were also unaware of Myanmar's Ministry of Power's plans to construct hydroelectric dams on two tributaries of the Kaladan river, which would in time affect the waterway part of the Kaladan project. The planners also had no prior knowledge of the shipwrecks on the Kaladan riverbed; the discovery of the wreck, and clearing it, delayed dredging activities. Land compensation claims in Mizoram, made while the land to extend the national highway was being acquired, also created hindrances to the KMTTP project.

“Lack of coordination, difficult terrain, technical issues, and security concerns have all caused delays in the key connectivity projects.”

# Challenges in the Post-Coup Environment

The following paragraphs outline the post-coup challenges facing Chin state, which are creating further impediments to Myanmar's connectivity projects with India.

## Rise of resistance groups

Around 70 percent of the western part of Chin State is controlled by armed rebel groups. While some are old, others have been formed after the 2021 coup; all of them seek a greater federal structure with more local powers. They include the Chin National Organisation formed after the 2021 coup (whose armed wing is the Chin National Defence Force); the Chin National Front (among the older rebel groups, whose armed wing is Chin National Army), and more recently, after the coup, the Chinland Defence Force; the Kuki National Army; and the Arakan Army. In the areas they control, it is the rebel groups who provide healthcare and education to the locals, especially in the areas farther from the towns and main road arteries. Some of these groups maintain close ties with one another, as well as with other ethnic armed groups in different parts of the state and in neighbouring countries.

Some of the elected members of the civilian government deposed by the military following the coup have formed a National Unity Government (NUG) in exile, with its own armed wing called the People's Defence Force (PDF). The Chin insurgent groups, sometimes working with the PDF and at other times on their own, have been launching attacks on the military forces.

## New equations among insurgent groups

The coup in Myanmar has revived collusion among Indian and Myanmarese insurgent groups operating along the border. The Indian groups need safe havens, while those from Myanmar need funds. Many of the latter have a long history of training, accommodating, and selling arms to Indian insurgents.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>b</sup> The Kachin Independent Army (KIA), which seeks an independent Kachin state carved out of Myanmar, has sheltered and trained many rebel groups from Manipur as well as United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) members. (See, for instance, [https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-role-of-bimstec-in-revitalising-indias-northeast/#\\_ftnref2](https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-role-of-bimstec-in-revitalising-indias-northeast/#_ftnref2) ) The KIA, and the United Wa State Army (operating in Wa state of Myanmar) have also supplied arms to Indian insurgent groups.

# Challenges in the Post-Coup Environment

Media reports claim that the Myanmar military is also arming Indian insurgents in return for them working against the Chin rebels.<sup>21</sup> In 2022, the Zomi Revolutionary Organisation/Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRO/ZRA), a rebel group from Manipur, allegedly raided the bases of various resistance groups in Chin state. The ZRO/ZRA has close links with a number of other groups in the region.<sup>c</sup> There is speculation that another group from Manipur, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) may be working with Myanmar's military junta,<sup>d</sup> considering that Myanmar has not handed over to India the PLA personnel it has captured, although it has done so in the case of five insurgents from the Revolutionary People's Front, another rebel group.<sup>22</sup>

## Failure of military operations

The military regime is unable to crush the resistance movement. The insurgent groups maintain that military tactics have also changed. Earlier, the defence forces would attack two or three rebel locations simultaneously, but lately, they have been striking at just one point at a time, albeit with more troops. The regime has also resorted to air strikes; between 7 and 13 January this year alone, there have been eight air strikes in Chin State.<sup>23</sup>

On 10 and 11 January, Camp Victoria, the headquarters of the Chin National Front, close to the Mizoram border, was bombed. It appears to have further galvanised Chin resistance, however.<sup>24</sup>

c The ZRO/ZRA has been linked to the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (another Manipur-based terrorist group) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah faction). The NSCN seeks an independent Nagaland; the Isak Muivah faction, led by Isak Swu and T. Muivah, is one of three groups it has split into, and the dominant one on Indian soil. (The other two, the NSCN (Khaplang faction) and NSCN (Reformation) operate mainly in Myanmar.) The NSCN (IM) signed a framework agreement for peace with the Indian government in 2015, but there is no final accord yet. Like the Mizos, the Kuki tribe, found in most of the north eastern states but predominant in the hill districts of Manipur, especially Churachandpur, has close ethnic links with the Chins. The ZRA/ZRO has also entered into an MOU with the Kuki Liberation Organisation (seeking an independent Kukiland) aimed at 'full cooperation in all spheres, with the objective of strengthening the blood ties among the Kuki-Chin-Mizo/Zomi people'.

d The PLA, which follows Maoist ideology, is said to have joined hands with the Kangla Yawol Kanna Lup in 2021. The ranks of both groups are drawn primarily from the Meitei community in Manipur. Their last strike was the killing of six people, including an Assam Rifles commanding officer and his family, in November 2021. (See: <https://indianexpress.com/article/north-east-india/manipur/assam-rifles-unit-ambushed-by-militants-in-manipur-7620900/>)

# Challenges in the Post-Coup Environment

## **Need for local sub-contractors**

In February 2022, Ircon International,<sup>e</sup> the engineering and construction company run by Indian Railways, won the contract to develop the road component of the KMTTP from Paletwa to Zorinpui.<sup>25</sup> It decided to employ local subcontractors in Myanmar, hoping to create goodwill and prevent the insurgent groups from targeting the project. The task has to be completed in 40 months, though the contract has a clause allowing for delay due to unforeseen environmental, political, and security concerns. The contract also says that the progress made by the previous contractor will be “reassessed” and even the completed portions may be reconstructed if required.

## **No formal links with the government-in-exile**

The entire region where the Indian connectivity projects are being set up is under the control of the government-in-exile, the NUG. India needs to establish direct communications with the NUG to operate effectively.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>e</sup> Engineers Projects India Limited (EPIL) and C&C Construction Co. Ltd were given the contract to build the highway in 2017 but it was terminated by the Indian government in 2022 without assigning reasons. In 2019, some of the employees of EPIL were abducted by AA while working on the KMTTP project.

# Indian Diplomacy Post-Coup

After India gained independence in 1947 and Myanmar in 1948, the two were initially close allies. Relations stagnated, however, after the Myanmar military coup in 1962. India viewed military rule in Myanmar as a threat to democratic values.<sup>27</sup> Following a strong military crackdown in 1988, India aligned itself with the pro-democracy forces in Myanmar, providing them material support, setting up camps for refugees in Manipur and Mizoram, and fiercely criticising the junta.<sup>28</sup>

In the last three decades, India's approach to Myanmar has become more pragmatic. Its response to the February 2021 military takeover was very different from its reaction to the one in 1962 or 1988. It expressed concern over the 'political turmoil' and sought a proper resolution through democratic means. Barely a month and a half after the coup, on 27 March 2021, Indian officials attended the military parade in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw to mark Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces) Day.<sup>29</sup> Some months later, in December 2021, then Foreign Secretary Harsh V. Shringla visited Myanmar. Though he did refer to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) five-point consensus on Myanmar<sup>e</sup> and the need for the country to return to democracy, his focus was to ensure that India's physical connectivity projects continued without disruption, and to discuss the rise in insurgency on the Indian side of the border after the coup.<sup>30</sup>

Again, in November 2022, Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra paid a two-day visit to Myanmar, where discussions similarly focused on border security, insurgency, trafficking concerns, and a review of bilateral development projects. There was no mention of either a return to democracy or Indian support of the ASEAN consensus. The omission was criticised in some sections of both India and Myanmar.<sup>31</sup>

The question is whether India's stance protects its strategic and security concerns. It does not seem to have done so for the following reasons:

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<sup>e</sup> The five-point consensus reached at a meeting in Bangkok in April 2021, with leaders of all 10 ASEAN countries in attendance, including Myanmar, was as follows: (a) violence in Myanmar should end immediately; (b) there should be dialogue among all concerned parties; (c) ASEAN would provide humanitarian aid to Myanmar; (d) ASEAN would appoint a special envoy for Myanmar; and (e) the special envoy would visit Myanmar and meet all involved parties. None of the points has been implemented at the time of writing. See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/22/myanmar-aseans-failed-5-point-consensus-year>

## **The military junta covertly supports some Indian insurgents.**

India engages with the junta hoping the latter would continue to help keep insurgents operating along the border at bay. As noted earlier, however, the military regime is maintaining relations with some of the insurgent groups to gain leverage in fighting its own battles. There are reports that these groups are being used to attack the displaced people fleeing Myanmar and even the NUG's PDF camps.<sup>32</sup>

## **Connectivity projects are in greater jeopardy.**

Another assumption is that engaging with the junta will keep India's 'Act East' policy intact, paving the way for broader connectivity with other Southeast Asian nations. This notion is being challenged by on-ground realities. Since the coup, adequate security has not been provided to workers on the connectivity projects. While there have been reports of Indian workers being attacked or abducted before the coup, the situation has worsened because of clashes between security forces and insurgent groups close to the site of ongoing projects. Since the coup, both Chin and Rakhine states have been mostly controlled by ethnic armed groups, whose permission is needed before work is done in their territories.

Shortly before the coup, an informal 18-month ceasefire had been brokered between the military and the Arakan Army in Rakhine state. It is said that the Arakan Army used the lull to grow in strength and acquire control over northern and central Rakhine. Since May 2022, the ceasefire has been broken, with the two sides clashing repeatedly, most recently in Paletwa town in September 2022. The ceasefire was renewed in November 2022, but so far neither has the Arakan Army surrendered its weapons, nor has the military ceased its crackdown on the group's members. India would need to liaise with the local resistance groups and the government-in-exile if its projects are to progress. There is no formal policy in place to do so, although in some areas, individual links have been built.<sup>33</sup>

## China is expanding its footprint in Myanmar's infrastructure projects.

Some analysts are of the view that India's emphasis on utilising corridors with Myanmar is aimed at countering the growing Chinese footprint in Myanmar.<sup>34</sup> China is a key trading partner and the second-largest foreign investor in Myanmar after Singapore, while India is way behind. China is involved in a number of infrastructure projects in the country, including those under the flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Between 1988 and June 2019, approved Chinese investments amounted to more than US\$ 25 billion, or nearly 26 percent of Myanmar's total foreign direct investment (FDI).<sup>35</sup>

Following the coup, work on the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)— a project under the BRI—picked up pace. Working committees of crucial developmental projects under the CMEC initiative (see Table 4) have been reorganised. China has promised more support for further development in Myanmar and allowed Myanmar to open an additional consulate in Chongqing. It is providing Myanmar with an RMB 650-million (US\$ 95 million) grant and financing a new LNG plant as well.<sup>36</sup>

**Table 4:**  
**CMEC Projects**

Name	Total Investment	Location	Status
Mee Lin Gyaing LNG	USD 2.5 billion	Ayeyarwady region	Ongoing
Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (KPSEZ)	USD1.5 billion	Kyaukphyu township, Rakhine state	Ongoing
New Yangon City project	USD1.5-billion	Yangon	Planning stage
Chinshwehaw CBECZ	–	Northern Shan state	Planning stage
Kanpiketi CBECZ	USD 22.4 million	Northern Kachin state's Special Region 1	Ongoing
Kyaukphyu Power Plant	USD 180 million	Kyaukphyu Township, Rakhine state	Ongoing
Kyaukphyu deep sea port	USD1.3 billion	Kyaukpyu township	Ongoing
Muse – Mandalay Railway	USD 8.9 billion	Mandalay	Ongoing
Mandalay-Tigyaing-Muse Expressway			Planning stage
Kyaukphyu-Naypyidaw Highway projects			Planning stage

Source: Author's own, using various open sources.<sup>37</sup>

# Indian Diplomacy Post-Coup

Two projects that have gained momentum in 2022 are the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port and the Muse-Mandalay railway, both previously opposed by the local population due to fears that the country will get entrapped in deep debt.<sup>38</sup> Following 2011 and especially after 2015, China started altering its ways to engage more with the people of Myanmar to create goodwill and keep its business model intact. It increased corporate social responsibility initiatives and paid attention to local laws.

Though it was believed that Beijing will be cautious in proceeding with more projects given the political turmoil and security concerns post-coup, the revamping of BRI post-coup shows Beijing's commitment to doing business with the military regime despite losing the people's goodwill.<sup>39</sup>

Analysts have noted that most of China's development financing in other countries goes into large state-led infrastructure projects for which the countries' natural resources are provided as collateral.<sup>40</sup> They have raised questions over the sustainability of China's loans, and criticised its poor record in creating jobs, capacity building, and maintaining environmental standards. They assert that much of Chinese lending is "hidden" – not reported to either the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank – raising serious transparency concerns.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, India's lines of credit are demand-driven, mutually beneficial for India and the recipient country, and do not carry the traditional conditionalities. Extending lines of credit also helps Indian exporters enter new markets and expand their presence in existing ones. However, the economic gains of such cooperation with Myanmar need to be reassessed. India also needs to get on-track to meet its project completion deadlines. Chinese transparency issues, questionable sustainability of projects, and debt scares are not new to the Myanmar regime. There have been previous instances when Myanmar has either renegotiated agreements or suspended the projects altogether. It has also tried to engage with other countries such as India, Singapore, Japan and western nations to balance the Chinese footprint.<sup>42</sup>



# The Imperatives for India

**E**xpedite project implementation: India should create a monitoring team to evaluate each of its projects. Such a mechanism was set up in 2009, but it was ad-hoc and has not been pursued since. National and sectoral level meetings continue to be held to follow the projects; joint working groups and committees have been created.

**Engage with all stakeholders:** As a democratic nation and close neighbour, India should engage not only with the military regime but also with other stakeholders such as the government-in-exile to ensure security and progress of its connectivity projects. India needs to more proactively endorse the five-point ASEAN consensus, which the junta has yet to implement.

**Increase people-to-people links:** Improving physical connectivity links is vital to enhancing people-to-people connections between India and Myanmar. Further developing the Buddhist circuit,<sup>g</sup> adding locations such as Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh), or Amaravati (the upcoming capital of Andhra Pradesh) to the tour design could attract more Myanmarese visitors.


A potential India-Myanmar tourist circuit could also include historical sites in Myanmar which Indians could visit, such as the temples in Yangon or the grave of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, who was exiled to Myanmar by the British. A Cambodia-Myanmar-India circuit can also be explored, given India's increasing attention to the grouping of Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam (CMLV countries).

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<sup>g</sup> The Buddhist circuit is a tourism package which includes places associated with the life of the Buddha, such as Lumbini (where he was born), Bodh Gaya (where he attained enlightenment), Sarnath (where he first preached), and Kushinagar (where he died).

# Conclusion

India shares a 1,700-km-long border with Myanmar, and developments in Myanmar have direct repercussions on India's border regions; therefore, stability in Myanmar is vital for the northeast. India recognises that it needs connectivity with and through Myanmar. Similarly, bringing stability and development to the northeast is critical for India to push its connectivity ambitions in the east. So too, it is important for Myanmar to increase its connectivity.

As a democracy and a close neighbour, India has worked with various stakeholders in working to build democratic ecosystems in the country. It needs to renew these efforts and help Myanmar emerge as a stable, democratic, federal union. India's connectivity initiatives have so far been welcomed in Myanmar, and it will be in its long-term interest to ensure that these are in tune with the desires of the people of Myanmar. 

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