CHAPTER – II

Geo-Strategic Background of the Region

A. Geo-Strategic Background of North-East

India’s North East has been the meeting point of many communities, faiths and cultures. North East India is the home for more than 166 separate tribes speaking a wide range of languages. Some groups have migrated over the centuries from places as far as South East Asia; they retain their cultural traditions and values but are beginning to adapt to contemporary lifestyles.

The term “Northeast” was first used by the British rulers to identify a geographical area. Alexander Mackenzie was perhaps the first to use the term “Northeast Frontier” to identify Assam, including the adjoining hill areas and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura in his book History of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal in 1884.

Except for the Goalpara region of Assam, the rest were late entrants to the British India, the Brahmaputra valley area of Assam became a part of British India in 1824, and the hill regions were incorporated even later. Sikkim was annexed to the Indian union through a referendum in 1975 and was recognised as part of Northeast India in the 1990s. When there was a plan to merge Assam with Eastern Bengal in the late 1890s and the beginning of 1900, there were proposals to name the new province as the “North Eastern Province”. Initially the term remained a geographical concept and throughout the colonial period the British rulers referred to Assam as the “Northeastern Frontier of Bengal”. Thus, in the colonial period the area what now constitute the “Northeast” was considered to be a frontier of Bengal that needs to be protected and defended militarily.

The Northeast region consist the physiographical division of Eastern Himalayas, Northeast Hills (Patkai-Naga Hills and Lushai Hills) and the Brahmaputra and the Barak Valley Plains. Northeast India is the confluence of

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4 India Year Book 2015
In the Indo-Malayan, Indo-Chinese, and Indian bio-geographical realms. Along with the west coast of India, this region has some of the Indian sub-continent's last remaining rain forests which support diverse flora and fauna and several crop species. Similarly, reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the region constitute a fifth of India's total potential. The region is covered by the mighty Brahmaputra-Barak river systems and their tributaries. Geographically, apart from the Brahmaputra, Barak and Imphal valleys and some flat lands in between the hills of Meghalaya and Tripura, the remaining two-thirds of the area is hilly terrain interspersed with valleys and plains; the altitude varies from almost sea-level to over 7,000 metres (23,000 ft) above Sea Level. The region's high rainfall averaging around 10,000 mm and above creates problems of ecosystem, high seismic activity and floods. The states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim have a montane climate with cold, snowy winters and mild summers.

The festivals and celebrations in the North-eastern states of India are a colourful reflection of the people and their lives. Throughout the year, different people celebrate festivals with lot of fanfare in different ways, most of them centering on their modes of living and livelihood. North East India comprises of seven states commonly known as the “Seven Sisters”. They are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.

The geographical location of North-East including Sikkim is 88°00'E to 97°30'E and 21°58'N to 29°30'N. In terms of geographical size, north-east India constitutes about an area of 2,62,179 sq. km. constituting 7.9 per cent of the country’s total geographical area which is roughly 3/4th the size of the state of Maharashtra. The Arunachal Pradesh consists 83,743 sq. km, Assam 78,438 sq. km, Nagaland 16,579 sq. km, Manipur 22,327 sq. km, Mizoram 21,081 sq. km, Tripura 10,486 sq. km, Meghalaya 22,429 sq. km, Sikkim 7,096 sq. km. Largest cities according to population of census 2011 are Guwahati, Agartala, Shillong, Aizawl, Imphal, Silchar, Dibrugarh, Nagaon, Jorhat, Dimapur, Darjeeling, Gangtok and Kohima.

Northeast India is the eastern-most region of India connected to East India via a narrow Siliguri Corridor squeezed between Nepal and Bangladesh. It comprises
the contiguous “Seven Sisters” States plus Sikkim. The Siliguri Corridor in West Bengal, with a width of 21 to 40 kilometres (13 to 25 mi), connects the North Eastern region with the main part of India. The region shares more than 4,500 kilometres (2,800 mi) of international border (about 90 per cent of its entire border area) with China (South Tibet) in the north, Myanmar in the east, Bangladesh in the southwest, and Bhutan to the northwest.

The states are officially recognised under the North Eastern Council (NEC), constituted in 1971 as the acting agency for the development of the eight states. The North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi) was incorporated on 9 August 1995 and the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDONER) was set up in September 2001.

MDONER (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region) Government of India, established in September 2001 and was accorded the status of a full-fledged ministry on May 2004, which functions as the nodal Department of the Central Government to deal with matters related to the socio-economic development of the eight States of Northeast India. It acts as a facilitator between the Central Ministries/Departments and the State Governments of the North Eastern Region including Sikkim in the economic development including removal of infrastructural bottlenecks, provision of basic minimum services, creating an environment for private investment and to remove impediments to lasting peace and security in the North Eastern Region including, Sikkim. The ministry is mainly concerned with the creation of infrastructure for economic development of North-Eastern region.

**Main activities/functions of the MDONER:**

- Non Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR)
- Coordination with the Central Ministries and the State Governments of the NE states.
- Capacity Building
- Advocacy and Publicity
International Cooperation

Enterprises of the Department

The ministry has following organizations functioning under it:

- North Eastern Council (NEC)
- North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi)
- North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Limited (NERAMAC)
- The Sikkim Mining Corporation Limited. (SMC)
- North Eastern Handlooms and Handicrafts Development Corporation (NEHHDC)

Demographics of North-East: 5

Northeast India's population (8 state) is approximately 45 million (4,54,86,784), which represents 3.1% of the total Indian population (1,210 million). In which Arunachal Pradesh Consist 13,83,727, Assam 3,12,05,576, Nagaland 19,78,502, Manipur 25,70,390, Mizoram 10,97,206, Tripura 36,73,917, Meghalaya 29,66,889, Sikkim 6,10,577. Population density is approximately 159 people per sq km with highest in Assam (398) and lowest in Arunachal Pradesh (17). The decadal growth rate of this region is 17.15 (2001-2011) with highest in Meghalaya (27.9) and lowest in Nagaland (-0.6). Nagaland is the only state in India having negative growth rate.

The sex ratio of the northeast is 954 (India- 943 per 1000) in which male-2,32,12,792 and female- 2,22,73,992 and child (0-6 years) sex ratio 958 (India- 919

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5 India Year Book, 2015
per 1000). In both cases northeast maintains better than the country. The literacy rate of the region is 78.84 % (male- 83.35% and female- 74.13%). The literacy rate is higher than the national literacy data (i.e. total-73.0%, male-80.9% and female-64.6%). There are variations in the literacy rates among different states with Arunachal Pradesh (65.4%), Assam (72.2%) below the national average and Meghalaya (74.4%) is below the average of north-east, while Sikkim (81.4%), Nagaland (79.6%), Manipur (79.2%), Mizoram (91.3%) and Tripura (87.2%) tops the list not only in the following region but in the entire nation.

The Schedule Tribe (ST) population of northeast is nearly 56.11% and Schedule Caste (SC) population is nearly 5.68% in its demographic composition. Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland do not have Schedule Caste population. The ST population is much higher as compared to India (i.e. 8.6%) and the SC population is much lower as the country (i.e. 16.6%). The physiographic location affects the demographic composition of the area. The rural population representation of northeast is 72.25% and urban population representation is 27.75%. 

The northeastern states, having 3.1% of India's total population, are allotted 25 out of a total of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha. This is 4.6% of the total number of seats.

**Ethnic Communities:**

Northeast India has over 220 ethnic groups and equal number of dialects. The hills states in the region like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are predominantly inhabited by tribal people with a degree of diversity even within the tribal groups. Besides the indigenous inhabitants people from Tibet, Burma, Thailand, West Bengal and Bangladesh have migrated into the region at various periods of history.

Adivasi, Assamese, Bhotia, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Biate, Bodo, Chakma, Chhetri, Dimasa, Garo, Gurung, Hajong, Hmar, Hrankhwl, Jamatia, Karbi, Khasi, Khampti, Koch, Kom, Kuki, Lepcha, Lushai, Meitei, Mishing, Mizo, Naga, Nepali, Noatia, Paite, Pnar, Purvottar maithili, Rabha, Reang, Singpho, Sylheti, various

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6 Census 2011, Govt. of India, India Year Book, 2015.
Tibetan tribes, Tamang, Tiwa, Tripuri, Zeme Naga Chorei and Limbu are different ethnic groups inhabiting the region.

The North East is a true frontier region of over 2000 km of border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and is connected to the rest of India by a narrow 20 km wide corridor of land. One of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions in Asia, each state has its distinct cultures and traditions. The region shares more than 4,500 kilometres (2,800 mi) of international border (about 90 per cent of its entire border area) with China (South Tibet) in the north, Myanmar in the east, Bangladesh in the southwest, and Bhutan to the northwest. The economy is agrarian. Little land is available for settled agriculture. Along with settled agriculture, jhum (slash-and-burn) cultivation is still practiced by a few indigenous groups of people.

Highlight the biodiversity significance of the region:

The forest reserves of North-East are Namdapha National Park, Manas National Park, Kaziranga National Park, Orang National Park, Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Sepahijola Wildlife Sanctuary, Keibul Lamjao National Park. The International Council for Bird Preservation, UK identified the Assam plains and the Eastern Himalaya as an Endemic Bird Area (EBA). The EBA has an area of 220,000 km² following the Himalayan range in the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal, Myanmar and the Indian states of Sikkim, northern West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, southern Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram. Because of a southward occurrence of this mountain range in comparison to other Himalayan ranges, this region has a distinctly different climate with warmer mean temperatures and fewer days with frost and have much higher rainfall. This has resulted in the occurrence of a rich array of restricted range bird species. More than two critically endangered species, three endangered species and 14 vulnerable species of birds are in this EBA. Stattersfield et al. (1998) identified 22 restricted range species out of which 19 are confined to this region and the remaining three are present in other endemic and secondary areas. Eleven out of the 22 restricted range species
found in this region are considered as threatened (Birdlife International 2001), a number greater than in any other EBA of India.

WWF has identified the following priority Ecoregions in North-East India:

- Brahmputra Valley Semi Evergreen Forests
- The Eastern Himalayan Broadleaved Forests
- The Eastern Himalayan Sub-alpine Coniferous Forests
- India–Myanmar Pine Forests

Historical Background of North-East:

The earliest settlers were Austro-Asiatic speakers, followed by Tibeto-Burmese and then by Indo-Aryans. Due to the bio- and crop diversity of the region the focus of current archaeological research has been on domestication of several important plants by early settlers. Writers have suspected an early trade route via Northeast India in the references of Chinese explorer, Zhang Qian made in 100 BC. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea mention a people called Sésatai in the region, who were the source of malabathron, so prized in the old world.

In the early historical period (most of first millennium), Kamarupa straddled most of present-day Northeast India, besides Bhutan and Sylhet in Bangladesh. Xuanzang, the traveling Chinese monk, visited Kamarupa in the 7th century, and described the people as "short in stature and black-looking", whose speech differed a little from mid-India and who were of simple but violent disposition; and that the people in Kamarupa knew of Sichuan that lay to the kingdom's east beyond a treacherous mountain. Established during the British Raj, the northeastern states were isolated from their traditional trading partners such as Bhutan and Myanmar.

Formation of North Eastern states:

In the early 19th century, both the Ahom and the Manipur kingdoms fell to a Burmese invasion. The ensuing First Anglo-Burmese War resulted in the entire region
coming under British control. In the colonial period (1826-1947), North East India was a part of Bengal Province from 1839 to 1873, when Assam became its own province. After the Indian Independence from British Rule in 1947, the Northeastern region of British India consisted of Assam and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura. Subsequently, Nagaland in 1963, Meghalaya in 1972, Arunachal Pradesh in 1975 (Capital changed to Itanagar) (actually formed on 20 Feb, 1987) and Mizoram in 1987 were formed out of Assam. Manipur and Tripura remained as Union Territories of India between 1956 until 1972 when they attained fully-fledged statehood. Sikkim was integrated as the eighth North Eastern Council state in 2002. The city of Shillong acted as the capital of the Assam province created during the British Rule. It remained as the capital of undivided Assam until formation of the state of Meghalaya in 1972. The capital of Assam was then shifted to Dispur, a part of Guwahati, and Shillong became the capital of Meghalaya.

**Impact of World War II:**

In 1944, the Japanese planned a daring attack on India. Traveling through Burma, it was stopped at Kohima and Imphal by British and Indian troops. This marked the furthest western expansion of the Japanese Empire and presaged Allied victory.

**Impact of Sino-Indian War (1962):**

Arunachal Pradesh, a state in the Northeastern tip of India, is claimed by China as South Tibet Sino-Indian relations degraded during the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The cause of the escalation into war is still disputed by both Chinese and Indian sources. During the war in 1962, the PRC (China) captured much of the NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency) created by India in 1954. However on November 21, 1962, China declared a unilateral ceasefire withdrew its troops 20 kilometres (12 mi) behind the McMahon Line and returned Indian prisoners of war in 1963.

**21st century unrest in the region:**

In 1947 Indian independence and partition resulted in a landlocked region, exacerbating the isolation that has been recognized, but not studied.
Muslim Bangladesh controlled access to the Indian Ocean. The mountainous terrain has hampered the road and railways connection in the region.

On 2 November 2000, in Malom, a town in the Imphal Valley of Manipur, ten civilians were shot and killed while waiting at a bus stop. The incident, known as the "Malom Massacre", was allegedly committed by the Assam Rifles, one of the Indian Paramilitary forces operating in the state. This incident resulted in continuing unrest in the area.

The militant groups operating in the area include the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak-Pro (PREPAK-Pro), Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) and United National Liberation Front (UNLF) of Manipur, Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) of Meghalaya, Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO), which operates in Assam and North Bengal, National Democratic Front of Bodoland and ULFA of Assam and the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT).

Northeast India is the northeastern borderland of South Asia and also the northwestern borderland of Southeast Asia. The people of Northeast India have distinct ethnic and cultural identities, which are similar with the people of Southeast Asia and China than with people of the rest of India. The region has more geographical contact and proximity to other national states than the Indian mainland and interacts mostly with the present day Myanmar. The region had been known for her natural resources and maintained active trans-border trade with its neighbours during the pre-independence period.\(^8\)

Assam had interaction with the British East India Company as early as 1792, at the request of the king of Assam, “for commercial advantages” by a friendly and open intercourse. The persisting internal strife and disorder led the Burmese to occupy the plains of Assam from 1817 to 1826 and Manipur from 1819 to 1826. At the request of the king of Assam the British defeated the Burmese who were forced to

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surrender their suzerainty over Assam and Manipur by the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. Eventually the British rulers annexed the whole region in the subsequent years, the Cachar plains in 1830, Khasi Hills (1833), Jaintia Hills (1835), Karbi Anglong or Mikir Hills (1838), North Cachar Hills (1854), Naga Hills (1866-1904), Garo Hills (1872-73) and Mizo Hills (1890). These annexations brought about drastic changes in the polity as well as in the economy of the region, with the gradual decay of feudal institutions and the rise of capitalist economic entities.

The plain areas of the region, the Brahmaputra, Barak, Imphal and Agartala plains, and the hill areas have distinct cultures, traditions and histories. They have coexisted for the past several centuries, amidst cordial relations combined with conflicts as well as social, economic and political interdependence. The hill areas are mainly inhabited by different tribes who mostly profess Christianity. However, most of the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh are Buddhists and Hindus. Some of the major hill tribes of the region are the Mizo of Mizoram, Khasi, Jaintia and Garos of Meghalaya, the Nagas of Nagaland and Kukis who have settled in Manipur, Nagaland, Assam and Tripura. There are also tribes who have settled in the plains known as “plain tribes” like the Bodos, Mishings, Rabha, etc in Assam. The plain areas of the region are mainly inhabited by non-tribals, who are Hindus with a substantial number of Muslims. The Meiteis of Imphal and Barak valley, the Bengalis of Agartala valley and the Assamese of the Brahmaputra valley are the prominent plain dwellers.9

In the past few decades there were conflicts around land, and ethnic enmity have intensified. In such baffling situation history has been used as a tool to protect identity and for its own good without taking into account the genuine rights of the others often leading to antagonism among them. Each community has rewritten exclusive histories of itself that speak of its own rights to the exclusion of the rest. Such nationalism based on ethnic and linguistic lines led the Assamese nationalists to propagate Swadin Asom which aims to re-read, re-interpret and even re-create history in order to build up the theoretical base that Assam had always been a free nation.

Northeast India became a region merely through a geo-political accident. The separation of Burma from the Indian sub-continent in 1937 and the partition of 1947 virtually created what we now call the “Northeast”. The Partition of India in 1947 caused the extreme geo-political isolation of the Northeast, making it the most regulated, a sensitive border region and the most exposed territory. In addition, the partition also caused the severance of the inland water, road and railway communications through the erstwhile East Pakistan and access to the Chittagong port was lost. The Chinese takeover of Tibet and the virtual closure of the border with Burma added to the isolation of the region. This condition has not been conducive to the region’s economic and political well-being and set its economy back by at least a quarter century.  

Before partition there was no idea of a separate northeastern region. The region does not fulfill the three traditional approaches to the definition of a region which are homogeneity, nodality or polarisation around some central place. In the words of Barrister Pakem, Northeast India is a region as the lack of sophisticated definition of a region for Northeast India does not make it a non-region. It is a region despite its varied physical features and its different economic, political and social systems. Thus, Northeast India is a region of diverse geographical features with a population characterised by diversity of ethnicity, language, culture, religion, social organisation and levels of economic development.

At the time of Independence “Northeast” basically meant Assam and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura. In order to quell the various ethnic, cultural and political aspirations for self-government among various tribal groups, new states were carved out of Assam. The notion was that such groups require representation in the democratic process and that once they have voice and representation in the parliamentary democracy, many of their problems would be abated.

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The state of Nagaland was created in 1963 by joining the then Naga Hills district of Assam and Tuensang Frontier division of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) or the present Arunachal Pradesh. In 1969, the Indira Gandhi government intended to fulfill the long standing demands of the hill tribes by providing them an autonomous state within the state of Assam covering all the autonomous districts of Assam, i.e., the Garo Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Mikir Hills, North Cachar Hills and Mizo Hills district. The Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act of 1969 provided Meghalaya, comprising the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills district and Garo Hills district, a semi-autonomous state which came into effect on April 2, 1970. Subsequently it became a fullfledged state of India on January 21, 1972 with the passing of North Eastern Areas (Re- Organisation) Act, 1971. The Government of India, in July 1971, offered the proposal of turning Mizo Hills into a Union Territory and the insurgent group Mizo National Front (MNF) was ready to accept the offer on condition that the status of Union Territory would be upgraded to statehood and therefore the Union Territory of Mizoram came into being on January 21, 1972 and subsequently the state of Mizoram was created on February 20, 1987. Even though the people of the NEFA did not voice for statehood, due to strategic reason the Indian government granted NEFA statehood by renaming it as Arunachal Pradesh in 1987.

The concept of Northeast was formalised politically and the term became popular with the formation of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in 1971. Since its inception the NEC functions as a regional planning body for the whole northeastern states and thus it is the nodal agency for economic and social development of the region.

**The Problem of N-E:**

There is a tendency of scholars and policymakers to club the whole northeastern states together as “Northeast” and use the term as an analytical category for the whole region. However, the practical relevance of clubbing all the eight states together and calling it the “Northeast” is always questioned. Udayon Misra points out that the use of the term “Northeast” is itself problematic as the region represents a varied cultural mosaic and has never considered itself to be one compact unit. He
says, “One has to recognise that there are many different communities in the region and the dynamics of each single movement have to be taken care of, if any solution is to be achieved”. To him “New Delhi suffers from a strong misconception that by coming to an agreement with the “most powerful insurgent group” (i.e. NSCN-IM), it would be able to solve the problem and that the situation could be improved. It has failed in appreciating the complex nature of the problem. The positive fallout of the multifarious identity movements in the region has been that the civil society organizations have gathered strength and it is no longer possible to ignore them.”

Wasbir Hussain also observes that, “By bracketing the eight northeastern Indian states, with its diverse tribes, customs and cultures, into what is called the ‘Northeast,’ we tend to ignore the distinct identity and sub-national aspirations of these ethnic groups. More so, such clubbing together of the region, in an attempt to look at it as a single entity, has led to stereotyping of the problems that plague the area. The fact that each state has a different set of location-specific concerns and grievances often gets blurred in the scheme of things of policy framers and government leaders who are supposed to address these issues”. 12

It is true that the northeastern region shares certain common problems like ethnic unrests, insurgency, immigration, drug trafficking, communication gap, etc. However, there are severe intra-regional differences in social issues and ethno-political aspirations. The region is, in fact, one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse region in Asia and each state has its distinct cultures and traditions.

**Diversity and Developmental Disparity:**

Northeast India, which occupies a remote corner of India, is one of the least developed regions of the country. This development begins with the region’s initial absorption into the world economy as a marginal periphery, a part of frontier of the British rule and which eventually leads to the region’s peripheral position within the

Indian nation-state after independence.\textsuperscript{13} The first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru stated during the debate on the First Five Year Plan:

"...it is admitted that there should be attempt to make every region, every part of India develop equally in so far as we can, and that we should remove the disparities that exist in India. There are some tremendous disparities. Some of our provinces, I would not name them, are extremely poor. They do not deserve to be poor.”\textsuperscript{14}

The lofty goals of the founding fathers of the Indian nation-state did not materialise even after sixty years of independence. Not only the northeastern states are far from being part with other Indian states in terms of development, even within the region there is huge disparity. Although the northeastern region shares certain problems there are severe intra-regional differences on economic development. The plain areas of the region, which are also the centre of administration, are more developed than the hill areas. Not only the hills and valleys are at different levels of economic development; the urban and rural areas of the valley exhibit economic disparities.

Even though the region is conceived as a tribal region, taking the region as a whole the non-tribal population is more than the tribals. The states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland have tribal population as majority. The region has a literacy rate of 78.84 percent as against the all India average of 73 percent.\textsuperscript{15}

The similarities that exist between different states of the region should not overshadow the different stages of socio-cultural and politico-economic development.\textsuperscript{16} Udayon Misra further observes. “The use of the illusive construct, the North-East, has not only led to discriminations in matters of financial allocation to resource rich and larger states like Assam, but more importantly, to serious

\textsuperscript{14} Nehru, Jawaharlal, Parliamentary Debate on the First Five year Plan, PC, Government of India, 1952.
\textsuperscript{15} Census 2011, India Year Book, 2015.
administrative mishandling by the Centre of the complexities of the region. The tendency of the Indian State to treat this extremely diverse region as one unit has resulted in the growth of totally incomplete and often misconceived notions about the different states that make up the northeastern part of the country. Such monolithic conceptions about a region, which stands out of for its diversity of cultures and civilisations, would only help to nourish the biases and prejudices which have marked the Indian State’s approach towards Assam and her neighbours since independence”.

B. Geo-Strategic Background of Myanmar

Burma, officially the “Republic of the Union of Myanmar”, commonly shortened to “Myanmar” is a sovereign state in Southeast Asia bordered by China, Thailand, India, Laos and Bangladesh. In 1989, the military government officially changed the English translations of many names dating back to Burma's colonial period, including that of the country itself: "Burma" became "Myanmar". The renaming remains a contested issue. Many political and ethnic opposition groups and countries continue to use "Burma" because they do not recognise the legitimacy of the ruling military government or its authority to rename the country.

In English, the country is popularly known by either of its short names "Burma" or "Myanmar". Both these names are derived from the name of the majority Burmese Bamar ethnic group. Myanmar is considered to be the literary form of the name of the group, while Burma is derived from "Bamar", the colloquial form of the group's name. Depending on the register used, the pronunciation would be Bama or Myamah. The name Burma has been in use in English since the time of British colonial rule. Burma continues to be used in English by the governments of many countries, including the United Kingdom and Canada. Official United States policy retains Burma as the country's name, although the State Department's website lists the country as "Burma (Myanmar)" and Barack Obama has referred to the country as Myanmar. The United Nations uses Myanmar, as do the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations, Russia, France, Germany, China, India, Norway, Australia and Japan. There are also other variations; in Spain and Italy the country is commonly known as "Birmania", in Portugal as "Birmânia", whereas the Government of Brazil uses "Mianmar".\(^{19}\)

**The Geography and Location:**

Myanmar, which has a total area of 678,500 sq km (262,000 sq miles), where 657,740 sq km occupies the land and 20,760 sq km occupies the water is the second largest country in mainland Southeast Asia, and the 40th-largest in the world ranging 936 km from east to west and 2,051 km from north to south. It is a land of hills and valleys and is rimmed in the north, east and west by mountain ranges forming a giant horseshoe. Enclosed within the mountain barriers are the flat lands of Ayeyarwaddy, Chindwin and Sittaung River valleys where most of the country's agricultural land and population are concentrated. The lowest point is the Andaman Sea (0 m) and the highest point Hkakabo Razi (5,881 m). It lies between latitudes 9° 32'N and 28° 31'N, and longitudes 92° 10'E and 101° 11'E. As of February 2011, Burma consisted of 14 states and regions, 67 districts, 330 townships, 64 sub-townships, 377 towns, 2914 Wards, 14220 village tracts and 68290 villages.\(^{20}\)

The length of contiguous frontier is 6,159 km. The total length of Myanmar-Bangladesh the Chittagong Division is 271 km (168.7 miles). The total length of Myanmar-China, the Tibet Autonomous Region and Yunnan province boundary is 2,204 km (1,370 miles); Myanmar-Thailand 2,107 km (1,309.8 miles); Myanmar-India the Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh states is 1,338 km (831.8 miles); and Myanmar-Laos 238 km (147.9 miles). One third of Burma's total borders of 1,930 km (1,200 miles) forms an uninterrupted coastline along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea to the southwest and the south, which forms one quarter of its total perimeter.

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Highlight the Biodiversity Significance of Myanmar:

As a whole, the location and topography of the country generated a diversity of climate conditions. Seasonal changes in the monsoon wind directions create summer, rainy and winter seasons. Extremes of temperature are rare. The directions of winds and depression bring rain, and although it is always heavy in the coastal areas during monsoon season, it seldom creates hardships. The Government is giving priority to the forest conservation and greening of nine arid districts in central Myanmar.

Myanmar is endowed with a rich diversity of habitat types arising largely from its unusual ecological diversity. It is home to nearly 300 known mammal species, 300 reptiles and about 100 birds’ species, and a haven for about 7,000 species of plant life. Since Myanmar considers such a rich pool of biodiversity as an important national asset, the Government has drawn up strict regulations to protect its biological resources. As some folktales have said, the map of the country itself resembles the figure of a dancing lady.

Natural Resources and Based Industries:

In the north, the Hengduan Mountains form the border with China. Hkakabo Razi, located in Kachin State, at an elevation of 5,881 metres (19,295 ft), is the highest point in Burma. Many mountain ranges, such as the Rakhine Yoma, the Bago Yoma, the Shan Hills and the Tenasserim Hills exist within Burma, all of which run north-to-south from the Himalayas. The mountain chains divide Burma's three river systems, which are the Irrawaddy, Salween (Thanlwin), and the Sittaung rivers. The Irrawaddy River, Burma's longest river, nearly 2,170 km (1,348 miles) long, flows into the Gulf of Martaban. Fertile plains exist in the valleys between the mountain chains. The majority of Burma's population lives in the Irrawaddy valley, which is situated between the Rakhine Yoma and the Shan Plateau.

Burma produces precious stones such as rubies, sapphires, pearls, and jade. Rubies are the biggest earner; 90% of the world's rubies come from the country, whose red stones are prized for their purity and hue. Thailand buys the majority of the
country’s gems. Burma's "Valley of Rubies", the mountainous Mogok area, 200 km (120 mi) north of Mandalay, is noted for its rare pigeon's blood rubies and blue sapphires.\textsuperscript{21} Gold is the most precious metal and Myanmar love gold. Gold is used everywhere: pagoda, monasteries, accessories of the nobles, and so on. Most pagodas in Myanmar are covered with gold leaves, or for those who cannot afford use gold paint in the modern days. You will see golden things or gold-covered monuments in every direction you turn. No wonder, this is called the Golden Land.

Many U.S. and European jewellery companies, including Bulgari, Tiffany, and Cartier, refuse to import these stones based on reports of deplorable working conditions in the mines. Human Rights Watch has encouraged a complete ban on the purchase of Burmese gems based on these reports and because nearly all profits go to the ruling junta, as the majority of mining activity in the country is government-run.\textsuperscript{22} The government of Burma controls the gem trade by direct ownership or by joint ventures with private owners of mines.\textsuperscript{23} Other industries include agricultural goods, textiles, wood products, construction materials, gems, metals, oil and natural gas. Myanmar is also rich in natural resources such as petroleum, timber, tin, antimony, zinc, copper, tungsten, lead, coal, some marble, limestone, precious stones, natural gas, and hydropower.

Most of the region of country lies between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator. It lies in the monsoon region of Asia, with its coastal regions receiving over 5,000 mm of rain annually. Annual rainfall in the delta region is approximately 2,500 mm while average annual rainfall in the Dry Zone, which is located in central Burma, is less than 1,000 mm. Northern regions of the country are the coolest, with average temperatures of 21 °C. Coastal and delta regions have an average maximum temperature of 32 °C.\textsuperscript{24} Myanmar has three main seasons, hot season, rainy season and cold season. Hot season is from March to May, rainy season is from June to

\textsuperscript{22} "Burma: Gem Trade Bolsters Military Regime, Fuels Atrocities". Human Rights Watch. 11 November 2007.
October and cold season is from November to February. The tropical monsoon is usually cloudy, rainy, hot, humid summers and less cloudy, scant rainfall, mild temperatures, lower humidity during winter.\(^{25}\)

The country's slow economic growth has contributed to the preservation of much of its environment and ecosystems. Forests, including dense tropical growth and valuable teak in lower Burma, cover over 49% of the country, including areas of acacia, bamboo, ironwood and michelia champaca. Coconut and betel palm and rubber have been introduced. In the highlands of the north, oak, pine and various rhododendrons cover much of the land.\(^{26}\) Heavy logging since the new 1995 forestry law went into effect has seriously reduced forest acreage and wildlife habitat.\(^{27}\) The lands along the coast support all varieties of tropical fruits and once had large areas of mangroves although much of the protective mangroves have disappeared. In much of central Burma (the Dry Zone), vegetation is sparse and stunted.

Typical jungle animals, particularly tigers and leopards, occur sparsely in Burma. In upper Burma, there are rhinoceros, wild buffalo, wild boars, deer, antelope, and elephants, which are also tamed or bred in captivity for use as work animals, particularly in the lumber industry. Smaller mammals are also numerous, ranging from gibbons and monkeys to flying foxes and tapirs. The abundance of birds is notable with over 800 species, including parrots, peafowl, pheasants, crows, herons, and paddybirds. Among reptile species there are crocodiles, geckos, cobras, Burmese pythons, and turtles. Hundreds of species of freshwater fish are wide-ranging, plentiful and are very important food sources.\(^{28}\)

The major agricultural product is rice, which covers about 60% of the country's total cultivated land area. Rice accounts for 97% of total food grain production by weight. Through collaboration with the International Rice Research Institute 52 modern rice varieties were released in the country between 1966 and


1997, helping increase national rice production to 14 million tons in 1987 and to 19 million tons in 1996. By 1988, modern varieties were planted on half of the country's ricelands, including 98 percent of the irrigated areas. In 2008 rice production was estimated at 50 million tons.

Burma is also the world's second largest producer of opium, accounting for 8% of entire world production and is a major source of illegal drugs, including amphetamines. Opium bans implemented since 2002 after international pressure have left ex-poppy farmers without sustainable sources of income in the Kokang and Wa regions. They depend on casual labour for income.

**Demographics and Ethnic Composition:**

Burma has a population of about 56 million. Population figures are rough estimates because the last partial census, conducted by the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs under the control of the military junta, was taken in 1983. No trustworthy nationwide census has been taken in Burma since 1931. There are over 600,000 registered migrant workers from Burma in Thailand, and millions more work illegally. Burmese migrant workers account for 80% of Thailand's migrant workers. Burma has a population density of 75 per square km, one of the lowest in Southeast Asia. Refugee camps exist along Indian, Bangladeshi and Thai borders while several thousand are in Malaysia. Conservative estimates state that there are over 295,800 refugees from Burma, with the majority being Karenni, and Kayin and are principally located along the Thai-Burma border. There are nine permanent refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, most of which were established in the mid-1980s. The refugee camps are under the care of the Thai-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC). Since 2006, over 55,000 Burmese refugees have been resettled in the United States.

There are over 53.42 million Buddhists, over 2.98 million Christians, over 2.27 million Muslims, over 300,000 Hindus and over 790,000 of those who believe in

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other religions in the country, according to an answer by Union Minister at Myanmar Parliament on 8 September 2011.

Ne Win's rise to power in 1962 and his relentless persecution of "resident aliens" (immigrant groups not recognised as citizens of the Union of Burma) led to an exodus/expulsion of some 300,000 Burmese Indians. They migrated to escape racial discrimination and wholesale nationalisation of private enterprise a few years later in 1964. The Anglo-Burmese at this time either fled the country or changed their names and blended in with the broader Burmese society. Many Rohingya Muslims fled Burma and many refugees inundated neighbouring Bangladesh including 200,000 in 1978 as a result of the King Dragon operation in Arakan and 250,000 in 1991.34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Composition in Burma (rough estimate)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bamar</td>
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<td>Shan</td>
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<td>Karen</td>
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<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>Kachin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
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<td>Chin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kayah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other groups</td>
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</table>

Burma is ethnically diverse. The government recognises 135 distinct ethnic groups. While it is extremely difficult to verify this statement, there are at least 108 different ethno-linguistic groups in Burma, consisting mainly of distinct Tibeto-Burman peoples, but with sizeable populations of Tai–Kadai, Hmong–Mien, and Austroasiatic (Mon–Khmer) peoples. The Bamar form an estimated 68% of the population. 10% of the population is Shan. The Kayin make up 7% of the population.

The Rakhine people constitute 4% of the population. Overseas Chinese form approximately 3% of the population. Mon, who form 2% of the population, are ethno-linguistically related to the Khmer. Overseas Indians are 2%. The remainders are Kachin, Chin, Anglo-Indians, Gurkha, Nepali and other ethnic minorities.

Burma is home to four major language families: Sino-Tibetan, Tai–Kadai, Austro-Asiatic, and Indo-European. Sino-Tibetan languages are most widely spoken. They include Burmese, Karen, Kachin, Chin, and Chinese. The primary Tai–Kadai language is Shan. Mon, Palaung, and Wa are the major Austroasiatic languages spoken in Burma. The two major Indo-European languages are Pali, the liturgical language of Theravada Buddhism, and English.35

Religion:

Many religions are practiced in Burma. Festivals can be held on a grand scale. The Christian and Muslim populations do, however, face religious persecution and it is hard for non-Buddhists to join the army or get government jobs. Such persecution and targeting of civilians is particularly notable in Eastern Burma, where over 3000 villages have been destroyed in the past ten years. More than 200,000 Rohingya Muslims have settled in Bangladesh over the last 20 years to escape persecution.36

The total of 89% population embraces Buddhism (mostly Theravāda). Other religions are practiced largely without obstruction, with the notable exception of some ethnic minorities such as the Muslim Rohingya people, who have continued to have their citizenship status denied and treated as illegal immigrants instead, and Christians in Chin State.37 4% of the population practices Islam; 4% Christianity; 1% traditional animistic beliefs; and 2% follow other religions, including Mahayana Buddhism, Hinduism, East Asian religions and the Bahá'í Faith.38 However, according to a U.S. State Department's 2010 international religious freedom report, official statistics are

alleged to underestimate the non-Buddhist population. Independent researchers put
the Muslim population at 6 to 10% of the population. A tiny Jewish community in
Rangoon had a synagogue but no resident rabbi to conduct services. Although
Hinduism is presently only practiced by 1% of the population, it was a major religion
in Burma's past. Several strains of Hinduism existed alongside both Theravada
Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism in the Pyu period.\(^{39}\)

**Status of Literacy in Myanmar:**

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Burma's official literacy rate
as of 2000 was 89.9%.\(^{40}\) Historically, Burma has had high literacy rates. To qualify
for least developed country status by the UN in order to receive debt relief, Burma
lowered its official literacy rate from 78.6% to 18.7% in 1987.\(^{41}\)

The educational system of Burma is operated by the government agency, the
Ministry of Education. Universities and professional institutes from upper Burma and
lower Burma are run by two separate entities, the Department of Higher Education of
Upper Burma and the Department of Higher Education of Lower Burma.
Headquarters are based in Yangon and Mandalay respectively. The education system
is based on the United Kingdom's system, due to nearly a century of British and
Christian presences in Burma. Nearly all schools are government-operated, but there
has been a recent increase in privately funded English language schools. Schooling is
compulsory until the end of elementary school, probably about 9 years old, while the
compulsory schooling age is 15 or 16 at international level.

There are 101 universities, 12 institutes, 9 degree colleges and 24 colleges in
Burma, a total of 146 higher education institutions. There are 10 Technical Training
Schools, 23 nursing training schools, 1 sport academy and 20 midwifery schools.
There are 2047 Basic Education High Schools, 2605 Basic Education Middle Schools,

\(^{39}\) "Burma—International Religious Freedom Report 2010". U.S. Department of State. 17 November

\(^{40}\) "Adult (15+) Literacy Rates and Illiterate Population by Region and Gender for" (XLS). UNESCO

Basic Education Primary Schools and 5952 Post Primary Schools. 1692 multimedia classrooms exist within this system.\textsuperscript{42}

In Burma, Internet access for the public is less than 1\%, through Internet cafes. Activity at these businesses is highly regulated. There is censorship, and the authorities take the opportunity to view e-mail and posts in the Internet blogs. At least two Myanmar bloggers have been sent to prison. One of them, known by the name of Zarganar, was sentenced to 59 years in prison for publishing a video of destruction caused by the "Nargis" Cyclone in 2008; Zarganar was released on October 12, 2011.

According to The World Factbook, Burma is one of three countries along with Liberia and the United States of America that has not adopted the International System of Units (SI). In June 2011, the Burmese government's Ministry of Commerce began discussing proposals to reform the measurement system and adopt the metric system used by most of its trading partners. On 10 October 2013, Dr. Pwint San, Deputy Minister for Commerce, announced that the country is preparing to adopt the metric system.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{Economic Background:}

Under British administration, Burma was the second-wealthiest country in South-East Asia. It had been the world's largest exporter of rice. It produced 75\% of the world's teak and had a highly literate population. The country was believed to be on the fast track to development. However, agricultural production fell dramatically during the 1930s as international rice prices declined, and did not recover for several decades. During World War II, the British destroyed the major oil wells and mines for tungsten, tin, lead and silver to keep them from the Japanese. Burma was bombed extensively by both sides.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{42} Chronicle of National Development Comparison Between Period Preceding 1988 and after (up to 31 December 2006).
\textsuperscript{44} http://www.soas.ac.uk/sbbr/editions/file64274.pdf
After a parliamentary government was formed in 1948, Prime Minister U Nu embarked upon a policy of nationalization and the state was declared the owner of all land. The government also tried to implement a poorly considered Eight-Year plan. By the 1950s, rice exports had fallen by two thirds and mineral exports by over 96% (as compared to the pre-World War II period). Plans were partly financed by printing money, which led to inflation. The 1962 coup d'état was followed by an economic scheme called the Burmese Way to Socialism, a plan to nationalise all industries, with the exception of agriculture. The catastrophic program turned Burma into one of the world's most impoverished countries.

Burma was admittance to Least Developed Country status in Southeast Asia by the UN in 1987, suffering from decades of stagnation, mismanagement and isolation. The lack of an educated workforce skilled in modern technology contributes to the growing problems of the economy. The country lacks adequate infrastructure. Goods travel primarily across the Thai border (where most illegal drugs are exported) and along the Irrawaddy River. Railways are old and rudimentary. Highways are normally unpaved, except in the major cities. Energy shortages are common throughout the country including in Yangon and only 25% of the country's population has electricity.

The military government has the majority stakeholder position in all of the major industrial corporations of the country. The national currency is Kyat. Inflation averaged 30.1% between 2005 and 2007. Inflation is a serious problem for the economy.

In 2010–2011, Bangladesh exported products worth $9.65 million to Myanmar against its import of $179 million. The annual import of medicine and medical equipment to Burma during the 2000s was 160 million USD.

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46 "List of Least Developed Countries". UN-OHRLLS. 2005.
In recent years, both China and India have attempted to strengthen ties with the government for economic benefit. Many nations, including the United States and Canada, and the European Union, have imposed investment and trade sanctions on Burma. The United States and European Union eased most of their sanctions in 2012. Foreign investment comes primarily from China, Singapore, the Philippines, South Korea, India, and Thailand.

Administrative divisions of Myanmar: \(^48\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>State/Region</th>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Townships</th>
<th>Cities/Towns</th>
<th>Wards</th>
<th>Village groups</th>
<th>Villages</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Mon State</td>
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<td>Rakhine State</td>
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<td>Shan State</td>
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<td>1912</td>
<td>11651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>312</strong></td>
<td><strong>2548</strong></td>
<td><strong>13742</strong></td>
<td><strong>65148</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Historical Background from British Burma

\(^{48}\) List of Districts, Townships, Cities/Towns, Wards, Village Groups and Villages in Union of Myanmar published by Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Union of Myanmar on 31 December 2001
The country was colonized by Britain following three Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824–1885). British rule brought social, economic, cultural and administrative changes. With the fall of Mandalay, all of Burma came under British rule, being annexed on 1 January 1886. Throughout the colonial era, many Indians arrived as soldiers, civil servants, construction workers and traders and, along with the Anglo-Burmese community, dominated commercial and civil life in Burma. Rangoon became the capital of British Burma and an important port between Calcutta and Singapore.

Burmese resentment was strong and was vented in violent riots that paralyzed Yangon (Rangoon) on occasion all the way until the 1930s. Some of the discontent was caused by disrespect for Burmese culture and traditions such as the British refusal to remove shoes when they entered pagodas. Buddhist monks became the vanguards of the independence movement. U Wisara, an activist monk, died in prison after a 166-day hunger strike to protest a rule that forbade him from wearing his Buddhist robes while imprisoned.

On 1 April 1937, Burma became a separately administered colony of Great Britain and Ba Maw the first Prime Minister and Premier of Burma. Ba Maw was an outspoken advocate for Burmese self-rule and he opposed the participation of Great Britain, and by extension Burma, in World War II. He resigned from the Legislative Assembly and was arrested for sedition. In 1940, before Japan formally entered the Second World War, Aung San formed the Burma Independence Army in Japan.

A major battleground, Burma was devastated during World War II. By March 1942, within months after they entered the war, Japanese troops had advanced on Rangoon and the British administration had collapsed. A Burmese Executive Administration headed by Ba Maw was established by the Japanese in August 1942. Wingate's British Chindits were formed into long-range penetration groups trained to

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49 Collis, Maurice (1945). *Trials in Burma.*
operate deep behind Japanese lines. A similar American unit, Merrill’s Marauders, followed the Chindits into the Burmese jungle in 1943. Beginning in late 1944, allied troops launched a series of offensives that led to the end of Japanese rule in July 1945. However, the battles were intense with much of Burma laid waste by the fighting. Overall, the Japanese lost some 150,000 men in Burma. Only 1,700 prisoners were taken.

Although many Burmese fought initially for the Japanese as part of the Burma Independence Army, many Burmese, mostly from the ethnic minorities, served in the British Burma Army. The Burma National Army and the Arakan National Army fought with the Japanese from 1942 to 1944 but switched allegiance to the Allied side in 1945. Under Japanese occupation, 170,000 to 250,000 civilians died.

Following World War II, Aung San negotiated the Panglong Agreement with ethnic leaders that guaranteed the independence of Burma as a unified state. Aung Zan Wai, Pe Khin, Bo Hmu Aung, Sir Maung Gyi, Dr. Sein Mya Maung, Myoma U Than Kywe were among the negotiators of the historical Panglong Conference negotiating then confronting with Bamar leader General Aung San and other ethnic leaders in 1947. In 1947, Aung San became Deputy Chairman of the Executive Council of Burma, a transitional government. But in July 1947, political rivals assassinated Aung San and several cabinet members.

D. The Myanmar after Independence till Date:

On 4 January 1948, the nation became an independent republic, named the Union of Burma, with Sao Shwe Thaik as its first President and U Nu as its first Prime Minister. 

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Minister. Unlike most other former British colonies and overseas territories, it did not become a member of the Commonwealth. A bicameral parliament was formed, consisting of a Chamber of Deputies and a Chamber of Nationalities, and multi-party elections were held in 1951–1952, 1956 and 1960.

The geographical area Burma encompasses today can be traced to the Panglong Agreement, which combined Burma Proper, which consisted of Lower Burma and Upper Burma, and the Frontier Areas, which had been administered separately by the British.

In 1961, U Thant, then the Union of Burma's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and former Secretary to the Prime Minister, was elected Secretary-General of the United Nations, a position he held for ten years. Among the Burmese to work at the UN when he was Secretary-General was a young Aung San Suu Kyi, who went on to become winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize.

Political Development since Independence:

On 2 March 1962, the military led by General Ne Win took control of Burma through a coup d'état and the government has been under direct or indirect control by the military since then. Between 1962 and 1974, Burma was ruled by a revolutionary council headed by the general, and almost all aspects of society (business, media, production) were nationalized or brought under government control under the Burmese Way to Socialism,\(^56\) which combined Soviet-style nationalisation and central planning with the governmental implementation of superstitious beliefs. A new constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma was adopted in 1974. Until 1988, the country was ruled as a one-party system, with the General and other military officers resigning and ruling through the Burma Socialist Programme Party

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During this period, Burma became one of the world's most impoverished countries. There were sporadic protests against military rule during the Ne Win years and these were almost always violently suppressed. On 7 July 1962, the government broke up demonstrations at Rangoon University, killing 15 students. In 1974, the military violently suppressed anti-government protests at the funeral of U Thant. Student protests in 1975, 1976 and 1977 were quickly suppressed by overwhelming force.

In 1988, unrest over economic mismanagement and political oppression by the government led to widespread pro-democracy demonstrations throughout the country known as the 8888 Uprising. Security forces killed thousands of demonstrators, and General Saw Maung staged a coup d'état and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In 1989, SLORC declared martial law after widespread protests. The military government finalised plans for People's Assembly elections on 31 May 1989. SLORC changed the country's official English name from the "Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma" to the "Union of Myanmar" in 1989.

In May 1990, the government held free elections for the first time in almost 30 years and the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party of Aung San Suu Kyi, won 392 out of a total 489 seats (i.e., 80% of the seats). However, the military junta refused to cede power and continued to rule the nation as SLORC until 1997, and then as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) until its dissolution in March 2011.

On 23 June 1997, Burma was admitted into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). On 27 March 2006, the military junta which had moved the

national capital from Yangon to a site near Pyinmana in November 2005, officially named the new capital Naypyidaw, meaning "city of the kings".\textsuperscript{62}

In August 2007, an increase in the price of diesel and petrol led to a series of anti-government protests that were dealt with harshly by the government\textsuperscript{63}. The protests then became a campaign of civil resistance (also called the Saffron Revolution led by Buddhist monks, hundreds of whom defied the house arrest of democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi to pay their respects at the gate of her house.\textsuperscript{64} The government finally cracked down on them on 26 September 2007. The crackdown was harsh, with reports of barricades at the Shwedagon Pagoda and monks killed. However, there were also rumours of disagreement within the Burmese armed forces, but none was confirmed. The military crackdown against unarmed Saffron Revolution protesters was widely condemned as part of the International reaction to the 2007 Burmese anti-government protests and led to an increase in economic sanctions against the Burmese Government.

In May 2008, Cyclone Nargis caused extensive damage in the densely populated, rice-farming delta of the Irrawaddy Division. It was the worst natural disaster in Burmese history with reports of an estimated 200,000 people dead or missing, and damage totaled to 10 billion dollars (USD), and as many as 1 million left homeless. In the critical days following this disaster, Burma's isolationist government was accused of hindering United Nations recovery efforts. Humanitarian aid was requested but concerns about foreign military or intelligence presence in the country delayed the entry of United States military planes delivering medicine, food, and other supplies\textsuperscript{65}.

In early August 2009, a conflict known as the Kokang incident broke out in Shan State in northern Burma. For several weeks, junta troops fought against ethnic

minorities including the Han Chinese, Wa, and Kachin. During 8–12 August, the first days of the conflict, as many as 10,000 Burmese civilians fled to Yunnan province in neighbouring China.66

**Democratic reforms:**

The goal of the Burmese constitutional referendum of 2008, held on 10 May 2008, is the creation of a "discipline-flourishing democracy". As part of the referendum process, the name of the country was changed from the "Union of Myanmar" to the "Republic of the Union of Myanmar", and general elections were held under the new constitution in 2010. Observer accounts of the 2010 election describe the event as mostly peaceful; however, allegations of polling station irregularities were raised, and the United Nations (UN) and a number of Western countries condemned the elections as fraudulent.67

The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party declared victory in the 2010 elections, stating that it had been favoured by 80 percent of the votes; however, the claim was disputed by numerous pro-democracy opposition groups who asserted that the military regime had engaged in rampant fraud. One report documented 77 percent as the official turnout rate of the election. The military junta was dissolved on 30 March 2011.68

Opinions differ whether the transition to liberal democracy is underway. According to some reports, the military's presence continues as the label 'disciplined democracy' suggests. This label asserts that the Burmese military is allowing certain civil liberties while clandestinely institutionalizing itself further into Burmese politics. Such an assertion assumes that reforms only occurred when the military was able to

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safeguard its own interests through the transition—here, "transition" does not refer to a transition to a liberal democracy, but transition to a quasi-military rule.69

Since the 2010 election, the government has embarked on a series of reforms to direct the country towards liberal democracy, a mixed economy, and reconciliation, although doubts persist about the motives that underpin such reforms. The series of reforms includes the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest, the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission, the granting of general amnesties for more than 200 political prisoners, new labour laws that permit labour unions and strikes, a relaxation of press censorship, and the regulation of currency practices.70

The impact of the post-election reforms has been observed in numerous areas, including ASEAN's approval of Burma's bid for the position of ASEAN chair in 2014; the visit by United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in December 2011 for the encouragement of further progress—it was the first visit by a Secretary of State in more than fifty years71 (Clinton met with Burmese president Thein Sein, as well as opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi); and the participation of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party in the 2012 by-elections, facilitated by the government's abolition of the laws that previously barred the NLD. As of July 2013, about 100 political prisoners remain imprisoned, while conflict between the Burmese Army and local insurgent groups continues.72

The by-elections occurred on 1 April 2012 and the NLD won 43 of the 45 available seats; previously an illegal organization, the NLD had never won a Burmese election until this time. The 2012 by-elections were also the first time that

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71 Hepler, Lauren; Voorhees, Josh (1 December 2011). "Budding Friendship on Display as Clinton, Burma's Suu Kyi Meet Again". Slate. Associated Press. Retrieved 1 April 2013. "Wrapping up a historic three-day visit to Myanmar [Burma], the first by a secretary of state to the Southeast Asian nation in more than 50 years"
international representatives were allowed to monitor the voting process in Burma. Following announcement of the by-elections, the Freedom House organization raised concerns about "reports of fraud and harassment in the lead up to elections, including the March 23 deportation of Somsri Hananuntasuk, executive director of the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), a regional network of civil society organizations promoting democratization."  

**The Government Politics:**

The constitution of Burma, its third since independence, was drafted by its military rulers and published in September 2008. The country is governed as a presidential republic with a bicameral legislature, with a portion of legislators appointed by the military and others elected in general elections. The current head of state, inaugurated as President on 30 March 2011, is Thein Sein.

The legislature, called the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, is bicameral and made up of two houses: The 224-seat upper house Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities) and the 440-seat lower house Pyithu Hluttaw (House of Representatives). The upper house consists of 224 members, of whom 168 are directly elected and 56 are appointed by the Burmese Armed Forces while the lower house consists of 440 members, of whom 330 are directly elected and 110 are appointed by the armed forces. The major political parties are the National League for Democracy, National Democratic Force and the two backed by the military: the National Unity Party, and the Union Solidarity and Development Party.

Burma's army-drafted constitution was approved in a referendum in May 2008. The results, 92.4% of the 22 million voters with an official turnout of 99%, are

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considered suspect by many international observers and by the National league of
democracy with reports of widespread fraud, ballot stuffing, and voter intimidation.\textsuperscript{75}

The elections of 2010 resulted in a victory for the military-backed Union
Solidarity and Development Party and various foreign observers questioned the
fairness of the elections.\textsuperscript{76} One criticism of the election was that only government
sanctioned political parties were allowed to contest in it and the popular National
League for Democracy was declared illegal and is still barred from political
activities.\textsuperscript{77} However, immediately following the elections, the government ended the
house arrest of the democracy advocate and leader of the National League for
Democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi and her ability to move freely around the country is
considered an important test of the military's movement toward more openness. After
unexpected reforms in 2011, NLD senior leaders have decided to register as a political
party and to field candidates in future by-elections.\textsuperscript{78}

Burma rates as a highly corrupt nation on the Corruption Perceptions Index
with a rank of 180th out of 183 countries worldwide and a rating of 1.5 out of 10 (10
being least corrupt and 0 being highly corrupt) as of 2011.\textsuperscript{79}

Ba Maw served as the first Prime Minister of Burma, but was succeeded by U
Saw from 1939 until 1942 when he was arrested by the British for communicating
with the Japanese.

The Communist Party of Burma was co-founded in 1939 by Aung San. When
the Japanese invaded Bangkok in December 1941 Aung San announced the formation
of the Burma Independence Army and hoped that the Japanese would rally to his side
but instead they asked Ba Maw to form a government. He was declared head of state

\textsuperscript{77} Tisdall, Simon (4 July 2011). "Aung San Suu Kyi has to tread softly – but governments must tell it like it is". The Guardian (UK).
\textsuperscript{78} "Suu Kyi's NLD democracy party to rejoin Burma politics". BBC. 18 November 2011. Retrieved 18 November 2011.
and his cabinet included Aung San as War Minister. In 1943 the Japanese declared Burma independent but this turned out to be a sham and in 1945 the Burma National Army rose up against the Japanese and Aung San began negotiations with the British which lead to the rout of the Japanese from Burma by May 1945.  

**2011 Government Reforms:**

According to the Crisis Group, since Burma transitioned to a new government in August 2011, the country's human rights record has been improving. Previously giving Burma its lowest rating of 7, the 2012 *Freedom in the World* report also notes improvement, giving Burma a 6 for improvements in civil liberties and political rights, the release of political prisoners, and a loosening of restrictions. In 2013, Burma improved yet again, receiving a score of five in civil liberties and a six in political freedoms.

The government has assembled a National Human Rights Commission that consists of 15 members from various backgrounds. Several activists in exile, including Thee Lay Thee Anyeint members, have returned to Burma after President Thein Sein's invitation to expatriates to return home to work for national development. In an address to the United Nations Security Council on 22 September 2011, Burma's Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin confirmed the government's intention to release prisoners in the near future.

The government has also relaxed reporting laws, but these remain highly restrictive. In September 2011, several banned websites, including YouTube, Democratic Voice of Burma and Voice of America, were unblocked. A 2011 report

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80 INDIAN NEWSPAPER REPORTS, c1868-1942, from the British Library, London
by the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations found that, while contact with the Myanmar government was constrained by donor restrictions, international humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) see opportunities for effective advocacy with government officials, especially at the local level. At the same time, international NGOs are mindful of the ethical quandary of how to work with the government without bolstering or appeasing it.\textsuperscript{87}

2013 Onwards:

Following Thein Sein's first ever visit to the UK and a meeting with Prime Minister David Cameron, the Myanmar president declared that all of his nation's political prisoners will be released by the end of 2013, in addition to a statement of support for the well-being of the Rohingya Muslim community. In a speech at Chatham House, he revealed that "We [Myanmar government] are reviewing all cases. I guarantee to you that by the end of this year, there will be no prisoners of conscience in Myanmar.", in addition to expressing a desire to strengthen links between the UK and Myanmar's military forces.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} Working Through Ambiguity: International NGOs in Myanmar. Soubhik Ronnie Saha The Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations Harvard University September 2011.