

# The India-Myanmar Relationship in 2026: An Entrenchment of Post-2021 Characteristics

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Between 30 May and 03 June 2026, Myanmar's former State Administration Council Chairman, Gen Min Aung Hlaing, paid his first [state visit](#) to India as President of Myanmar – a post he assumed in April this year. With his earlier visit to India for the Big Cat Alliance Summit being canceled (due to the Summit's postponement), Hlaing was accompanied in his current visit by a high-level delegation comprising several Cabinet Ministers, senior officials, and business leaders. President Hlaing visited Bodh Gaya in Bihar on May 30 (to offer respects at the Mahabodhi Temple) and met the President, Prime Minister, External Affairs Minister, and National Security Advisor of India on June 1. Additionally, apart from President Hlaing's participation in the India-Myanmar Business Conclave, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to completing two key India-led projects in Myanmar – the Kaladan Multi-Modal

Transit Transport project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway.

Moreover, while India reaffirmed its support for sovereignty and territorial integrity and pledged support for Myanmar-led efforts towards achieving peace, stability, national reconciliation, and socio-economic development, President Hlaing [assured](#) India that Myanmar's "territory would not be permitted to be used against India's security interests."

### **Three Characteristics of Entrenchment**

In light of Myanmar's elections at the beginning of this year, the change in leadership in Dhaka, Myanmar's current map of control (with ethnic armed groups [controlling](#) vast parts of the country), and India's historic posture towards Myanmar, President Hlaing's India visit has reflected one major variable – that the existing characteristics of the India-Myanmar bilateral relationship since 2021, have further entrenched themselves. These are characteristics pertaining to the bilateral political relationship, the on-the-ground situation in Myanmar, and changes in the India-Bangladesh relationship.

***Political/Bilateral*** – Since 2021, India's approach to Myanmar has been to engage the *junta* in practice at the level of full diplomatic ties, without overt formal recognition. India's efforts to push the SAC toward the restoration of democracy were limited to bilateral meetings and quiet engagement. By 2024 and 2025, as the *Tatmadaw* lost more ground to ethnic armed organizations and it became clear that the Arakan Army was in control of virtually the entire length of the India-Myanmar border, India's engagement with the AA increased. Despite a friction-ridden history, the AA itself has been open to [engaging](#) India, adopting a pragmatic position due to its need for broad-based international support. But India's overall [approach](#) to Myanmar never changed. Even during the second half of 2025, while India engaged groups like the AA

and others from Myanmar's Three Brothers Alliance, New Delhi's overall approach to Myanmar remained that any agreement/settlement to resolve the civil war should [include](#) the SAC/*Tatmadaw*, which [remained strong](#) in the hinterland regions near the capital. For India, any reconciliation effort had to have the Myanmar military in the room. Given the irreconcilable differences between Myanmar's EAOs and the SAC, India was forced to restrict its efforts to knowledge-sharing [collaborations](#) at the Track 1 and 1.5 levels and bring its own experience in constitution-building to bear, with lessons that Myanmar can eventually apply.

In February 2026, the Myanmar elections featured an engineered and [internationally delegitimized](#) electoral landscape, resulting in a globally expected win for the Union Solidarity and Development Party, which served as the king's party. With Gen Min Aung Hlaing formally taking charge as President in April, the question of India's formal non-recognition of the earlier *junta* became immaterial, allowing even broader overt engagement. Across Myanmar's multi-phased election, India tacitly [accepted](#) Myanmar's electoral process, officially highlighting the need for fair democratic instruments but without expressing concerns vis-à-vis the USDP. This characteristic of India's position was reinforced when New Delhi [denied](#) that Indians acting as foreign observers in Myanmar had any official status.

**Ground Realities** – Similar to the political characteristics of the bilateral relationship, there has also been an entrenchment of the challenges facing India's regional projects through Myanmar. Even as President Hlaing committed to aiding the completion of the Kaladan and India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway projects, the Myanmar state's control of areas through which these projects pass has not been restored. While the India-Myanmar-Thailand project remains only a concept, the Kaladan project's deadlock is now a reality, with the 109-km Paletwa-Zorinpui Road (the heart of

the project's larger rationale, as it connects to India's Northeast) still [incomplete](#). Famously described as a mud track by Indian MP K Vanlalvena during his [2024](#) and [2025](#) Myanmar visits, the difficulties of finishing this track have now entrenched themselves even further. In Rakhine state, near the Sittwe port, Myanmar's control has diminished even further. Across the first week of June, Sittwe town itself became a key and active battleground, with Arakan Army fighters [pushing closer](#) to the *Tatmadaw's* Shwe Min Gan naval base as well as its Regional Operations Command (ROC).

***India-Bangladesh*** – The third cause for the entrenchment of post-2021 characteristics in the India-Myanmar relationship is unarguably Bangladesh, and is integrally related to India's continued interest in projects such as Kaladan and the trilateral highway. It has long been evident to government insiders, based on informed stakeholder comments to CSDR, that the challenges to these projects on the ground are well recognized in New Delhi. However, the rationale for the continued pursuit of these projects is broader. As CSDR's 2025 [report](#) on Myanmar noted, the original logic of these projects to connect India's Northeast to the mainland was to circumvent Bangladesh, given Bangladeshi resistance to Indian overland connectivity through the Mongla and Chittogram ports. During the zenith of Sheikh Hasina's control of the Bangladeshi state and polity across 2022 and 2023, Dhaka's openness to being integrated into these projects evidently increased. However, the fact that it was a temporary window became evident with Hasina's ouster, the breakdown in the India-Bangladesh relationship under Muhammad Yunus, and, eventually, the February 2026 election results, which propelled the Bangladesh Nationalist Party to power. Now, even as the BNP has struck a pragmatic stance towards New Delhi and has expanded engagement, bilateral friction has proven to be enduring. Bangladesh's rejuvenated relationship with Pakistan acts as an additional variable. This has occurred in parallel to the downturn in Myanmar-Bangladesh relations (albeit at a

lower scale than India-Bangladesh), which draws on Dhaka's historic concerns vis-à-vis the *Tatmadaw's* actions against the Rohingya minority and the consequent high influx of refugees into Bangladesh. At a grand strategic level, these conditions make deepening the India-Myanmar relationship more desirable for New Delhi, which can be supplemented by signaling to Dhaka.

### **Anticipated Continuity**

Given the degree of continuity in the India-Myanmar relationship since 2021 and the growing number of variables that deepen this continuity, there is little reason to expect radical changes to the characteristics outlined above. However, it is reasonable to expect limits to the degree to which Myanmar can act as a point of pressure for India against Bangladesh. While India itself has had significant border security concerns with Myanmar, the Arakan Army's control of Rakhine complicated the degree to which stronger ties with Naypyidaw can yield strategic benefits on the India-Bangladesh front. More importantly, Myanmar itself is likely to remain more strategically dependent on Beijing than on New Delhi. Nonetheless, there remain sufficient reasons for India to maintain stronger ties with Myanmar, with fewer disablers than pre-February 2026 and more enablers. Specifically, a key front that India will likely also watch will be the fraught [relationship](#) between the Arakan Army and the Bangladesh military, which might allow India to play the role of an objective third party and increase goodwill with both actors (especially by benefiting from the AA's desire to lessen Chinese influence over their actions).