India's Eastern Neighbourhood - Myanmar & Bangladesh

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- India has largely been appreciable in terms of settling land and maritime boundaries in its neighbourhood.
\n
- But the differences between Myanmar and Bangladesh demands India's attention and cooperation with other regional powers, given China's role.
\n

\n\n

How are India's maritime boundaries?

\n\n

\n
- One of India’s remarkable diplomatic achievements has been that it has settled its maritime boundaries with all its eastern neighbours.
\n
- Bilateral agreements on maritime boundaries with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia have contributed to this.
\n
- But besides this, tripartite agreements have been made to determine tri-junctions.
\n
- These include agreements with Myanmar and Thailand, Indonesia and Thailand and with Sri Lanka and Maldives.
\n
- Even arriving at an agreement to demarcate maritime frontiers with Pakistan will not be difficult, once the land boundaries are demarcated.
\n
- In any case, there have rarely been any maritime tensions with Pakistan.
\n

\n\n

How does it compare with China?

\n\n

\n
- Delineating maritime boundaries in accordance with international law give India the reputation of being a responsible power, across its eastern neighbourhood.
\n
- In contrast, China has maritime boundary disputes with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia.
\n
- India readily implemented a verdict by an International Tribunal, which went against its claims on its maritime boundary with Bangladesh.
\n
- China has, however, violated the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea by rejecting a similar decision, on its maritime boundary with the Philippines.
\n
- Beijing has also used military intimidation to enforce its maritime claims on countries like the Philippines and Vietnam.
\n

\n\n

What is the case with Bangladesh and Myanmar?

\n\n

\n
- Another important factor in dealing with eastern neighbours has been the development of cooperation across land borders.
\n
- India has settled land borders with both Myanmar and Bangladesh.
\n
- It has moved forward in strengthening trade, investment and connectivity cooperation with them.
\n
- Both Bangladesh and Myanmar have been helpful and cooperative in dealing with Indian separatist groups, which seek to operate from their soil.
\n
- Prospects for cooperation have been augmented, as Bangladesh and Myanmar welcome increasing regional cooperation in BIMSTEC.
\n

\n\n

What is the refugee issue?

\n\n

\n
- Myanmar Army made a crackdown on Muslim Rohingyas in Myanmar’s

Rakhine Province.
\n
- This has led to over 7,00,000 Muslim Rohingya refugees from Myanmar fleeing to, and imposing a huge economic burden, on Bangladesh.
\n
- To make matters worse, the repatriation of refugees is becoming harder than expected.
\n
- There are prolonged negotiations and promises of aid for refugee resettlement from India, China and Japan.
\n
- But there are just not adequate facilities for the displaced and traumatised refugees to return.
\n
- With this, relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar have worsened.
\n
- Myanmar alleges that Rohingya refugees are being armed in Bangladesh, amidst denials by Bangladesh.
\n

\n\n

What is China's role here?

\n\n

\n
- With growing international pressures because of its alleged persecution of Rohingyas, Myanmar is turning increasingly to China for support.
\n
- Taking advantage of this, China is interfering in Myanmar’s internal affairs, for working out a political settlement with the trans-border armed, ethnic groups.
\n
- China is also demanding Myanmar’s consent to go ahead with the massive Myitsone Dam hydroelectric project.
\n
- The Myitsone Dam’s construction has been strongly opposed by the people of Kachin State.
\n
- Given its location, the electricity produced by this project will be largely consumed in China’s Yunnan Province.
\n
- It has also been controversial in Myanmar, with environmental impact on its huge flooding area and its location, barely 60 miles from the earthquake prone Sagaing faultline.

\n
- But China keeps professing that it promotes contacts between the Myanmar government and armed insurgent groups, operating across the China-Myanmar border.
\n
- The most powerful of these groups, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), operates from China, across the Shan State, in western Myanmar.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Why is India concerned?

\n\n

\n
- India is concerned as UWSA is now allied to a “Northern Alliance,” comprising armed groups linked to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).
\n
- The KIA operates from the Kachin State, bordering Arunachal Pradesh.
\n
- It has links with the Rohingya-dominated Arakan Rohingya Solidarity Army in Myanmar’s Rakhine State, bordering India.
\n
- Moreover, National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K) members, involved in armed insurgency in Manipur and Nagaland, routinely move across the Myanmar-China border.
\n
- Growing Chinese influence in Kachin State, which borders Arunachal Pradesh, undermines Myanmar’s sovereignty.
\n
- It also adversely affects India’s security interests.
\n

\n\n

What lies ahead?

\n\n

\n
- Japan, like India, appears to recognise the dangers of pushing Myanmar to a corner, on the Rohingya issue.
\n
- Because, this will make Myanmar even more dependent on Chinese support

in the UN.
\n
- The focus of attention of the international community should be on rehabilitation of refugees.
\n
- Both India and Japan should work jointly, in both Myanmar and Bangladesh, to amicably settle the problem of repatriation and resettlement of refugees.
\n
- The SAARC is now non-functional; BIMSTEC is, however, showing promise, complementing connectivity and trade.
\n
- Differences and tensions between Myanmar and Bangladesh should not be allowed to worsen, as it will undermine India's efforts to promote regional cooperation in eastern neighbourhood.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: BusinessLine

\n

