Reassessing Myanmar relations

What is the issue?

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- There is a longstanding refugee crisis going on in Myanmar.
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- On the other hand, the Ind0-Myanmar ties is waning and this needs to be addressed.
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What is Myanmar's stand on ethnicity?

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- Myanmar has an ethnic nationalistic approach right from the British colonial rule.
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- It has always nursed an opposition for Indian people and for the Indian state.
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- The opposition was there when the British left in 1947-48, and was reflected in the citizenship regulations of the post-colonial state.
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- To this day, Indians regardless of their religion are derogatorily referred to as "kalas" (aliens).
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- The Tamil community that remained in Myanmar, for instance, has been compelled to assume Burmese names, customs and language.
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- The dominant narrative remains one of a Bamar majoritarianism is unwilling to accommodate even the half-dozen significant ethnic minority groups.
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- The Myanmarese state and society refuse to even acknowledge there being a people called Rohingya.
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What is India’s actual stand on Myanmar ties?

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- Indian investors are preferring to invest in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam than in Myanmar with its anti-Indian bias.
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- A mere 35,000 Indians visited Myanmar in 2015 (compared to 150,000 Chinese).
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- In the same year, Indians invested around $730 million, constituting a mere 1.4 % of the foreign direct investment (FDI) in the country.
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- In comparison, Chinese investments of $18 billion constituted 34%of the total FDI.
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- It is possible to list a number of “under progress” projects in connectivity, energy and so on.
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How does Myanmar’s interest affect India?

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- Myanmar’s role is often exaggerated over the rampant collusion between various armed groups operating along the India-Myanmar border.
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- As far as cooperation in fighting insurgents goes, the Myanmarese are doing it only to the extent if it is in their interests.
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- Through the last couple of decades the nation is sheltering fugitive Pakistani nuclear scientists.
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- The nation is running drugs and arms smuggling rackets which severely affects bordering Indian states.
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- It is also playing host to Chinese listening posts.
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- For the past three decades, India’s plan on Myanmar in order to promote its interest from counter-insurgency to balancing China has produced lacklustre results.

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- The elites in Myanmar have always feared being swallowed by India and China, and it’s not as if Chinese domination is somehow more acceptable to them today.
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How can India revamp its ties with Myanmar?

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- India should stop seeing the region from the perspective of its own geopolitical insecurities.
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- India need not engage to prevent Myanmar from coming under Chinese dominance.
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- It is in Myanmar's interest to prevent itself from being dominated by China.
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- It is unnecessary to indulge in the military-majoritarian regime to the extent India has been doing.
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- India should back Bangladesh over the Rohingya issue and rally international support for Dhaka’s efforts for regional stability.
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- Contrary to conventional wisdom, India can afford to adopt a stricter approach.
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Source: Business Standard

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