Visit to Myanmar

Why in news?

India's Army Chief Manoj Vikram Naravane and Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shingla visited Myanmar.

What is the challenge?

- There is a common link between the challenges India face in Ladakh and the developments across our borders with Myanmar.
- The challenges in Myanmar arise from Chinese policies designed to use Myanmar soil to promote separatist violence in the north-eastern States.
- Virtually every armed insurgent group in the North-East has links with armed insurgent groups in north-western Myanmar.
- The notable one is the Kachin Independence Army, which operates across Myanmar's borders with China's bordering Yunnan province.
- China's relations with Myanmar are quite unique.
- Given existing sanctions by both the US and its European Allies, Myanmar has become heavily dependent on China.

What is happening at the border?

- The Myanmar-China border has become the epicentre of local armed separatist groups operating on Myanmar soil.
- Members of the Indian groups enter China's Yunnan after crossing the border into Myanmar's Kachin Province.
- They are welcomed, armed, trained and even financed in the Yunnan Province before crossing back to India.

What is the leverage for China?

- The indigenous armed separatist groups in Myanmar are used as leverage by China to influence Myanmar's internal affairs.
- These groups participate in the conference organised by the Myanmar Government for drafting a new Constitution for the country.
- China even has an Ambassador to liaise with armed groups operating along the China-Myanmar border.

How does Myanmar react?

- Myanmar is compelled to tolerate and live with Chinese interference.
- But, there have been recent instances when Myanmar has reacted strongly to Chinese transgressions.
- Myanmar has made no secret of its concerns about China's long-standing links with separatist groups in its north-eastern States.

What is India's strategic approach?

- Strategically, India has established its presence across the shores of Myanmar, in the Bay of Bengal.
- This was a result of participation of ONGC in successful offshore oil exploration projects.
- It also has a presence in Sittwe Port that it has built on the Bay of Bengal, for transportation of goods from north-eastern States to Kolkata.
- This is particularly important as, China is keen to build the Bay of Bengal Port of Kyaukphyu, linking the port to its Yunnan Province.
- The port is located not far from the Sittwe Port built by India.
- There are natural concerns in Myanmar of facing a debt trap situation on the Kyaukphyu port project built by China.

What should India do?

- **Quad** - India should join with its Quad partners on issues ranging from dealing with Rohingya refugees to projects involving large investments.
- The issue of Rohingya refugees is raising tensions between Myanmar and Bangladesh.
- It would be resolved by an inclusive effort involving Myanmar's affected regional neighbours and major external powers like Japan and the US.
- **Power balance** - Myanmar lies on the crossroads between India and Bangladesh, on the one hand, and ASEAN countries, on the other.
- It is on the crossroads of South and South-East Asia.
- The Quad will have to pay due attention to the problems and challenges that Myanmar faces from China.
- **Private sector** - India's private sector will have to be incentivised to map out a strategy to enhance its presence in Myanmar.
- India has, however, done well by establishing training institutions in information technology and agricultural research in Myanmar.
- **Military cooperation** with Myanmar is set to expand with the supply of a Kilo-Class submarine and torpedoes.
- Continuous support from the government and the Indian diplomatic missions in the country can serve Indian interests in Myanmar.

Source: Business Line

