

# China, India and Myanmar Triangular Relationship: In the Context of Rohingya Issues

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**Abstract:** Myanmar's geo-political and geo-economic position is very important to China and India. India and China are the two regional powers of Southeast Asia, although it shares border with the two countries. Basically, Myanmar is the center of connectivity to South Asia and Southeast Asia with the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. The new economic super power of the world. China's ambitious project BRI connects Myanmar with two corridors. Especially in the case of importing fuel oil and exporting products to the global market, Chinese ships have to go around the Malacca Strait, which is time consuming and costly and strategically risky. But using Kukpyu Port in Rakhine State will reduce China's dependence on the Malacca Strait and expand trade. That is why the bilateral relationship between the world's second largest economy China (GDP \$14.140 Trillion, 2019) and the 73rd economy Myanmar (GDP \$ 69.994, 2019) is very important (Ahamed, Rahman & Nur, 2020). China has been playing an important role in Myanmar's economic development through bilateral trade relations since 1988. From 1988 to 2018, 26% of all foreign investment in Myanmar came from China and as of June 2020, Chinese investment in Myanmar was US \$21350.668 Million (DICA, 2020). India shares a 1643 km land border with Myanmar with 4 northeastern states of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur. Myanmar is the gateway to the implementation of 'Act East Policy' and 'Neighborhood First Policy' announced by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 (Ahamed, Rahman & Nur, 2020). In addition, the world's two most important sea routes, The strait of Malacca and The strait of Hormuz, are connected to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean through the Bay of Bengal. Myanmar has a 725 km coastal boundary with the Bay of Bengal. Because of this, Myanmar is geo-politically and geo-strategically India., important to the Western world including China. Due to US presence in Indian Ocean, recent Sino-Indian conflict and Myanmar's strategic location, Sino-Myanmar relations have become one of the research topics at present. This article will analyze the multifaceted aspects of China-Myanmar relations.

**Key Word:** India, China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Rohingya, Geo politics.

## I. Introduction

China-Myanmar are geographically bordering two countries with a common border of 2185 km. Besides, other neighboring countries of Myanmar are Bangladesh, India, Thailand and Laos. The relationship between these two countries in Southeast Asia is very important especially for geopolitical and strategic reasons. The emergence of China as a new world superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union against the dominance of the US imperialist power in the current world system is a new research topic in politics. Especially in South and Southeast Asia, China has been cooperating financially and militarily with neighboring countries for the last few decades to increase its hegemony. continued In order for China to emerge as a new world power, it is very important to establish its own control in the region, especially in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal in terms of geopolitics and geo Economics. Due to the location of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean in the south of Myanmar, Myanmar's position is important to other western powers including India. Especially in natural resources. The abundant Indian Ocean contains 62% of the world's natural resources, 35% of natural gas, 40% of gold, 60% of uranium, and 80% of diamonds (Ahamed, Rahman 2020). In that case, Myanmar is one of the means to implement China's strategic interests. As a result, since the Chinese annexation on October 1, 1949, it has been playing an important role in the economic development of Myanmar based on bilateral relations. China is one of Myanmar's partners in terms of investment and exports. From 2009 to 2019, Myanmar's exports to China were \$5. 71 million dollars and China has invested \$ 21 billion dollars till March 2020(DICA, 2019). Following this, Chinese President Xi Zia Ping visited Myanmar on the occasion of celebrating 70 years of China-Myanmar diplomatic relations (January 17-18, 2020) and signed 33 trade agreements in various bilateral sectors, which is a new milestone in China-Myanmar relations (Financial Times, 2020).

For strategic reasons, China and Myanmar have become tested friends. After the 8 August 1988 student uprising in Myanmar and subsequent military takeover, Myanmar became economically isolated from the rest of the world. In particular, America became isolated from world trade due to the economic sanctions of European countries, and as the savior of Myanmar, China increased relations for strategic reasons and invested in all areas including military, natural resources, industry, agriculture and infrastructure development. Due to the increasing surveillance in the ocean, alternative communication systems are needed to keep the wheels of

China's economy moving. In particular, one of the main materials of China's economy is fuel oil, which China imports from various countries including the Middle East and Africa and enters China through the Strait of Malacca. But China's dependence on the Strait of Malacca for import and export is risky for strategic reasons. That's why Myanmar is the gateway to China's connection with Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East in order to implement China's luxury trade plan Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). As part of the BRI plan, China Myanmar Economic Under the Corridor (CMEC), a connecting road and railway will be built from Kunming, the capital of China's bordering Yunnan province, through Mandalay, the central province of Myanmar, to Yangon in the south and Kyaukphyu port in Rakhine state in the west (Financial Times, 2020). Basically, CMEC is China's gateway to the Bay of Bengal. In Lakh, China has invested US\$ 9 billion dollars to build the railway in Myanmar, \$ 1.68 billion dollars to build New Yangan Town and Port and Special Economic Zone project \$ 10 billion dollars (Frontier, 2019). It will be able to continue to import fuel oil and export products free from the influence of the United States. India's relationship with Myanmar is historically recognized. Both countries gained independence from British colonialism almost at the same time through nationalist movements. Myanmar is the only state in the region that shares a 1643 km land border with India's four northeastern underdeveloped states (Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh) and a 725 km coastal border with the Bay of Bengal. Also, Myanmar is home to 2.5 million people of Indian origin. That is why Myanmar is very important to India geopolitically and strategically. India adopted the Look East Policy in 1991 to increase economic and political relations with the ASEAN countries after the Cold War. It later expanded to Japan, China and the Republic of Korea. In 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi adopted a new 'Act East Policy' and 'Neighbourhood First' policy to boost trade relations with neighboring countries (Ahamed, Rahman & Nur, 2020). The purpose of which is to expand trade with Southeast Asia and Asia Pacific and Pacific Island countries.

However, the importance of Myanmar in regional diplomatic practices in the Pacific region and connectivity with South Asia and Southeast Asia is essential to India. Myanmar is an important member of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Strategically, Myanmar is centrally located as a bridgehead for India's trade expansion in Southeast Asia. Again, the Bay of Bengal connects the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean with the Malacca Strait and the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's trade routes. Due to its location on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, Myanmar is geopolitically important to other countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia, including India. In this article, I will discuss various aspects of China-India and Myanmar in the geopolitical and strategic field and determine the future course of action. Also, the role of China and India in the Rohingya issue will be evaluated.

### Objectives of the Research

1. Analyzing the importance of Myanmar's relations with China and India in geo-political and strategic terms
2. Analyzing the historical context of Myanmar's relations with China and India
3. Identifying Myanmar's economic and political interests with China and India
4. To analyze the bilateral relations of neighboring countries with Myanmar
5. Identifying obstacles in Myanmar's relations with China and India and determining the future.

### II. Research Methodology

The research work has been done in a qualitative manner. Various information and data used in this research have been collected from primary and secondary sources. In that case, various research articles related to the subject, journals, magazines, newspapers, archives, video records, information from various online portals. has been collected. Also, information has been collected from research works stored in various libraries of the country including online libraries. Also the subjects were analyzed based on the researchers own experience.

### China-Myanmar Relations in Geopolitical and Strategic Aspects

Neighboring Myanmar is geopolitically and strategically important for maintaining China's position as a superpower in global politics and accelerating economic growth. Myanmar is the connecting bridge of China's luxury project Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Geographically, China shares a 2185 km border with Myanmar. Good relations with Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam as neighboring countries are very important to keep itself free from the increasing influence of China's arch-nemesis USA in South Asia and Southeast Asia countries and to expand trade. Myanmar is very important to China for strategic reasons in terms of continuing to import Chinese fuel oil from the Middle East and African countries and exporting Chinese products to different parts of the world. Because over the past two decades, 80 to 85 percent of China's trade has been by sea. In this case, one of China's means of communication is Straits of Malacca which is not safe for strategic reasons. Especially in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, due to the increasing influence of other hostile states including the United States, China has been looking for an alternative way of importing and exporting in order to maintain its economic activities for a long time and its implementation is centered on Myanmar. A connecting road will be built from Kunming, the capital of Yunnan, China's southern province, to Kyaukphyu, Rakhine State in Myanmar. In 2009, China-Myanmar agreed to build a crude oil pipeline and natural gas pipeline with an investment of US\$ 1.5 billion and US\$ 1 billion respectively (Han, 2020). By doing this, the Bay

of Bengal will be connected with the Mediterranean Sea of China and the time of transportation of goods will be saved by about 2 weeks and the distance will be reduced by about two thousand kilometers. Also, the interference of the western world in the import and export of goods will be reduced.

Strategically, Sino-Myanmar relations are prime to China as they are beneficial to Myanmar. Due to the BRI project in Myanmar, which is isolated from the international arena, Chinese investment has increased hundreds of times. From a geopolitical point of view, Myanmar is not only important to China but also important to other Western worlds including the United States, India, and Russia. Because the Western world wants to hinder China's economic rise. Due to the United States' military agreement with India to increase its dominance in Southeast Asia including the Indian Ocean, which is one of China's concerns. On the other hand, another neighboring country of China, Japan, also has US military bases. Basically, for these strategic reasons, China has chosen Myanmar as an alternative trade route. March 2009 In the month, China-Myanmar signed a joint agreement to build the Kunming to Rakhine oil and gas pipeline at a cost of US\$1.5 billion and US\$1.04 billion (Weifeng, 2016).

### **India-Myanmar Relations in the Context of Geopolitics & Geo-Strategy**

Geo-politically and geo-strategically, Myanmar is of immense importance to India as the gateway to South-East Asia. Myanmar is the only country in South-East Asia which shares a border with India's four North-Eastern provinces (Mizoram-510KM, Manipur-398KM, Nagaland-215KM and Arunachal Pradesh 510KM) has a long border of 1643 km (Ahamed, Rahman & Nur, 2020). besides, due to the continuous increase of China's influence in Southeast Asia and India-China dispute on the Ladakh border, Myanmar also plays an important role as a buffer state. The Gateway of India's 'Act East Policy' and 'Neighborhood First Policy'. India's diplomatic, economic, and political relations with South Asian and Southeast Asian countries will be established through Myanmar. That is why Myanmar was granted SAARC observer status in 2008. China's economic and diplomatic relations with India's other neighbors, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. The days are increasing. In addition, China's military influence in the Bay of Bengal has increased due to its long-standing relationship with Myanmar. That is why relations with Myanmar are important for India to establish itself as a regional power and to expand trade with ASEAN states.

Maintaining the security and integrity of the 6 north-eastern states of India is a challenge due to their remote and remote location from the mainland. At the same time, Arunachal Pradesh has a 1125 km border with China which is strategically important. Also, due to the historical relationship between China and Myanmar, it is impossible to maintain the stability of these regions of India without the cooperation of Myanmar. India's northeastern provinces need internal security and stability to accelerate economic growth and development, which depends in large part on Myanmar's support. Again, it is time-consuming and expensive to transport goods from mainland India to these provinces. On the other hand, using Sittwe port in Myanmar's Rakhine province to transport goods to these regions will save time and money. Again, Myanmar is India's gateway for expanding trade in Southeast Asia, including ASEAN countries. That is why Myanmar is important geo-politically and geo-strategically.

Myanmar is naturally rich in gas, oil and mineral resources. Myanmar ranks 10th among the natural gas rich countries in the world. On the other hand, India needs gas, oil and electricity to continue its growing economic development, one of the sources of which can be Myanmar. Also, transportation of oil and gas and goods from Myanmar to India is relatively easy and affordable. Bay of Bengal is one of the source of natural resources and mineral resources of the world. Myanmar, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka can develop their economy by using the natural resources of the Bay of Bengal based on mutual agreement.

China-Myanmar bilateral relations have grown rapidly since 1990. China has become one of the major investors, especially in the military, hydropower, oil & gas, mining, etc. sectors. As of June 30, 2020, China has invested US\$ 21350.668 million in Myanmar, which is the second highest (Ahamed, Rahman & Nur, 2020). On the other hand, under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project, Myanmar is the gateway to connect China with Africa, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. In this, China can reduce its dependence on the Strait of Malacca and import fuel oil and export goods through the Bay of Bengal. China's presence in the Bay of Bengal is a threat to India's security. form At the same time, India took up the Kaladham Multi-Model Transit Transport project (KMMTTP) aimed at increasing connectivity with Myanmar. At the same time, it took initiatives to develop diplomatic and trade relations with Southeast Asian countries.

### **India – Myanmar Relations in the Context of Bay of Bengal**

The Bay of Bengal is very important geopolitically and geostrategically in India-Myanmar relations. It is located in the north-eastern part of the Indian Ocean. India is in the west and north-west of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh in the south and Myanmar and Andaman Nicobar Islands in the east. The Bay of Bengal is about 2172000 Square Kilometers. (839000 SQ mile) spread across the region. Its length is about 2090 km and width is 1610 km (Ahamed, Rahman & Nur, 2020). The Bay of Bengal is located between South and Southeast Asia. The importance of the Bay of Bengal is immense in the economic development of the region and the expansion of trade between the neighboring states. The joint initiative of India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka located on the

coast of the Bay of Bengal can play an important role in developing the 'Blue Economy'. The Bay of Bengal is rich in natural resources whose proper utilization can transform the economic status of the region

On the other hand, in terms of geo-strategy, the Bay of Bengal is very important in world trade. It connects India and the Pacific Ocean with two important sea routes of the world, Strait of Malacca and Strait of Hormuz. Also, the Bay of Bengal is the western coastal country of India with two important regions of the world, South Asia and Southeast Asia, added Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. On the other hand, it connects Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia through the eastern coast. That is why the Bay of Bengal is of great strategic importance to India and China, the two largest countries in the region. The Bay of Bengal has a long sea border with Myanmar and border connections with India, China, Thailand and Laos. Because of this, Myanmar is important to China and India in the expansion of trade and commerce in Southeast Asia.

In particular, Myanmar is the connecting path for the implementation of India's 'Act East Policy' and 'Neighbourhood First policy'. That is why it is strategically important to strengthen India's trade relations with Myanmar. However, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was formed in 1997 with the aim of free trade between the countries of the Bay of Bengal region. However, it has not been fully effective. On the other hand, China's military presence in the Bay of Bengal is increasing day by day due to the continuous improvement of Sino-Myanmar military relations, which poses a threat to India. In order to establish its control in the Bay of Bengal, China has built an intelligence monitoring station in the southwest of Myanmar, which is near the Indian military base in the Andaman-Nicobar Islands. Also, in recent times, China has deployed military ships in the Bay of Bengal for information collection and security. Again, India has its control in the Bay of Bengal through a military agreement with the United States. For these reasons, Myanmar is equally important to the Western world, including China, India, strategically and geopolitically in the Bay of Bengal.

### **Rohingya Crisis and the Role of China-India**

Arakan is a region on the southeastern border of Bangladesh. China and India to the north, the Bay of Bengal to the south and west, the middle boundary of the Naf River and the Chittagong Hill Tracts on the southeastern border of Bangladesh to the north and west (Akhand, 2013). The people of this Arakan are known as Rohingya. The issue of Rohingya crisis was not only Myanmar's issue for various reasons, it also has the role of the capitalist world including China and India. What is now Rakhine State was a part of the independent Arakan State. For hundreds of years of independent existence, the state has been overrun by Burmese rulers; But the Rohingyas of Arakan have always resisted those attacks together. Although Arakan became part of independent Burma as a legacy of British Burma. However, the ethnic groups of Arakan still could not accept the dominance of Burma in that way. Arakan was significant in the regions of Burma where ethnic rebellion is going on. About 90% of the Rohingya live in the western part of Rakhine State and are Muslim. Although they have been living permanently since ancient times, the Myanmar government has not recognized them as citizens of the state (Zarni & Cowley, 2014). However, there is evidence that they have been living on the border since before the first British colonization of Myanmar, i.e. before 1824. The Myanmar government does not recognize them as a minority. Although their constitution mentions that they will be citizens if they lived before the British colony. After independence in 1948, the government recognized the Rohingya as citizens (Holliday, 2014). Some of them were even elected members of parliament. However, after a military coup in 1962, the Rohingya in Myanmar underwent a policy change and military rule continued until 2011 (Gaetano, 2013). During the long-term rule, General N win started a Burmanization campaign targeting all ethnic groups in Myanmar (Walton, 2013). One of the steps taken by Myanmar's military junta government to keep the Rakhine down was to create a divide between the Rakhine and the Rohingya, the two main ethnic groups in Arakan. This was perpetuated in 1982 by denying the Rohingya civil rights through the creation of the Citizenship Act. The Myanmar government refuses to use the term Rohingya, and are promoting them as illegal Bengali immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh (Kipgen, 2014). As a result, most of the Rohingya Muslim population in Myanmar are stateless citizens; As they have no written documents living before the British colonization (Holliday, 2014). Ethnic conflicts between 1977 and 1992 drove many Rohingya from Myanmar and sought refuge in neighboring Bangladesh.

Furthermore, after the end of the military rule in 2010, the election led by Aung San Suu Kyi was elected and after she was elected to the State Council, it was thought that the Rohingya problem would be solved (Jones, 2014). However, since 2012, Buddhist persecution and violence against the Rohingya have increased. This has left around 10,000 homeless and killed around 1,000 people (Kipgen, 2014). Following this, in October 2016, ARSA attacked police and military forces near the Bangladesh border (ICG, 2017). In each north, the Myanmar military conducted a severe campaign and about 90,000 Rohingya fled the country and took refuge in Bangladesh (Han, 2020). On August 25, 2017, an attack that killed 14 members of the security forces sparked fresh conflict. This problem has become extreme and creates the precedent of the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Militants of the army attacked the Rohingya population in the name of killing, burned houses, violated human rights by means of murder, rape, etc." (Barany, 2018). In this situation, people fled and took shelter in the bordering country Bangladesh. From 25 August 2017 to 31 October 2017, about ten thousand people were killed and about 6 lakh people were forced to leave the country (Uddin, 2017).



Also, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar is identified as an ethnic and religious problem to the world community, but its real cause is capitalist interests. Especially the Arakan state where the Rohingyas live is rich in various natural resources including oil, gas, and coal and is geographically important. That is why China and India are playing the role of key players behind the Rohingya crisis. Since the establishment of trade relations between China and Myanmar in 1989, Chinese investment in Myanmar has increased steadily. In recent times, China has emerged as the largest investor in Myanmar. At the same time, India's investment has also increased. -Myanmar is very valuable to China in Dhaka for political and strategic reasons. Especially under China's new economic master plan BRI, Rakhine Province is the connecting bridge of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC). It is an oil and gas pipeline and road that stretches from Kyukpyu Port in Rakhine to Kunming. and by rail. Under this project, China will invest about 10 billion US dollars in ports and special economic zones (Reuters. 2017). Crude oil imported from the Middle East will be transported to Kunming in China's Yunnan Province through this pipeline. About 22 million tons of oil can be imported, which is 5 to 6 percent of China's total oil imports.

### **India's Strategic Interests and Bilateral Trade in Myanmar**

India's emergence as a rising economic power in Southeast Asia and the long-standing Sino-Myanmar relationship make India and Myanmar of immense importance for geopolitical and strategic reasons. In particular, China's rise as a world power and strengthening its position in the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal require good relations with neighboring countries including Myanmar. Myanmar (formerly Burma) has been a province of India since the British period. In 1937, it was made a Crown colony using it as a buffer zone between India and the rest of Asia. However, after independence in 1948, India-Myanmar relations deteriorated due to India's support for democracy during Myanmar's military rule. However, Delhi's Look East policy in the 1990s led to renewed relations with Myanmar. Connections between Asia and South-East Asia Myanmar is important to India as a bridgehead. On the other hand, the current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi adopted the 'Act East Policy' in 2014, trying to convince South East Asian countries that India is interested in establishing relations with the region. India needs good relations with Myanmar especially for security reasons and stability in the 4 southern states (Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland). Myanmar shares a common border of 1643 km with these four inlets. Myanmar also has 2276 km of coastline that shares the Bay of Bengal. Especially the areas around Coco Deep Pond and Andaman Sea are important for India's strategic reasons. China's growing presence in this region is a cause of concern for India. Also, Myanmar is important in establishing economic and political relations with ASEAN countries.

However, India-Myanmar relations opened new horizons in March 1993 with the visit of then Indian Foreign Secretary J. N. Dixit to Yangon, when India agreed to change its foreign policy and establish relations with the military government. Myanmar is a gateway to connecting ASEAN countries. It is also important to develop our own relations as members of various regional alliances in the region. Both India and Myanmar have various regional alliances viz.

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic co-operation (BIMST-EC), Mekong Ganga cooperation, Ayeyawady-chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), Greater Mekong Sub Regional Programme (GMS), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), East Asia Economic Cooperation (EAEC).

Additionally, high-level delegations of the two countries have met several times with the aim of accelerating India-Myanmar relations. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and the 9th East Asia Summit (November 11-13, 2014). During his visit, he met Myanmar President U Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi. Also Prime Minister Modi visited Myanmar on 5-7 September 2017. He then visited Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Bagan. Also in January 2018, Aung San Suu Kyi visited India on the occasion of the 25th India ASEAN Summit.

More over, since the signing of the India-Myanmar Bilateral Trade Agreement in 1970, the trade relationship between the two countries has grown rapidly. In the fiscal year 1990-'91, the trade was US \$ 87 million which increased to US \$ 577 million in the fiscal year 2004-2005. In the fiscal year 2016-2017 Trade relations between the two countries increased to US \$ 2.18 billion. Which was US \$ 12.4 Million in fiscal year 1980 to 1981 (Drishti, 2019). India-Myanmar took up the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project in 2008 to boost their trade relations. It connects India's northeastern Mizoram with Myanmar's Arakan state capital Sittwe. The project is a combination of the Kaladan River waterway and a highway. (Thang & Scott, 2015). Also Kolkata port along with Sittwe port will transport goods. Again in the field of investment, India is the 11th partner of Myanmar. 320 Indian companies have invested US \$ 763.6 million (Myanmar Times, 2019). On the other hand, India is Myanmar's fifth largest trading partner. Agriculture dominates India-Myanmar trade.

In particular, India imported Beans & pulses worth \$809 million and Timber worth \$156 million in 2016-17. On the other hand, India exported US \$ 424 million in FY (2016-'17) and US \$ 67 million in sugar and US \$ 178 million in pharmaceuticals in FY (2017-'18). India has also invested in Myanmar's gas sector. Last month, India bought Myanmar's Shwe oil. and gas project Block A-1, A-

3 allocated US \$ 121.27 million for development. ONGC Company has invested US\$ 722 million in Shwe project till 31 March 2019 (TheTelegraphindia,2020).

### **Bangladesh-Myanmar Geo-strategic and Trade Relations**

Strategically, as Myanmar is important to China, Bangladesh is equally important. Due to India being Bangladesh's largest neighbor and the recent improvement in relations between India and the United States, China is maintaining relations with Bangladesh to strategically dominate the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. Historically, the Bay of Bengal (BoB) has played an important role as a link of trade, commerce and culture and has been involved for centuries (Yhome, 2014). Relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar have existed since ancient times. Bangladesh is one of the five countries that border Myanmar. There is a 271 km border between the two countries, including the Naf River (Kumar, 2016). Myanmar gained its independence from the British in 1948. On the other hand, Bangladesh gained its independence from Pakistan on 16 December 1971 through a liberation war. Myanmar soon recognized Bangladesh as its seventh country. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on 21 March 1972 (Tun, 2016). After independence, there was significant progress in the relations between the two countries. As a result, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad visited Myanmar in 1972. In 1973, the Bangladesh government appointed K.M Kaiser as the ambassador of Bangladesh. In return, President U NE Win visited Bangladesh in 1974. However, despite the great potential, there has been no significant progress in the past 50 years except for border trade between the two countries.

Historically, the Bay of Bengal has played an important role as a connecting state in terms of trade and commerce, but formal trade between the two countries began on 13 January 1972 with the recognition of Bangladesh as a sovereign state. Between 1972 and 1985, three agreements were signed between 1972 and 1985 to enhance bilateral relations.

1. The General Trade Agreement (1973)
2. The Repatriation of Refugee Agreement (1978)
3. The Land Boundary Agreement (1979)

Besides, an agreement was signed in 1994 aimed at Bangladesh-Myanmar border trade, although the Teknaf-Maungdaw trade officially started on 5 September 1995. Later, a Bangladesh delegation visited Myanmar in 1998 (Singh, 2009). But other neighboring countries did not have significant success. In the fiscal year 2014-2015, Bangladesh exported goods worth 25 million dollars to Myanmar and imported goods worth 31 million dollars (Houqe,2016). According to Myanmar Ministry of Commerce statistics, the total trade volume in the last 5 fiscal years (2011-2012 to 2015-2016) was 275.698 million dollars which is less than half of Myanmar-Thailand 2011-2012 total trade (Tun, 2016).

Due to Myanmar's growing relationship with China and India, many believe that Bangladesh is declining geographically. Especially in Rakhine State, China-India's billion dollar investment is reducing the importance of Bangladesh in the region. Also, China is losing confidence due to Bangladesh's excessive dependence on India. In particular, the President of China expressed interest in building a deep sea port in Sonadia, Bangladesh, but India and America objected to it. As a result, China built a port in Kyukpyu, Rakhine State, Myanmar as an alternative. Still, China regards Bangladesh as a nexus to secure its position in the Bay of Bengal and implement the BRI.

On the Contrary, the difference between Bangladesh and Myanmar is that Kaypyidaw has been able to exploit its geographical and strategic position to create a competition between China and India. As a result, Beijing and New Delhi have built a deep sea port and special economic zone in Rakhine state. But Bangladesh has failed to utilize this facility. In recent years, not only Myanmar, but also the small state of Sri Lanka have built deep sea ports using the facilities. Pakistan has the largest deep sea in Asia. Built the port at Gwadar which is currently developing a billion dollar SEZ with the help of China. India has at least 10 sea ports. Bangladesh is the only country in the world that has failed to modernize the thousand-year-old port in the heart of the Bay of Bengal, which has increased Myanmar's importance to the world.

### **III. Conclusion**

The trilateral relationship between India, Myanmar and China is very important in the politics and economy of South and Southeast Asia. An important consideration in India-Myanmar, China trilateral relations is the potential for huge investment in Myanmar, which is rich in natural resources, and the desire of India and China to expand trade relations with the ASEAN countries. By improving India-Myanmar bilateral relations, the expected development of the economic conditions of both countries is possible if investment in the developing economy of Myanmar is increased. Also, Myanmar is of great geo-political and geo-strategic importance to India as a gateway to Southeast Asia. Due to China's growing influence in the Bay of Bengal, strengthening India's relationship with Myanmar is necessary to maintain regional stability. Also, trade relations with Myanmar are very important for expanding India's trade in Southeast Asian countries. In addition, the development of bilateral relations with China and India is important for Myanmar for the economic progress of Myanmar, which is internationally isolated due to the Rohingya crisis.

On the other hand, the emergence of China in terms of economic and military capabilities as a counter force to the single hegemony of the United States in the current world system is a relief news for world politics. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is one of the ways to establish itself as a 'super power' in the world arena. China's strategic partner to implement this initiative is Myanmar. Especially for the expansion of its own trade in the Indian Ocean, Middle East and African continent and as a new import and export high way as an alternative to the Strait of Malacca, the economic corridor and gas and oil pipeline from Rakhine to Kunming in Wuhan Province of China are very important. China transports its energy through this route. In addition, good relations with Myanmar and other neighbors and stability in the region are very necessary to establish their own control in the world system. At the same time, Myanmar is economically lagging behind others in the region due to its military rule for a long time. China has been investing in Myanmar's oil, gas and mineral resources since the 1990s. Moreover, Myanmar is one of the investment areas of China's economy. On the other hand, since the beginning of Myanmar's agro-based industry, the export of wood, agricultural products and marine fish to China is limited. As a result, there is a huge trade deficit between Myanmar and China. At the same time, various Chinese development projects have become a threat to Myanmar's environment and people's livelihood. In this situation, Myanmar can establish itself as a new partner in the world economy if it can maintain a long-term relationship based on mutual interests by establishing balanced trade relations with Myanmar. Similarly, China, Relations with India and Myanmar are also important for Bangladesh. Especially the role of China and India in economic development of Bangladesh and resettlement of Rohingyas is important.

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