



POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND MYANMAR(1992–2014): A VIEW FROM THE IMPACTS OF LOOK EAST POLICY

Nguyen Tuan Binh*

University of Education, Hue University
32 Le Loi St., Hue City, Vietnam

Abstract. After the Cold War, India has adjusted its foreign policy, called Look East Policy to serve the domestic economic reform and adapt to the new international situation. India's Look East Policy is the policy toward the Southeast Asia region, which possesses abundant natural resources and plays a role in the support for India in the Asia – Pacific region strategy. The foreign policy of India can get results on economics, politics, and society for this country. Besides, this success brings useful experiences for ASEAN countries, in general, and Myanmar, in particular, when they enforce their new foreign policy. Myanmar is considered as a "bridge" between India and Southeast Asia. This Southeast Asian country has become an important role in the shift of India to the East. With its strategic location, Myanmar plays an important role in India's Look East Policy. With the positive impact of the Look East Policy, the relationship between India and Myanmar from 1992 to 2014 has achieved many positive results, contributing to the development of each country.

Keywords. India, Look East, Myanmar, policy, politics

1. Some remarks about India's Look East Policy

The Look East Policy was officially launched in 1992 and was enforced by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao (1991–1996). This new foreign policy in India's long-term strategic considerations aimed at building and expanding India's influence in the Asia-Pacific region, simultaneously competing and curbing to China in this region and especially in the Indian Ocean – India's traditional area of influence. Basically, the general objective of this policy is to move India into the military and economic power country not only in Asia but also across the world. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asserted: "This is a strategic shift in India's vision for the world and New Delhi's *position* in the global economy"¹. *India deploys the Look East Policy to*

¹ Vietnam News Agency (2006), "India: Look East Policy Is More Open and More Successful", *The Special Reference Document*, vol. 8, Ha Noi, Vietnam, p. 6.

* Corresponding: nguyentuanbinh@gmail.com

develop economy and trade relations with East Asian countries and maintain a high and stable growth of India's economy. Besides, India makes an effort toward economic integration with the Asia – Pacific region in which India aims at building the Asian Economic Community². Thus, the objective of India's Look East Policy was shown rather clearly. India aimed at becoming a regional power to get its economic and strategic benefits, simultaneously curbing and competing with China – a neighbour country. To reach this objective, the Look East Policy was seen as a new direction for India's foreign policy after the Cold War³.

The birth of the Look East Policy stems from many factors. *Firstly*, the collapse of the Soviet Union and East European communist bloc had made India lose the place which had a very important support about economics, politics, and defense. Although India is not a member of the socialist bloc, it has a close relationship with the Soviet Union. Especially, from the Sino – Indian War in 1962, India – The Soviet Union relations became more intimate with the signing of The Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation between the two countries in 1971. *“If the relationship between India and the Soviet Union was the strategic alliance which was based on political interests, the Soviet Union was also the strong support of India in terms of economy and tary”*⁴. Thus, the collapse of the Soviet Union strongly affected the economic and political situation in India. This can be seen as a decisive factor for India's foreign policy adjustment. *Secondly*, the consequences of the Gulf War (1990–1991) have affected the main oil supply of India. As a petroleum importing country, India has faced many difficulties since this war broke out. India lost a total of 500 million USD from its debt in Iraq and about 112 million USD in the trade with Iraq and Kuwait⁵. This circumstance has made India seek new sources of energy supply. *Thirdly*, the rise of China's economy has been perceived by India as a threat towards India's interests at the Indian Ocean and the East. The objective of the Look East Policy is to look for an area to help India counterbalance with other countries, first of all, ASEAN countries, China, Japan, etc. At the same time, this policy will help India resolve some problems in the South Asia region. Although the Cold War ended, the relationship between India and South Asian countries has still faced many difficulties due to the instability of this region concerning situations in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, etc. *Fourthly*, after the Cold War, India faced the unrest threats of terrorism in Punjab, Jammu, and Kashmir. Thus, India should establish outside partnerships to prevent

²Muni S.D. (2011), “India's Look East Policy: The Strategic Dimension”, *ISAS Working Paper*, No. 121, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, p. 17.

³Tran Thi Ly (2002), *The Adjustment Policies of the Republic of India from 1991 to 2000*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Ha Noi, Vietnam, p. 131.

⁴Vo Xuan Vinh (2011), *ASEAN in India's Look East Policy*, Historical Ph.D. dissertation, The Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi, Vietnam, p. 18.

⁵Prakash Nanda (2003), *Rediscovering Asia: Evolution of India's Look East Policy*, Lancer Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, India, p. 268.

these threats. Moreover, India has increased cooperation with the Asia-Pacific's countries to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. *Lastly*, because of the economic crisis, India must carry out the reform to stabilize and improve the people's lives. This posed an urgent need for the Government of India to strengthen diplomatic relations to restore and develop its economy effectively. In summary, from the inside and outside factors mentioned above, in order to stabilize and develop the country and enhance its position on the international arena, India has carried out the Look East Policy.

India's Look East Policy is divided into two distinct phases. The first phase lasted roughly one decade, from 1992 to 2002, and was implemented under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao (1991–1996) and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998–2004). This is a period in which India resumed the regional relations. Before 1990, India focused on maintaining diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, which were established shortly after India gained Independence in 1947. The fact that India pursued the Soviet and South Asian region biased foreign policy made it almost out of the development process in the East Asia region. This is the reason for India to rebalance its foreign policy which reflected in the Look East Policy. The first phase of the Look East Policy centred and focused primarily on trade and investment linkages with Southeast Asian countries.

The second phase, which began in 2002, marked a new step forward by achieving free trade agreements and establishing the economic linkage between India and other countries in the region⁶. The second phase of the Look East Policy is also marked by the following characteristics. *Firstly*, it is a geographical expansion. If the content of the first phase is primarily to develop trade and economic relations with ASEAN countries, the second phase is the expansion of the "East" to Northeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand in the South Pacific, while strengthening the economic and security cooperation with these countries. The rise of China and the shift of the global strategic focus of the United States to the Asia-Pacific region have made the geopolitical landscape of this region change, therefore India has begun to actively participate in and become a catalyst for the political developments in the region. At the 35th Anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Vietnam and India (1972–2007) in Hanoi, the Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India Pradeep Kumar Kapur also affirmed that "*The main goal of the Look East Policy at the beginning of the 1990s was to strengthen relations with ASEAN. This policy is gradually expanding into the Far East and Pacific region and create favourable conditions for India to have closer links with China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji,*

⁶Jayanth V. (2004), "Narasimha Rao and the Look East Policy", <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2004/12/24/stories/2004122407541200.htm>.

Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands"⁷. In short, "Look East" is now not only toward South-east Asia but also toward the Asia-Pacific region. *Secondly*, the expansion of the field of cooperation encompasses several different areas, particularly security and defense cooperation, such as joint military exercises on the sea in the fight against terrorism. *Thirdly*, India recognizes that connectivity with Southeast Asia also includes geography. In the second phase of the policy, India also began to develop roads and transportation between India and Southeast Asia. The India – Myanmar – Thailand Highway and the New Delhi – Hanoi Railway Project are two of the examples. *Finally*, if the first stage is the tendency of competition and restraint of China, in the next stage, despite the competition, there is also a tendency to cooperate with China to solve bilateral issues. It could be said, with the Look East Policy, the Asia-Pacific region was considered as "a springboard for India to enter the global market"⁸. In 2014, when the Look East Policy was changed into "Act East" policy, India expanded and improved its relations with Northeast Asia and South Pacific countries in all dimensions: the political, cultural and economic fields except ASEAN. This is reflected in the continuous efforts to strengthen relations with Australia, Japan and South Korea⁹.

In India's Asia-Pacific strategy and Look East Policy, Southeast Asia, in general, and Myanmar, in particular, hold a very important strategic position, "as a vital factor for the success of India's Look East Policy"¹⁰. Myanmar creates a link not only between India and Southeast Asian countries but also between South Asia and Southeast Asia and takes an uninterrupted connection from India to Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand. Myanmar is the only country in Southeast Asia that has a border of 1463 km on land and sea with India. Myanmar is India's gateway to Southeast Asia and could be the required impetus to realize India's Look East Policy¹¹. Myanmar is viewed from India's perspective as a "land bridge" that connects India with Southeast Asia and as such a vital link in its new trade route via Look East Policy¹². In this policy, Indian policymakers considered the Northeast region to be the starting point for India's "link" with Southeast Asia in order to restore the historical ties between India with Thailand, Laos,

⁷ Vo Xuan Vinh (2009), "Some Basic Contents in India's Look East Policy", *Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 10, Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Ha Noi, Vietnam, p. 57.

⁸ Vo Xuan Vinh (2011), *ASEAN in India's Look East Policy*, Historical PhD dissertation, The Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi, Vietnam, p. 33.

⁹ Rahul Mishra (2014), "From Look East to Act East: Transitions in India's Eastward Engagement", Special Forum, <http://www.theasianforum.org/from-look-east-to-act-east-transitions-in-indias-eastward-engagement/>.

¹⁰ Vietnam News Agency (2006), "India Increases Its Pressure on Myanmar", *The Special Reference Document*, vol. 155, Ha Noi, Vietnam, p. 7.

¹¹ Sridhar Ramaswamy, Tridivesh Singh Maini (2014), "The Strategic Importance of Myanmar for India", <http://thediplomat.com/2014/08/the-strategic-importance-of-myanmar-for-india/>.

¹² Bertil Lintner (2007), "India Stands by Myanmar Status Quo", Asia Times online, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/IK14Df02.html.

Cambodia, and Vietnam through Myanmar to promote trade cooperation. Consequently, India – Myanmar relations in the field of politics and diplomacy from 1992 to 2014 had many favourable conditions to develop when India deployed its new foreign policies, such as the Look East Policy.

2. Impact of Look East Policy on the political and diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar(1992–2014)

The policy of India towards Myanmar has made fundamental changes since 1992 (this is when India's Look East Policy was initiated), therefore, India – Myanmar relations were also significantly improved. Since the Cold War, the political and diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar have developed gradually, marked by visits, exchanges, bilateral talks, and regular contacts in the high level between the two countries, during which several important documents were signed in many fields of the corporation between India and Myanmar.

In 1992, the Burmese government responded positively to India's offer to normalize the bilateral relationship. An eight-member Burmese delegation led by U Aye, DirectorGeneral of the Political Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visited India from 11 to 14 August 1992 and met the senior officials of the ministries of External Affairs, Home, Defense and Commerce of the Government of India. This was the first ever official Indo-Burmese senior-level meeting since Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Myanmar in 1987. In March 1993, India's Foreign Secretary Jyotindra Nath Dixit visited Rangoon and met the Burmese leaders, including Lt. General Khin Nyunt. During this visit, the agreement of drug smuggling control across the border and the border trade agreement were signed¹³. These two bilateral visits were viewed as misunderstanding-managing exercises for both countries. Simultaneously, India specifically asked the Burmese government to release all political prisoners and stressed that India continued to support the restoration of democracy in Myanmar.

In January 1994, Myanmar's Deputy Foreign Minister U Nyunt Swe visited India; during his six-day visit, he held a series of meetings with Indian ministerial officials and discussed wide-ranging issues to improve the relationship between the two countries. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 21 January 1994 to increase cooperation between the civilian border authorities of the two countries and to prevent "*illegal and insurgent activities*"¹⁴.

¹³ Yogendra Singh (2007), "India's Myanmar Policy: A Dilemma Between Realism and Idealism", *IPCS Special Report*, No. 37, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, India, p. 1.

¹⁴ Aung Zaw, David Arnott, Kavi Chongkittavorn, Zunetta Liddell, Kaiser Morshed, Soe Myint and Thin Thin Aung (2001), *Challenges to Democratization in Burma: Perspectives on Multilateral and Bilateral Responses*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, Sweden, p. 94.

After the end of Cold War, India has maintained the commercial and strategic relations with Southeast Asian countries as a part of the Look East Policy. ASEAN is a regional organization, which plays strategically and politically important position for India in its integration with East Asia and Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, ASEAN is also an important factor for the process of building ASEAN Economic Community as well as “the motive force” to lead the multilateral corporation structures in the region of India. India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992 and a full dialogue partner in December 1995. The relationship between India and Myanmar has developed to a new level since 1997 when Myanmar became a member of ASEAN. In February 1998, the Deputy Foreign Minister of India Rangunath visited Myanmar to further strengthen the bilateral relationship, which was resumed in the early 1990s. Since the late 1990s, Myanmar has stepped up its regional integration to diversify its foreign policy and escaped isolation, particularly when Myanmar joined to ASEAN (1997) and sub-regional organizations such as Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) (December 1997) and the Mekong – Ganga Cooperation (MGC) (2000). This is another stimulus to position Myanmar within the Look East Policy. These two projects underlie cooperation in tourism and education, emphasize links between Indian traditional culture and ASEAN, and could also become important measures for promoting relations with Myanmar. Additionally, they aimed at enhancing trade and encouraging the development of an appropriate socio-economic strategy through infrastructure construction programs, e.g., the Trans – Asia Highway Project, so that the region would be transformed to a base for domestic and foreign investors, to tap the contiguous markets of China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and beyond. India is already engaged in constructing linkages with Myanmar and recognizes that since roads and communication constitute important elements of infrastructure in the economy, therefore, physically connecting the Northeast to the business centres of Southeast Asia was extremely important.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Myanmar is still an important factor in the second phase of India's Look East Policy, as Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's speaking: “*Myanmar is the key partner in India's Look East Policy and has the perfect position to act as an economic bridge between India and China, between South Asia and Southeast Asia*”¹⁵. To implement their purposes, India has focused on further developing bilateral relations, primarily in the political and diplomatic fields.

On November 14th, 2000, a visit to India made by General Maung Aye – the Vice Chairperson of The *State Peace and Development Council* was the first step to enhance India – Myanmar

¹⁵ Nguyen Truong Son (2015), *Towards the East – A Great Strategy of India*, National Political Publishing House, Ha Noi, Vietnam, p. 28.

relations to a new stage¹⁶. The visit of General Maung Aye was a high-level contact between India and Myanmar from the visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to Myanmar in 1987. The visit marked the success of the effective cooperation of the two countries since the mid-90s of the 20th century. This shows that India is opening up a new phase in its relationship with Myanmar and is ready to pursue its interests in Asia.

In January 2002, Myanmar and India signed an agreement to re-open the Consulate General in each side. Following this document, the Consulate General of Myanmar was re-opened in Calcutta, India. At the same time, the Indian Consulate General was set up in Mandalay (Myanmar)¹⁷. Re-opening Consulates General has contributed to the recovery of the institutional mechanism needed for regular dialogues between the two countries. At the end of October 2004, Senior General Than Shwe paid the first state visit to India. At the meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Senior General Than Shwe emphasized that Myanmar would not allow any insurgent groups' activities on its territory, and he pledged to restore democracy in Myanmar simultaneously and hoped to receive support from India. He also supported India's effort to become a member of the United Nations Security Council. In return, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh pledged to support Senior General Than Shwe's efforts to establish Myanmar's democracy. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed with Senior General Than Shwe that "*democracy time period is a complex process, but it creates favourable conditions for political stability and economic development*"¹⁸. During this visit, India and Myanmar signed three documents, including the Protocol on strengthening anti-terrorism cooperation, drug trafficking, weapons, money laundering, organized crime, international economic crimes, the Cultural Exchange Agreement to 2006, and the cooperation in a hydropower project in Myanmar. In addition to the above statements, India and Myanmar signed a memorandum of understanding on non-traditional security cooperation and joint military cooperation of the two countries against the active groups of rebels in Manipur and Naga in the border region. In short, Senior General Than Shwe's visit was a historic visit enhancing Myanmar – India relations to a new long stage. Through Senior General Than Shwe's visit, India made no secret about engaging Myanmar as a centre of South Asia area.

¹⁶ Khriezo Yhome (2009), *India – Myanmar Relations (1998 – 2008): A Decade of Redefining Bilateral Ties*, ORF Occasional Paper #10, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, India, p. 3–4.

¹⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2012), "India – Myanmar Relations" <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/myanmar-july-2012.pdf>.

¹⁸ Vietnam News Agency (2006), "India Connects Arch with Myanmar", *The Special Reference Document*, vol. 98, Ha Noi, Vietnam, p. 15.

From March 8 to 10, 2006, India's President Abdul Kalam was all set to visit Myanmar¹⁹. This is the first official visit of an Indian head of state to Myanmar over the past 24 years. Within the framework of the visit, India and Myanmar signed an agreement on cooperation in the field of remote sensing technology and two memorandums of cooperation in the field of oil and Buddhist studies²⁰. During the visit, President Abdul Kalam offered to help build the institutional system and restore the democratic system in Myanmar. This showed that India's efforts for the democratic reforms in Myanmar had an important contribution in promoting democracy through the official channels, diplomats, and in the discussions between the two governments.

Before the general election took place in Myanmar (according to the "seven-step roadmap to democracy"²¹) on July 25, 2010, General Than Shwe paid a five-day official visit to India to enlist international support for the efforts to build a "democracy plan" in this country and had talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Two leaders issued a joint statement and announced some agreements, including five agreements on cooperation against terrorism and the preferences of India for Myanmar. According to these agreements, 60 million USD of a loan was allocated to invest in the construction projects of roads and 10 million USD to buy machinery. During the talks, India promised to help Myanmar build the democratic institutions by providing the training programs for Myanmar officials²². When Myanmar was under the pressure from the international community, General Than Shwe's visit to India (before coming to China) was seen as a major action to improve Myanmar's image. India – Myanmar cooperation, in general, and political-diplomatic relations, in particular, had new development bases as stated by Indian President Pratibha Devisingh Patil, "I am confident that, just like your previous visit, this visit will prove to be a milestone in our ever-expanding ties and bring our countries even closer"²³.

On October 12, 2011, Myanmar President Thein Sein visited India to promote bilateral cooperation with its western neighbour. This is Thein Sein's first official visit after taking up

¹⁹ Amit Baruah (2006), "Kalam to Visit Myanmar", <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-international/kalam-to-visit-myanmar/article3172626.ece>.

²⁰ Bibhu Prasad Routray (2011), "India – Myanmar Relations: Triumph of Pragmatism", *Jindal Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 1, Issue 1, India, p. 306.

²¹ The 7-step Road Map includes: 1. Reconvening of the National Convention that has been adjourned since 1996; 2. After the successful holding of the National Convention, step by step implementation of the process necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic state; 3. Drafting of a new constitution in accordance with basic principles and detailed basic principle laid down by the National Convention; 4. Adoption of the constitution through national referendum; 5. Holding of free and fair elections for Pyithu Hluttaws (Legislative bodies) according to the new constitution; 6. Convening of Hluttaws attended by Hluttaw members in accordance with the new constitution; 7. Building a modern, developed and democratic nation by the state leaders elected by the Hluttaw; and the government and other central organs formed by the Hluttaw.

²² Avtar Singh Bhasin (2011), *India's Foreign Relations – 2010 Documents*, Geetika Publishers, New Delhi, India, p. 1300–1308.

²³ Avtar Singh Bhasin (2011), *India's Foreign Relations – 2010 Documents*, Geetika Publishers, New Delhi, India, p. 1310.

office on March 30, 2011. During the visit, President Thein Sein held talks with Indian President P.D. Patil and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. In the meetings, India congratulated the transition to civilian government and offered support to promote Myanmar's more comprehensive and far-reaching democratization process. India also applauds the political, economic and social reform efforts in Myanmar over the past few years. The Prime Minister of India and the President of Myanmar reiterated their shared commitment to strengthen and broaden the multifaceted relationship based on shared history, civilizational ties and close religious, linguistic and cultural affinities and to take it to a new level. While acknowledging the fact that both sides have a responsibility to promote peace, security, and stability in the region, they emphasized the need to intensify economic, social and developmental engagement to bring about overall socio-economic betterment and inclusive growth. They agreed on enhancing effective cooperation and coordination between the security forces of the two countries in tackling the deadly menace of insurgency and terrorism, which caused countless loss of innocent lives. Both sides also underscored the need to strengthen institutional mechanisms for sharing of intelligence to combat the menace of insurgency, arms smuggling and drug trafficking²⁴. The visit of President Thein Sein is also an opportunity for India to further expand its relationship with Myanmar. In the new context of the 21st century, President Thein Sein's visit to India demonstrates Myanmar's willingness to enhance bilateral relations and is also seen as an event that promotes ties.

In 2012, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh paid a historical visit to Myanmar, which took place from May 27th to 29th. This is the first visit of an Indian prime minister within 25 years since 1987. The purpose of this visit was promoting cooperation and bilateral relations between India and Myanmar in various fields: politics, security, trade and investment, etc. The agreement between the two countries consisted of 12 points on strengthening bilateral relations, establishing the border regional markets, trade forums and joint investments, building the border security mechanisms, the agricultural research centre, and the cultural exchange program in Myanmar. This visit was not only a step in India – Myanmar relations but also confirmed an important role of this Southeast Asian country in India's Look East policy.

In May 2014, after becoming the 15th Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi decided to take the name "Act East" instead of the Look East Policy. In his speech at the India – ASEAN Summit in November 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared: "*A new era of economic development, industrialization and trade has begun in India. Externally, India's "Look East Policy" has become "Act East Policy"*"²⁵. Minister of Foreign Affairs Sushma Swaraj has stated: "*The Look East is no longer suitable, we now need Act East*". Regarding the policy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi

²⁴ Avtar Singh Bhasin (2012), *India's Foreign Relations – 2011 Documents*, Geetika Publishers, New Delhi, India, p. 1138.

²⁵ Narendra Modi (2014), "English Rendering of the India – ASEAN Summit Opening Statement by the PM", <http://www.narendramodi.in/english-rendering-of-the-india-asean-summit-opening-statement-by-the-pm-6876>.

cared about the promotion of economic programs with the Southeast Asian countries to attract investment, especially in the field of infrastructure as well as the connection trade points in the area. The government of India wants to have more practical actions in strengthening the relations with ASEAN countries. This can be seen as an advance of India in consolidating the strategic relations and expanding economic ties with the Southeast Asian countries. With the first steps of "Act East", we could realize that the Southeast Asia region still remains a major role in the foreign strategy of India. This creates the favourable conditions for India-ASEAN relations, in general, and India - Myanmar, in particular, to be consolidated and developed in the next years.

3. Conclusion

1. The Look East Policy of India is the policy towards the East. It took Southeast Asia as a centre with the purpose of making India flourish the economy and elevate its political strategy position in the world. The policy of India toward Myanmar has had basic adjustments since 1992 when India implemented the Look East Policy with many clever, flexible and real methods. To implement that policy well, Myanmar was considered as a very important link between India and Southeast Asia, as the President Pratibha Devisingh Patil's speaking: "*Myanmar's location makes it a natural bridge between the member countries of the ASEAN on the one hand and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on the other. For us, Myanmar is our gateway to ASEAN and central to our Look East Policy. Myanmar is an active fellow member of BIMSTEC and an observer in SAARC. Together, India and Myanmar can make important contributions to regional cooperation initiatives and help bring the countries of this region closer*"²⁶. Through strengthening improved relations with Myanmar, India contributed to stabilizing the political situation in South Asia, thereby reaching Southeast Asian countries, gaining the position of India, clearing the path to Asia - Pacific. It could be said that India's Look East Policy was considered as the basic factor that directly affected the relationship between India and Myanmar. In the early 21st century, Myanmar's foreign policy has also changed on the basis of the trend of diversification and multilateralisation to avoid over-reliance on China. The position of India and Myanmar is growing internationally, while India is considered as one of the "emerging" countries, Myanmar is considered as the "crossroads of Asia". India - Myanmar relations (1992-2014) in the field of politics and diplomacy had favourable factors for improvement and development.

²⁶ Avtar Singh Bhasin (2011), *India's Foreign Relations - 2010 Documents*, Geetika Publishers, New Delhi, India., p. 1310.

2. Before 1992, under the Burmese military leadership and the impact of the Cold War, the political and diplomatic relations between Myanmar and India entered difficult years with many obstacles. Restricting diplomacy with India in the years of 1962–1991 caused Myanmar to lose its “close neighbour”, a democratic country that always supported Myanmar in the years of national liberation and after independence. Although two countries still maintained diplomatic relations at the ambassador level, it seemed that India and Myanmar had “*forgotten each other*” for a long time. Since 1992, however, under the powerful impact of the Look East Policy, the political and diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar have been developed in various forms, many levels of diversity and abundance, such as the talks of senior leaders of two countries, high-level specialized meetings, local leaders, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms. Signing the agreements, treaties, declarations, joint statements, and other documents of the two countries has provided the legal basis and basic direction for the activities in the fields of trade, investment, security-defense, etc. In short, during the long period (1992–2014), the political and diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar gained great achievements, improved changes, and strengthened development. What this relationship achieved is important to create a stable and peaceful environment for the development of India and Myanmar, simultaneously contributes to ensuring security and maintaining the stability and development of South Asia, South East Asia and Asia – Pacific in the following years.

References

1. Amit Baruah (2006), “Kalam to Visit Myanmar”, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-international/kalam-to-visit-myanmar/article3172626.ece>, March 23, 2012.
2. Aung Zaw, David Arnott, Kavi Chongkittavorn, Zunetta Liddell, Kaiser Morshed, Soe Myint and Thin Thin Aung (2001), *Challenges to Democratization in Burma: Perspectives on Multilateral and Bilateral Responses*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, Sweden.
3. Avtar Singh Bhasin (2011), *India’s Foreign Relations – 2010 Documents*, Geetika Publishers, New Delhi, India.
4. Avtar Singh Bhasin (2012), *India’s Foreign Relations – 2011 Documents*, Geetika Publishers, New Delhi, India.
5. Bertil Lintner (2007), “India Stands by Myanmar Status Quo”, Asia Times online, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/IK14Df02.html, Nov 14, 2007.
6. Bibhu Prasad Routray (2011), “India – Myanmar Relations: Triumph of Pragmatism”, *Jindal Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 1, Issue 1, India, 299–321.
7. Khriezo Yhome (2009), *India – Myanmar Relations (1998 – 2008): A Decade of Redefining Bilateral Ties*, ORF Occasional Paper #10, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, India.

8. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2012), "India – Myanmar Relations" <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/myanmar-july-2012.pdf>, July 2012.
9. Narendra Modi (2014), "English Rendering of the India – ASEAN Summit Opening Statement by the PM", <http://www.narendramodi.in/english-rendering-of-the-india-asean-summit-opening-statement-by-the-pm-6876>, November 12, 2014.
10. Nguyen Truong Son (2015), *Towards the East - A Great Strategy of India*, National Political Publishing House, Ha Noi, Vietnam.
11. Prakash Nanda (2003), *Rediscovering Asia: Evolution of India's Look East Policy*, Lancer Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, India.
12. Rahul Mishra (2014), "From Look East to Act East: Transitions in India's Eastward Engagement", Special Forum, <http://www.theasanforum.org/from-look-east-to-act-east-transitions-in-indias-eastward-engagement/>, December 01, 2014.
13. S.D. Muni (2011), "India's Look East Policy: The Strategic Dimension", *ISAS Working Paper*, No. 121, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.
14. Sridhar Ramaswamy, Tridivesh Singh Maini (2014), "The Strategic Importance of Myanmar for India", <http://thediplomat.com/2014/08/the-strategic-importance-of-myanmar-for-india/>, August 12, 2014.
15. Tran Thi Ly (2002), *The Adjustment Policies of the Republic of India from 1991 to 2000*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Ha Noi, Vietnam.
16. V. Jayanth (2004), "Narasimha Rao and the Look East Policy", <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2004/12/24/stories/2004122407541200.htm>, Dec 24, 2004.
17. Vietnam News Agency (2006), "India: Look East Policy Is More Open and More Successful", *The Special Reference Document*, vol. 8, Ha Noi, Vietnam.
18. Vietnam News Agency (2006), "India Connects Arch with Myanmar", *The Special Reference Document*, vol. 98, Ha Noi, Vietnam.
19. Vietnam News Agency (2006), "India Increases Its Pressure on Myanmar", *The Special Reference Document*, vol. 155, Ha Noi, Vietnam.
20. Vo Xuan Vinh (2009), "Some Basic Contents in India's Look East Policy", *Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 10, Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Ha Noi, Vietnam, 55–61.
21. Vo Xuan Vinh (2011), *ASEAN in India's Look East Policy*, Historical PhD dissertation, The Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi, Vietnam.
22. Yogendra Singh (2007), "India's Myanmar Policy: A Dilemma Between Realism and Idealism", *IPCS Special Report*, No. 37, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, India, 1–5.