Syllabus subtopic: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the details of the agreement signed; about India-Myanmar relations

News: The visiting Myanmar President U Win Myint had a meeting with PM Modi on important bilateral issues. The two sides signed 10 agreements with a focus on socioeconomic development of Myanmar.

Key takeaways from the meeting

Some of the major takeaways are

1. Bus service between Manipur’s Imphal and Myanmar’s Mandalay,

2. more Rakhine state development programme projects,

3. medical radiation equipment for treatment of cancer patients,

4. cooperation on petroleum, including in refinery, stockpiling, blending and retail.

Details of the agreements signed

- India’s assistance in the construction of Integrated Check Point at Tamu, Myanmar, bordering Manipur, will also be done. For ease of people-to-people movement across the border at Moreh Tamu, the two countries signed the Land Border Crossing Agreement in 2018, which allowed bona fide travellers with valid document to cross the border at two international points of entry/exit: Moreh-Tamu and Zokhawathar- Rih.

- They also decided to extend the Quick Impact Project schemes to Myanmar. Under this, India takes up capacity development work in the form of small projects which yield quick beneficial results for the local people.
On the side of governance, India will help Myanmar with the project of e-ID cards, which is modelled after the Aadhaar project.

The two sides decided to provide more projects to Rakhine State Development Programme. India had committed $25 million grant assistance to Myanmar over a period of five years and phase-I involved completion of 250 prefabricated house in Rakhine State.

The two sides also expressed commitment to continue negotiations on various pending treaties like Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty and Extradition Treaty.

India will also support establishment of Myanmar’s diplomatic academy, and extend National Knowledge Network to Myanmar.

They also reiterated Indo-Pacific concept, as both sides agreed to work together to promote principles of openness, inclusiveness, transparency, respect for international law and ASEAN centrality in Indo-Pacific.

The agreements included an MoU on ‘Cooperation for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons; Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation and Re-Integration of Victims of Trafficking’.

India Myanmar Relations

India and Myanmar have traditionally had much in common, with cultural, historical, ethnic and religious ties, in addition to sharing a long geographical land border and maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal.

Importance of Myanmar for India

- Cultural, historical, ethnic and religious ties
To tackle insurgency in North-East – “a large number of cross-border ethnic groups and insurgents from Northeast India have military bases in Myanmar

For Economic development of North-East – Act east policy – Myanmar lies at tri-junction of east, southeast and south Asia

Strategically important to India as it is the only ASEAN country that shares a border with India

India is eying Myanmar’s abundant oil and natural gas reserves to meet her energy requirements

Myanmar, a rapidly growing economy, offers significant opportunities for trade in goods and services, investment and project exports.

Forums shared by both countries: ASEAN; BIMSTEC; Mekong Ganga Cooperation

In addition to a land border, both countries also share a long maritime boundary in the strategically significant Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal where they face common challenges, which include not just a rising China but illegal fishing and smuggling.

Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project

The project will connect the seaport of Kolkata with Sittwe seaport in Myanmar by sea; it will then link Sittwe seaport to Lashio in Myanmar via Kaladan river boat route & then from Lashio on to Mizoram in India by road transport.

It will reduce distance from Kolkata to Mizoram by approximately 1000 km
and cut travelling time to 3-4 days for transport of goods.

- Significant in case of any conflict with China as present route i.e. chicken neck could be blocked by China in conflict situation.

- The access to the sea that the project provides its Northeastern states could boost their economies.

- It would strengthen India’s trade and transport links with Southeast Asia.

- It will be instrumental in India’s “act-east policy”.

**India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway**

India’s renewed commitment to complete the 3,200-km India-Asean trilateral highway that extends from Moreh in India to Mae Sot in Thailand via Mandalay, Myanmar.