



Coup D'etat in Myanmar

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The article is based on “[The Way Forward in Myanmar](#)” which was published in ‘The Hindu’ on 05/02/2021. It talks about how the nascent democracy established in Myanmar is again overthrown by Military Junta and how India, the world’s largest democracy, is a stakeholder in the country’s internal issue.

Democracy is a form of government in which a substantial proportion of the citizenry participates in ruling the state and the representatives elected by the people run the country on their behalf.

However, this ideal statement is not being followed everywhere. Turning the attention to international affairs and diving deep into Myanmar, the military has once again taken over the country, declaring a year-long state of emergency and placing elected leaders under detention.

In this predicament, it is a tightrope walk for India. Being itself the world’s largest democracy, India has to back democracy in Myanmar but it must secure its security and developmental interests too.

Coup in Myanmar

The **Myanmar military has grabbed power in a coup** for the third time in the nation’s history since its independence (1948).

- However, the military officials, in their defence, denied it as a coup and claimed the fraud as “obstruction in the path to democracy”.
- **State of emergency** has been declared, transferring all powers to **Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing**.

The Torturous Politics of Myanmar

- **Double Standards of the Junta:** The **Constitution of Myanmar** was drafted in **2008** by the military with the intent to remain in power behind a civilian party.
In 2015, the **Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)** lost the election which disappointed the military, and was concerned with the new democratic Myanmar that could emerge with the victory of the **National League for Democracy (NLD)**.
- **Hostility Towards the Rohingyas:** The 2020 elections were held after the Army launched a brutal crackdown on Rohingya in **Rakhine State** in the name of fighting terrorism, which forced over **700,000 Rohingya Muslims** to flee Myanmar to neighbouring countries, mainly **Bangladesh**.
- **Null Foreign Intervention:** Myanmar has always preferred solving its internal conflicts by itself letting negligible interference from any Foreign or International Power.
Many **international mechanisms** comprising Western and Asian countries that were formed to coordinate strategies on Myanmar were **disbanded after the 2015 election**.
- **Divided Myanmarese Communities:** The military understands the people's psyche well.
 - The divide between the **Burmans**, the majority group, and the **ethnic minorities remains wide**. The latter are generally opposed to a strong Central government.
 - In the recent military coup, the **Burmans are supportive of Aung San Suu Kyi** but it will be true only up to a point.
They are largely Buddhists and peace-loving. Hence, they might accept the grabbing of power from elected representatives by the army.

Gist of the Issue

- The November 2020 election of Myanmar resulted in a landslide victory for the **National League for Democracy (NLD)**, which won over **82% of parliamentary seats** at the union, regional and state levels
- The army-backed **Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)** claimed the elections as a widespread fraud.
Without offering any concrete evidence, the military has overthrown the winning party and has detained the political leader including Myanmar's **de facto head Aung San Suu Kyi**.
- The activists used social media to oppose the military coup and organise protests.
Myanmar's junta blocked Facebook and WhatsApp in the name of ensuring stability even as street protests were reported from some cities.

Global Responses

- The **UN Secretary-General** has **vowed** to mobilise the international community to put enough pressure on Myanmar to ensure that the **military coup in the country "fails"**.
- **China and Russia** have taken a **non-committal approach** to the coup.
- **ASEAN** made a muted call for "dialogue, reconciliation and return to normalcy while Japan has called it a "coup"
- The Western countries including **Australia and the US** have issued strong statements with **threats of sanctions**.

The US President has referred to the action as a **coup** and has called on the military **"to relinquish seized power"**, free all officials and advocates detained, lift the restrictions on telecommunications and refrain from violence.

Timeline: Key events in history of Myanmar

Year ▲	Events
1948	Myanmar gains independence from British rule
1962	Military leader Ne Win stages a coup and rules the country through Junta
1988	Aung San Suu Kyi returns to her home country as pro-democracy protests erupt against junta
1989	Suu Kyi is put under house arrest
1990	The National League for Democracy (NLD) wins elections, but military refuses to hand over power
2010	A pro-junta party wins Myanmar's first elections in 20 years
2010	Suu Kyi is freed from detention
2012	Suu Kyi wins a by-election and takes her seat in Parliament
2015	NLD wins a sweeping victory in general elections
2020	Myanmar holds elections, with the NLD registering a landslide win
2021	Myanmar military takes control of the country

India as a Stakeholder

India's Stand

- India is engaged on the Myanmar issue as a member of the UN Security Council. Soon after the coup, India had expressed concern and said the rule of law and democratic process must be upheld.

- Though India has expressed deep concern over recent developments in Myanmar, **cutting off from the Myanmar military is not a viable option** as India has **significant economic and strategic interests in Myanmar** and its neighbourhood.

Myanmar's Significance to India

- **India-Myanmar Ties: India and Myanmar** are neighbours with close cultural and people-to-people ties, bolstered by trade, economic, security and defence-related exchanges.
- **India's aid to Myanmar in Pandemic:** India has extended assistance to Myanmar in its fight against **Covid-19** by providing medicines, test kits and **vaccines**.
 - India has committed to continuing its humanitarian support for the people in Myanmar in mitigating the health and economic impact of the **pandemic**.
 - India has also sent 15 lakh doses of the **Covishield vaccine** to assist Myanmar in fighting the pandemic.

Myanmar has begun to vaccinate itself with Covid vaccine sent by India, while putting **China's 300,000 doses** on hold.
- **The Submarine Gift:** India handed over a kilo-class submarine **INS Sindhuvir (UMS Minye Theinkhathu)** to the Myanmar navy.

The Indian gift is the first and only submarine of the Myanmar navy.
- **Myanmar as India's Cornerstone:** India's military-diplomatic outreach to Myanmar became a cornerstone of its **Act East policy**.

India's security relationship with the Myanmar military has become **extremely close**, and it would be difficult to "**burn bridges**" with them given their assistance in securing the **North East frontiers from insurgent groups**.
- **Infrastructure and Developmental Projects:** Apart from strategic concerns, India has cultivated **several infrastructure and development projects** with Myanmar, which it sees as the "**gateway to the East**" and ASEAN countries.

These include the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral highway and the **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project** as well as a plan for a Special Economic Zone at the Sittwe deep-water port.

Way Forward

- **Reducing the Gap Among Different Communities:** Adhering to the communal division among the people of Myanmar, jumping to the conclusion that Myanmar will see a nationwide protest against the military coup, is not correct.
 - In the current scenario, the military will continue to exploit ethnic and religious fault lines.
 - **Engagement with domestic stakeholders**, including ethnic minorities, especially from the north, **should be pursued by the international community**.

- **Threatening with the Imposition of Sanctions is not a Solution:** The Myanmar military has always been able to economically withstand sanctions by striking deals with Asian countries in the past, therefore imposing sanctions is unlikely to bring any major political change.
- **Criticising the Military is not Wise for India:** India must want to remain engaged in Myanmar for quite a few reasons. Many insurgent groups find haven in Myanmar which means India needs its help to counter them.

For India, engagement with Myanmar is vital. It shall maintain a two-track engagement, acknowledging the primacy of the army in Myanmar's affairs.

Conclusion

- In a country where military leadership has scripted the meaning of democracy, tensions are most likely to prevail.
 - In such cases, domestic forces and geopolitics often fail to deter its actions and impulses to rule.
- It is likely for India to feel concerned when democracy in a country is threatened.
 - But the country must be committed to its policy of non-interference in another state's internal affairs.
 - Keeping the national interest of the country in mind, India shall astutely balance its principles, values, interests and geopolitical realities.

Drishti Mains Question

Myanmar is the cornerstone in India's Act East Policy. comment



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This editorial is based on **“On The Upswing”** which was published in The Indian Express on 29 January, 2021. Now watch this on our Youtube Channel.
