

Myanmar and Russia - Strategic Partners in Need?

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The 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Myanmar and Russia marks a significant milestone in the enduring ties between the two nations. Over recent decades, Myanmar and Russia have consistently nurtured strong relations, collaborating across various domains. Facing challenges such as sanctions from unfriendly Western countries in the past two years, both nations have drawn even closer, exemplifying resilience and mutual support.

Amid global shifts in alliances, Myanmar and Russia have solidified their friendship, transcending geopolitical constraints. The expanding trade ties between the two countries underscore a growing economic partnership, with Russia's focus on ASEAN aligning with Myanmar's emphasis on the EAEU countries, fostering increased cooperation. This shared vision includes Myanmar's belief that Russia can play a crucial role in facilitating integration with the EAEU countries, reciprocated by Russia's expectation of expanded strategic cooperation with ASEAN through Myanmar.

The report emphasizes the multifaceted cooperation between Myanmar and Russia, spanning diplomatic, economic, and strategic dimensions. Against a backdrop of evolving global dynamics, both nations continue to deepen their collaboration, navigating challenges and leveraging their shared interests for mutual benefit.

The strength of a nation's foreign relations is a foundation for further development in foreign cooperation and a lever in the international stage. The foreign cooperation between Myanmar and Russia has flourished in recent years, as both nations have actively held closer ties in diplomatic, economic, and strategic partnerships, leading to strengthened and collaborative efforts in various fields, including trade, investment, energy, and infrastructure projects.

Bilateral trade between Myanmar and Russia has experienced significant growth, reflecting a deepening economic relationship between the two nations. In 2021, trade amounted to 15.7 million US dollars, and by the end of 2022, trade had increased to more than US\$335 million. In the first half of 2023, trade turnover between Russia and Myanmar amounted to about 200 million US dollars. Myanmar's Ministry of Commerce indicates that trade between the two countries could potentially grow to US\$1 billion. Russian exports to Myanmar and Russian Imports from Myanmar are mostly products in need, such as sunflower oil, clothing, and raw materials. In November 2022, the Minister of Investment and Foreign Economic Affairs Myanmar signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Russian Foundation, "RK-Investments", aimed at developing investment cooperation in main areas of mutual interest. In December 2022, Russia and Myanmar agreed to develop cooperation in a number of key sectors, customs assistance and bilateral trade.

Myanmar expresses significant interest in Russian energy resources, particularly in the importation of liquefied natural gas and petroleum. This interest underscores Myanmar's strategic approach to ensuring a stable energy supply also deepening economic ties with Russia in the energy sector. For Russia, expanding the participation of Russian energy companies in projects in Myanmar was mainly discussed at the 25th St. Petersburg Economic Forum between the two countries before the meeting of the two leaders at the 7th Eastern Economic Forum in

Vladivostok. Moreover, at the 28th St. Petersburg forum, Rosatom signed with Myanmar memorandum on the development of clean energy wind turbines in the country.

Furthermore, Russia and Myanmar are presently engaged in collaborative construction projects, specifically focused on iron casting in Pang Pet (Shan State), with the active participation of Tyazhpromexport. Collective endeavours are underway to finalize the construction of the plant and initiate its operational phase. Additionally, Russia has expressed a keen interest in investing in the Shveli-3 project in Myanmar, indicating a mutual commitment to exploring and advancing joint ventures in various sectors. Moreover, Myanmar conducts payments for Russian oil in foreign currency, predominantly utilizing Chinese yuan or US dollars for most trading activities. In response to Western sanctions, the Bank of Russia and the Central Bank of Myanmar have forged bilateral financial agreements and are actively collaborating on the implementation of the Russian Mir system. This system facilitates direct payments in both kyats and rubles, providing a strategic solution to navigate economic challenges posed by external Western sanctions.

Tourism is integral to foreign relations as it boosts cultural exchange, enhances people-to-people connections, and promotes mutual understanding, playing a pivotal role in building positive diplomatic ties. In the tourism sector, Myanmar and Russia are poised to reintroduce direct flights from Mandalay, reconnecting Yangon to Novosibirsk after a 30-year hiatus, and subsequently extending the route to Moscow. To stimulate tourism between the two nations, Myanmar has instituted a visa-free policy for Russian citizens, reciprocated by Russia's introduction of an electronic visa system for Myanmar citizens, with future plans for a complete visa-free regime. This strategic initiative aims to facilitate seamless travel, encourage cultural exchange, and enhance bilateral relations through increased tourism activities.

In the realm of international affairs, Myanmar and Russia maintain a traditionally friendly and supportive relationship. Myanmar plays a pivotal role in reinforcing Russia's priorities in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly within ASEAN. Russia, in turn, actively engages in involving Myanmar in integration associations and multilateral mechanisms for cooperation in Eurasia. During the 26th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, a memorandum of cooperation was signed between the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), the governing body of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and Myanmar. This memorandum aims to expand collaboration in areas such as regional economic integration, customs regulation, energy, and transport. Moscow has also backed Naypyidaw's endeavours to attain the status of a dialogue partner within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a designation granted in May 2023. Furthermore, Russia supports Myanmar's interest in joining the New Development Bank, governed by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, as a means to offset its sanctions. This multifaceted collaboration underscores the depth and breadth of the diplomatic and strategic ties between Myanmar and Russia.

In conclusion, the foreign relation between Myanmar and Russia stands as a testament to the depth and diversity of their collaborative efforts across diplomatic, economic, and strategic realms. Both nations have demonstrated resilience and adaptability in the face of international challenges. Myanmar's role in supporting Russia's priorities in the Asia-Pacific region and Russia's backing of Myanmar's integration efforts with EAEU countries showcase a symbiotic relationship. This multifaceted cooperation not only bolsters the economic prosperity of both nations but also contributes to regional stability and diplomatic goodwill, exemplifying a promising trajectory for future collaboration.

Источники и литература

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