

Viewing cable 07NEWDELHI847, GOI EXPOUNDS UPON ITS BURMA POLICY AFTER RECEIVING

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SUBJECT: GOI EXPOUNDS UPON ITS BURMA POLICY AFTER RECEIVING
DEMARCHE

REF: SECSTATE 15425

Classified By: Political Counselor Ted Osius for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

1. (C) PolCouns delivered reftel demarche to Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Joint Secretary (Bangladesh, Burma, Sri Lanka and the Maldives) Mohan Kumar. Kumar made the following points regarding the GOI's current Burma policy:

-After a period of limited interaction with Burma because of its poor human rights and governance records, pressure from Indian insurgent groups with havens in Burma, especially the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), dictates a policy of constructive engagement.

-Indian officials are ""pushing Burma at every available moment"" to accelerate their National Convention road map and include minorities in the process.

-Given the reluctance of Bangladesh to grant India transit rights, Burma represents the only viable alternative for linking the isolated northeastern states with ASEAN markets and beyond, which is critical for a long term resolution to Northeast India's insurgency woes.

-There is an active and vocal opposition to India's renewed engagement with Burma, most notably the Caucus of India Democracy within Parliament.

----- GOI continues to deny providing the Burmese junta with military supplies

12. (C) In a 15 February meeting with the MEA Joint Secretary responsible for Burma, PolCouns highlighted USG concerns regarding the GOI's growing military relationship with Burma and warned that, in his view, India's close military ties with Burma may become a stumbling block to joint democracy promotion as envisioned by FS Menon and U/S Burns. Kumar claimed that, to his knowledge, the GOI was not providing lethal equipment to Burma but continued to supply its ASEAN neighbor with bulldozers and dump trucks for infrastructure projects to enable the Burmese military to access ULFA hideouts in the inhospitable terrain on the Burmese side of the border. PolCouns countered that the Embassy had information from a variety of sources, including military, that the GOI continues to arm the Burmese junta. He expected that the issue would be raised in Washington during Foreign Secretary Menon's visit the following week. ""They don't need SIPDIS arms from us,"" Kumar responded, adding, ""they get all they need from China.""

----- ""Perhaps Burma is our Pakistan"" -----

13. (C) Kumar said that the GOI's current policy of engagement with Burma was absolutely necessary as ""The ULFA guys hiding in Burma are screwing the hell out of us!"" He asserted that Burma was an essential part of the GOI's two-pronged approach to tackling its insurgency problem in the northeast. The first element of the strategy is military, and ""Burma is the only one helping us."" Pointing to alleged Bangladesh unwillingness to confront Indian insurgent groups camped on its borders, Kumar argued, ""Tell Bangladesh to cooperate and I am happy to say bye-bye Myanmar."" Referring to the second approach, Kumar stated that ""Bangladesh's stubbornness in allowing access to transit routes for trade leaves us with Burma as the only alternative to connect the northeast to ASEAN markets,"" and provide an economic incentive for ULFA to lay down its arms. ""Do you want us to connect through China?,"" he asked. Kumar commented that ASEAN and China maintained close ties with Burma but did not face the same pressure from the U.S. to refrain from engaging. ""Why not pick on Musharraf?"" he queried, ""Where is democracy there?"" PolCouns pushed back, noting that the Burmese junta was using its military might to NEW DELHI 00000847 002 OF 002 violently repress innocent civilians. He also warned that India may experience a strong backlash for supporting the junta when a legitimate Burmese government comes to power. Kumar acknowledged that the possibility was a GOI concern.

----- ""The GOI continues to push them at every opportunity"" -----

14. (C) Kumar noted that there is a serious debate in Parliament regarding the

GOI's policy of engagement with Burma. ""I have the Indian Parliamentarians' Forum for Democracy in Burma breathing down my neck,"" he stated. He also emphasized that the GOI ""continues to push (the Burmese junta) at every opportunity to accelerate the National Convention Process and involve minorities."" He stated that External Affairs Minister Mukherjee delivered this message to the Burmese during his last visit. Responding to PolCouns' assertion that India could be more public in its efforts to bring pressure on the junta, Kumar lamented ""We are not getting a very enthusiastic response when we push them.""

----- GOI's interest revolves around ULFA, not oil -----

¶5. (C) The Joint Secretary reiterated that the USG needs to understand that the ULFA violence is driving the Indo-Burma relationship and connectivity to ASEAN as an economic alternative to ULFA insurgency was a vital part of the effort to quell the insurgency. He claimed that competition for natural resources was not a big factor. ""There is not enough gas for both India and China,"" he declared, ""and China is going to get it. However, all is not rosy in their relationship (China-Burma) either. We got entry into Burma because (the junta) thought that the Chinese were becoming too close."" When queried about the specific objectives of Union Home Minister Duggal's upcoming visit, Kumar asserted that the GOI's sole aim is to push the Burmese for more aggressive action against ULFA. He stated that border infrastructure projects will be discussed at length in order ""to close the loophole to the Burmese argument that their lack of action is due to lack of access."" In response to questions regarding the GOI's 103 million dollar upgrade project at Sitwe Port, Kumar emphasized that it was a vital cog in connecting the northeast to ASEAN markets via the Asian Development Bank highway project. He closed by noting that ""negotiations with ULFA to lay down its arms is not enough. Viable economic opportunities and development are the only way to achieve a lasting peace in the northeast.""

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Kumar agreed with our message that India could exert a positive influence on the Burmese regime, and claimed India pushes ""at every opportunity."" But the GOI differs with us on how best to achieve the goal of pushing Burma toward reform, freedom and human rights. From the MEA's perspective - and we have heard this repeated in unofficial channels, too - India is fighting a losing battle with China for influence in Burma, and pushing the junta on issues of democracy and human rights only decreases India's influence. MEA also is under pressure internally on Burma, including from Parliamentary groups opposed to the GOI's Burma policy. Post will continue to press the GOI on Burma, and seek ways to reinforce the message MEA is receiving from Parliament and NGOs who believe India can be more constructive in what it extracts from the Burmese regime.

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<http://www.wikileaks.ch/cable/2007/02/07NEWDELHI847.html>