

New hopes rising in Indo-Myanmar relations



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Although delayed, a ray of hope has been seen in better Indo-Myanmar relations with accepting the Indian proposal by Junta government of that country to open Stilwell Road, which will encourage and boost India's trade with the South-eastern Asian countries, especially with China. The Foreign minister of Myanmar, Nyan Win, has agreed to the request of Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), at a recent meeting in Kolkata to this effect. With the opening of Stilwell Road, distance between India and China via Tenai in Myanmar will be cut to the minimum. The minister informed that China has already constructed road up to Tenai and he has offered to construct the balance part of the road with support of the Indian Government up to the Indian borders. With this gesture the Myanmar seems to have extended hands of friendship with India which is likely to open the doors of better relations between the two countries and resolve the critical issues of gas supply to India.

It may be mentioned in this context that failure to reach a timely understanding between India and Bangladesh led Myanmar to find out a market for gas in China. According to available reports Myanmar and China have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for supply of gas from Myanmar to China. But an official source in Yangon has informed that some new gas fields have been found in Myanmar's Arakan region near the Bay of Bengal. These fields are spread over the areas of Suu, Suufu and Miya. These fields are discovered by Korea's oil company, Deud International. Some Indian companies also have some share in it. Deud has 51 percent share and India's ONGC 18.5 percent, GAIL 8.5 percent.

Soon after the discovery of the gas India had shown interest to import gas from Myanmar. A private company of Bangladesh, namely, Mohna Holding Ltd; sent a proposal to construct pipeline from Myanmar to India via Bangladesh. But Bangladesh did not respond for a long time. Anyhow keeping in mind the crisis of gas in future Bangladesh took interest in the gas pipeline lately.

On the other hand India started search for a new route for pipeline from Myanmar via Mizoram, Tripura, Assam and West Bengal to Kolkata. This route was much expensive. Whereas the pipeline via Bangladesh covers 900 kms and cost Rs.4, 500 crore, this route take 500 kms and Rs.2, 500 crore more. Besides, the risk of safety and security of pipelines from militant activities in Assam and Tripura was great. Due to all these factors, India could not take any decision in this matter.

In due course Myanmar decided to sell its gas to China. In August 2008, Deud International getting permission from Myanmar government signed an agreement with Chinese government's company, China Petroleum Corporation. Deud and its consortium would spend 5.3 billion dollars on this project. As per agreement china would get gas from this project for 30 years. Gas supply would begin in 2013 and 600 million cubic feet gas would be supplied daily. However, it is expected that in future Myanmar would be ready to supply gas to India also with the increasing production of gas from new fields...

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