

Foreign secretary's visit showcases Delhi's careful balancing act on Myanmar, lays out the challenge.

Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla's two-day visit to Myanmar, the first by a high-ranking Indian official since the coup in February, points to a subtle recalibration in India's approach to Naypyidaw.

To begin with, India had kept a distance from the hardline position taken by the US and Europe that sought to censure and sanction the junta for ousting Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy after they swept the parliament elections.

Delhi had also appealed for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar and even mildly criticised the sham trial that sentenced Suu Kyi to four years' imprisonment, later reduced to two years, in one of the numerous cases filed against her, earlier this month. During his visit, Shringla met the military brass, members of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and some civil society leaders. However, his request for an audience with Suu Kyi was denied.

New Delhi took a maximalist position on Myanmar when the military pulled the curtains down on the fledgling democracy in 1962 and held on to it until the 1990s when the then PM, P V Narasimha Rao, decided to engage the junta. The change of stance followed the realisation that the sanctions regime imposed by western democracies forced Myanmar into the orbit of Beijing. The situation is not very different today though the democratic impulse in Myanmar, a legacy of the pro-democracy movement of 1988 and the partial restoration of democratic government since 2015, has been manifesting in street protests.

The coup and the subsequent isolation of Myanmar by the US and its allies has pushed the junta closer to Beijing. India's relations are also complicated by a long and porous border that runs through a hilly terrain, frequented by insurgent groups operating in Nagaland and Manipur. Naypyidaw has been sympathetic to India's security concerns in recent years.

But the recent attack on an Assam Rifles officer and family in Manipur, close to the Myanmar border, suggests that the threat from insurgent groups is far from over. Besides, tribes in Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur have ethnic bonds with their counterparts across the border, which explains the influx of refugees following the military action in Myanmar.

It may be prudent for Delhi to engage with the junta and use its good offices to persuade Naypyidaw to restore the democratic system in Myanmar while ensuring that India's own interests are protected. Shringla's visit hints that, for now, India is willing to hold back the democracy pitch and allow realpolitik to dictate the terms of the relationship.

Expected Question (Prelims Exams)

- Q. Who had gone from India's side on a recent visit to Myanmar?**
- (a) President of India
 - (b) Prime Minister of India
 - (c) Foreign Secretary of India
 - (d) National Security Advisor of India

Expected Question (Mains Exams)

- Q. What are the interests of India in Myanmar? What steps does India need to take in Myanmar to counterbalance China?**

(250 Words)

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.