



Indian Council of World Affairs
Sapru House, Barakhamba Road
New Delhi

Report

on

Release of

Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia's Book

'India-Myanmar Relations: Changing Contours'

by

Hon'ble Shri M. Hamid Ansari

Vice President of India

at

Sapru House, New Delhi
22 September, 2015

Shree Hamid Ansari, Honourable Vice President of India released the book authored by Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia titled 'India-Myanmar Relations: Changing Contours' on 22 September 2015 in the presence of esteemed gathering comprising academia, diplomatic community and eminent social and political personalities. In his remarks on the book, the Vice President underlined the lack of serious scholarship on Myanmar despite its obvious importance for India. He expressed his pleasure that Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia's book has come out at the right time to fill this gap. The Vice President said, "the proximity to our North-Eastern region and the geographical location of Myanmar as our conduit to South-East Asia makes it important from our point of view. We also have shared security interests and, hence, our desire to see a stable Myanmar that is at peace with itself."

Prior to the Vice President's address, the Director General of the Indian Council of World Affairs, Ambassador Nalin Surie welcomed the Vice President of India; author of the book, Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia and Ambassador Shyam Saran, former Foreign Secretary and Chairman of Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). Ambassador Surie congratulated the author for his accomplishment and hoped that it would add to India's understanding of Myanmar. The author of the book, Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia expressed his gratitude to all helping hands in his book project, particularly the support from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore and the Indian Council of World Affairs. In his introductory remarks on the book, he underlined the fact that Myanmar is no longer a neglected country in the regional politics; it has received high level attention of its neighbours, the ASEAN, China and India. While sharing history, culture and regional interests with Myanmar, India wishes that Myanmar continues its journey towards inclusive governance, progress and prosperity. He argued that the understanding of social, political and cultural dynamics of Myanmar is crucial for a better understanding of policy making for India-Myanmar relations.

Ambassador Shyam Saran, who has written the foreword to the book, spoke of the importance of the book in India's current Myanmar policy deliberations. He noted that Myanmar is going through the most fascinating social and political transformations. In this

transformation, the future of ceasefire between the government and the rebels; role of military leadership, political parties such as that of Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy; the prospects of upcoming elections; and the role of major neighbours, such as China are the most important questions, which have been answered in this book. The book outlines how closely Indian policy making is linked with these factors. Amb. Shyam Saran shared thoughts of the author that until the recent past, India-Myanmar remained like strangers and their relations were largely unknown to the people of both countries. It was so despite the fact that India and Myanmar share a colonial past and Myanmar city, Yangon was once full of Indian businesses and people until some 2.5 million Indians were left out in uncertainty, following the initiation of Burmisation and nationalisation programs by the Myanmar authorities in the late sixties. Though the doors were again slightly opened following Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's 1987 visit and Aung San Suu Kyi's electoral victory in 1990, the military intervention reversed the process.

The Deputy Director General of ICWA, Ajaneesh Kumar conveyed his gratitude to the Vice President for accepting the invitation of chairing this session. He also thanked all the eminent participants.

Report prepared by Dr. Omair Anas, Research Fellow, ICWA.