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ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**On Myanmar, India Needs a
Rethink**

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ON MYANMAR, INDIA NEEDS A RETHINK

In News

- Recently, Myanmar's army claimed success in retaking Myawaddy, a critical node in the bustling trade route with its eastern neighbour, Thailand.

About the Situation

- Myanmar's military took power in a coup in February 2021 after complaining of fraud in a November 2020 general election won by Aung San Suu Kyi's party.
 - ♦ Election monitoring groups found no evidence of mass fraud.
- The India-Myanmar border is witnessing unrest on both sides: in Myanmar, ethnic communities are fighting for their civil and political rights and a democratic government,
 - ♦ On the Indian side, ethnic communities are fighting for the protection of their sociocultural and economic rights.

Importance of Stability in Myanmar for India

- India and Myanmar share an **unfenced 1,643 km-long border** and people on either side have familial and ethnic ties, which had initially prompted the arrangement.
 - ♦ A 1968 government notification limited the free movement of people up to 40 km on either side of the border, which was further reduced to 16 km in 2004. The FMR's provisions were last revised in 2016.
 - Under the FMR, any member of a hill tribe, who is a citizen of either India or Myanmar, and who resides within 16 km of the border on either side, can cross on the production of a border pass, usually valid for a year, and can stay up to two weeks per visit.
- The India-Myanmar border passes through the States of Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km), and Mizoram (510 km).
- The political stability of **Myanmar is of paramount importance** to India, particularly for the northeastern region and its connectivity projects, such as the **Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP)**, since the project is not only a regional connectivity endeavour but a pivotal element of India's strategic ambitions to counter Chinese influence and enhance stability in its northeastern territories.

Concerns and Challenges

- The political upheaval in Myanmar following the military coup in February 2021 has created a complex and precarious situation for **human trafficking between India and Myanmar**.
- The **instability, unrest, and power struggles** within Myanmar have given rise to **criminal syndicates** that exploit vulnerable individuals and profit from illicit activities.
- The **FMR makes the international border extremely porous**, and the hilly and inhospitable terrain provides cover to the activities of various Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs).
 - ♦ The porous international border saw large-scale smuggling of goods, drugs, arms, and wildlife into India
- The lack of cooperation from the Myanmar authorities due to the ongoing political crisis hampers effective collaboration in tackling this issue.
- Additionally, the vast and difficult terrain along the border poses challenges in patrolling and securing the area adequately.
- the main regional forum ASEAN has been unable to deal with the challenges
 - ♦ In the name of stabilising its frontier with Myanmar, China has inserted itself deeper into the nation's internal affairs.

Governments steps

- Government has decided to scrap the **Free Movement Regime (FMR)** along Myanmar border to ensure the internal security of the country and to maintain the demographic structure of India's North Eastern States.

- It is now planning smart fencing of the 1,643-km border and the project is set to be completed in less than five years.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- India's policy towards Myanmar should be adaptable, considering the fluid nature of alliances and power dynamics.
- India must now begin a dialogue with Myanmar's National Unity Government comprising the democratic opposition and the ethnic armed groups.
- India must also open channels of communication with the local forces in control of the regions across the land border with Myanmar.
- Enhancing collaboration between border control agencies and establishing direct communication channels between India and Myanmar can serve as a potent strategy to combat trafficking in persons and foster cross-border and regional cooperation.
 - ♦ Joint operations and intelligence sharing can help intercept traffickers and rescue victims.
- The collection of biometric information of migrants from Myanmar must be done with the cooperation of local authorities and border communities.
- To resolve the ongoing ethnic conflict in Manipur and curb Naga insurgency, the Centre must complete the ongoing development projects in the border areas.
- ASEAN and others need to support Myanmar's independent media and people in their battle for a truly democratic country

Mains Practice Question

- Q. Why is there continuing Conflict in Myanmar ? and why does it matter to India ?How instability in Myanmar has affected India's interest ?

