



# **DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

**TOPIC**

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**MYANMAR, MANIPUR AND STRAINED  
BORDERS**

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## MYANMAR, MANIPUR AND STRAINED BORDERS

### Context

- The recent political instability in Myanmar, coupled with the influx of refugees into India, particularly the border regions with Myanmar, has strained the already fragile border management and security infrastructure.



### About India-Myanmar Border

- The India-Myanmar border shares **1643 kms** and passes through the *States of Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km), and Mizoram (510 km)*.
  - These have historically been porous, **allowing free movement of people** under the **Free Movement Regime (FMR)**.
- However, border **regions of Manipur (sharing a border with Myanmar's Chin state)**, have long been a site of ethnic tensions, insurgency, and geopolitical complexities.

### Geopolitical Context

- Myanmar's Political Crisis:** Since the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, the country has been engulfed in widespread conflict.
  - The **Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military)** has cracked down on pro-democracy activists, ethnic rebel groups, and civilian resistance movements, leading to a surge in violence, particularly in **Myanmar's northwestern states of Chin, Sagaing, and Kachin**.
- Free Movement Regime (FMR):** It allows people **residing within 16 km on either side of the border** to cross without a visa for up to 14 days, and was designed to facilitate traditional and cultural exchanges.
  - However, in recent years, concerns over **illegal migration, drug trafficking, and insurgency** have led to debates about its continuation.

### Ethnic Unrest in Manipur and Its Myanmar Connection

- Manipur's Ongoing Ethnic Violence:** Manipur has witnessed a significant influx of refugees fleeing military persecution.
  - Many of these refugees share **ethnic ties with indigenous tribes in Manipur and Mizoram**, particularly the **Kuki-Zo community** (from Chin hills of Myanmar), deepening regional ethnic tensions.
- Insurgency Factor:** Several insurgent groups, including the *United National Liberation Front (UNLF)*, *People's Liberation Army (PLA)*, and *Kuki National Organization (KNO)*, have historically **operated along the porous border**, often using **Myanmar as a sanctuary**.
  - Additionally, Myanmar's own rebel groups, such as the **Chin National Army (CNA)**, share ties with **Kuki-Zo factions in Manipur**, creating complex security challenges for India.

## Security Implications for India

- **Refugee Influx and Humanitarian Concerns:** States like Mizoram and Manipur have witnessed an influx of refugees, prompting calls for a structured refugee policy.
  - ♦ India has been cautious in dealing with Myanmar refugees, as it is **not a signatory to the Refugee Convention (1951)**.
- **Cross-Border Insurgency and Smuggling:** The region has become a conduit for the **Golden Triangle's drug trade**, particularly *heroin and methamphetamine*.
  - ♦ Intelligence reports have linked insurgent groups with cross-border criminal networks, necessitating stricter border monitoring.
- **Strategic and Diplomatic Concerns:** India has maintained a cautious approach, prioritizing stability along its northeastern borders, and growing Chinese influence in Myanmar has added to its strategic concerns.
  - ♦ For India, it presents a **dual challenge** — ensuring border security while preventing the region from becoming a breeding ground for external influences, including China, which has growing stakes in Myanmar.

## Economic and Social Implications

- The establishment of Border Haats and other economic activities aimed at promoting cross-border trade and livelihoods have been disrupted.
- The humanitarian crisis in Manipur has led to gaps in documenting humanitarian needs and providing adequate relief to affected populations.

## Policy Considerations and the Way Forward

- **Reassessing the Free Movement Regime (FMR):** While completely scrapping the FMR could disrupt traditional ties, a more regulated framework with biometric tracking and controlled entry points could help mitigate security risks.
- **Border Fencing and Security Operations:** To curb illegal migration and insurgent activities, India has accelerated border fencing efforts.
  - ♦ The deployment of Assam Rifles and paramilitary forces has also been strengthened.
- **Stronger Counterinsurgency Operations:** Enhanced intelligence-sharing and joint military operations with Myanmar's authorities could help curb cross-border insurgent activities.
- **Humanitarian Dilemmas:** India faces the challenge of balancing security with humanitarian responsibilities. The Mizoram government, for instance, has provided aid to Myanmar refugees, while Manipur has adopted a stricter stance.
  - ♦ India must develop a clear refugee policy to balance security concerns with humanitarian obligations, particularly for ethnic communities with historical ties to Indian states.
- **Diplomatic Engagement with Myanmar:** India continues to engage with both Myanmar's military regime and ethnic insurgent groups to ensure security cooperation.
  - ♦ The **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project**, which connects **India's Northeast to Myanmar's Rakhine state**, remains a crucial element of **India's Act East Policy**.

## Conclusion

- The Myanmar-Manipur border represents a complex web of ethnic, security, and geopolitical challenges. India's response needs a careful balancing act—enhancing security without alienating border communities and maintaining strategic engagement with Myanmar while upholding democratic values.
- The evolving situation demands a nuanced approach that combines diplomacy, security, and socio-political reconciliation to prevent further instability in this sensitive frontier.

Source: TH

### Mains Practice Question

Considering the political instability in Myanmar and the resulting influx of refugees into Manipur, what strategies should the Indian government adopt to address the humanitarian, security, and social implications of strained borders?

