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Myanmar, Manipur, and strained borders

India-Myanmar Border Dynamics

India-Myanmar Border Overview The India-Myanmar border stretches over 1,643 kilometers, traversing the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram. This border is notably porous under the Free Movement Regime (FMR), allowing residents within 16 km of either side to cross freely for up to 14 days, facilitating cultural and traditional exchanges. However, regions like Manipur, which borders Myanmar's Chin state, have been centers of ethnic tension, insurgency, and geopolitical complexities.

Geopolitical Context Since the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, the country has been mired in conflict, with the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military) aggressively suppressing pro-democracy movements and ethnic rebels. This turmoil has escalated violence, especially in the northwestern states of Chin, Sagaing, and Kachin. The FMR, while intended to promote local exchange, has come under scrutiny due to rising concerns over illegal migration, drug trafficking, and insurgency.

Ethnic Unrest and Insurgency in Manipur Manipur has become a refuge for many fleeing persecution from Myanmar, particularly those ethnically linked to the Kuki-Zo community from the Chin hills. This influx has intensified local ethnic tensions. Insurgent groups such as the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People's Liberation Army (PLA), and Kuki National Organization (KNO) leverage the porous borders, often using Myanmar as a base, while groups like the Chin National Army (CNA) have connections with factions in Manipur, complicating the security landscape.

Security Implications for India The influx of refugees has prompted a need for a structured refugee policy, especially as India is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. The border regions are also challenged by the drug trade from the Golden Triangle, necessitating robust border monitoring. Strategically, India treads cautiously, balancing border stability and the growing Chinese influence in Myanmar.

Economic and Social Implications Economic initiatives like Border Haats aimed at promoting cross-border trade have been disrupted. The humanitarian crisis in Manipur exacerbates the need for comprehensive documentation and relief measures for those impacted.

Policy Considerations and the Way Forward

- **Revisiting the FMR:** Modifying the FMR to include biometric tracking and controlled entry could reduce security risks without severing traditional ties.



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- **Enhancing Border Security:** Accelerated efforts in border fencing and the bolstered presence of Assam Rifles and other paramilitary forces are crucial to mitigate illegal activities.
- **Counterinsurgency Measures:** Strengthening intelligence-sharing and collaboration for military operations with Myanmar could help address insurgent activities.
- **Balancing Humanitarian Responsibilities:** Developing a clear refugee policy that accounts for security and humanitarian needs is vital, especially for communities with cross-border ethnic ties.
- **Diplomatic Strategies:** Continuous engagement with Myanmar's military and ethnic groups is essential to maintain security cooperation, with projects like the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project highlighting the significance of India's Act East Policy.

Conclusion The complex challenges at the Myanmar-Manipur border require India to strategically balance enhancing security and fostering community ties. The ongoing situation necessitates a nuanced approach that integrates diplomacy, security measures, and socio-political strategies to stabilize this critical frontier.

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