



EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

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TOPIC: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Should the free movement regime between India and Myanmar remain?

Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the India-Myanmar Border

- The FMR allows unrestricted movement for ethnic communities across the India-Myanmar border.
- Its proposed revocation raises concerns about security, economy, and culture, causing regional opposition.

Arguments in Favor of FMR

- **Ethnic and Cultural Ties:** Communities on both sides share familial, linguistic, and cultural connections, making free movement important for social cohesion.
- **Economic Benefits:** Cross-border trade supports local economies, providing jobs and livelihoods, particularly in Mizoram and Nagaland.
- **Humanitarian Concerns:** Myanmar's political crisis has caused many to flee, and removing the FMR could worsen the humanitarian situation.
- **Diplomatic Relations:** Restricting movement could harm India-Myanmar relations and push Myanmar closer to China, reducing India's regional influence.
- **Act East Policy:** FMR supports India's Act East Policy by promoting regional connectivity and trade with Southeast Asia.
- **Security Through Cooperation:** Instead of building fences, working together with Myanmar on security can reduce illegal activities like smuggling.

Arguments Against FMR

- **Security Threats:** Uncontrolled movement can lead to drug trafficking, illegal arms trade, and insurgent infiltration, destabilizing Northeast India.
- **Ethnic Conflicts:** Foreign nationals influencing ethnic tensions in places like Manipur pose risks with an open border policy.
- **Illegal Migration:** Unchecked migration could lead to demographic shifts and political instability.
- **Strategic Vulnerability:** China's growing influence in Myanmar requires stronger border controls to prevent espionage and security threats.



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- **Economic Exploitation:** Smuggling of goods like gold, drugs, and wildlife harms India's economy and public health.
- **Border Management Challenges:** A porous border makes it difficult to enforce customs, taxation, and legal trade regulations.

Conclusion

- A balanced approach is needed to limit unregulated movement while maintaining cultural and economic connections.
- Strengthening border monitoring, promoting legal trade, and involving local communities can address security concerns without alienating border populations.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/should-the-free-movement-regime-between-india-and-myanmar-remain/article69383147.ece>

India's geopolitical vision should be larger

India's Limited Political Role in Global Conflicts

- **Historical Role:** India has historically played an active role in regional conflicts, such as in Bangladesh (1971), the Maldives (1988), and Sri Lanka (2009).
- **Recent Reticence:** Despite its past engagements, India has refrained from similar involvement in recent international conflicts.
- **Global Contributions:** India has made significant contributions to global welfare through initiatives like 'Vaccine Maitri,' the International Solar Alliance, and disaster relief efforts, showcasing its global engagement outside of conflict zones.
- **Russia-Ukraine War:** Russian President Vladimir Putin thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for India's diplomatic efforts in relation to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

India's Reticence and Economic Priorities

- **Focus on Economic Growth:** Over the past two decades, India has concentrated on economic growth, becoming the world's fifth-largest economy.
- **Risk of Economic Disruption:** There is a prevailing belief that engaging in international conflicts could hinder India's economic progress and disrupt its bilateral relations with other countries.
- **Regional Approach:** India has preferred to let regional powers handle conflicts, especially in areas like West Asia, where Gulf countries have assumed the lead in regional affairs.



Expectations from India on the Global Stage

- **Non-Aligned Movement:** Historically, India played a leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which aimed to empower developing nations and reduce colonial influences.
- **Modern Multi-Alignment Policy:** India today follows a multi-alignment policy that strengthens bilateral ties but lacks broader global leadership on major international issues.
- **Global Expectations:** As a major democracy and an aspiring permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), India is expected to take a more active role in shaping global decisions and addressing global conflicts.

India's Influence in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

- **Diplomatic Stance:** India's decision to abstain from voting on the Ukraine war in the UNSC allowed it to encourage other developing countries to adopt a balanced stance.
- **PM Modi's Statement:** Prime Minister Modi's statement that "this is not an era of war" and his advice against the use of nuclear weapons highlighted India's diplomatic influence in the conflict.
- **Building Credibility:** Putin's gratitude towards India signifies that India has built credibility with both Russia and Ukraine, positioning it as a potential player in conflict resolution and diplomatic efforts.

The Risk of Losing Influence to Other Nations

- **Rise of Other Mediation Powers:** Countries like Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have taken proactive roles in mediating international conflicts.
 - **Türkiye** hosted Ukraine-Russia peace talks.
 - **Saudi Arabia** facilitated U.S.-Russia discussions.
 - **Qatar** played a role in facilitating Congo peace talks.
- **Geopolitical Risk:** If India continues to remain passive, it risks losing its geopolitical influence to these emerging players who are increasingly active in conflict mediation and resolution.

Global Power Shifts and India's Strategic Needs

- **Political Shifts in the West:** The political shift to the right in the U.S. and parts of Europe may lead to a reduction in their engagement with Asia and Europe, creating gaps that India could fill.
- **Countering China's Influence:** India must expand its geopolitical influence to counter China's growing power in Asia, especially considering India's economic trade dependence on China.



- **Pressure on the Quad:** As global power dynamics shift, the Quad (India, Japan, Australia, and the U.S.) may lose its strategic relevance, placing additional pressure on India to take a more active stance in international affairs.

Time for a Policy Shift

- **Regional Strategy Beyond Bilateral Ties:** India needs to develop a regional strategy that goes beyond strengthening bilateral ties, particularly in regions like West and Central Asia.
- **Re-engaging with European Nations:** India must strengthen its ties with European nations and undertake economic reforms to boost its competitiveness and improve trade relations, particularly with the U.S.
- **Signaling Readiness for Global Leadership:** While India may not necessarily mediate all conflicts, it must signal its readiness to take an active role in shaping global affairs and asserting its leadership on global issues.

Historical Precedents and Lessons for Today

- **India's Role in the Korean War:** During the Korean War (1951-52), India played a key role in the UN despite being a newly independent and impoverished nation. This demonstrated India's commitment to global peace and diplomacy even in challenging circumstances.
- **Recent UNSC Tenure:** India's recent tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC (2021-2022) saw it act as a bridge for divergent views, showing its diplomatic flexibility and influence on global decisions.
- **Balancing Growth with Engagement:** India must balance its focus on economic growth with active geopolitical engagement to secure its position as a major global power in a fragmented world.

Conclusion

- **Need for Active Engagement:** India must play a more active role in shaping the evolving world order while continuing to balance its focus on economic growth.
- **Strengthening Multi-Alignment:** Expanding its multi-alignment policy beyond bilateral ties will enhance India's global influence, allowing it to safeguard national interests and contribute effectively to global decision-making in a rapidly changing world.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-geopolitical-vision-should-be-larger/article69387128.ece>