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By Kr. Aditya



Free Movement Regime to end at Myanmar border

India and Myanmar share an unfenced border, and citizens on either side have familial and ethnic ties, which prompted the 1970s arrangement, last revised in 2016

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VIJAITA SINGH

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WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

The Union government is all set to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Myanmar border, a senior government official said on January 2.

People living in border areas, who could cross over to India, will soon require visas, the official added.

India and Myanmar share an unfenced border, and people on either side have familial and ethnic ties, which prompted the arrangement in the 1970s.

It was last revised in 2016.



ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Bhutan

Pangsau Pass

MANIPUR

MYANMAR

Imphal

Sagaing Division

Bangladesh

Tamu

China

Moreh

MIZORAM

Chin state

Mandalay

WHAT IS THE FREE MOVEMENT REGIME?

The border between India and Myanmar runs for 1,643 km in the **four states of** Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh.

The FMR is a mutually agreed arrangement between the two countries that allows tribes living along the border **on either side to travel up to 16 km inside the other country without a visa.**





The FMR was implemented in 2018 as part of the Narendra Modi government's Act East policy at a time when diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar were on the upswing.

In fact, the FMR was to be put in place in 2017 itself, but was deferred due to the Rohingya refugee crisis that erupted that August.

BUT WHY SUCH A REGIME?

The border between India and Myanmar was demarcated by the British in 1826, without seeking the opinion of the people living in the region.

The border effectively divided people of the same ethnicity and culture into two nations without their consent.

The current IMB reflects the line the British drew.

People in the region have strong ethnic and familial ties across the border.



In Manipur's Moreh region, **there are villages where some homes are in Myanmar.**

In Nagaland's Mon district, **the border actually passes through the house of the chief of Longwa village, splitting his home into two.**

Apart from facilitating people-to-people contact, **the FMR was supposed to provide impetus to local trade and business.**

The region has a long history of trans-border **commerce through customs and border haats.**

Given the **low-income economy**, **such exchanges are vital for the sustenance of local livelihoods.**

For border people in Myanmar too, **Indian towns are closer for business, education, and healthcare** than those in their own country.

SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH FMR NOW?

Although beneficial to local people and helpful in improving Indo-Myanmar ties, the FMR has been criticised for unintentionally **aiding illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and gun running.**

The Indo-Myanmar border runs through forested and undulating terrain, is almost **entirely unfenced, and difficult to monitor.**

In Manipur, less than 6 km of the border is fenced.



Since the military coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, the **run** junta has launched a campaign of persecution against the Kuki-Chin peoples.

This has pushed large numbers of Myanmarese tribals across the country's western border into India, especially into Manipur and Mizoram, where they have sought shelter.

Mizoram, where a large section of the population has close ethnic and cultural ties with people across the border, has set up camps for more than 40,000 refugees, despite protests from the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

Manipur too has received a chunk of illegal migrants over the past year and a half.

A committee set up by the state government to identify such migrants recently put their number at 2,187.

Last September, 5,500 illegal immigrants were caught in Moreh, and 4,300 were pushed back, sources said.

Biometrics of these individuals have been recorded.

SO WHAT WILL HAPPEN NOW?

The official said that the entire border will be fenced and a tender will be issued in the next few days.

He added that a survey of the border areas with the help of drones has been completed.

The fencing will be completed in the next four-and-half years.

Anyone coming through will have to get a visa



Amid apprehension that States such as Nagaland and Mizoram may oppose the move, **the official said,**
“Border security is Centre’s domain.

We may take note of their concerns but the final decision is of the Union government. **We are in talks with Myanmar.”**

CONCLUSION



The idea is to not only to stop the misuse of the FMR, which is used by insurgent groups to carry out attacks **on the Indian side** and **flee towards Myanmar,**

But also put a brake on the influx of **illegal immigrants, drugs and gold smuggling**



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