



Free Movement Regime

For Prelims: [Free Movement Regime](#), [Issues in Myanmar](#), [Treaty of Yandaboo](#), [India's Act East policy](#), [Manipur](#), India States Bordering Myanmar, Treaty of Friendship, 1951, Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project.

For Mains: Potential Reasons for Reconsidering the FMR, Major Aspects of India-Myanmar Relations, India's Border Issues.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

India's recent plans to **review the [Free Movement Regime \(FMR\) agreement with Myanmar](#)** and fence the India-Myanmar border have initiated discussions, especially in the northeastern states.

- The decision aims to address a complex intersection of **historical, cultural, and security considerations**.

What is the Free Movement Regime?

- **Historical Context:**
 - Much of India's northeast region was under Burmese occupation until the [Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826](#) established the current India-Myanmar boundary.
 - The Treaty of Yandabo was signed by **General Sir Archibald Campbell on behalf of the British** and Governor of Legaing Maha Min Hla Kyaw Htin on behalf of the Burmese.
 - It ended the **First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826)**.
 - However, the border separated communities with shared ethnicity and culture, including the **Nagas** in Nagaland and Manipur, as well as the **Kuki-Chin-Mizo communities** in Manipur and Mizoram, without their agreement.
 - Currently, India and Myanmar share a 1,643 km border across [Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh](#), of which only 10 km is fenced, in Manipur.
- **Free Movement Regime:**
 - The FMR was established in **2018** as part of [India's Act East policy](#), promoting cross-border movement up to **16 km** without a visa.
 - Individuals residing at the **border need a one-year border pass for stays lasting up to two weeks** in the neighbouring country.
 - It aimed to facilitate **local border trade**, improve access to education and healthcare for border residents, and strengthen diplomatic ties.
- **Potential Reasons for Reconsidering the FMR:**
 - **Security Concerns:**
 - **Increased Infiltration:** Concerns have arisen about the influx of illegal immigrants, particularly the **Chin, Naga communities and Rohingyas from Myanmar**, potentially straining resources and impacting local demographics.

- **Drug Trafficking and Arms Smuggling:** The porous border facilitates the **illegal movement of drugs and weapons**, posing a threat to internal security to India and fueling crime.
 - In 2022, Manipur witnessed 500 cases filed and 625 individuals arrested under the [Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances \(NDPS\) Act](#), as per data from the Chief Minister's Office.
- **Insurgency Activities:** The FMR has been misused by **insurgent groups operating in [northeastern India](#)**, allowing them to cross the border easily and evade capture.
 - E.g. **Kuki National Organisation** (KNO) and Kangleipak Communist Party-Lamphel (KCP-Lamphel) in Manipur.
- **Socio-economic and Regional Issues:**
 - **Impact on cultural identity:** Concerns exist about the preservation of indigenous culture and traditions in border areas, potentially **threatened by increased [migration](#)**.
 - **Environmental Degradation:** Deforestation and illegal resource extraction along the border are attributed to unregulated cross-border movement.
 - **Regional Dynamics:** [China's growing influence in Myanmar](#) and its potential impact on border security add another layer of complexity to the situation.

What are the Major Aspects of India-Myanmar Relations?



- **Historical and Cultural Ties:** India and Myanmar share a long history dating back centuries, with cultural and religious connections deeply rooted in **Buddhism**.
 - [Treaty of Friendship, 1951](#) forms the foundation of their diplomatic relations.
- **Economic Cooperation:** India is Myanmar's **4th largest trading partner** and a major source of investment.
 - The projects in which India has been involved in Myanmar include the [Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project](#), the **Trilateral Highway Project** and restoration and conservation of **Ananda Temple in Bagan (completed in 2018)**.
- **Disaster Relief:** India has responded promptly and effectively in rendering assistance following natural calamities in Myanmar like **Cyclone Mora** (2017), earthquake in Shan State (2010) and the outbreak of [influenza virus in Yangon](#) in July-August 2017.

Way Forward

- **Focus on Shared Interests:** Continuing and expanding economic cooperation in areas like **infrastructure, energy, and trade** could benefit both nations, fostering deeper ties beyond political differences.
 - Also, encouraging cultural exchanges, **religious tourism** can build trust and understanding between the people of both countries.
- **Comprehensive Border Management:** India needs to develop a comprehensive and balanced approach to border management that **considers security concerns while facilitating legitimate cross-border activities with Myanmar.**
- **Supporting a Democratic Transition:** India's engagement in Myanmar should ultimately aim to support a peaceful transition to democracy in Myanmar, even if the process is slow and challenging.
 - A stable and democratic Myanmar aligns with India's vision for **regional stability and prosperity**, making this a long-term strategic goal.



UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Department of Border Management is a Department of which one of the following Union

Ministries? (2008)

- (a) Ministry of Defence
- (b) Ministry of Home Affairs
- (c) Ministry of Shipping, Road Transport and Highways
- (d) Ministry of Environment and Forests

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q1: Analyze the multidimensional challenges posed by external state and non-state actors, to the internal security of India. Also discuss measures required to be taken to combat these threats. **(2021)**

Q2: For effective border area management, discuss the steps required to be taken to deny local support to militants and also suggest ways to manage favourable perception among locals. **(2020)**

Q3: Border management is a complex task due to difficult terrain and hostile relations with some countries. Elucidate the challenges and strategies for effective border management. **(2016)**

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