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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

India, Myanmar, and a Shifting Strategic Balance

INDIAN EXPRESS

4 June 2026 · IR · SECURITY & DEFENCE · GS2

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India, Myanmar, and a Shifting Strategic Balance

 **The Indian Express** 4 June 2026 **GS2**

Source: ujjyari.com — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

EDITORIAL SUMMARY

The *Indian Express* analyses India's strategic recalibration following **Myanmar President U Min Aung Hlaing's state visit to India** (May 30 – June 3, 2026) — his first foreign trip since the February 2021 military coup. The editorial argues that India's decision to host the junta leader reflects **pragmatic security-first diplomacy**: New Delhi is prioritising the **phase-out of the Free Movement Regime (FMR)**, border security assurances against anti-India insurgent groups, and access to Myanmar's **critical minerals** and connectivity corridors — over democratic legitimacy concerns. The editorial warns that this approach risks India ceding the moral high ground while failing to adequately counter growing Chinese influence in Myanmar.

MYANMAR SINCE THE 2021 COUP

The **Myanmar military (Tatmadaw)** seized power in the **February 2021 coup**, overthrowing the elected NLD government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Since then:

- Civil war between the Tatmadaw and the **People's Defence Forces (PDF)** and ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) has intensified
- By 2025, the military controls less than 50% of Myanmar's territory
- **1 million+ internally displaced**; humanitarian crisis worsening
- International sanctions from US, EU, UK; India and China have not imposed sanctions
- **China** has emerged as the dominant external partner for the junta — arms supplier, economic lifeline

INDIA'S INTERESTS IN MYANMAR

INTEREST	DETAILS
Border security	~1,643 km shared border; insurgent groups (ULFA, NSCN-K, Arakan Army) have used Myanmar sanctuaries
Free Movement Regime	FMR allows people to move 16 km across the India-Myanmar border without visa; being phased out as security concern
Connectivity	Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project; India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway
Critical minerals	Myanmar has rare earths, jade, rubies, tungsten; China dominates extraction currently
Act East Policy	Myanmar is the land bridge to ASEAN; essential for India's eastern connectivity

OUTCOMES OF THE MIN AUNG HLAING VISIT

What India Secured

- ① **FMR phase-out agreed** — Myanmar assured cooperation in winding down the Free Movement Regime
- ② **No-sanctuary assurance** — Myanmar committed that its territory would not be used by anti-India insurgent groups
- ③ **Border fencing acceleration** — India to accelerate fencing along the ~1,643 km India-Myanmar border
- ④ **Critical minerals MoU** — cooperation agreement on rare earth and mineral exploration

What India Offered

- Continued development assistance (connectivity projects, power supply to border villages)
- No political condemnation of the military government
- Maintained Neighbourhood First engagement

THE STRATEGIC DILEMMA

Pragmatic Case for Engagement

- **Security first:** India cannot afford ungoverned spaces on its eastern border — engagement with whoever controls territory is necessary
- **China balance:** If India disengages, China fills the vacuum; India already lags China as Myanmar's top partner
- **Connectivity stakes:** Kaladan and the Trilateral Highway require functional Myanmar government cooperation
- **Ethnic armed groups:** Several pro-India EAOs (Chin National Army, others) need India's diplomatic leverage to protect their interests in peace negotiations

Moral/Strategic Case Against Pure Pragmatism

- **Democratic legitimacy:** India's credibility as a democracy promoter is undermined by hosting the junta
- **Ethnic resistance forces:** Several EAOs controlling border areas are aligned against the junta; India may need their cooperation too
- **Long-term instability:** A military government fighting 60%+ of its territory is not a stable partner
- **Civil society:** India-Myanmar people-to-people ties and India's goodwill with Myanmar civil society are eroded by junta legitimization

FREE MOVEMENT REGIME (FMR) — CONTEXT

The **FMR** allows residents of both countries to cross the India-Myanmar border and travel up to **16 km** on either side without a visa. Originally designed to support border communities' cultural and economic ties (tribal communities on both sides share ethnicities), the FMR has increasingly been flagged as a security **vulnerability**:

- **Ethnic insurgents** using it to move across the border
- **Drug trafficking** (Golden Triangle is adjacent)
- **Irregular migration** from Myanmar into Manipur and Mizoram

India announced the **cancellation of FMR** as policy in early 2024 and the June 2026 visit has advanced the implementation timeline.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Prelims

- Myanmar President: U Min Aung Hlaing
- Visit: May 30 – June 3, 2026
- FMR: Free Movement Regime (16 km both sides; being phased out)
- India-Myanmar border: ~1,643 km
- Key connectivity: Kaladan Multi-Modal Project; India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway
- India policies: Neighbourhood First Policy, Act East Policy

Mains Angles

- 1 **GS2 – India’s Neighbourhood Policy:** How does India balance democratic values with strategic pragmatism in its policy toward Myanmar? Is the engagement approach sustainable?
- 2 **GS3 – Internal Security:** Examine the security implications of the Free Movement Regime along the India-Myanmar border. Is its phase-out the right policy?
- 3 **GS2 – IR:** Critically analyse India’s Act East Policy in the context of the Myanmar civil war. How does China’s deepening footprint in Myanmar affect India’s connectivity ambitions?

FACTS CORNER

FACT	DETAIL
Myanmar President	U Min Aung Hlaing
Visit to India	May 30 – June 3, 2026
Myanmar coup	Since the coup of February 2021
India-Myanmar border	~1,643 km
FMR	16 km free movement both sides; being phased out
Key project	Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project
India policies invoked	Neighbourhood First, Act East Policy
Key security ask	No anti-India groups on Myanmar territory

Source: India, Myanmar, and a Shifting Strategic Balance — Ujjyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

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