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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# Reimagining the India-Myanmar Border: On the Free Movement Regime

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CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# Reimagining the India-Myanmar Border: On the Free Movement Regime


 **The Indian Express**    19 June 2026    **GS2**    **GS3**

Source: [ujyari.com](https://ujyari.com) — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"When a national border cuts through a single ethnic community, how should the state weigh security and fencing against the lived ties and livelihoods of border people, and against the objections of the states involved?"*

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Indian Express](#)

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## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

The Centre's move to scrap the **Free Movement Regime (FMR)** and **fence the India-Myanmar border** has met strong objections from **Mizoram and Nagaland**. For an aspirant, this is a GS2/GS3 case at the intersection of **internal security**, **Act East connectivity** and **cooperative federalism** (<https://ujyari.com/terms/cooperative-federalism/>): how should the state regulate a border that runs straight through a single ethnic community?

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

The **FMR** let border residents cross visa-free within a fixed limit, recognising that the **~1,643-km** boundary divides kindred peoples. **Post-Manipur** concerns over arms, insurgents, drugs and refugees drive the push to **fence** and scrap it. But fencing severs families, disrupts livelihoods and undercuts **Act East**, and the affected states object. The answer is a **calibrated** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/calibrated/>), **consulted** framework, not a blanket seal.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

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ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
<b>Free Movement Regime</b>	Visa-free crossing within a fixed border limit	Recognises shared cross-border communities
<b>Border fencing</b>	Physical barrier along ~1,643 km	The security response under debate
<b>Act East connectivity</b>	India's link to Southeast Asia via the northeast	A hard barrier undercuts the policy
<b>Federal pushback</b>	Mizoram and Nagaland objections	Internal security needs local consent

## THE ANALYSIS: WHY A BLANKET SEAL FALLS SHORT

- ❶ **The border divides one community.** Kinship, trade and seasonal movement predate the colonial line; the FMR acknowledged this.
- ❷ **Security concerns are real.** Manipur violence, arms, the drug trade and post-coup refugees make porousness a liability.
- ❸ **Connectivity cuts the other way.** Act East runs through this frontier; a hard barrier isolates the region it seeks to engage.
- ❹ **Consent matters.** Mizoram and Nagaland's objections make this a test of cooperative federalism (<https://ujivari.com/terms/federalism/>), not just border policy.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

*the **Free Movement Regime (FMR)**, allowing visa-free crossing within a fixed distance of the **India-Myanmar border (~1,643 km)**, spanning **Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram**. **Drivers:** the **Manipur violence**; cross-border arms, insurgents and drugs (the **Golden Triangle**); refugee inflow after the **Myanmar coup (2021)**. **Policy frame:** **Act East Policy** (<https://ujivari.com/terms/act-east-policy/>); the **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project**; the **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway**. **Concepts:** cooperative federalism; internal security; border management; humanitarian and kinship ties. **Federal note:** Mizoram and Nagaland have formally objected to fencing.*

## THE DEBATE

**Argument for scrapping and fencing:** Instability in Myanmar and the flow of arms, drugs and insurgents make a porous border a security liability; a fenced border with regulated crossings is the responsible course.

**Argument against:** Fencing severs families and livelihoods, ignores the consent of the states most affected, and undercuts Act East connectivity; **the border is a community, not just a line.**

**The balanced verdict:** Some regulation is unavoidable, but a **blanket scrap is the wrong instrument.** A calibrated, consulted framework with regulated crossings and intelligence-led policing addresses security while preserving ties and connectivity.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*A weak answer picks a side: total openness or a full fence. The strong answer reframes the choice as how to regulate, designing a managed border with crossing points, biometric passes and state consultation. The move, “convert a binary into a design problem,” works across internal-security debates, from data regulation to migration policy.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Colonial boundary -> divides one ethnic community -> FMR (visa-free crossing) recognises this. The pressure: Manipur + arms/drugs + refugees -> push to fence + scrap FMR. The countervailing (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/countervailing/>) reality: severed kinship + lost livelihoods + Act East disruption + state objections. The resolution: regulated crossings + biometric passes + intelligence-led policing + consultation -> managed, not sealed.

## THE WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Replace a blanket scrap** with a calibrated, regulated-crossing framework.
- 2 **Introduce biometric border passes** at designated points for genuine residents.
- 3 **Consult Mizoram and Nagaland** so internal security rests on local trust.
- 4 **Pair fencing selectively with intelligence-led policing** of arms and drugs, preserving Act East connectivity.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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*Examine the rationale for reassessing the Free Movement Regime along the India-Myanmar border, balancing internal-security concerns against ethnic ties, livelihoods and Act East connectivity. (250 words)*

*“The task is a border that is managed, not merely sealed, one that protects against threats while keeping faith with the communities and the Act East promise it holds.”*

*Free Movement Regime · India-Myanmar border (~1,643 km) · Act East Policy · Kaladan project · India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway · Golden Triangle.*

*When a border cuts through one community, how should the state weigh fencing against the livelihoods of border people and the objections of the affected states?*

*Connects to GS2/GS3 PYQs on India’s neighbourhood policy, internal security in the northeast and federalism; a probable question is the security-versus-connectivity framing above.*

*static GS2 on Act East and the northeast; the RELOS strategic-autonomy editorial in this edition.*

**Sources:** *The Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/section/opinion/editorials/>), *Ministry of Home Affairs* (<http://www.mha.gov.in>)

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**KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

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**Reassessing the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and fencing the roughly 1,643-km India-Myanmar border reflects genuine post-Manipur security concerns, but the border communities share deep ethnic and economic ties that any new framework must accommodate, leaving the state to balance internal security against Act East connectivity and federal pushback from Mizoram and Nagaland.**

 **SUPPORTING**

- The FMR allowed people living near the border to cross without a visa within a fixed limit, a recognition that the boundary cuts through shared communities.
- Post-Manipur, concerns over cross-border movement of arms, insurgents, drugs and refugees have driven the push to scrap the FMR and fence the border.
- Mizoram and Nagaland have objected strongly, since the border divides kindred communities and fencing disrupts livelihoods, family ties and local trade, raising a federal as well as a humanitarian dimension.

 **COUNTER**

Some argue that an open or lightly regulated border has become a security liability, and that a managed, fenced border with regulated crossing points is the only responsible response to instability in Myanmar.

 **WAY FORWARD**

Replace a blanket scrap with a calibrated framework, regulated crossing points with biometric passes, consultation with affected states, and security measures that preserve legitimate community ties and Act East connectivity.


**MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

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**QUESTION**

*Examine the rationale for reassessing the Free Movement Regime along the India-Myanmar border, balancing internal-security concerns against ethnic ties, livelihoods and Act East connectivity. (250 words)*

**INTRODUCTION**

A border is a line on a map; for the people of India's northeast frontier with Myanmar it runs through a single community. The move to scrap the Free Movement Regime and fence the boundary is where security policy meets lived geography.

**BODY**

The Free Movement Regime (FMR) permitted residents on either side of the roughly 1,643-km India-Myanmar border to cross without a visa within a fixed distance, an acknowledgement that the colonial-era boundary divides kindred communities, the Nagas, the Kuki-Chin-Mizo peoples and others, whose kinship, trade and seasonal movement predate the line. The case for reassessment is not invented.

The Manipur violence, the inflow of arms and insurgents, the drug trade along the Golden Triangle, and the refugee pressure following the Myanmar coup have all made a porous border a security concern, and the Centre has pushed to end the FMR and fence the frontier. Yet the same border carries the logic of Act East: connectivity to Southeast Asia runs through it, and a hard barrier risks cutting India off from the very region it seeks to engage.

The federal dimension is sharp. Mizoram and Nagaland have objected that fencing severs families, disrupts livelihoods and ignores the consent of the states most affected, a reminder that internal security in the northeast is inseparable from local trust.

The honest counter is that instability in Myanmar makes some regulation unavoidable; an entirely open border is no longer tenable. But the choice is not binary.

A calibrated framework, regulated crossing points, biometric border passes, intelligence-led policing of arms and drugs, and genuine consultation with the affected states, can address security without severing the ties and connectivity that make the frontier more than a fault line.

**CONCLUSION**

Security and kinship are not opposites here; they are both real. The task is a border that is managed, not merely sealed, one that protects against threats while keeping faith with the communities and the Act East promise it holds.


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