

Indo- Myanmar Border management

Why in news?

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Myanmar was building a border demarcation fencing with India. The construction is currently on hold.

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How did the border problem between India and Myanmar emerged?

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- The formation of Myanmar as a separate State in 1935 and decolonisation of the sub-continent in 1947 divided ethnic communities living along the Indo-Myanmar border.

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- These communities, particularly Nagas, found the newly created boundary to be inconsistent with the traditional limits of the region they inhabited.

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- And they felt a deep sense of insecurity as they became ethnic minorities on both sides of the border.

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What is FMR?

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- The people living in the Eastern districts of Nagaland and in the areas of NSAZ in Myanmar have close family ties and engage in cultural and economic exchanges.

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- In some instances, the imaginary border line even cuts across houses, land and villages.

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- People living on the Indian side, own land holdings including cultivated lands and forested areas across the border and are completely dependent on

it for their livelihood.

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- Also from the Myanmar side, a lot of villagers come to the Indian side to buy basic essentials.

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· Therefore the Indian and Myanmar governments established the **Free Movement Regime (FMR)**, which allowed Nagas to travel 16 kilometres across the border on either side without any visa requirements.

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- Taking advantage of the FMR, a sizeable number of students from NSAZ also study in schools on the Indian side of the border.

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What are the shortcomings of FMR?

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- The FMR has been misused by locals to smuggle contraband in their head loads, which are not subject to inspection.

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- Militant groups have been using the porous border for moving cadres and arms.

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- Along with other active Indian insurgent groups, the NSCN-Khaplang (NSCN-K), which had unilaterally abrogated the ceasefire with the Government of India (GoI) in 2015, maintains its camps and training bases in NSAZ in Myanmar.

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- All these groups carry out illegal activities including launching strikes against Indian security forces and returning to their safe havens in Myanmar.

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- China has also been reportedly aiding some of these groups.

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- Policing such a large area marked by harsh terrain and dense forest is difficult.

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What is the impact of the fence construction along the border?

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- The ongoing activity of fence construction along the Indo- Myanmar has triggered apprehensions among the people living on either side of the border.
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- The affected people mainly are Konyak, Khamniungan and Yimchunger Nagas who inhabit the areas of Eastern Nagaland in India and the Naga Self Administered Zone (NSAZ) in Myanmar.
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- It would deprive them of the produce from their land and forest resources.
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- From the security perspective, possible anti-establishment sentiments could destroy the peace along the Indo Myanmar border.
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How to manage the border between India and Myanmar?

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- Suitable measures need to be initiated in order to establish trust and confidence amongst the affected populace.
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- Tripartite talks involving the local stakeholders via state government, the Myanmar government and the GoI could be organised to address extant concerns.
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- Socio-economic initiatives on either side of the border aimed at benefitting the local inhabitants by alleviating poverty and bringing greater development in the region should be worked out.
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- A mutually acceptable arrangement addressing the security concerns of both the countries with minimum discomfort to the local inhabitants would be best way to address the border problem.
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- The GoI on its part should provide an assurance that no construction of border fence will be undertaken on the Indian side without taking the affected population into confidence.
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How the borders should be managed?

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- In case national security concerns dictate the necessity of constructing a fence along the India-Myanmar border, options such as selective fencing, better use of technology, and regulated flow of cross-border movement, among other initiatives, can be examined.

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- Regulated borders with greater emphasis on developing people-to-people contact and cross-border trade initiatives are likely to yield greater security benefits.

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- It is however essential to take into confidence the affected populace and the local stakeholders prior to the finalisation and implementation of such plans.

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Source: IDSA

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