

## Reassessing India-Myanmar Border Strategy: The End of Free Movement Regime

The Indian Government's decision to terminate the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the 1,643km India-Myanmar border signifies a major shift in border management strategy. This move, impacting states like Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh, reflects a strategic pivot from the previously more open-border policy under India's Act East Policy.

- **Security Concerns Prompting Policy Change:** The primary rationale behind ending the FMR is escalating security concerns. The porous nature of the border, especially in Manipur, has facilitated illegal activities, including drug trafficking and insurgent movements. Post the 2021 Myanmar coup, the region experienced an influx of Burmese civilians, intensifying concerns over illegal immigration and regional stability.
- **Challenges of Permeability and Insurgency:** The border's permeability has been exploited for narcotics trafficking and cross-border insurgency, with groups using the FMR for attacks and establishing safe havens. Key trade points like Moreh and Zokhawatar lack essential infrastructure and screening facilities, exacerbating informal trade and smuggling.
- **Diverse State Perspectives and Socio-Cultural Dynamics:** Manipur's Chief Minister N Biren Singh advocates for the FMR's termination, while Mizoram's Chief Minister Lalduhoma underscores the importance of socio-cultural ties, advocating for the FMR's continuation. The perspectives of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh likely reflect similar socio-cultural considerations.
- **Smart Fencing and Socio-Cultural Implications:** The planned implementation of smart fencing along the border, while enhancing security, may not fully address cross-border insurgency due to the unique socio-cultural landscape of the borderland. Tribes like the Singphos, Nagas, Kukis, and Mizos, with strong cross-border ties, are likely to be impacted by the suspension of the FMR and the comprehensive border fencing plan.
- **Geopolitical Risk and Strategic Implications:** India's closure of the FMR is a response to heightened risks following the Myanmar coup, insurgent activities, and increased drug trafficking. This strategic move aims to control unfolding regional tensions but presents challenges in balancing security with socio-cultural and economic interactions.