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TODAY'S ANALYSIS

(02 April 2025)

TOPICS TO BE COVERED

- **SHOULD FREE MOVEMENT REGIME WITH MYANMAR END?**
- **BANGLADESH LEADER MOHD YUNUS REMARKS ON NORTH EAST INDIA**
- **MCQs**



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SHOULD FREE MOVEMENT REGIME WITH MYANMAR END?



- In February 2024, the Union Home Minister announced plans to scrap the **Free Movement Regime (FMR)** along the **India-Myanmar** border due to security concerns and allegations.
- These unregulated cross-border movements **were contributing to ethnic conflicts**, particularly in Manipur.

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- However, the Ministry of External Affairs has **yet to issue a formal notification**, and Myanmar has not signed any agreement on this matter.
- The FMR, which has **existed since 1968**, allows people on both sides of the **1,653 km border** to move freely within a 16 km limit.
- This policy has facilitated deep familial, ethnic, and trade ties between border communities.

WHAT IS FREE MOVEMENT REGIME?

- The Free Movement Regime (FMR) **allows citizens in India and Myanmar's border regions to cross into each other's countries without a visa, within a specified limit.**
- It was **introduced (current version) in 2018 as part of India's Act East Policy.**
- The regime allows individuals living near the border to **travel up to 16 km** into the neighboring country with minimal restrictions, facilitating local trade, educational access, and healthcare.
- Those residing along the border are granted a **one-year border pass that permits stays of up to two weeks in the neighboring country.**

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- Much of India's northeast was under Burmese occupation until the **Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826**, which established the current India-Myanmar boundary.
- The treaty was signed between the **British and the Burmese**, ending the **First Anglo-Burmese War**.
- This border, however, divided communities with shared ethnic and cultural backgrounds, such as the **Nagas in Nagaland and Manipur, and the Kuki-Chin-Mizo communities in Manipur and Mizoram**, without their consent.
- Currently, India and Myanmar share a 1,643 km border through Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh, of which only 10 km is fenced in Manipur.

IMPACT OF FMR ON BORDER COMMUNITIES

- For communities in Mizoram, which shares an international border with Myanmar, the **FMR had limited impact**.
- Historically, cross-border transactions have been a part of everyday life, with people on both sides maintaining strong business and familial relationships.
- The **16 km restriction imposed in 2004** did not substantially change the nature of these interactions.

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- For other border communities, the **FMR is largely unknown**. The regime has only gained attention recently due to issues in Manipur.
- Prior to that, these communities were largely unaware of any formal restrictions on their movement across the border.

CENTER'S SECURITY CONCERNS

The Centre has expressed concerns over the possible negative impact of the FMR, focusing on security issues such as infiltration, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and insurgency activities.

- **Increased Infiltration:** There are growing concerns about the **influx of illegal immigrants, particularly from the Chin and Naga communities in Myanmar**, along with the movement of Rohingyas.
- This is feared to strain local resources and impact the demographic makeup of border areas.
- **Drug Trafficking and Arms Smuggling:** The porous border allows for the easy movement of drugs and weapons, posing a serious threat to internal security.
- In 2022, Manipur reported 500 cases and 625 arrests under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

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- **Insurgency Activities:** Insurgent groups operating in India's northeast, such as the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and Kangleipak Communist Party-Lamphel (KCP-Lamphel), have been able to cross the border easily due to the FMR, evading capture and further destabilizing the region.

SOCIO ECONOMIC & REGIONAL ISSUES

The FMR has also raised concerns regarding its socio-economic impact, including potential harm to local cultures and the environment.

- **Cultural Identity:** There are concerns about the **preservation of indigenous cultures and traditions** in the border areas. The unrestricted movement of people has raised fears that increased migration might dilute local cultural practices.
- **Environmental Degradation:** Unregulated cross-border movement has been linked to **illegal resource extraction**, including deforestation and mining activities, further exacerbating environmental challenges in the region.
- **Regional Dynamics:** **China's growing influence** in Myanmar has added complexity to the security situation. The geopolitical situation, coupled with Myanmar's internal instability, makes managing the border increasingly challenging.

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MAJOR ASPECTS OF INDIA MYANMAR RELATIONS

India and Myanmar share long-standing historical and cultural ties, with Buddhism acting as a significant link between the two nations.

- **Treaty of Friendship (1951):** This treaty forms the foundation of their diplomatic relations.
- **Economic Cooperation:** India is Myanmar's fourth-largest trading partner and a major source of investment.
- Collaborative projects include the **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project** and the **Trilateral Highway Project**, which aim to enhance connectivity and trade.
- India has also been involved in the restoration of Ananda Temple in Bagan, Myanmar.
- **Disaster Relief:** India has been prompt in providing disaster relief to Myanmar during natural calamities, including Cyclone Mora in 2017 and the earthquake in Shan State in 2010. Presently, India has launched **Operation Brahma** for medical assistance.

SHOULD FMR CONTINUE? WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

- **Monitoring and Regulation:** While the FMR could be reformed to better monitor cross-border movement, completely scrapping it may not address the underlying issues of cross-border crime or ethnic conflict.

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- Instead, border areas could be more effectively managed by strengthening monitoring mechanisms and fostering better communication between Indian and Myanmar authorities.
- **Legalizing Trade:** Legalizing some forms of cross-border trade could help curb illicit activities and generate revenue for the government.
- By formalizing trade, the government could also ensure proper regulation of goods moving across the border, which would benefit the local economy while minimizing illegal practices.
- **Community Involvement:** Involving local communities in discussions and giving them a sense of ownership and responsibility could also play a crucial role in ensuring the security and economic stability of the region.
- The government must carefully navigate the sentiments of border populations, who share ethnic ties across the border.

PRACTICALITY OF FENCING THE BORDER

- The proposal to erect a fence along the 1,700 km India-Myanmar border faces significant practical challenges, including the difficult terrain and the complex nature of the border region.

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- Even in countries with advanced infrastructure, such as the U.S., fences have proven ineffective in completely preventing illegal border crossings.
- A fence could also exacerbate tensions with local communities, many of whom share close ethnic and familial ties with people across the border.
- These communities may see such measures as an infringement on their rights and identity.

CONCLUSION

The future of the Free Movement Regime between India and Myanmar is uncertain. While security concerns are valid, scrapping the FMR or erecting a border fence may not be the most effective solutions. A more comprehensive approach that involves better border management, community engagement, and the legalization of cross-border trade could address both security issues and local economic needs. Any decision should prioritize the interests of the people living along the border while safeguarding national security.

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BANGLADESH LEADER MOHD YUNUS

REMARKS ON NORTH EAST INDIA



Background:

- **Muhammad Yunus**, the **interim leader of Bangladesh**, sparked a diplomatic controversy with remarks made during his **four-day visit to China** from **March 26 to 29, 2025**. These comments, about India's northeastern states, have led to a heated political debate and significant backlash in India.

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- His statements come at a time when **India-Bangladesh relations** are already strained, especially as **China** has been increasingly making overtures to **Bangladesh**, complicating India's diplomatic landscape in the region.

WHAT DID YUNUS SAY?

- **On Northeast India's Geography:** Yunus described the seven northeastern states of India (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Tripura), collectively known as the "**Seven Sisters**", as "**landlocked**", stating they have "**no way to reach out to the ocean**".
- **Bangladesh as a Strategic Gateway:** He further declared that **Bangladesh** is the "**only guardian of the ocean**" for this region.
- He suggested that Bangladesh could serve as an economic link for Northeast India to the wider world, especially by **facilitating trade between China and the rest of the globe**.
- **China's Economic Interests:** Yunus added that Bangladesh could potentially act as an extension of the **Chinese economy**, offering opportunities to build, produce, and market goods, which would be exported to China and beyond.

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HOW DID INDIA RESPOND?

Yunus' comments have drawn sharp criticism from various quarters, particularly from political leaders in **Northeast India**.

- **Leaders from Northeast India:**

- **Himanta Biswa Sarma**, the **Chief Minister of Assam**, strongly condemned Yunus' remarks.
- Sarma deemed them “**offensive**” and noted that such comments play into the **vulnerability narrative** of India's “**Chicken's Neck**” corridor – the narrow land strip (22 km wide) that connects the Northeast to the rest of India.
- He also stressed the need for improving **infrastructure** in the region, including the development of **robust railway and road networks** to strengthen India's connectivity.
- He suggested that the **Chicken's Neck** vulnerability could be mitigated by exploring alternative road routes, bypassing Bangladesh entirely, which would lessen India's dependence on the corridor.

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NATIONAL POLITICAL REACTIONS

- **Pawan Khera**, a **Congress leader**, criticized the Indian government's foreign policy, accusing Bangladesh of **aligning with China** to **encircle** India, especially with regard to the **Northeast**.
- He warned that **Manipur** and **Arunachal Pradesh** were already at risk, pointing out that **China has been establishing villages in Arunachal**.
- **Gaurav Gogoi**, a **Congress MP** from Assam, also raised concerns. He pointed out the contradiction between the "**strong ties**" that **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** emphasized in his communications with Bangladesh and Yunus' recent remarks, which were viewed as **undermining India's territorial integrity**.
- **N Biren Singh**, the former **Chief Minister of Manipur**, also **condemned Yunus' comments**, accusing Bangladesh of trying to use Northeast India as a **strategic pawn** in its **geopolitical maneuvering**, especially with China's involvement. Singh reiterated that **India's unity and territorial integrity** are **non-negotiable**.

WHY ARE YUNUS' REMARKS PROBLEMATIC FOR INDIA?

- The "Chicken's Neck" Corridor:

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- The **Siliguri Corridor**, also called the **Chicken's Neck**, is the **only land link** between India's northeastern states and the rest of the country.
- It is strategically critical as it is the narrow strip of land (about 22 km wide) connecting India with **Bangladesh** and providing access to the **Northeast**.
- **Any disruption in the Chicken's Neck** would sever the **Northeast's connection** with the rest of India, effectively isolating the region.
- This geographic vulnerability is a long-standing concern for India, as it could be used to disrupt vital supplies, trade, and troop movement.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

- The Northeast is not just important from an internal connectivity perspective; it also holds **geopolitical value** in India's relations with neighboring countries like **China**, **Bhutan**, and **Nepal**.
- With **China's increasing presence** in South Asia, particularly through its **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, the growing closeness between **Bangladesh and China** is seen as a **strategic concern** for India.
- Yunus' comments may be viewed as **Bangladesh positioning itself** as a potential **geopolitical ally of China**, which could pose challenges to India's strategic positioning in the region.

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ECONOMIC & TRADE IMPLICATIONS

- Yunus implied that Bangladesh could serve as a **link for regional trade**, facilitating access to the sea for China, which is a crucial aspect of China's broader **economic ambitions** in the region.
- This shift in Bangladesh's position could have far-reaching consequences for India's economic ties with Bangladesh, particularly in terms of **trade routes** and **logistics**.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

- **Recent Tensions:** India and Bangladesh have had a **complicated diplomatic history**, with cooperation in areas like **trade**, **counterterrorism**, and **regional stability** being somewhat offset by concerns over issues like **border security** and **water-sharing** agreements.
- **China's Influence in Bangladesh:** The growing ties between **Bangladesh and China** have raised alarms in India.
- China's increasing influence in Bangladesh, especially its economic and infrastructure projects, are perceived as a potential **challenge to India's regional dominance**.

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MCQs

1. Which of these states do not share a boundary with Myanmar?

- (A) Mizoram
- (B) Arunachal Pradesh
- (C) Nagaland
- (D) Meghalaya

Ans. (D)

2. Consider the following statements wrt Free Movement Regime and mark the correct one:

- 1. FMR was introduced in 1968 to facilitate the cultural & economic exchange.
- 2. It was restructured in 2018 which restricted the movement upto 16 kms inside both the countries with a pass valid for 14 days.

- (A) Only 1
- (B) Only 2
- (C) Both 1 & 2
- (D) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (C)

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3. Which of these state do not share a boundary with Bangladesh?

- (A) Mizoram
- (B) Assam
- (C) Tripura
- (D) Manipur

Ans. (D)

4. Which of these ports in Bangladesh have Chinese presence established?

- (A) Chattogram
- (B) Chittagong
- (C) Mongla
- (D) None of the above

Ans. (B)



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