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Q20

Cross-Border movement of insurgents is only one of the several security challenges facing the policing of the border in North-East India. Examine the various challenges currently emanating across the India-Myanmar border. Also, discuss the steps to counter the challenges.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · GS III · 15 marks · Border Security and Organised Crime
Security challenges and their management in border areas - linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

Core demand of the question

- Examine security challenges on the India-Myanmar border beyond insurgent crossing
- Discuss steps to counter them
- Cover **FMR**, terrain, drugs, arms, refugees, and diplomacy

Revision summary

The India-Myanmar border is a long, largely unfenced hill and forest line across four North-Eastern States.

Insurgent sanctuary in Myanmar is one challenge among **FMR** misuse, narcotics, arms, wildlife, and refugee pulses.

Terrain and sparse posts make western-style fencing only a partial answer.

Counters are Myanmar cooperation, selective smart borders, regulated **FMR**, NCB and money-trail cases, ICPs, and Kaladan plus the trilateral highway.

Border-area development and village intelligence matter as much as a new outpost.

Introduction

The **India-Myanmar border** runs about **1,600 kilometres** through **Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram**. It is a rain forest and hill border, not a desert fence. **Cross-border movement of insurgents is real: camps, arms, and sanctuary have long sat on the Myanmar side. It is only one challenge. Drugs, wildlife, fake documents, refugees, a free-movement custom, and a thin State** are the others. Policing this border is therefore **terrain plus ethnicity plus a neighbour in flux**, not a single patrol problem.

Body**Challenges emanating across the border**

- **Insurgent movement:** groups from the North-East have used Myanmar's Sagaing and Chin hills as rest, training, and strike-and-return space. This remains the classic problem, but it is not the whole list.
- **Free Movement Regime (FMR):** historically, tribes within **16 kilometres** on either side may cross with a permit/head-load custom. Kinship is real; so is **misuse** for arms, drugs, and

unaccounted people. Fencing clashes with that social fact.

- **Terrain and unfenced stretches:** thick forest, monsoon slides, and few roads mean the **Assam Rifles** and State police cannot see every nullah. Border outposts are sparse compared with the western land border.
- **Golden Triangle narcotics:** heroin and, increasingly, **methamphetamine** move from Myanmar production toward Manipur and Mizoram routes into India. Money from drugs funds both crime and some armed politics.
- **Arms and explosives** along the same tracks; wildlife and timber trafficking use the same guides.
- **Gold, wildlife parts, and contraband** as high-value, low-bulk loads that do not need an insurgent flag.
- **Refugee and illegal migration pulses** when Myanmar's army campaigns or communal violence hit **Chin, Naga, and other kin groups**; Mizoram's social hospitality then becomes a policing and a humanitarian puzzle. (Rohingya pressure is heavier on Bangladesh, but instability in Myanmar still spills west.)
- **Fake identity and SIM-document** networks in hill towns.
- **China's economic and security weight in Myanmar** can constrain how far Naypyidaw will squeeze camps that India wants closed.
- **Local extortion and parallel taxes** on the Indian side, which make the border a business as well as a front.
- **Limited Integrated Check Posts** and a slow **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit** and **India-Myanmar-Thailand** road, so legal trade is thin and smuggling is the working economy.

Steps to counter

- **Diplomacy and operations with Myanmar:** coordinated patrols, intelligence sharing, and periodic **cross-border operations** against camps, with respect for Myanmar's sovereignty - the political permission is as important as the rifle.
- **Selective fencing and smart border:** fence where population and smuggling tracks are dense (Manipur has seen this debate); use **sensors, drones, and satellite** where fence is impossible. Do not pretend a full Radcliffe-style fence fits this hill.
- **Regulate, do not naively abolish, FMR:** biometric permits, shorter lists of crossing points, and intelligence on repeat misusers; consult tribal councils so the regime is not only a Delhi circular.
- **Assam Rifles, CAPF, and State police joint SOPs; Multi-Agency Centre** feeds on drugs-and-arms, not only on named insurgents.
- **Narcotics Control Bureau**, customs, and **prevention of money laundering** against the meth-and-heroin profit; destroy the market, not only the mule.
- **Border Area Development Programme**, roads, telecom, and schools so the Indian side is not a vacuum that the smuggler administers.
- **Integrated Check Posts** (Moreh-Tamu and others) to pull trade into the legal gate.
- Finish **Kaladan** (Sittwe to Mizoram) and the trilateral highway so the North-East's look-east is a truck, not a mule track.
- **Humanitarian screening** of genuine refugees versus infiltrators; work with UNHCR norms without advertising a pull factor.
- **Community policing** with Naga, Kuki, Mizo, and other village authorities who already know who is a cousin and who is a stranger.

- **Long-term:** a **stable, cooperative Myanmar**; without it, every Indian fence is a temporary patch.

Flow diagram

India-Myanmar border -> Insurgent camps
India-Myanmar border -> FMR kinship misuse kinship misuse
India-Myanmar border -> Golden Triangle drugs arms
India-Myanmar border -> Refugee pulses
Diplomacy smart fence ICP -> India-Myanmar border
BADP Kaladan IMT highway -> India-Myanmar border

Conclusion

Insurgent crossing is one India-Myanmar problem among drugs, **FMR** misuse, an unfenced forest, refugees, and thin legal trade. Counter it with Myanmar's cooperation, smart and selective fencing, a regulated **FMR**, narcotics-and-money law, check posts, Kaladan and the trilateral road, and development on our side of the hills. A patrol without a livelihood and a neighbour's nod will not hold this border.

Facts & figures

Border length

About 1,643 kilometres with Myanmar, touching Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram.

FMR

Free Movement Regime: traditionally allowed hill tribes to cross within about 16 km for kinship and local trade, with permit practice; open to misuse.

Assam Rifles

The lead central force for much of this border, working with State police and other agencies.

Kaladan project

Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project linking Sittwe port in Myanmar to Mizoram, meant to legalise and shorten the North-East's sea access.

Golden Triangle

Opium and methamphetamine production zone of mainland South-East Asia; Myanmar is the near source for North-East drug routes.