



The Reimposition of Protected Area Regime (PAR): Reasons, Implications and Challenges

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Abstract: On the 17th December, 2024, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reimposed the Protected Area Regime (PAR) in the states of Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram. The PAR was introduced under the Foreign (Protected Area) order, 1958 for all areas falling between 'Inner Line' and the international border in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Rajasthan, Sikkim and Uttarakhand for security purpose. As per instructions issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on 30th December, 2010, the entire area within the states of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram were relaxed for a particular time period but had been extended from time to time. The reimposition of PAR aimed at addressing security concerns primarily, the alleged illegal immigration from Myanmar. The withdrawal for PAR in the above states now restricted the entry of foreigners in the protected area except under and in accordance with a permit issued by the central Government at any office authorized by the central Government. This article will discuss the reason, implications and challenges on the reimposition of Protected Area Regime within the states of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram.

Keywords: Protected, Security, Regime, Foreigners, Reimposition

Introduction

On 17th December, 2024 the Union Home Ministry announced the reimposing of Protected Area Regime (PAR) in the states of Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland. The central government took such initiatives due to rising security concerns over foreign influx from neighbouring countries. With this the relaxation of the restrictions which had been in place since 2010 has been withdrawn. The new regulation requires foreigner to acquire prior permissions and Protected Area Permits (PAP) for visiting the above mention states (Singh V. , 2024).

What is Protected Area Regime (PAR)

Protected Area Regime is a regulation under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, of 1958, which restricts the entry of foreigners into certain areas close to international borders due to security, cultural

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sensitivity, or strategic importance. All areas falling between the 'Inner line', as defined in the said order, and the International Border of the State have been declared as Protected Area whereas, areas falling between the 'Inner Line' and the 'Territory occupied by indigenous tribes' as "Restricted Areas" (Affairs, 2025). Protected Areas are located in the following States-

- (i) Whole of Arunachal Pradesh
- (ii) Parts of Himachal Pradesh
- (iii) Parts of Jammu & Kashmir
- (iv) Whole of Manipur
- (v) Whole of Mizoram
- (vi) Whole of Nagaland
- (vii) Parts of Rajasthan
- (viii) Whole of Sikkim (partly in Protected Area and partly in Restricted Area)
- (ix) Parts of Uttarakhand

Relaxation of PAR for Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram

The Ministry of Home Affairs on the 30th December, 2010 issues an instruction for the relaxation of PAR in the States of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram as a measure to promote tourism. The orders will be effective from 1st January 2011, which was initially framed for one year but had been extended from time to time. Under the new regulations any Myanmar nationals visiting the States of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram are also exempted from the requirement of obtaining a Protected Area Permit (PAP) till 31st December, 2022 due to special considerations such as -

1. All such Myanmar nationals shall obtain a visa from the Indian Missions/ Posts abroad or e-Tourist Visa facility which has been made available to the nationals of Myanmar under the existing procedure.
2. All such Myanmar nationals shall have to compulsorily register themselves with the Foreigners Registration Officer (FRO) of the State/ District they visit within 24 hours of their arrival. No such registration would be required if the Myanmar nationals are only passing through the State by road with no intention of staying in that particular State.



India's Problem with Immigrant and Asylum Seekers

India shares a 1,643 km border with Myanmar. Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram share borders with Myanmar, a country experiencing instability since a military coup in 2021. The Suspension of the Free Movement Regime (FMR), allowing unrestricted movement within 16 km of the border, has heightened security risks and border control concerns. Over 40,000 refugees from Myanmar's Kuki-Chin-Zo ethnic group have entered Mizoram, with around 60,000 more entered Manipur and estimated of 5000-6000 Nagas from Myanmar also seek refuge in Nagaland (Vijaita Singh, 2024). In addition to this, since November last year, over 200 Kuki Chin people have fled their homes in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts to take shelter in the Indian state of Mizoram, fleeing military operations by the Bangladesh security forces in the restive Chittagong Hill Tract.

Since India is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, New Delhi does not recognize asylum seekers from Myanmar as a refugee. Instead, the Central ministry informed State government not to welcome nor give refuge to Myanmar who seeks refuge in India. However, Mizoram and Nagaland states decided to accommodate asylum seekers from Myanmar since the Zo-ethnic tribes in Mizoram has close ties with Chin people in Myanmar and the Naga in India shared historical and cultural lineage with Nagas of India (Jangu, 2024). In Manipur, the state government lately wanted to enforced strict laws in order to stop influx of people from Myanmar. However, since border areas with Myanmar are occupied by the Kuki-Zo ethnic tribes, many asylum seekers from this community were sheltered.

India's Rising Security Concerns

The India-Myanmar frontier is an open border with a free movement regime, permitting tribes residing on both sides of the border to travel up to 16km across the boundary for up to three days without visa restrictions. This regime was suspended in 2021, but that has failed to check the inflow of Myanmar nationals into India. The continuing political instability in Myanmar and the long-term influx of refugees are straining the security and commercial activities in Northeast India. The ongoing clashes between the Kuki-Zo ethnic community and the Meitei people since 3rd May 2023 have resulted in over 250 deaths and 60,000 displacements. The state government suspects the involvement of "foreign hands" in the unrest (Singh R. , 2024). The outgoing chief minister fanned ethnic tensions by pointing to the arrival from Myanmar of Chin refugees, tribal kin of the Kuki-Zo, claiming that the latter were fostering illegal immigration. Another concern is the trade connects to the wider "Golden Triangle" region of South-east Asia, which includes Myanmar and harbours a thriving opium economy.



In addition to this, insurgency had resurfaced in Manipur over the past years. Majority of insurgent groups from Manipur have historically operated from bases in Myanmar including the Kuki and Meitei insurgent groups. Over the past decades, illegal drug trafficking from the Golden Triangle via Manipur and Mizoram has been a serious concern for Central Government. Mizoram and Manipur being a border with Myanmar is a prone to the illicit trafficking of abusive drugs and narcotics substances. The insurgency groups were having nexus with drug syndicates and arms smugglers as a means of generating funding for their operations (Hazarika, 2024).

Due to the above factors the Ministry of Home Affairs with concern decided to take the initiatives to tighten security matters in the Indo-Myanmar border areas. After 14 years of relaxation, the reimposition of Protected Area Regime (PAR) reflects heightened security concerns, particularly the influx of people from Myanmar and Bangladesh. Myanmar nationals, previously exempted, must now compulsorily register with the Foreigners Registration Officer (FRRO) within 24 hours of arrival. Accordingly, the Ministry of Home Affairs announced the reimposition of PAR focusing on the following reasons –

1. Growing instances of illegal migration and cross-border movement from Myanmar due to political instability and ethnic conflicts.
2. Concerns about insurgent activities and other security challenges in the region.
3. To regulate the movement of foreigners and prevent misuse of entry points for illegal activities, and
4. Protection of sensitive indigenous cultures and traditions in the region.

Implications of Reimposing PAR

The reimposition of PAR directly or indirectly will have impact on the social, economic and political life of the people as follow-

1. **For Foreign Visitors:** Foreigners visiting the area will now require special permits and approvals from government officials. Visitors who could easily obtain permission earlier now have to go through much more intricate procedure for visiting the area. Since permits are not easily available and accessible it could potentially discourage tourism.
2. **Impact on Tourism and Development:** States in Northeast India are mostly economically less productive and largely dependent on income from all sectors including tourism. The imposition of restrictions may slow down international tourism and investments in the states since tourists and side seers might find it extra burden to find the trouble in getting the permit. In addition, the Ministry



of Home Affairs discourages visiting of protected area unless there are extraordinary reasons to justify the visit. This could greatly reverse the benefits gained during the relaxation period.

3. **Enhanced Security:** The military coup in Myanmar has led to migration into India. Over 40,000 refugees have settled in Mizoram, with around 4,000 entering Manipur. Many of these migrants belong to the Kuki-Chin-Zo ethnic group, which has cultural ties to communities in the Northeast. This demographic shift has raised concerns about security and social stability in the region. Facilitates better control over foreign movements and addresses illegal migration concerns became first priority of Indian Government.
4. **Border Control:** India-Myanmar border stretching has been recognized for its illegal activities such as smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal drug trafficking and insurgent movements. Strengthens India's border management by reducing unauthorized cross-border activities became one of the main targets for New Delhi.

Challenges by Nagaland and Mizoram

Soon after the announcement for reimposition of PAR was made, an inquiry immediately arises from Mizoram and Nagaland government. In Mizoram the Zoram People's Movement government under the leadership of Chief Minister Lalduhawma expressed their concern over the central government decision for reintroduction of PAR fearing negative impact on tourism and movement between Zo-ethnic groups particularly in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Mizoram (Baruah, 2025).

Mizoram's tourism sector witnessed a total of 2, 19,149 visitors during the 2023-24. According to report released by the state's Tourism Department, of this number, 3,818 were foreign tourists, with Americans being the predominant group (Vanlalruata, 2025). Most importantly, Mizoram represent an example for being one of the most peaceful states in India where the government today is moving towards development in tourism sectors. The Mizoram Peace Accord which was signed between Mizo National Army and Indian Government represent the most successful peace accord in India. The reimposition of PAR could hinder government initiatives making Mizoram a tourist destination.

Moreover, Chief Minister Lalduhawma is also a ardent believers of the idea of Zo-reunification. During his visit to USA as a Chief Guest of Mizo Day Lalduhawa openly said, 'The main objective of ZORO Movement in 1988 was Zo-Reunification within India. Can the 'Zo' people in India, Burma and Bangladesh today, aspire to be re-united under India? Looking at the geopolitical realities of our time, it may not be so

farfetched to think this could be a possibility one day. Perhaps, fate has this reunification in store for us in the future' (Lalrinchhana, 2024). In other words, Mizoram is landing a helping hand towards the Zo-ethnic people who fled atrocities from Myanmar juntas. The Mizo opened their doors for food and shelter to their brother and sister who did the same towards them when they faced famine in the past. Therefore, the bond and attachment share by Zo-ethnic groups in Mizoram and Myanmar compelled them to even question the standpoint of Indian government on PAR.

However, Lalduhawma also express his government did not totally oppose the imposition of PAR, though initially opposed by them (Wire, 2025). The state government felt the necessity of restricting movement across the India-Myanmar border and agreed with the Centre in the introduction of a new protocol to regulate cross-border movement under the Free Movement Regime (FMR).

Chief Minister of Neiphiu Rio however expressed his strong opposition with the reimposition of the PAR in Nagaland. Highlighting the state has a peaceful atmosphere representing one of the lowest crime rates among Indian states (Rhakho, 2025). He also expressed his government concerns over the reintroduction of PAR could have negative impact on the thriving tourism industry. It's a known fact that among Northeast states Nagaland represents the most tourist destination. During the Hornbill festival Nagaland received 2,05,968 visitors among which 2,527 are foreigners. A resolution was passed by members of Nagaland Legislative Assembly highlighting that Naga people live on both sides of the international border, and removing the FMR and fencing the border would severely disrupt the age-old historical, social, tribal, and economic ties of the Naga people.

Challenges associated with PAR in the Northeast

1. **Administrative Bottlenecks:** Obtaining permits can be time-consuming and cumbersome for foreign nationals, deterring tourism and investment. Tourism, especially eco-tourism, contributes significantly to the economy by generating revenue and creating jobs. Local communities often depend on tourism for their livelihood, necessitating open access to protected areas.
2. **Security Concerns:** The region's proximity to international borders and the presence of insurgent groups pose security challenges. Some protected areas, particularly in conflict-prone regions, are used as hideouts for insurgent groups or other anti-national activities. Many protected areas are located near international borders, making them vulnerable to illegal activities, infiltration, or smuggling. The reimposition of the PAR reflects the Government of India's prioritization of security in its northeastern states.



3. **Preservation of Indigenous Cultures:** The military coup in Myanmar has led to migration into India. Over 40,000 refugees have settled in Mizoram, with around 4,000 entering Manipur. The influx has led to demographic changes, increasing tensions between local communities and refugees. Balancing cultural preservation with tourism and development remains a challenge. A strong border security can maintain ethnic harmony and prevent conflicts.
4. **Lack of Infrastructure:** Due to lack of development in some areas, poor road connectivity and limited facilities could hinder the effectiveness of PAR relaxation policies. Besides, security measures can enhance the perception of safety, encouraging domestic and foreign investment.

Conclusion

Considering the situation in Myanmar and the level of illegal immigration in the three states of Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland the reimposition of PAR is justifiable from security point of view. However, considering the vulnerability of situations at border area and the people who lives within the area the government must come up with exceptional provision. The Government can introduced special permit to boost tourism in the region. For this the authority can also create a special tourist zone within the three states. For security and surveillance purpose Geographic Information System (GIS) technologies can be used for real-time monitoring of protected areas. In addition, a digital pass for tourist with tracking devices can be issued for further observation. Most importantly, not restriction but connectivity between people from both sides of the border could alone keep up with cultural identities, traditions, and family relationships so that they may conserve their heritage.

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Citation in APA 7th Edition: Guite, L. (2025). The Reimposition of Protected Area Regime (PAR) Reasons, Implications and Challenges. Lyceum India Journal of Social Sciences, 2(1), 57–64. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15491621>

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