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SPECIAL ISSUE MARCH WEEK 4



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# Special Issue

## March (Week 4)

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## **All about Mizoram's bond with people fleeing Myanmar**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga held a virtual meeting with Myanmar Foreign Minister-in-exile Zin Mar Aung of the National League for Democracy. The meeting took place despite the Centre's reluctance to accommodate people fleeing Myanmar in light of the recent military coup and the crackdown on protesters — the Home Ministry has written to the governments of border states Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, as well as the Assam Rifles, asking them to identify Myanmar nationals fleeing the coup and deport them.*

### **Who are the Chin communities mentioned by the Mizoram CM?**

- The Chin Hills, or the Indo-Chin hill ranges as they are often called, are a mountainous region in north-western Myanmar. At an elevation of 2100-3000 metres, this heavily-forested mountain region was the home of numerous tribes that fall under the Zo umbrella.
- The Zo people include all the tribes that come under the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic group spread across Myanmar, India and Bangladesh including a host of tribes, sub-tribes and clans such as Chin, Kuki, Mizo, Zomi, Paitei, Hmar, Lushei, Ralte, Pawi, Lai, Mara, Gangte, Thadou etc.
- Believed to have originated in China, the tribes migrated through Tibet to settle in Myanmar, and speak a group of the Tibeto-Burman languages. But constant feuds among clans of different tribes and their kings (chieftains), drove many of the clans westwards, towards Mizoram and some parts of Manipur, in the 17th century.
- Here the tribes set up new villages and colonies, but even with their new identities, they remain socially and emotionally tied with the Chin tribes of Myanmar.
- When British rule extended towards the Northeast, Mizoram was denoted an “excluded area” and remained outside the administration of the British, governed only by the Scheduled District Act.

### **What is the nature of the bond between the Chin people in India and Myanmar?**

- While they are separated by a 510-km India-Myanmar border, they consider themselves “one people” despite past conflicts: the Indo-Chin people.
- Besides the shared ethnicity, what binds these two peoples together is a shared religion. Mizoram is predominantly Christian, as are the Chin people of Buddhist-majority Myanmar. Mizoram officials refer to the refugees' status as a Christian minority people in seeking asylum for them, and also the fear of persecution by the junta.
- Rih Dil in Chin state, Myanmar, is a cultural and spiritual lake for the Mizos, deeply revered in folklore, shaping pre-Christian belief of traditional Mizo views of life after death.

### **How well are the two sides connected?**

- The Mizoram-Myanmar border is porous, with very little fencing, if any. While the latest influx has been driven by the coup, Myanmar residents have been crossing this open border for decades.
- While the Assam Rifles has now received orders to keep strict vigil amid reports of over 300 refugees having crossed in, it is understood that the actual number of refugees is much higher, with more arriving every day.
- In the early 20th century, Mizos from Champhai district and elsewhere migrated to Myanmar, setting up villages in the Kalay-Kabaw valley. Many are believed to have joined the Myanmar army for lucrative employment.
- Many Mizo families also migrated to Myanmar in 1966 and 1986, when the Mizo National Front sought secession from India, to escape counter-insurgency operations from the Indian government.





- In 1988, a crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Myanmar drove Chin refugees across the Tiau River to Champhai district in India and have since been integrated into Mizo society.
- The Mizo social fabric spans across the border, which now separates families. While the two countries have an arrangement called Free Movement Regime (FMR) that allows locals on either side to go up to 16 km on the other side and stay up to 14 days, thousands regularly cross over on either side for work and to meet relatives, often unofficially and for extended periods.
- Marriages are often arranged across the border.
- In border trade, Mizoram depends to a large extent on Myanmar for many essential commodities including beef, pork, good quality rice, fruits, and household utensils. Mizoram sends across items scarce in Myanmar such as medicines or fertilisers.
- A road is under construction to connect the two countries through Champhai, and recent discussions have taken place between the Centre and the state to set up a Land Customs Station at Zokhawthar, also the site of an emerging township.
- India's Look East, Act East policy and greater interactions on the border have strengthened an already strong connection between the people on either side of the border, say officials.

#### **What is India's policy on asylum seekers?**

- India is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, and it does not currently have a national law on refugees. In 2011, the Centre circulated to all states and Union Territories a Standard Operating Procedure to deal with foreign nationals who claimed to be refugees.
- An illegal immigrant can be a foreign national who enters India on valid travel documents and stays beyond their validity, or a foreign national who enters without valid travel documents.
- Cases that can be prima facie justified on grounds of well-founded fears of persecution on account of race, religion, sex, nationality, ethnic identity, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, can be recommended by states or Union Territories to the Home Ministry for a long-term visa (LTV) after due security verification. LTV-holders are allowed to take up private-sector employment and enrol in any academic institution.
- Police officers who fled Myanmar following the coup rest at an undisclosed location in Mizoram on Thursday. (AP Photo)
- In the view of the Indian government, illegal migrants "infringe on the rights of Indian citizens" and are "more vulnerable for getting recruited by terrorist organisations". Section 3(2)(c) of the Foreigners Act, 1946 gives the Centre the right to deport a foreign national. The power to identify and deport foreign nationals who are in India illegally has been delegated to the states, Union Territories and the Home Ministry's Bureau of Immigration.
- Illegal immigrants intercepted at the border can be sent back then and there.

### **All about Suez Canal & it's impact on global trade**

**Context:** *Global trade has been impacted after a container ship got stuck in the Suez Canal, the 193-km waterway that is pivotal in connecting Europe and Asia. Located in Egypt, the artificial sea-level waterway was built between 1859 and 1869 linking the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. As the shortest route between the Atlantic Ocean and lands around the Indian and western Pacific Oceans, the canal is one of the busiest waterways in the world, negating the need to navigate around the Cape of Good Hope in Africa and thus cutting distances by up to 7,000 km.*

#### **Suez Canal's Long History**

- The canal has existed in one form or the other since construction started under the reign of Senausret III, Pharaoh of Egypt (1887-1849 BC). Many kings who ruled later kept improving and expanding this canal.



Construction picked up pace around 300 years back as maritime trade between Europe and Asia became crucial for many economies.

- In 1799, Napoleon's efforts to build a proper canal were brought to an end due to an inaccuracy in the measurements. In the mid-1800s, French diplomat and engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps convinced the Egyptian viceroy Said Pasha to support the canal's construction.
- In 1858, the Universal Suez Ship Canal Company was tasked to construct and operate the canal for 99 years, after which rights would be handed to the Egyptian government. Despite facing multiple problems ranging from financial difficulties and attempts by the British and Turks to halt construction, the canal was opened for international navigation in 1869.
- The French and British held most of the shares in the canal company. The British used their position to sustain their maritime and colonial interests by maintaining a defensive force along the Suez Canal Zone as part of a 1936 treaty. In 1954, facing pressure from Egyptian nationalists, the two countries signed a seven-year treaty that led to the withdrawal of British troops.

### **Egypt takes over Suez Canal**

- In 1956, Egyptian President Abdel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal to pay for the construction of a dam on the Nile. This led to the Suez Crisis with UK, France and Israel mounting an attack on Egypt.
- The conflict ended in 1957 after the United Nations got involved and was followed by the first instance of the UN Peacekeeping Forces being deployed anywhere in the world. Even as the occupying forces withdrew their troops, the UN forces were stationed at Sinai to maintain peace between Egypt and Israel.
- In 1967, Nasser ordered the peacekeeping forces out of Sinai leading to a new conflict between the two countries. Israelis occupied Sinai and in response, Egypt closed the canal to all shipping. The closure lasted until 1975, when the two countries signed a disengagement accord. The canal was the focal point of the Arab-Israeli War of 1973, with the Arab coalition led by Egypt and Syria.
- The canal continues to be the lifeline for all trade between the West and East as 10 per cent of the global trade passes through it every year. The average 50 ships that pass through it daily carry about \$9.5 billion worth of goods, every day. The freight and cargo include everything from crude oil to perishables.

### **Impact of Suez Canal blockade**

- On March 23, due to weather obstructions a giant container ship, MV Ever Given, en route from China to the Netherlands ended up getting stuck in one of the canal's narrow stretches, thus blocking all traffic.
- Over 200 ships are stuck on both sides of the canal putting stress on global supply chains. The long-term impacts of this block will depend on how long it lasts, but some countries have already seen a rise in oil prices after the blockage.
- The incident also raises questions about finding solutions to prevent future accidents and reducing the global dependence on this narrow waterway.