



## India's Myanmar dilemma

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### (Mains GS2: India and it's neighbourhood)

#### Context:

- The unfolding tragedy in Myanmar, occasioned by the military overturning the election results last month, portends a new cycle of political repression, humanitarian disaster and geopolitical instability.
- The tussle between the Centre and State over the issue of “political refugees” from Myanmar has created a tough time for India and security agencies in handling situation on the ground.

#### Challenges for India:

- India, because of its proximity to Myanmar, its geopolitical role, and its interests, will inevitably be drawn into the train of events.
- The most immediate challenge is, of course, dealing with the refugee crisis that this coup occasions.
- The Chief Minister of Mizoram was writing to the Centre government that India cannot ignore the humanitarian crisis unfolding in our backyard, and remain “indifferent” to the suffering of those crossing the border.
- The Manipur government has, thankfully, withdrawn a circular that would have prohibited providing meaningful assistance to victims of political persecution.
- This circular, if enacted, would have been distorting India's image.

#### Centre state tussle:

- Following the February 1 coup when the Myanmar military overthrew the democratically elected government, around 300 Myanmarese nationals including many policemen have crossed into India and sought refuge.
- There is considerable support and sympathy among the people of Mizoram over the situation in Myanmar as many have relations across the border.

#### India and Myanmar arrangement:

- India and Myanmar have an arrangement called Free Movement Regime (FMR) which allows locals on both sides to go upto 16 km across the other side and stay upto 14 days.
- Thousands of Myanmarese nationals visit regularly for work and to meet relatives.
- In March 2020, FMR was suspended due to COVID-2019 and no one has been being allowed since.
- The fallout of this was that there has been an increase smuggling across the border as the livelihood of people has been disrupted due to the pandemic.

### **World's response to the crisis:**

- The rich and powerful nations have not pulled their weight in crafting an adequate multilateral response to the global refugee crisis.
- Myanmar's other neighbours, and especially ASEAN countries, are also unlikely to do the minimal decent thing.
- Although helping refugees is not costless, and the burden has to be shouldered by the nation, not just a few states.
- But India now risks moving from the transition "strategic ambiguity to exclusion".
- However, this is in keeping with the ideological temper of our times, where the complexities of people's very human predicaments are effaced by xenophobia, paranoia, and discrimination.

### **Conclusion:**

- The humanitarian case for providing some kind of safe haven for refugees is too obvious to be stated.
- The idea of "VasudhaivaKutumbakam" is not opportunistic displays of noblesse oblige, it is adherence to basic norms of decency.
- Thus, humanitarian treatment of those fleeing persecution, has to be the cornerstone of any civilised state's response to a politically induced humanitarian disaster.