

Between Care and Uncare: Unpacking the Ambivalent India-Myanmar Border and Its Effects on Western Myanmar

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Abstract

Western Myanmar, specifically Chin State and Sagaing Region, was among the first regions to take up arms against the military regime following the 2021 coup, prompting brutal junta offensives including airstrikes, arson, artillery attacks and violent raids. Escalating conflict forced thousands to flee into Northeast India. Chin State has sent the largest number of asylum seekers, with over 33,000 officially sheltering in neighbouring Mizoram, while smaller numbers from Sagaing Region have fled to Manipur.

Beyond serving as an escape route, segments of the India–Myanmar border have become vital lifelines for besieged communities. The porous Mizoram–Chin border functions as both a strategic exit and an informal humanitarian corridor, enabling access to emergency medical care, humanitarian aid and economic opportunities. Following Operation 1027, when the Arakan Army captured large parts of Rakhine and southern Chin State and the junta blockaded trade routes linking Rakhine to the Bamar heartland, the southern Mizoram–Chin border emerged as a crucial supply line for communities in Arakan.

Yet for war-affected populations, the border is a Janus-faced geography. In Mizoram, despite narratives of Mizo–Chin fraternity, refugees face social and political scrutiny and are often framed as cultural and economic threats. In Manipur, Chin and other Burmese refugees encounter more intense violent otherisation, detention, deportation and blame for ongoing ethnic conflict. In both states, refugees are subject to biometric surveillance and sometimes, forced confinement. The India–Myanmar border thus constitutes an ambivalent crisis frontier, simultaneously offering protection and producing vulnerability – dynamics intensified by India's decision to fence the border.