



**Panel Discussion: Impact of the Myanmar crisis on North-East India**  
**June 17, 2021, 1800-1930 hours**

**Concept Note**

On February 1, the military (Tatmadaw) took over the reins of power in Myanmar. Civilian leaders such as State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and other elected representatives were put under detention. Over the past 100 days, Myanmar has witnessed large-scale violence as protests erupted against the military coup. The country is also witnessing renewed violence between ethnic armed groups and the Tatmadaw. The coup has resulted in an economic crisis, resulting in shortages of essential items.

Myanmar is not only India's eastern neighbour but also the only ASEAN member country with which India shares a border. Given its strategic location, the political crisis in Myanmar can undermine stability and prosperity in the Bay of Bengal region. The military coup has also demonstrated the fragile economic and security interlinkages between Northeast India and Myanmar. The Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram make up 1643 kilometres of India's border with Myanmar. The border is defined by porosity and easy movement of goods. There is also a [Free Movement Regime](#) agreement which allows locals to travel up to "16 km into the other side and stay there up to 14 days without visas". This provision ensures that the ethnic kinships on either side of the border can maintain relations, and also facilitates commercial interactions. However, the porous borders also mean that political developments on either side of the border continue to have a spill over impact on each other's territory. India has remained concerned that many Indian insurgent groups have bases in Myanmar.

India's north eastern region and Myanmar constitute the land bridge between South and South-East Asia. The need for developing these border regions through connectivity projects and trade has long been discussed as an important component in the overall framework of India's Act East Policy (AEP). However, the coup has raised concerns about further delays in operationalising connectivity initiatives such as the trilateral highway and the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP). The worsening of the security situation will only exacerbate the lack of connectivity networks, which in turn will negatively impact not only northeast India but also economic interactions between the two countries. The cross-border movement of goods along the Moreh-Tamu border has already been negatively impacted.



There has also been a significant movement of people from Myanmar to India, including elected representatives and security personnel. There are reports that more than 15,000 people from Myanmar are [currently taking shelter](#) in bordering Indian states, out of which at least 18 are exiled lawmakers. More than [5,000 refugees are in Mizoram](#) alone. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to provide necessary medical infrastructure to the incoming refugees. In case of an increased refugee influx from Myanmar, the ethnic politics in Northeast India will also be impacted.

In this context, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs has asked Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh to [keep a check](#) at the border areas and “allow people into the country when it is absolutely essential on humanitarian grounds”. However, the response of state governments in this region is contingent upon local ethnic dynamics. For instance, while Manipur seems to be taking a more cautious approach, Mizoram has embraced the entry of citizens from Myanmar. In March, Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga spoke to the Myanmar Foreign Minister in exile.

The porous borders also bring about other security challenges such as [drug trafficking](#). There have been seizures of drugs and illegal substances in Mizoram and Manipur by the Assam Rifles and the boom in drug production in Myanmar remains a cause for worry. As a result, the Indian government and the local state governments have a two-front challenge of reaching out to the refugees and simultaneously taking steps to counter human trafficking and narcotics trade.

All the provinces abutting the Indian border on Myanmar’s side are experiencing high-intensity conflict. In Kachin, it is well-known that the [Kachin Independence Army](#) (KIA) is taking on the Tatmadaw. The [Sagaing region](#) is also witnessing clashes between opposition groups and the Tatmadaw. Close to the Indian border, in the [town of Mindat](#) (Chin state), there has been full-scale fighting between civilians and the Myanmar military. In the Rakhine province, the situation tends to be volatile, with fluid relations between the Arakan Army (AA) and Tatmadaw.

On June 17, 2021, the Delhi Policy Group and Asian Confluence jointly hosted a panel discussion to discuss the February 1, 2021 coup by the Myanmar military and its impact on North-east India. It brought together academics, civil society activists, media personnel and policy makers to consider the following aspects:



- a) The impact of the evolving situation in Myanmar on the North-eastern region in India and long-term implications for India's Act East Policy.
- b) Growing ethnic conflict in Myanmar and the impact on the ethnic landscape in India.
- c) The influx of refugees and associated aspects such as rehabilitation, humanitarian assistance and repatriation.
- d) The impact of developments in Myanmar on border regions, trade and above all on ongoing projects such as the KMTTP and the Trilateral Highway.
- e) The respective perceptions of security and development of border regions on both sides, and their impact on ongoing connectivity projects.
- f) Recent trends in narcotics and small-arms trafficking across the India-Myanmar border.

## Program and List of Participants

1800 – 1810	Remarks by <b>Amb. H.K. Singh</b> , <i>Director General, DPG</i>
1810 – 1820	Remarks by <b>M.P. Bezbaruah</b> , <i>Former Member, World Tourism Organization &amp; Former Member North Eastern Council</i>
1820 – 1925	Moderator: <b>Sabyasachi Dutta</b> , <i>Executive Director, Asian Confluence</i>  Remarks by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>Amb. V.S. Seshadri</b>, <i>Senior Fellow for International Trade, Delhi Policy Group and Former Ambassador to Myanmar</i></li><li>➤ <b>Alana Golmei</b>, <i>Head, Burma Centre, New Delhi</i></li><li>➤ <b>Rajeev Bhattacharya</b>, <i>Senior Journalist and Author of Rendezvous with Rebels</i></li><li>➤ <b>Ibohal Meitei</b>, <i>Professor, MIMS, Manipur University</i></li><li>➤ <b>Lt. Gen. A.S. Lamba (Retd.)</b>, <i>Former Vice Chief of Army Staff</i></li></ul>

## Q & A Session

1925 – 1930	Vote of Thanks by <b>Mohit Musaddi</b> , <i>Research Associate, Delhi Policy Group</i>
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