



BAJIRAO IAS ACADEMY

THE HINDU ANALYSIS

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**CHINA-BANGLADESH-
PAKISTAN AXIS**



A China-led trilateral nexus

A China-led trilateral nexus as India's new challenge

Last week, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh held their first trilateral meeting in Kunming, China. The discussions focused on furthering cooperation and exploring the possibilities of deeper engagement. This meeting closely follows another trilateral meeting between China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, held in May, with the aim of extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and increasing cooperation. These trilaterals, led by China, come at a time of Pakistan's little relevance to the region, India's increasing relations with Afghanistan, and New Delhi's deteriorating ties with Bangladesh. The use of trilaterals underscores China's fresh attempts at making Pakistan a stakeholder in the region and keeping New Delhi preoccupied with immediate concerns.

A war that shaped alignments

The 1962 war between India and China has largely shaped regional alignments and geopolitics. Following the war, China found Pakistan to be an ally that could keep India engaged with immediate threats and limit it from challenging Beijing's interests, security, and status. On the other hand, Pakistan deemed China to be a country that would unquestionably offer economic and military assistance to support its aggression against India. To date, Pakistan is highly dependent on China for assistance, investments and infrastructure development. In fact, by the end of 2024, Pakistan had a loan of over \$29 billion from China. It is estimated that over 80% of Pakistan's arms imports are from China. In addition, China has also shielded Pakistan-backed terrorists at the United Nations Security Council and other multilateral platforms.

This camaraderie was largely visible during India's Operation Sindoor in May 2025. China termed India's retaliation to the Pakistan-sponsored attack in Pahalgam as "regrettable" and urged a political solution and dialogue. It backed Pakistan's stance of initiating an investigation into the Pahalgam terror attack in April 2025. The latest escalation also saw Pakistan deploying various Chinese-made hardware and weapons that ranged from surveillance radars, drones, missiles, guidance



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The Beijing-led
trilaterals are
aimed at
challenging
India's long-term
interests

systems, and fighter jets. In the immediate aftermath of Operation Sindoor, Pakistan's Foreign Minister met his Chinese counterpart to reaffirm its "iron-clad friendship." The trilateral with Afghanistan and other countries likely emerged from this meeting.

The resurfacing of an idea

This idea of China and Pakistan using plus one against India is not a new phenomenon. Even in 1965, Pakistan flirted with the idea of using East Pakistan, China and Nepal to cut off India from its strategic Siliguri corridor. This idea of using South Asian countries seems to have resurfaced as both China and Pakistan face a confident India. Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks in Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019), and Pahalgam have seen India retaliate in a befitting manner. It has shown that India will no longer tolerate Pakistan's nuclear blackmail. India has also used its diplomatic clout and growing economy to isolate Pakistan. India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, halting trade, restricting port access, and targeting military installations – all as a part of its retaliatory measures against the Pahalgam attack – has damaged Pakistan military's operational capacities and confidence, highlighting Rawalpindi's limitations and weaknesses. India's military and diplomatic responses to Chinese border intrusions in Doklam and Galwan have also likely taken Beijing by surprise. New Delhi has also increased close cooperation with like-minded countries to limit Chinese aggressions.

At the same time, India's pragmatic engagement and domestic politics of the region have slowed down China's momentum in South Asia. In the Maldives, Beijing appears reluctant to trust President Mohamed Muizzu and the country's economy, despite his initial anti-India rhetoric. Mr. Muizzu has now turned to India to keep the country's economy afloat. In Nepal, despite signing the framework for Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperation, major differences in funding remain unresolved and the progress of projects has been slow. In Sri Lanka, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is developing close ties with India by respecting its redlines. Despite ideological and historical differences with Delhi,

he visited India before China. In the case of Bangladesh, despite differences, India has not hindered the trilateral energy cooperation with Nepal.

These increasing anxieties are likely to have motivated China to push for trilaterals with Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Before their respective regime changes in 2021 and 2024, both countries were staunch supporters of India's fight against both Pakistan and its state-sponsored terrorism. With the change in regimes, however, Pakistan and China have attempted to draw both countries closer to their orbit. They remain cautious of pragmatic engagement between India and the Taliban, fearing that Pakistan would lose its leverage. At the same time, Pakistan has increased security, economic and political engagements with the new government in Bangladesh.

Historically, both Bangladesh and Afghanistan have enjoyed close ties with Pakistan and provide a fertile ground for cross-border terrorism. Pakistan's influence, supported by China and its economic clout, could thus create new terror and security-related challenges. This will help Pakistan become a relevant country in the region, create rifts between India and its neighbours, and keep Delhi preoccupied with immediate security and terror-related challenges, making way for Chinese BRI projects, interests and investments in the region.

China efforts and setbacks

The developments in the region demonstrate, once again, that China, and not Pakistan, is India's biggest challenge. With both Pakistan and China confronting a confident India, China sees an opportunity to challenge India through the trilateral nexus. At a time when India is seeking support from South Asian countries to fight terrorism, Chinese efforts will create new setbacks. South Asian countries will thus have to learn to balance between India and China, as Beijing uses Islamabad to create new complexities in the region. On its part, Delhi will have to continue to express redlines and convey the point that any misadventures by its neighbours could have severe economic, military, and political costs.

Context

- ❑ Last week, **China, Pakistan and Bangladesh** held their first trilateral meeting in Kunming, China.
- ❑ The discussions focused on furthering cooperation and the possibilities of deeper engagement.
- ❑ This meeting closely follows another **trilateral meeting between China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan**, held in May, to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

The China-Pakistan Nexus: A Strategic Alliance Against India

- ❑ The **1962 India-China war** catalysed an enduring strategic partnership between China and Pakistan, aimed at countering India's regional influence.
- ❑ Post-war, **China identified Pakistan as a key ally** to engage India with immediate security threats, thereby limiting New Delhi's ability to challenge Beijing's interests, security, and global status.
- ❑ **Pakistan's reliance on China** has deepened over the decades, with significant economic and military support shaping its strategic posture.
- ❑ By the end of 2024, **Pakistan's debt to China exceeded \$29 billion**, primarily for infrastructure and investments. It is estimated that over 80% of Pakistan's arms imports are from China.
- ❑ China has consistently **protected Pakistan on international platforms**, notably shielding Pakistan-backed terrorists at the United Nations Security Council.
- ❑ This camaraderie was largely visible during **India's Operation Sindoor in May 2025**, following the Pakistan-sponsored Pahalgam terror attack.

Resurfacing Strategic Manoeuvres: The Trilateral Threat

- ❑ The **concept of leveraging regional countries against India** is not new. In 1965, Pakistan explored using East Pakistan, China, and Nepal to threaten India's strategic Siliguri Corridor.
- ❑ India's decisive responses to Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks in **Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019), and Pahalgam (2025)** have signalled a shift from tolerance of Pakistan's nuclear blackmail.
- ❑ Measures like **suspending the Indus Waters Treaty**, halting trade, restricting port access, and targeting military installations have weakened Pakistan's military confidence.
- ❑ **India's pragmatic engagement** and domestic politics of the region have slowed down China's momentum in South Asia.
- ❑ In the Maldives, **President Muizzu's initial anti-India stance** has shifted toward reliance on New Delhi for economic stability.
- ❑ **Nepal's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects** with China face funding disputes, while Sri Lanka's President Dissanayake has prioritised ties with India.

China's Regional Ambitions and India's Countermeasures:

- ❑ China's push for **trilaterals with Afghanistan and Bangladesh** reflects its anxieties over India's growing influence.
- ❑ **Post-2021 and 2024 regime changes**, both Afghanistan and Bangladesh have tilted toward Pakistan and China, raising concerns about new terror and security challenges.
- ❑ South Asian nations face the challenge of balancing relations with India and China, as **Beijing leverages Pakistan to complicate regional dynamics**.
- ❑ The developments in the region demonstrate, once again, that **China, and not Pakistan, is India's biggest challenge**.
- ❑ On its part, Delhi will have to continue to express redlines and convey the point that any misadventures by its neighbours could have severe economic, military, and political costs.

Court of Arbitration's ruling on J&K Dams

India: IWT arbitration court illegal, decision a charade at Pak behest

Court issued 'supplemental award' concerning Kishenganga, Ratle projects

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 27

INDIA ON Friday rejected the authority of an arbitration court "illegally" formed under the Indus Waters Treaty after the body issued a "supplemental award" on its competence to hear cases on the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects in Jammu & Kashmir.

The Indian government has consistently opposed the proceedings of The Hague-based Court of Arbitration ever since its constitution by the World Bank in October 2022.

In a statement Friday, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) termed the move as the "latest charade at Pakistan's behest" and said that this is an attempt by Islamabad to escape accountability for its role as the global epicentre of terrorism.

"India has never recognised the existence in law of this so-called Court of Arbitration, and India's position has all along been that the constitution of this so-called arbitral body is in itself

a serious breach of the Indus Waters Treaty and consequently any proceedings before this forum and any award or decision taken by it are also for that reason illegal and per se void," said an MEA statement.

The Court of Arbitration had said Thursday that India's position of holding the treaty in abeyance "does not deprive the Court of Arbitration of competence".

India is constructing the Kishenganga project on the Kishenganga river, a tributary of the Jhelum, and the Ratle project on the Chenab river.

In 2015, Pakistan objected to their design features and moved the World Bank to seek a settlement through a neutral expert. But it withdrew its request a year later and asked for adjudication through a Court of Arbitration instead.

India, for its part, sought a neutral expert to rule on the differences. On October 13, 2022, the World Bank appointed Michal Lino as the neutral expert. The same day, it also appointed a Court of Arbitration.

India has opposed the court since then, saying it could not be "compelled to recognise illegal and parallel proceedings not envisaged by the Treaty".

India has continued participating in the "Treaty-consistent Neutral Expert proceedings".

The MEA statement on Friday said: "Following the Pahalgam terrorist attack, India has in exercise of its rights as a sovereign nation under international law, placed the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism. Until such time that the Treaty is in abeyance, India is no longer bound to perform any of its obligations under the Treaty. No Court of Arbitration, much less this illegally constituted arbitral body which has no existence in the eye of law, has the jurisdiction to examine the legality of India's actions in exercise of its rights as a sovereign."

The Indus Waters Treaty was signed on September 19, 1960, after nine years of negotiations between India and Pakistan.

Then Indian Prime Minister Pt Jawaharlal Nehru and then Pakistani President Mohammed Ayub Khan signed the treaty in Karachi. The treaty has 12 Articles and 8 Annexures (from A to H). As per the provisions of the treaty, all the water of "Eastern Rivers"—Sutlej, Beas and Ravi—shall be available for the "unrestricted use" of India. However, Pakistan shall receive water from "Western Rivers"—Indus, Jhelum and Chenab.

In January 2023, India had issued a notice to Pakistan seeking the "modification" of the Treaty. This was the first such notice in the more than six decades of the Treaty's existence.

India upped the ante in September 2024, by issuing Islamabad another formal notice, this time seeking the "review and modification" of the IWT. The word "review", according to experts, effectively signals New Delhi's intent to revoke, and renegotiate the Treaty which will turn 65 this year. India decided to keep in abeyance the IWT on April 23 Pahalgam terror attack, in which 26 people were killed.

Context

- ❑ India rejected the supplemental award by the Court of Arbitration on **Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects**, saying that it "never recognised" the **Court of Arbitration**, which is a **"serious breach" of the Indus Waters Treaty**, which has been put "at abeyance" after the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam.

Recent Dispute: Kishenganga and Ratle Hydropower Projects

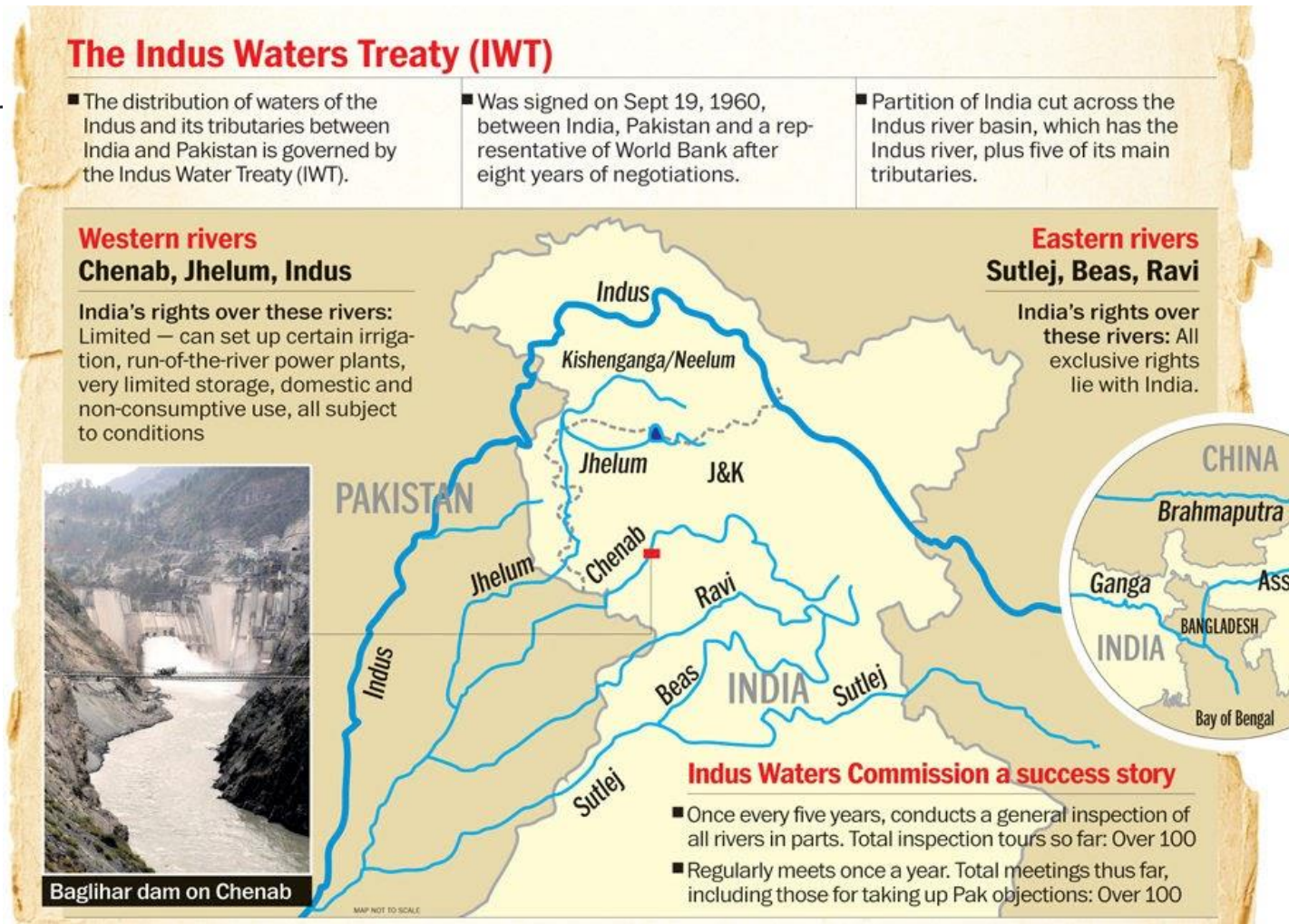
- ❑ These Projects are located in Jammu and Kashmir, on tributaries of the Jhelum and Chenab rivers (Western rivers).
- ❑ Pakistan raised objections to the design and technical aspects of these projects, alleging violations of the Indus Water treaty provisions.
- ❑ Pakistan approached the World Bank to establish a Court of Arbitration to resolve these technical disputes.

India's position:

- ❑ India's stance regarding this Court of Arbitration was that it was a **“unilateral action”** by Pakistan to approach the World Bank.
- ❑ India has never recognised the legitimacy of the Court of Arbitration, calling it an **“illegal”** body.
- ❑ The MEA reminded that after the Pahalgam terror attack, India has exercised **“its rights as a sovereign nation under international law”** and placed the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance.

Indus Waters Treaty (IWT):

- ❑ Signed in 1960 between India and Pakistan brokered by the World Bank.
- ❑ It allocates waters of the Indus River system:
- ❑ Eastern rivers (Sutlej, Beas, Ravi) to India.
- ❑ Western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) to Pakistan.
- ❑ Establishes a mechanism for dispute resolution through bilateral talks, a Permanent Indus Commission, or neutral experts, with the Court of Arbitration as a last resort.



Sustainable Development Report 2025

For first time, India breaks into top 100 in global SDG rankings

The index measures overall progress toward achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015; India takes 99th rank, up from 109

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India has, for the first time, secured a position among the top 100 countries in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index, ranking 99th out of 167 nations in the 2025 edition of the Sustainable Development Report (SDR), released on Tuesday by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

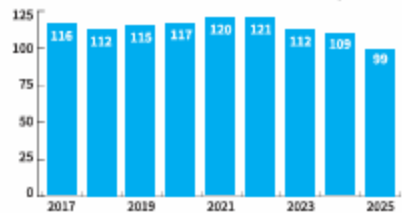
The latest report places India with a score of 67 on the SDG Index, a significant improvement from its 109th rank in 2024. China is ranked 49th with a score of 74.4, while the United States stands at 44th with 75.2 points.

The index measures overall progress toward achieving the 17 SDGs adopted by United Nations member states in 2015, with a score of 100 indicating full achievement of all goals.

Among India's neighbours, Bhutan ranks 74th (70.5), Nepal 85th (68.6), Bangladesh 114th (63.9),

Moving up

India ranks 99th on the 2025 SDG Index with a score of 67, while China ranks 49th with 74.4 and the US 44th with 75.2 points



SOURCE: UNSD

and Pakistan 140th (57). Maritime neighbours Maldives and Sri Lanka stand at 53rd and 93rd places respectively.

The report noted that since the adoption of the SDGs, India has steadily improved its standing: it ranked 112th in 2023, 121st in 2022, and 120th in 2021.

Despite India's gains, the report flagged that global progress on the SDGs has largely stalled. "Only 17 per cent of the SDG targets are on track to be achieved by 2030," it stated, attributing this to "conflicts,

structural vulnerabilities, and limited fiscal space" in many regions.

The SDR, authored by a team led by economist Jeffrey Sachs, pointed to continued dominance by European nations on the index. Finland, Sweden and Denmark hold the top three positions, with 19 of the top 20 countries located in Europe.

However, even these nations are facing challenges related to climate change and biodiversity due to unsustainable consumption patterns.

Context:

- ❑ India has, for the first time, ranked in the top 100 (99th) in the Sustainable Development Report (SDR) 2025 released by the **UN Sustainable Development Solutions** Network (SDSN), marking its 10th edition.
- ❑ The Sustainable Development Report is the world's most authoritative ranking on progress towards SDGs for 193 UN member states.
- ❑ **Top Rankers:** Finland (1st), Sweden (2nd), Denmark (3rd)

Economic and Social Development

- ❑ **Poverty Reduction (SDG 1):** India has made significant strides in poverty reduction, improving its SDSN ranking from 110th in 2016 to 99th in 2023 among 167 nations.
- ❑ Proxy data indicate a substantial decline in poverty, nearly halving from 22% in 2012 (NSSO data) to 12% in 2023 (World Bank estimates).
- ❑ **Zero Hunger (SDG 2):** Despite progress in poverty alleviation, achieving zero hunger remains a challenge. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-21) reports stunting at 35.5%, a marginal improvement from 38.4% (NFHS-4, 2015-16), and wasting reduced from 21.0% to 19.3%.
- ❑ It also reveals the wide disparity between income groups and rural and urban areas in access to a nutritious diet.
- ❑ **Rising Obesity Concerns:** Obesity in the working age population (15-49 years) has almost doubled between 2006 and 2021, and is concentrated in wealthier urban areas.
- ❑ This trend highlights the **dual burden of malnutrition**, where undernutrition coexists with overnutrition, necessitating targeted public health interventions.

Infrastructure and Technological Advancements

- ❑ **Electricity Access (SDG 7):** India has achieved near-universal household electrification over the past two decades, a significant milestone under SDG 7. However, the quality of power and duration vary vastly based on regions and urban/rural fault lines.
- ❑ **Renewable Energy Growth:** India ranks as the fourth-largest deployer of renewable energy, primarily solar and wind, reflecting its commitment to sustainable energy.
- ❑ **Digital and Financial Inclusion (SDG 9):** Infrastructure development under SDG 9 has been bolstered by rapid mobile penetration and financial inclusion through UPI-linked digital payment systems.
- ❑ However, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant gaps in rural internet connectivity.

Governance and Institutional Challenges

Governance and Rule of Law (SDG 16): India's performance in governance and the rule of law (SDG 16) has been a weak link throughout the Modi years. Persistent challenges in ensuring transparent and accountable governance structures limit progress in sustainable development.

Assam Mizoram draft rules to curb illegal immigration

Assam, Mizoram draft rules to curb illegal immigration

Soon, only District Commissioners will have the power to issue Aadhaar cards, says Assam CM; in Mizoram, plans on to confiscate identity cards of Myanmar nationals who frequently cross border

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Two northeastern States have toughened their stand on identification documents to curb unauthorised cross-border movements of Bangladesh and Myanmar nationals.

The Assam government has decided to implement a policy to issue Aadhaar cards to adult citizens only through the District Commissioners (DCs) to prevent Bangladeshi nationals from acquiring them, while the Mizoram government plans to retain the identity cards of Myanmar nationals to regulate movement across the border.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the need to toughen the rules of issuing Aadhaar cards was discussed at the State Cabinet meeting on Friday. "Usually, people who come to Assam and Bharat from Bangladesh [illegally] are adults. Since we have already achieved 100% Aadhaar coverage, we will thoroughly enquire into the applications of new adults," he told press-



High vigilance: BSF personnel patrol the India-Bangladesh border at Golakganj in Dhubri district of Assam. *AFP*

persons in Guwahati.

"Soon, only the DCs will have the power to issue Aadhaar cards. If such a policy is made, it will be difficult for Bangladeshi people to obtain Aadhaar. Detecting and pushing them back will be easy if they do not possess this document," he said, hours after announcing that 20 more illegal Bangladeshi immigrants were pushed back.

The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government has been working on plugging the vulnerabilities of Aadhaar since April, when, Mr. Sarma said, people who

did not apply for inclusion in the National Register of Citizens have been barred from getting the unique identification number.

In September 2024, he said that four Assam districts had more Aadhaar cardholders than their projected population. Bengali-speaking Muslims are a majority in these districts — Barpeta bordering Bangladesh, Dhubri, Morigaon, and Nagaon.

"We found that 103.74% of the population were issued Aadhaar cards in Barpeta, 103.48% in Dhubri, 101.74% in Morigaon, and 100.68% in Nagaon. Some

immigrants definitely managed to take Aadhaar," the Chief Minister had said.

In Aizawl, Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma proposed the confiscation of the identity cards of Myanmar nationals who cross over into India frequently, amid the civil war in their country. He came up with this proposal at a meeting with Surinder Bhagat, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs and Protector General of Emigrants, at the Chief Minister's Office recently.

Acknowledging the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar forcing many to take refuge in Mizoram, Mr. Lalduhoma said, "Many refugees are law-abiding, but there are some who continue to cross the border to and from Myanmar, exploiting the ongoing crisis there."

He warned of stern action against those misusing the shelter provided, including the seizure of their Myanmar-issued identity documents. He suggested that such IDs be collected from each Myanmar national for the duration of their stay in Mizoram.

Context

- The two northeastern States, Assam and Mizoram, have toughened their stand on identification documents to curb unauthorised cross-border movements of Bangladesh and Myanmar nationals.



Assam's Aadhaar Policy:

- ❑ The Assam government to issue Aadhaar cards to adult citizens only through District Commissioners (DCs).
- ❑ Aimed at making it **difficult for illegal Bangladeshi immigrants** to obtain Aadhaar, facilitating their detection and deportation.
- ❑ Assam has achieved **100% Aadhaar coverage**, prompting stricter measures for new applications.
- ❑ **Additional Measures:** Since April 2025, individuals not applying for inclusion in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) are barred from obtaining Aadhaar.



Mizoram's Policy on Myanmar Refugees:

- ❑ The Mizoram Government plans to retain the identity cards of Myanmar nationals to regulate movement across the border.

Implementation:

- ❑ Identity cards to be collected from Myanmar nationals during their stay in Mizoram.
- ❑ Strict action, including seizure of IDs, against those misusing refugee status.
- ❑ Biometric data collection of Myanmar nationals entering Mizoram initiated to enhance monitoring.





Thank you

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