

People's response to the influx of Myanmar refugee in Mizoram: Implication and limitation of the State policy

Abstract: With the recent subjugation of the people and their representatives by the Junta Government in Myanmar since February 2021, many communities choose to flee to the neighbouring countries where they have close affinity in terms of ethnicity. Among them, Mizoram, India has been one of the destinies of the refugees to take shelter taking advantages of the common culture, shared histories, economic ties and religious commonalities. The people, the civil society, the churches, and the state government made a prompt response to the influx of refugees who were forced to leave their homeland by providing shelter and food on need basis. But, the irony is that the Government of India has not made any positive response to accommodate the Myanmar refugee. The major assumption is that India was not a signatory of 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol which prevents the Government of India to take prompt action for Myanmar refugee. India's response to refugee and migrant is based on ad-hoc basis utilizing the State laws barring the international law on refugee. Though most of these refugees belong to the minority religion, but among the neighbouring countries, Myanmar has been excluded in the CAA 2019. So, religion cannot be employed to accommodate them within India. Since the GoI is silent on the refugee's problem, with limited resources the state of Mizoram has been compelled to accommodate the Myanmar nationalities fleeing their homeland against military invasion because of close affinity among the people across the borders in terms of culture, history, religion. With the involvement of the civil society and the churches, refugee camps are set up in some places, while many people have also joined their relatives mainly in the urban areas. In the process, the state government as well as the civil society has taken precautionary roles in responding the refugee problem. In the present situation, Myanmar refugee has been given recognition and categorized as 'raltlan' which implies escaping the Junta military operation. Particularly the civil society registered the refugee in their local data for their record and this documentation in some way or the other differentiates the refugee and the local. But the major problem lies in the absence of proper law and guidance from the Government of India. The state government has been limited not only in terms of resources but also on how to initiate proper plan and policy to check the continuous inflow of refugee. The only response made by the Government of India has no positive outcome either for the state or for the refugee. In this context, the study will analyse the response made by the state government vis-à-vis Centre government policy on refugee. Case study has been conducted on how the Myanmar refugee has been accommodated and given recognition in Mizoram.

The history

The ethnic linkages between the frontiers of India's North East with the people of the Myanmar bordering the present state of Mizoram can be traced back to the pre-colonial era. The close affinity across the modern states border preceded the state formation process of the Colonial state intervention on the region. In fact, historians traced the origin of Mizo people from the east where settlement was first made in Burma prior to the occupation of the present state of Mizoram and its neighboring states. With the arrival of the Colonial military power, the expedition had been termed as 'Chin Lushai Expedition'¹. Then, after the British annexation of the Hills of the frontier, the colonial administrator soon realised the common ethnicity between the people inhabiting the borderland of the then British Burma and the then Lushai Hills. Thus, there was plan to bring the Chin – Lushai Hills under one administration soon after the tribes were subjugated and annexed by the British. There were three main reasons behind the idea of bringing the tracts under one administration. First, for administrative convenience as the 'Chin Lushai country is dealt with by three civil administrations and three military commands' (p. 8). Second, it was desirable for the Colonial authority that the whole of the tracts should be placed under the Chief Commissionership of Assam. Third, the people shared the same origin, history and culture which were found to be convenient to be placed under single administration.

With the initiation of the Military department, Chin- Lushai Conference was held at Fort William from 25-29 January, 1892 which was attended by, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Commander-in-Chief, Madras, the two Chief Commissioners of Assam and Burma respectively, two Secretaries to the GoI, Foreign Department and Military Department respectively, and Quarter Master-General of India. The conference passed a resolution that the majority are of the opinion that it was desirable to bring Chin-Lushai Hills under one administration but it was not ascertain that immediate steps could be taken. The conference was also of the opinion that the boundaries of the new administration be drawn after consultation with the local officers. It was also agreed that the portions of Arakan Hill Tracts along with the North and South Lushai Hills be brought under the administration of Assam (Chin-Lushai Conference, Fort Williams, the 29th January, 1892)². Later in 1896, there had been a follow up meeting in Lunglei to look into the recommendation of the Chin-Lushai Conference. The meeting was attended by the local civil and military officers of both the North and South Lushai Hills and the political officer of Chin Hills. Though the British failed to unite the Chin Lushai Hills under one administration, however as agreed by the meeting in 1898 both the North and the South Lushai Hills were amalgamated and

¹ Reid, A.s. (1893). *Chin-Lushai Land. Including A Description of the various expeditions into the Chin-Lushai Hills and the Final Annexation of the Country*. Cuncutta: Thacker, Spink & Co. Elly, E.B. (1893 [1978]). *Military Report on the Chin-Lushai Country*. Reprint by Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl.

² *Foreign Department Report on Chin Lushai Hills, September, 1892*. Reprint by Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Mizoram, Aizawl, 1890.

brought under the administration of Assam³. later in 1928, portions of the Akaran Hills occupied by the Maras was placed under the then Lushai Hills district.

The significance of the Chin Lushai conference of 1892 is such that it has been the symbol to show that the people belonged to common ancestors, same culture, shared history and single administration for Mizo nation is the final destiny. The historic event has been occasionally celebrated by ZORO (Zo Reunification Re-organisation) the body which seeks for the reunification all the Mizo-ethnic communities across the borderland (<https://dipr.mizoram.gov.in/post/chin-lushai-conference-125-na-hmanpui>).

However, after the establishment of the Lushai Hills District there was hardly any attempt made by the Colonial government or its local officer to unite the Chin Lushai Hills. In fact, in the first decade of the 20th Century Chin Hills regulations 1896 which had been in application in the Chin Hills was introduced in the Lushai Hills, restricting the inflow of the ‘foreigner’ in the district. Later, with the introduction of GoI Act 1935, there was a complete separation of British India and British Burma whereby Mizo Hills had been under the former and the Chin Hills (Tribal Tracts) on the later (Section 311 of GoI Act, 1935). However, the tribal areas and tracts of both India and Burma were placed under the excluded areas where the provincial or federal law was inapplicable unless it was sanction by the Governor⁴. Thus, common mode of administration had been implemented in the tribal areas/tracts even after the separation of India and Burma.

It was only at the last decade of British departure from the sub-continent that the idea of uniting all the hills tribes of India’s North East with the hill tracts of Burma was rejuvenated by the Colonial administrator including the former governor of Assam and the Hill’s District officers⁵. This whole idea of uniting the frontier tracts of the North East and Burma had been published by Reginald Copland and the book had been used as source to rejuvenate by some writers and politicians for separate state from India and Pakistan and Burma known as ‘crown colony’.

In the case of Mizo Hills, at the dawn of independence there was an agenda from United Mizo freedom organization party to merge with Burma contesting the Mizo Union support for District Autonomy under Assam under Independence India. To support their agenda UMFO claimed that Mizo people were the same with the people across the border in Burma, otherwise Mizo do not have any affinity with the plains or Indian in terms of race, culture and history. But, with the integration process, the then Mizo Hills became parts of Indian Union with special provision for autonomy under the Sixth Schedule.

³ Pau, Pum Khan (2018), “Reconfigured frontier: British policy towards the Chin-Lushai Hills, 1881-1898”. *The NEHU Journal*, Vol XVI, No. 1, January - June 2018, pp. 1-17.

⁴ Hall, D.G.E (1950). *Burma*. London: Hutchinson’s University Library. Second Impression. P. 153.

⁵ Syiemlieh David R. (2016). *On the Edge of Empire: Four British Plans for North East India, 1941-1947*. New Delhi: SAGE.

Cross border, 'Nationalism' and the idea of integration of Mizo Inhabited areas: In the post-Independence context, the idea of integration of Mizo across the border became one of the foremost propagandas of political parties, NGOs and Students' Union. The most dominant force of such movement was again initiated by the Mizo National Front (MNF) seeking for sovereign state for the divided nation of the Mizo. Though the MNF sought shelter in East Pakistan in the earlier stage of their underground movement, after the liberation of Bangladesh they had shifted their contingent in Myanmar, Arakan hills in particular. During their stay in Myanmar, the hill people helped the MNF in giving food shelters and protected them from the State agencies. In fact, it was the blood that ties them in troubled times. Though the MNF movement culminated against the Indian State for separate nation, the final destiny was the integration of all the inhabited areas of the Mizo tribes across the 'international border'. During the MNF movement many Mizo had migrated to Myanmar seek shelter, and to start a new life. Some of the descendants of those migrated has gradually move back to Mizoram after the peace and normalcy was restored in Mizoram.

Here it will be significant to understand that it was not only the MNF that built the strong bond between the people across the border, people to people constant connection also helped in spreading Christianity among the hill people of Myanmar across the border since the pre Independence. Another crucial factor was economic interdependence, particularly after Independence the economic ties through informal trade between Mizoram and Myanmar gradually increases. After Bangladesh (prior East Pakistan) became Independent State the trade route to Calcutta from Mizoram via Bangladesh through Karnaphuli (Khawtlang Tuipui) had been closed down. So, most of the commodities are imported from the east where Myanmar played the most important trade route for Mizoram. The GoI also gradually formalised the border trade and the Indian State also understand the ties across the border put much relaxation on the items to import and export unless there are illicit items.

Such is the connection between the people of both side in terms of history, culture, social, religion and economy, that providing security in times of troubles is what the people of Mizoram can do the least for the Myanmar refugee in the post military regime.

The crumble of democracy: Choosing the temporary destiny

Though the ruling military junta government changed the name of Burma to Myanmar in 1989, the people are still continued to be recognized as Burma *mi*, Burma '*raltlan*' (refugee). As in the general theories of migration there has been a push and pull factor for the influx on population from one region to the other. Such that in the context of Myanmar refugee it is the iron rule of the Military Junta that curbs the growth democracy and subjugation of the pro-democracy party and its leaders. To survive and to struggle, the pro-democracy leaders seek asylum in the neighbouring countries in which India is one of the destinations. Particularly the state of Mizoram has continued to be the safe place to seek shelters and security. It is the

common lineage and the ethnic linkage that proved to be crucial factor for the Hill tribes of Myanmar to choose Mizoram as their temporary relief.

The influx of population from the neighbouring state of Myanmar is not something new to the people of Mizoram as it has been a common observation since the early 1990 when the Military Government refuse to hand over the power to the National League for Democracy (NLD) after winning 1990 elections, capturing more than 80 per cent of the seats. Later in 2010 when the election was held based on the 2008 Constitution, the NLD boycotted the elections claiming that the 2008 Constitution was undemocratic⁶. Following the boycott by the largest pro democratic party NLD, small parties and ethnic minority parties fought against the military government backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Using their financial power and organization strength backed by the Military, USDP won an overwhelming majority in both the house⁷. However, the NLD was soon to return to the electoral politics as they contest in 2012 by-election, which was held with the promise of free and fair election by President Thein Sein and the UEC⁸. In this election observers were invited from ASEAN, US and EU to witness the process. NLD won with a landslide victory winning 44 out of 45 constituencies they had contested⁹.

With the return of NLD into the active electoral politics gives hope to the people to restore democratic government in Myanmar. People who had seeked asylum in the neighbouring countries including India had moved back to their homeland. In fact, many support of NLD from Mizoram also actively participated in the political process. Then with the overwhelming majority in the 2015 general election by the NLD with almost 80 per cent of the elected seat, for many it looked as if the table had turned in favour of democracy and liberty. The reciprocal impact of the return of pro-democracy is that Myanmar people who has long been settle in Mizoram has also move back to their homeland. There had been a free movement between Mizoram and its neighboring town in Myanmar never as before. As many has claimed that there had been a shortage of labour/work force viz., house maid, weaver working in handloom, etc. where the Myanmar people were employed In Mizoram.

However, the life enjoyed and rebuilt by the people of Myanmar was short-lived as the Military staged a *coup d'état* abruptly curtailing the democratic transition of the country on February 1, 2021. The justification of their action was allegation of fraud in election held on November 2020 when once again NLD defeated the military backed party¹⁰. Even though the

⁶ Toshihiro, Kudo (2011), "Myanmar results of the 2010 elections in Myanmar: AN analysis". *Ide-Jetro*, January 2011. <https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Research/Region/Asia/pdf/20110104.pdf>.

⁷ Steinberg, David I. (2011), "Myanmar in 2010: The election years and beyond". *Southeast Asian Affairs*, pp. 173-189.

⁸ Clapp, Priscilla (2015). *Myanmar: Anatomy of a Political Transition*. Washington: US Institute of Peace. P. 6.

⁹ Than, Tin Maung Maung (2011), "Myanmar's 2012 By-Elections: The Return of NLD". *SouthEast Asian Affairs*, pp. 204 -219. P. 210.

¹⁰ International Crisis Group (2021). *Responding to the Myanmar Coup*. Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°166, 16 February 2021. P. 2.

military claimed their objective is to repair fraud through fresh election, they had to face protest from the people. Though the protest was peaceful and democratic in nature the military responded with harsh law with curfews and restriction on public communications, social media and external coverage¹¹. Day by day the Military interventions on the people's movement turned out to be lethal and, on the other end the pro democratic movement of the people becomes more vibrant calling support across the world. However, the movement is incomparable to the military might as it ended up not only to the arrest of anti-government, but to the extent of ariel bombing to the villages. As a result, many fled to the neighbouring countries where they have immemorial ethnic affinity, Mizoram becomes one among them.

Response to the influx of 'Burma' refugee

When the refugees started entering into the state of Mizoram due to the Military response to the outbreak pro-democracy movement in Myanmar, there was a grave concern among the people of Mizoram on how the government of Mizoram will rehabilitate the refugees. As early as March 8, 2021, in the State Assembly proceedings the home minister said that the subject related to the 'foreigner' is the central subject and it will be dealt accordingly as per the instruction of the GoI. He however added that until there is any instruction from the central, these refugees will be rehabilitated and identified. He further said that their detail will not be disclosed as of now as it can be unsafe for their relatives who stayed back¹².

Since there was no concrete response from the centre, the state government has to look into the matter on its own as there was a continuous influx of Myanmar refugee and many villages and towns were Starting to face the problem on their settlement. Since India is not a signatory of 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol it does not have a national policy for the protection and resettlement of the refugees. Though India is the major recipient of refugees and political and religious asylum in the case of Tibetan, Bangladeshi, Chakma, Myanmar and even the Rohingyas, still it is reluctant to sign the international agreement. So, in the case of major influx on refugee in Mizoram, no concrete official statement of the GoI is heard even though the State Government through official and political platforms constantly informs the central authority seeking the centre intervention.

There can be various factors as to why India chose not to sign the Convention or Treaty even though India is the largest refugee receiver in South Asia. According to Sarkar (2015) after analyzing different expert comments argued that it can be chiefly related to security reason. First, 'the infrastructure and resources in the country are poorly equipped to deal with the sudden spike of population' and it can have adverse impact on the demographic balance¹³.

¹¹ International Crisis Group (2021). *Responding to the Myanmar Coup*. Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°166, 16 February 2021. P. 6.

¹² Proceeding of the *Eight Legislative Assembly of Mizoram (Seventh Session)*, Monday, the 8th March 2021, p. 229.

¹³ Sarkar, Dipankar De (2015), "Why India won't sign Refugee Treaty". *Mint*. 15th September, 2015. <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/bePZQScFIq1wEWv9Tqt4QO/Why-India-wont-sign-Refugee-Treaty.html>

Leaving on its own, the state government formed High Level Committee on Myanmar Refugees with the Home Minister as the Chairman. District Level Committee on Myanmar Refugees and Village Level Committee on Myanmar Refugees is formed in every district and villages respectively to take care of the refugee. The absence of any proper policy from the state and the centre can be problematic for both the local people and also for the Myanmar refugee. Though the Mizo community welcomes their brother and sister who seek their help, but the inability of the local community to further handle the continuous inflow of the refugee coerced the State Government to take certain measures at least in ad-hoc manner.

In December 20, 2021 the State High Level Committee declared that in order to identify the Myanmar refugee, temporary identity card was to be made for each and every refugee. So, it was more than a year that the identification process had been operated from the District Level and ID card is being provided signed by the Additional Deputy Commissioner which is assigned as the District Nodal Officer¹⁴. The committee also declared that the state government has already spent Rs. 380 lakhs till December 2021. Here, it is to be noted that most of the relief came from the local people, the NGOs, Churches, various relief organizations, UN bodies and constantly from the Myanmar diaspora across the world.

Another initiative taken by the state government in rehabilitating the refugees is enrolling their children in schools. Though most of the children are enrolled in Government run school there are also some which have the finance to be enrolled in private schools. There are now more than 6000 children of refugees enrolled in different schools across the state of Mizoram¹⁵.

Another initiative taken to help the refugees is the support of the churches. Since, most of the refugees are Christian; as discussed earlier, there has been connections between them and the churches in Mizoram since the earlier days. Belonging to the same faith or religion proved advantageous for the refugee community to be accepted morally by the local people. In every camp or refugee settlement site, temporary church is being built which has been looked after by the pastors and the pastor also played one of the leading roles in the administration of the camp.

To understand the everyday life of the refugees, a case study was conducted in an disband BRTF camp in Thaizawl village, Lunglei district.

Everyday life of the refugee: Case Study of old BRTF Camp at Thaizawl village

Thaizawl village is situated at Lunglei district, Mizoram, about 25 kms south of Lunglei city. According to 2011 census, there are about 80 houses with a population of 378. As of now it has been expected that the population is about 500 and number of the household has also been

¹⁴ Vanglaini Mizo Daily, "Mizoram sorkarin ráltlânte tan Cheng nuai 380 a hmang tawh". 12th September, 2021.

¹⁵ The Hindu, "6,195 Myanmar students in Mizoram schools", Guwahati, September 29, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/6195-myanmar-students-in-mizoram-schools/article65950300.ece>

increased. Within the village area just above the village is situated Border Road Task Force camp which was abandoned after they were shifted to other place. As information given by the current VCP of Thaizawl village, the BRTF camp was established in 1977 it was mainly for Medical Complex and there were surgical and medical units. Apart from the Indian forces the medical service had been benefitted by the civilians. However, the whole unit had been shifted to 71RCC at Lawnglai town in Lai Autonomous District in 2017.

The land where the BTRF camp had been established belongs to three individuals. Taking the advantage of the abandon camp, the district official, the NGOs, Village Councils agreed to accommodate the refugees for temporary relief. Due to the rapid inflow of the refugees the take has been increased and now the number of the Myanmar refugees is around 640. However, some family added them while some family shifted to other places.

On May 12, 2022 along with the News editor of JB Zonet Network Cable, Lunglei I had visited the site and observed the ground situation. I also conducted personal interview with Pu Kunga, Chairman of the Relief Committee in the BRTF Camp, Thaizawl. In their committee there are Chairman and Secretary and two members each from the villages who took shelter in the refugee's camp.

The resettlement of the refugee in the camp has been started from January 15, 2022. The first group of refugees came from Buaichhia village in Myanmar and they were around 170. Soon, they were joined by the different villages and now there are around nine villages that have been resettled in the camp. They are from Matu tribe/community. There belong to Matupi Township in Chin Hills.

Kunga narrated that "All the villagers had left their village, even the old ones due to the fear of the Military. In one incident around ten people from their villages had been shot and killed, so people moved into the jungle to hide from the military".

Their village is situated about one day drive by bike from the Mizoram Border. The nearest village in Mizoram is Zawngling village. They used bike for transportation mainly to carry the weak and their belonging. As he continues,

"Many also had to walk on foot through the jungle and river to cross the border. Luckily, it was a dry season and the rivers were shallow. We left our house with most of our property in it because we could carry only what is the basic necessity. Since we could not bring along our domesticated animals like pigs, hens, etc., we told the group who fought back the military to kill and eat them. Later on, we heard that when somebody from us visited our village many of our belonging had been gone".

They brought their bike and some are even seen in the camp area. Many were also sold at Zawngling, Tuipang, and other places.

Their main occupation in the villages before they sought asylum was cultivator. However, they also made garden particularly they grow *telhawng* (edible tuber- akin to the yam family). They process the crop and dried them and sold them with an amount ranging from 10,000 to 12,000 Indian Rupee to people from Yangon.

The Chairman narrated on how they arrived at the present camp site –

When we entered Mizoram seeking shelter, they did not know that they will be resettle in the present camp. We first called our relatives who stayed at Lunglei and told that we are in distress and we have no place to go but to join them. Then our people who had been residing permanently at *Ramthar veng* Lunglei since very long time back took the initiative with the help of the District Myanmar Refugee Committee. Then they inform and requested the Deputy Commissioner of Lunglei, the Village Council and the owner of the land where BRTF camp has been situated to give permission for temporary resettlement of the refugees. After all the necessary things were completed, they came to the present camp site. Before we arrived, they halted at Zawngling village in Mara Autonomous District. During that time people from our community who stayed aboard contributed money and sent it to us. With that money, they hired a vehicle and then they have been transported to the camp. Since the BRTF has already vacated the place, the quarters are being used to for resettlement. Each family was allotted a room of 10' x 12' (Feet) wide and fire place was made outside.

When we arrived at the place there were tall grasses everywhere except on the field. The trees were also huge and thick. So, we cut them and cleaned them accordingly for our settlement. The Village Council and the YMA of Thaizawl village helped us in every possible ways from the very beginning. Through voluntary works the camp was regenerated.

How do they survive after they were resettled in the camp?

At initiative of the Relief Committee at Thaizawl, and with the help of the Village Council and Young Mizo Association, they work as daily labour to do any manual work to earn wages. If there is no work available, they spend their day in the camp. An adult man can earn Rs. 400 per day. They get their ration from different source viz., from different organization and Churches from Lunglei. While we visited the camp, there was a relief ration delivered of around 30 bags of rice from Myanmar Presbyterian Church.

Within a week they mainly consumed around 46 bags (100 kg each) by the people of the camp. Apart from rice, potatoes, pulses, vegetable oils and whatever they were given by the donor. Some families whose relatives stayed aboard were sent money and can buy food item they like. But most of them face a hard time in terms of money and therefore, depends on the relief provided by the donors.

Pu Kunga said that “they were very fortunate to be resettled in the BRTF camp which was situated above the Thazawl village. We are slightly more in numbers than the population of Thazawl”.

With regards to the place of worship, there do not have the church building at the initial stage. So, they used the open lawn as the place for worship. All the people followed Christian faith, but they are from different denomination, the Baptist is the largest in number. Pu Ruata said that the place where we had taken interview is not only for the place of worship but it is multipurpose hall. However, they used it as a church on Sunday, and on the night of Wednesday and Saturday, the same tradition followed in Mizoram. There are six pastors in the camp at the time of visiting, all belonging from the Baptist church. The present hall which is being used as their Church has been inaugurated on the last Saturday before we visited by the Pastor from Serkawn, Lunglei the headquarters of Zoram Baptist Church. The inaugurating team also gave them one lakh for the refugee camp.

Pu Kunga, the Chairman of the camp used to stay in Lunglei before and four of his five children were born in Mizoram. It can be assumed that due to his experience and not being a stranger to Mizoram he was made the Chairman. The eldest among the inmate is 104 years old. On the day we visited the camp there was one deceased, an old lady of 95 years old. The old people and the women and children were given priority at the time of their journey by carrying them with a motor cycle.

Pu Ruata took the chairmanship of the relief camp just one month ago. Before his chairmanship, he did not stay much inside the camp. From Lunglei he used to visit them and help the sick people by escorting them to the hospital. During his chairmanship, they did not receive any cash relief from the State government but they were given *silpouline* and sometimes rations. During the dried season there was a scarcity of drinking water, so they bought water most of the time. During the dry season they could not take bath properly or wash their clothes due to the scarcity of water. Though there are some small streams, due to the massive road infrastructure project all the streams are dried out during dry season as it was covered.

At the time of sickness, they visited the hospital and were being treated equally like the others, the citizen. For immunization and other health programme the health experts from the health department and the Churches' Hospitals visited them at their camp. On the day of our visit to the camp there was also an immunization programme in which the health expert gave polio vaccination to the children. Medical checkup along with medicine were also given to the people free of cost.

The everyday life of the Myanmar refugee in the camp shows the real situation on how the refugee lives in the camp. Compare to other refugee camps, the people living here has the advantage as there is ready made house build by the BRTF. Though each family occupied only one room, they build their fire place outside and there was enough place for recreation as the

camp site is large. Some of them are fortunate to join their relatives in other villages and towns, most of them do not have the same advantage. For most, it is safe to stay in the camp and they are being monitored by the authority. They are identified by being given identity card. They hope that their country will regenerate into better land and that staying in the camp is only temporary, but for how long is the answer they are waiting.

Conclusion: Restriction and surveillance

See the real-life situation in brief; one can understand that each has gone through a difficult situation with no clear future. But by the relief and the shelter provided by the people and state of Mizoram, it cannot be denied the fact that the people of Mizoram give their effort in welcoming the Myanmar refugee who are being considered as their blood relation. However, with the continuous influx of the refugees there has been an apprehension on how it will affect the close-knit society of the Mizos. As in case of BRTF camp the population of the refugee is much larger than Thazawl village. The villagers and the refugee do not get mixed with each other in their daily activities unless it is called for by the authority. The NGOs, the villages and even the state official are worried for how long they will be able to support the refugee, particularly those re-settled in the camp. As the nearby village or towns are the place where the immediate relief is often being sought.

Moreover, in the overall context within the state, there are no restrictions or clear-cut boundary set by the State government on the re-settlement of the refugee, the Myanmar refugee settle and mix with the general population. Particularly in the towns and Aizawl city, they stayed with their relatives, they rent a house, and some are being employed in the shops, houses, daily manual works, etc. They are also doing business selling their electronic items moving from door to door which otherwise is a normal practice.

Such is the present condition that there is an apprehension among the people in general that some might have been involved in illegal activities in partnership with the permanent settlers. Moreover, there is also a belief that some of the refugees who are well off try to purchase land and also start their own business. As such, the Deputy Commissioner of Aizawl district on September 18, 2022 issued an order that unless authorized by the State Government, no Myanmar refugees is to purchase land and start a business. The refugees were also not permitted to make Adhaar card, voter id, driving license and such other document issued by the state government¹⁶. The refugees are also instructed to inform to their local/village level committee if they bring their vehicles and each Local/village level committee on Myanmar refugee are instructed to follow the order and if there is any defaulter, complain has to be sent to the Chairman of the District Task group on Myanmar Refugee.

¹⁶ Retrieved from: <https://dipr.mizoram.gov.in/post/myanmar-refugee-chungchanga-dc-aizawl-thuchhuah>

Moreover, to have a concrete and better policy on the Myanmar refugee, the largest NGO in the State the Young Mizo Association in their 'Rorel Inkhawm' (General Meeting) held on September 27, 2022 resolved for pressuring the State Government to build better relief camps to accommodate all the refugees in the camps.

So, it is now understood that with the State and Centre's inability to tackle the refugee problem in a systematic manner, there is apprehension among the people and the NGOs that it can be damaging both for the local community as well as for the refugee. In the present context, it has not only been difficult to have concrete plan but also to identify them as the larger number has been mingled with the local population. Even those who had been settled in camps need to go to the villages and nearby towns to earn their living and if one finds any opportunity there, they are free to leave their camp as the state government could not afford a concrete plan without the central assistance, but the latter is still silence. Somehow, the nodal department, Disaster Management and Rehabilitation coordinate all the districts on the inflow and out of the Myanmar refugee. But, the real problem lies on how to encounter the refugees with more systematic approach in which both the Central government and State government should jointly coordinate at least in an ad-hoc manner, otherwise the local resource is draining.

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Draft of the paper to be presented in the *Seventh Critical Studies Conference November 2022 Migrant Asias - Refugees, Statelessness & Migrant Labour Regimes* on 17-19 November 2022, organized by *Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group*.

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