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The Issues of Refugees in Mizoram and the Response of State Government

Dr. Praveen Pathak*

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Abstract

The Mizoram refugee situation has worsened as a result of Myanmar's February 2021 military coup headed by Army Chief General Min Aung Hlaing. Armed insurgency and ruthless crackdowns in Chin State, which has strong ethnic and linguistic ties to Mizoram, have pushed thousands to flee across the India-Myanmar border. According to official sources, roughly 31,000 Myanmar citizens—11,798 children and 10,047 women—have sought safety in Mizoram's 11 districts. Residents of Warang and neighboring villages fled as the Myanmar Army stormed several settlements in Chin State on August 30, resulting in a new wave of displacement. In addition to Myanmar nationals, Mizoram is currently hosting almost 40,000 refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh, as well as around 5,500 people displaced by ethnic conflict in Manipur. The majority of these towns lack legal recognition, national policy backing, and financial help from the central government, putting significant burden on the state's meager resources. The Mizoram administration recognizes the difficulties of managing such a huge refugee population. With limited infrastructure and financial resources, the state is looking into measures like keeping digital records and granting identity cards to refugees. This effort seeks to offer accurate demographic data, expedite administrative procedures, and

* Assistant Professor,Department of History,Starex University, Gurugram, Praveenpthak@gmail.com

improve resource allocation. However, the lack of a clear national refugee strategy, as well as the lack of support from the central government, continues to be significant barriers. The humanitarian crisis emphasizes the critical necessity for coordinated measures that balance security concerns and humanitarian commitments. Mizoram's experience demonstrates the importance of geopolitics, ethnic unity, and local administration in combating forced migration. The situation also highlights larger problems regarding India's refugee management framework, the role of government assistance, and surrounding states' duties in dealing with regional instability. Finally, Mizoram's efforts demonstrate both resilience and fragility in the face of an increasing refugee influx, necessitating ongoing attention from politicians, humanitarian groups, and civil society.

Key word- *Mizoram, Refugees, Myanmar, Biometric data, Humanitarian crisis, Bangladesh.*

Introduction

The true definition of *Mizoram* is "land of the hill people." "*Mizo*" refers to "people who live in the highlands," whereas "ram" refers to "land," which is "land of the Mizo people." Mizoram is a landlocked state bordering *Myanmar* to the east and Bangladesh to the west. It also has borders with the northern states of *Manipur, Assam,* and *Tripura*. *Mizoram*, originally known as the *Mizo* District, was a part of Assam, just like the other northeastern states. It became a Union Territory in 1972 after being separated from *Assam*. Mizoram achieved full independence on February 20, 1987, with the 53rd Constitutional Amendment of 1986. The state is largely mountainous, with plains dispersed throughout, and there are 21 major mountain ranges of varying elevations that run north to south. The *Chhimtuipui*, commonly known as the *Kolodyin,* is the largest river. It begins in Myanmar and continues through the districts of *Siaha* and *Lawngtlai* before returning to *Myanmar*. The *Tlawng* is *Mizoram's* most significant river, as well as the most accessible and navigable. It flows through the state's northern section before entering the Barak River in Assam. They include rivers such as the *Tuirial, Tuut, Khaothlang Tuipui, Khauchak,* and others. 87% of people practiced Christianity, but in different

denominations. According to the 2011 census, 7.2% of *Chakma Buddhists* were *Hindu*, whereas 8.5% practiced Theravada Buddhism [*].

Research Methodology:

This study examines the refugee issue in *Mizoram* using both qualitative and quantitative methods. To understand sociopolitical dynamics, the qualitative method includes interviews with policymakers, community leaders, and refugees, as well as a review of government reports, media coverage, and academic research. To quantify refugee inflows, resource allocation, and state-level interventions, the quantitative method uses surveys, demographic data, and statistical records. Combining these methodologies ensures a comprehensive perspective that includes both human experiences and measurable trends. This mixed-methods strategy improves validity by providing nuanced insights into the conflict and the Mizoram government's efforts to address the problem.

Research Objective:

The study aims to objectively investigate the refugee issue in *Mizoram*, focusing on its causes, repercussions, and political implications. *Mizoram* has had a constant influx of refugees, primarily from *Myanmar*, owing to ethnic relations and political instability across the border. This study will examine the humanitarian problems caused by this movement, such as shelter, food security, healthcare, and identity documentation. A key goal is to investigate the conflict between the central government and *Mizoram*, where opposing viewpoints have emerged: the central government emphasizes strict border control and adherence to national refugee policy, whereas the *Mizoram* government emphasizes humanitarian obligations and ethnic solidarity with the Chin and *Mizo* people. The study looks into the Mizoram government's activities, such as providing temporary shelters, issuing identity cards, coordinating with civil society groups, and appealing for national and international assistance. By

[*] *Profile of Mizoram, https://protocol.mizoram.gov.in/page/profile-of-mizoram*

examining these activities, the study hopes to illustrate how state-level solutions strive to reconcile humanitarian concerns with political and administrative constraints. Finally, the goal is to evaluate the effectiveness of *Mizoram's* refugee crisis strategies and their implications for India's overall refugee management system.

Research Limitation:

The study is limited to *Mizoram's* refugee problem, concentrating solely on its sociopolitical, humanitarian, and administrative components. It excludes refugee difficulties in other Indian states and international contexts, allowing for a more focused examination of *Mizoram's* specific challenges, government solutions, and central-state conflict dynamics.

Research Design:

The study employs an analytical research design to thoroughly investigate *Mizoram's* refugee situation. It emphasizes on evaluating existing data, government policies, and sociopolitical responses rather than developing fresh experimental discoveries. The design focuses on critical review of reports, demographic figures, and policy texts to detect trends and discrepancies. The study exposes varied approaches to refugee management by examining the tension between central and state administrations. It also examines the *Mizoram* government's activities, comparing their effectiveness to national frameworks. This analytical method guarantees a balanced, evidence-based understanding of humanitarian and political elements.

Literature Review

Being Mizo (Pachau, 2014) is a cultural-historical exploration of *Mizo* identity, examining how social, political, and religious forces shaped the idea of "being *Mizo*." Pachau's work is widely regarded as a foundational text in identity studies of Northeast India.

Jackson's the Mizo Discovery of the British Raj (2025). investigates colonial encounters between the Mizo and the British, highlighting the transformative role of Christianity and empire in reshaping

Cross-border Migration in Mizoram (Tribal Research Institute). A research-based compilation that examines migration flows beyond Mizoram's boundaries, providing insights into demographic shifts, refugee difficulties, and sociopolitical challenges.

Malsawmliana and Ralte (2024). provide a social, economic, and political history of the Mizo. A detailed analysis of Mizoram's history, with a focus on socioeconomic structures and political events. It is very valuable for students studying modern Northeast Indian history.

Documents about North East India: Mizoram (Sharma, 2021) is an edited collection of colonial records, administrative reports, and political documents that provides as an invaluable resource for historical study on Mizoram.

Refugee and Human Rights in Northeast India, NESRCA collection of writings on refugee crises and human rights issues in the region, with Mizoram serving as a prominent case study. It places local issues into larger humanitarian debates.

Mizoram, the Ancient Homeland of Mizos (Ralte, 2024). This book examines Mizo migration and settlement, providing a historical perspective on Mizoram's ancient origins and cultural legacy.

Mizo Saga (Chhana, 2022) is a historical tale of Mizo migration that presents a simplified yet structured overview of community history, making it suitable for general readers and students.

Mizoram and the refugee crisis

On March 10, 2021, the Chief Secretaries of the border states of *Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram*, and *Arunachal Pradesh* received a letter from India's Ministry of Home Affairs requesting them to "take appropriate action in accordance with law to prevent illegal infiltration into India from *Myanmar*." Furthermore, it reminded the states that India cannot provide

"refugee status to any foreigner" because it is not a signatory to the United States Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The letter clarified India's stance on *Myanmar* refugees, referring to the refugee flow caused by the country's political coup as "illegal infiltration of foreigners[*]. Beginning July 3, 2021, over 4,000 people from *Myanmar's* Chin State attacked *Mizoram's Champhai* area. Prior to this, the *Chin National Defence Force (CNDF)* and the *Chinland Defence Force-Hualangoram (CDF-H),* two anti-military armed groups, were involved in heavy fighting. Both organizations are part of the People's Defense Force, which is affiliated with Myanmar's pro-democracy National Unity administration. In recent months, the military administration lost control of a substantial chunk of *Chin* state[†].

Mizoram's refugee problem is becoming worse. This small northeastern state is home to over 40,000 refugees from *Bangladesh* and *Myanmar*, as well as over 5,500 people displaced by ethnic conflict in *Manipur*; the vast majority of them lack legal status, national policy backing, and financial assistance from the central government. *Chin* State, which shares significant ethnic and linguistic ties with Mizoram, has been devastated by armed insurgency and deadly military crackdowns since Myanmar's military coup in February 2021. As of July 4, 2025, more than 3,600 individuals had been forced to evacuate to India as a result of recent unrest. Approximately 50,000 people are currently displaced in Mizoram, including thousands of Kukis fleeing Manipur and 2,200 Baam refugees from Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Mizoram has chosen a humanitarian approach, despite the central government's demand to states to stop "illegal infiltration." Refugees have received food, lodging, medical treatment, and education from Chief

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[*] *In Mizoram, a refugee crisis highlights Mizo tribal affinities and hostility,Suraj Gogoi,Published on: 02 Jun 2023, https://www.himalmag.com/comment/mizoram-refugee-crisis-chin-kukichin-bangladesh-myanmar-mizo-tribal-affinities-hostility*

[†] *How is Mizoram handling the refugee crisis? July 13, 2025,RAHUL KARMAKAR, HTTPS://WWW.THEHINDU.COM/NEWS/NATIONAL/MIZORAM/HOW-IS-MIZORAM-HANDLING-THE-REFUGEE-CRISIS/ARTICLE69805112.ECE*

Minister *Lalduhoma's* government and organizations like as the *Zo Reunification Organization (ZORO),* despite Home Ministry laws. Relief efforts in *Mizoram's* refugee camps have become increasingly difficult. Locals in border regions like *Zokhawthar* are concerned about increased crime, packed hospitals, and a shortage of supplies[*].*Lalmuanpuia* Punte, the Mizoram Chief Minister's political advisor, told The Telegraph on Monday that approximately 4,000 people are fleeing the war in Chin State. On Saturday, there were approximately 3,000 individuals. This latest increase would exacerbate the already heavy strain of Myanmar refugees in Mizoram. After factional conflicts between the China Land Defence Force-*Hualangoram* (CDF-H) and the *Chin National Defence Force (CNDF),* the influx began. More than 32,000 Myanmar refugees have been residing in *Mizoram* since the coup in 2021, and that number went even higher on Saturday. According to official *Zokhawthar* sources, Monday was quite quiet, despite the ongoing refugee surge. "More people have crossed the border since Sunday night," says one source.

There are approximately 3,500 refugees in *Zokhawthar* alone. Twenty persons crossed the border during the day."The refugees are being housed by relatives on the *Mizoram* side or in camps set up by NGOs such as the Young *Mizo* Association." On July 7, a number of Mizoram civil society organizations intervened to quell the violence that had erupted near the border. The *YMA (Young Mizo Association)* and *ZORO (Zo Reunification Organization)*, led by Mizoram Chief Minister *Lalduhoma*, mediated tribal groupings. This covert gathering was designed to stop any future wars and restore the prior state of peace[†].During a meeting with *Surinder Bhagat,* Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, in *Aizawl*,

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[*]*India's Unseen Crisis: Mizoram's Refugee Crowd, Riya Goyal, 11 Jul 2025, https://cultcurrent.in/ArticlesDetails.aspx?Article=555*

[†] *Samir K Purkayastha 8 July 2025,Mizoram's refugee crisis escalates again due to cross-border conflict https://desh.thefederal.com/state/resentment-among-local-people-due-to-refugees-in-mizoram*

Chief Minister *Lalduhoma* noted that while many refugees follow the law, some take advantage of the circumstances in Myanmar by crossing the border repeatedly before returning to *Mizoram*. According to the source, the Chief Minister has stated that the state government will take strong steps against these refugees because they routinely violate the nation's laws. The official quoted Chief Minister *Lalduhoma* as saying, "The *Mizoram* government will take strict action against those refugees who are undisciplined and repeatedly violate the laws." Refugees who often cross international borders while staying in Mizoram may have their Myanmar ID cards taken[*].

Biometric data

Official records show that Mizoram is home to approximately 3,000 *Bangladeshi* refugees. *Myanmar* refugees live in all eleven districts of the state. The majority of refugees from *Bangladesh's Chittagong* Hill Tracts live in the *Lawngtlai* area, which shares borders with *Myanmar*. These refugees also live in the *Lunglei* and Thenzawl towns in central *Mizoram's Serchhip* district. There are around 2,000 Bangladeshi refugees in *Lawngtlai* region, with 266 living in *Thenzawl* town and 63 in *Khawmawi* hamlet in *Lunglei* district. Following the completion of the biometric data collection for *Myanmar* refugees, officials stated that data on Bangladesh refugees would be gathered[†].For the past four years, the *Mizoram* government has been gathering biometric data from for the past four years,

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[*] *Yogesh Dilip, June 7, 2025 The Mizoram government is considering confiscating the identity cards of Myanmar refugees who repeatedly cross the international border. https://hindi.theprint.in/india/mizoram-government-is-considering-confiscating-the-identity-cards-of-myanmar-refugees-who-repeatedly-cross-the-international-border/835588/*

[†]*Biometric data of 14k Myanmar refugees collected, Vanlalruata, 26 Oct 2025,https://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/epaper/2025/oct/october26/biometric-data-collection-of-14532-myanmar-refugees-completed-in-mizoram-31265-refugees-in-the-state/articleshow/124816209.cms*

the Mizoram government has been collecting biometric information from refugees from Bangladesh and Myanmar. In 2023, Chief Minister *Zoramthanga* of the *Mizo* National Front ignored the *Modi* government's demand to collect biographical and biometric information from refugees. Even when *Zoramthanga* was ousted from office, the state government's position remained unchanged. The current administration, led by Chief Minister *Lalduhoma*, proclaimed in the state assembly in February 2024 that it would not collect biometric information from refugees. In compliance with a Home Ministry rule dated 2023, biometric data collection is being implemented in 11 districts to collect biometric data from all "illegal migrants."

According to *Andrew H. Vanlaldika*, *Mizoram's* Additional Home Secretary, district deputy commissioners have been entrusted with gathering the refugees' iris scans, fingerprints, and photos in addition to details on their jobs, residences, and family names. According to him, the information is kept on the Foreigners' Identification Portal, which the Home Ministry can access. A nodal officer in *Champhai*, a border district in *Myanmar* with the biggest number of refugees, claimed all refugees were required to fill out a form comprising parents' names, date of birth, gender, address in *Myanmar*, and details of stay in India. Legally, biometric data in India is governed by the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. However, it is unclear whether refugees, who are technically "illegal immigrants" under Indian law, are entitled to its protection[*].Experts expressed concern about legal gaps. Because cross-border data exchange is not particularly covered by India's data privacy law, refugees' biometrics may be given to *Myanmar* authorities upon request. *Meenakshi Ganguly* of Human Rights Watch told Scroll that, while biometric information is routinely used to give humanitarian help, it poses substantial risks when

[*] *Rokibuz Zaman,August 21, 2025, As Mizoram collects biometric data of Myanmar refugees, experts warn of risks https://scroll.in/article/1085733/as-mizoram-collects-biometric-data-of-myanmar-refugees-experts-flag-risks*

people are fleeing oppressive or violent regimes. According to The Scroll, the UN refugee agency shared ***Rohingya*** refugees' biometric information with *Myanmar* authorities, raising concerns about forced repatriation and additional persecution. According to *Mizoram* Home Department officials, collecting biometric data poses a variety of issues. The work is hindered by internet connection and technical challenges, particularly in remote areas. It is easy to collect information from refugees living in relief camps, but it is more difficult to get information from people living with friends, family, or in rented accommodation. The *Tatmadaw*, the country's military, overthrew the elected government in early March 2021, triggering the refugee crisis. The date of the coup was February 1, 2021. The most visitors to *Mizoram* have come from *Myanmar's* Chin State, which borders it.The *Zoramthanga* government in *Mizoram* has decided that it will not obtain biometric information from *Myanmar* refugees living in the state.

According to the Indian Express, in April of this year, the Union Home Ministry directed Manipur and Mizoram, which border Myanmar, to collect biographical and biometric information on "illegal immigrants." It requested in June that the states develop a plan, begin the process, and complete the campaign by the end of September. The *Manipur* administration has requested an extension, while the *Zoramthanga* government has stated that it will not collect biometric information on refugees. *Mizoram's* Minister of Information and Public Relations, *Lalruatkima*, notified the outlet that the state had decided not to collect the data on "humanitarian grounds." He went on to suggest that the state government would not do so because the Center would "throw them out after taking them in," referring to the state's people' interactions with migrants. Furthermore, he added that the state is home to approximately 60,000 refugees from *Bangladesh's Chittagong* Hill Tracts and *Myanmar*.

Mizoram refugees and solutions

The 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol define a refugee as someone who is outside their country of origin and is

unable or unwilling to return due to a credible fear of persecution. This fear could arise from their nationality, race, religion, political convictions, or membership in a particular social group. A refugee is someone whose claim to refugee status has yet to be recognized by the law. While illegal migrants freely traverse borders in search of better economic opportunities, refugees are not considered illegal migrants because they are fleeing persecution. India's Position: India does not have a national refugee law and is not a signatory to either the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol. The Foreigners Act of 1946 is the primary statute controlling refugees in India. Additionally, India uses the following laws to deal with refugees:

The Indian Passport Act, 1920

The Repatriation of Prisoners Act, 2003

The Passport (Entry into India) Rules, 1950

In 1968, India and *Myanmar* signed the FMR, a bilateral agreement that allows hill tribal members to cross the border. Its objectives are to support India's Act East Policy, promote trade, and maintain cross-border cultural links. Travel was initially permitted up to 40 kilometers, but was later limited to 10 kilometers. The *Assam* Rifles defend the border with Myanmar, and state officials provide border passes under the FMR. Residents of the border region can travel without a passport or visa if they have a border pass that can be scanned using a QR code. People can be compared to a bad list using biometric data collected and submitted to a centralized server. Although the initiative has laudable intentions, security, smuggling, and illegal immigration concerns have resulted in tighter restrictions. If the president signs off on the *Mizoram* Family Register Maintenance Bill of 2019, it could serve as a model for local identification and regulation. Provide clear instructions and training to state-level Foreign Registration Officers (FROs). The Ministry of Home Affairs and UNHCR should work together to make timely refugee status determinations. To speed up the refugee response, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of External Affairs, and the Government of *Mizoram* should establish a

special interministerial Refugee Coordination Task Force. Encourage inclusive local development initiatives, and make sure that legitimate refugees have access to basic services. Prevent the trafficking and exploitation of vulnerable groups, such as women and children. Currently, refugees are housed in improvised shelters with limited access to healthcare, education, and sanitation services. Collaborate with UNHCR and the *National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)* to establish temporary reception facilities. Create a refugee data management system to monitor refugee arrivals and service requirements. Create humanitarian corridors for asylum seekers and use smart fence technologies to monitor sensitive crossings. Increase community involvement and local law enforcement to detect criminal activity without racial stereotyping*.

There is a legal void in addition to the humanitarian issue. The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol have not been ratified by India. Since there is no national refugee law, the *Bawm, Rohingya*, and *Chin* are all considered "illegal migrants." As a result, they are denied identity cards, legal protection, and a clear future. When a democracy like India refuses to even refer to refugees as "refugees," it begs the question: Is India stripping refugees of their dignity? This exclusion is further explained by the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which only grants citizenship to non-*Muslim* minorities in *Bangladesh, Afghanistan,* and *Pakistan*. This excludes Muslim communities that left Myanmar, such as the *Rohingya* and *Chin*. In the meanwhile, UNHCR's function in Mizoram is limited; they can only offer identity cards rather than true protection. Another critical economic question is: Who is responsible for the entire crisis? Mizoram's own resources and the kindness of its people hold the key to the answer. The central government does not offer major financial help. The earlier 'free movement regime,' which enabled *Zo* persons to cross the border without a visa, was terminated in 2024.Now, the central government's aim to fence the border may perhaps hurt local businesses and family bonds.And all of

this is taking place as the situation in Myanmar deteriorates—attacks on hospitals, bombings, and airstrikes continue. There is currently no way to return in such a situation. What is the long-term strategy then? Is empathy enough? India now needs a specific policy. The impending Asylum Bill of 2021 may serve as a basis. The burden on Border States like *Mizoram* may be reduced, and displaced individuals may be afforded the right to live with dignity through temporary identity cards, international aid, mental health programs, and skill development initiatives [*].

Conclusion

The refugee situation in *Mizoram* is one of the most severe humanitarian and legal issues confronting India. The migration of thousands of displaced people from *Myanmar, Bangladesh,* and *Manipur* has put a burden on the state's limited resources, resulting in a complex scenario characterized by ethnic instability, border insecurity, and ineffective policies. The *Mizo* community's cultural and familial ties to the *Chin* of *Myanmar*, the *Bawm* of *Bangladesh*, and the *Kuki-Zo* tribes of Manipur demonstrate the deep-rooted ethnic solidarity that has molded Mizoram's compassionate response. However, compassion alone cannot bear the strain of sheltering nearly 40,000 refugees without national and international assistance.

India's lack of a national refugee law, as well as its non-signatory status to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, make refugees legally vulnerable, with many being classified as "illegal migrants." This deprives communities like the *Rohingya*, *Chin*, and *Bawm* of identity cards, protection, and respect. The *Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)* complicates

[*]*India's Unseen Crisis: Mizoram's Refugee Crowd, Riya Goyal, 11 Jul 2025* https://cultcurrent.in/ArticlesDetails.aspx?Article=555

issues by banning *Muslim* refugees from *Myanmar*, creating concerns about India's adherence to humanitarian values. Meanwhile, *Mizoram* is nearly entirely responsible for its own financial and social well-being, with little help from the national government. Policy innovation is critically needed. Temporary identity cards, refugee data management systems, interministerial coordination, and engagement with *UNHCR* and *NDMA* might all help provide urgent aid. Long-term initiatives must incorporate skill development, mental health programs, and inclusive local development in order to integrate refugees into society while maintaining security. The elimination of the Free Movement Regime in 2024, as well as the central government's fencing plans, have the potential to disrupt cross-border ethnic ties and hurt local livelihoods, escalating tensions. Finally, *Mizoram's* refugee crisis highlights the need for India to have a comprehensive asylum policy. Only through integrated governance, international help, and acceptance of refugee rights can displaced people live with dignity while border nations like *Mizoram* are relieved of unfair obligations.

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