

Myanmar puts off border pact

Myanmar has indefinitely deferred signing an agreement with India to streamline the free movement of people within 16 km along the border.

India is keen to sign the agreement but Myanmar — citing “domestic compulsions” — has asked more time before the agreement is sealed.

On January 3, the Union Cabinet had approved the agreement between India and Myanmar on land border crossing to enhance economic interaction between people of the two countries.

Border passes

To give it shape, the Centre had asked four States — Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram — that share the unfenced border with Myanmar to distribute “border pass” to all the residents living within 16 km from the border.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been deferred twice in the past seven months.

It was to be signed in September last year when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Naypyidaw for a bilateral visit. India tried to again push the agreement in January when Myanmar’s State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi was in New Delhi with nine ASEAN leaders as chief guest for the Republic Day parade.

“Myanmar has been dragging its feet on the agreement. They have asked for more time and are reluctant due to domestic compulsions. They fear that if they sign the pact, the international agreement will have to be adhered to,” a senior government official said.

India raised issue

An official said as per the proposal, there would have been no restrictions on the movement of people across the borders.

The domiciles were to be allotted border passes and those going across for agriculture, work or to meet relatives should carry the pass at all times.

The official said both the countries intend to put a system in place after India raised the issue of movement of extremists and smugglers freely across the border.

Naorem Premkanta Singh, a militant arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), who was part of the group that attacked an army convoy in 2015 in Manipur’s Chandel district killing 18 personnel, has said in his interrogation that they were in India for five days after the attack before crossing over to Myanmar on foot.

He is alleged to have said the ambush party moved together and were able to walk to Myanmar even though an Indian army helicopter hovered above to look for the suspects.

India and Myanmar share a 1,643 km unfenced border along Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km) and Mizoram (510 km) and permit a ‘free movement’ regime upto 16 km beyond the border.

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