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Protected Area Permit in Nagaland:

Tourism vs. Security Debate

Protected Area Permit in Nagaland Latest News

Ahead of its flagship Hornbill Festival (to be held in Kohima, December 1-10, 2026), the Nagaland government has urged the Centre to completely withdraw the Protected Area Permit (PAP) scheme from the state.

The festival draws over one lakh visitors annually, including international tourists — and Nagaland argues the PAP regime hinders investment, economic growth, and tourist flow to this major cultural event.

What Is the Protected Area Permit (PAP) Regime?

Issued by the Government of India, the PAP authorises foreigners to visit states along India's international borders in areas designated as protected or restricted.

Legal basis: Originally imposed under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958.

Coverage: Spans most northeastern states, including Nagaland.

Timeline of Changes

2011: PAP was relaxed for Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland specifically to boost tourism.

December 2024: The Centre reimposed PAP in these states, citing security reasons.

Since then, the Nagaland government has consistently demanded its complete withdrawal.

Nagaland's Core Arguments Against PAP

CM Neiphiu Rio wrote to the Union Home Ministry in September 2026, arguing:

> *At a time when states are being encouraged to compete for investments, build international partnerships, promote tourism and contribute to India's global outreach, such restrictions place Nagaland at a distinct disadvantage.*
>
> *A regulation designed for a very different historical and security environment should not obstruct the developmental aspirations of what he called a peaceful state.*
>
> *The continued PAP regime creates "avoidable frustration and a sense of alienation," especially among youth.*

Deputy CM Y Patton (also Home and Border Affairs Minister) confirmed the state is seeking complete withdrawal to ease tourism, particularly during Hornbill Festival:

> *"Nagaland is a very small and peaceful state. There is no law and order issue over here. The PAP must be removed."*

He noted discussions with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who assured a review — but no concrete decision has emerged yet.

The Practical Problems with PAP: Expert View

Experts highlighted the bureaucratic burden PAP imposes:

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The convoluted application process has caused a drastic fall in international visitors.

On one hand we are encouraging tourism in Nagaland, and on the other, when people from outside try to visit they are required to get the PAP mandatorily.

Key Structural Flaw: PAP processing currently happens after visa issuance, rather than "at the source itself" when the visa is granted — leading to tourists wasting valuable travel days waiting for permits after landing in India.

Experts argued that since a visa is already issued after thorough verification, this alone should suffice for Nagaland, given it is "a part of India itself."

Why the 2025 Partial Relaxation Wasn't Enough

Ahead of the 2025 Hornbill Festival, the Centre had relaxed PAP restrictions following repeated requests from Nagaland.

However, CM Rio explained why this limited relaxation had little practical benefit:

"Such a limited relaxation had little practical benefit for international tourism. Foreign visitors plan their journeys, purchase tickets, arrange accommodation and finalise itineraries weeks and months in advance."

A relaxation announced only around the Festival dates cannot provide the certainty required for international travel planning — effectively defeating its intended purpose.

This underscores Nagaland's demand for a permanent, not seasonal, policy change.

Conclusion

Nagaland's demand for complete PAP withdrawal captures a broader tension in India's Northeast policy — balancing legacy security frameworks, rooted in a different geopolitical era, against the economic aspirations of states now actively courting tourism and investment.

With the Hornbill Festival serving as both a cultural showcase and a significant economic opportunity, the state's leadership argues that bureaucratic permit hurdles undermine India's own goals of global outreach and regional development.

As the Centre continues reviewing the matter without a concrete resolution, the coming festival season may once again test whether security considerations and tourism-driven growth can be reconciled through lasting policy reform, rather than temporary, festival-timed relaxations.