

# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

By



SOURCES



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### **Important News Articles**

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2. India and France agree to set up 'joint surveillance missions' in Indian Ocean - The Hindu
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## Important News Articles

### GS I

#### 1. J'khand's in R-Day parade showcases skill of tribal women in Tasar silk production- The Print

**Relevance:** Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

**News:**

- Jharkhand's tableau in the Republic Day parade on Friday showcased the skill of tribal women in the production of Tasar silk.

**Tasar Silk**

- It is a type of wild silk, which is **made from silkworms that feed on plants like Asan and Arjun**.
- People from different parts of India call it tusaar, tusser, tushar, tusa, tassore, and tasar etc.
- Globally, it is **produced in China, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh**.
- India is the second-largest producer** of tussar silk and the exclusive producer of Indian tussar (also known as tropical tussar)
  - Which is largely tended to by tribals.
- In India, it is primarily produced in **Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh**.
- Currently, **Jharkhand** is one of the **largest producers**.
- Jharkhand has also applied for the prestigious GI (Geographical Indication) tag for its Tasar Silk

**Selection Process of Tableaux**

- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) is responsible for conducting** the parade and coordinating arrangements with States and other agencies.
- Preparations for the ceremony, which has become synonymous with national pride and patriotism, begin months in advance.
- This process includes **the selection and shortlisting of tableaux**.
- The Ministry of Culture collaborates with the MoD in the selection process, given the cultural and artistic nature of the tableaux, **supporting in the evaluation and promotion of cultural displays**.

#### Prelims Takeaway

- Tropical Tussar
- Geographical Indication tag

### GS II

#### 2. India and France agree to set up 'joint surveillance missions' in Indian Ocean - The Hindu

**Relevance:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

**News:**

- India and France have agreed to intensify their cooperation in the Southwest Indian Ocean, **building on the "joint surveillance missions** carried out from French La Reunion in 2020 and 2022

#### Prelims Takeaway

- Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul
- joint surveillance missions

**Key Highlights**

- France is the first major Western military power** with which India has conducted joint patrols
  - Under which Indian Navy P-8I maritime patrol aircraft were deployed to the French island territory of La Reunion.
- They also welcomed the **extension of those interactions in India's maritime neighbourhood**.
- The two countries have also committed to **"revitalising" the trilateral cooperation with Australia, deepen the one with the United Arab Emirates (UAE)** and explore new ones in the region.

- In this regard, the **joint statement noted the establishment of the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) for LEAP engines** in India by Safran
- The plans to add MRO for Rafale engines, a comprehensive helicopter partnership with a joint venture for Indian Multi-Role helicopter (IMRH) engine between HAL and Safran
  - And the additional Scorpene submarines constructed in India, including indigenisation.
- **Jet engine deal with France will give 100% access to technology**, says Indian envoy

#### Space cooperation

- In the realm of space cooperation, the two countries had launched the Strategic Space Dialogue in June 2023 to provide “**strategic guidance and direction**” across all aspects of space cooperation.

### 3. US blocks fresh proposal to restart dispute settlement mechanism - Indian Express

**Relevance:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

#### Prelims Takeaway

- MPIA
- WTO

#### News:

- A proposal supported by 130 WTO members to **restart the selection process for filling vacancies on the WTO's Appellate Body faces rejection from the United States.**

#### Key Highlights

- The ongoing deadlock raises concerns about the functionality of the Appellate Body, exacerbating global trade tensions amid geopolitical challenges and protectionist trends.

#### Persistent U.S. Obstruction:

- The United States, **for the 73rd time, blocks the proposal initiated by Guatemala** to launch the selection process for Appellate Body members.
- Since 2017, **the U.S. has opposed the appointment of new judges**, citing concerns over judicial activism at the WTO and issues related to U.S. sovereignty.

#### Global Trade Impact

- The **absence of a functional Appellate Body** is worrisome; especially as global trade is already slowing amid growing geopolitical tensions.
- Developed countries adopting inward-looking trade measures, such as carbon taxes, further complicate the trade landscape, impacting countries like India.

#### WTO Ministerial Conference and Reform Efforts

- Ahead of the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi, **India aims to advocate for a resolution to the system.**

#### Controversial U.S. Perspective

- The U.S. asserts that the old system was not working for multiple members, emphasizing that **relaunching the Appellate Body selection process does not address underlying concerns.**
- The statement received surprise from some members, given the significant support for the proposal among 130 co-sponsoring countries.

#### Alternative Measures and U.S. Impact

- **Seven members suggest exploring the multi-party interim appeal arrangement (MPIA)** to maintain appeal rights in the absence of a functioning Appellate Body.

- The U.S. Trade Representative argues that the proper functioning of the Appellate Body disproportionately affects the U.S., citing a high number of disputes challenging U.S. laws.

#### 4. Govt plans accreditation system overhaul - Indian Express

**Relevance:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

**News:**

- The **National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)** recently announced significant **reforms in the accreditation system for higher education institutes.**

**Key Reforms**

**Binary Accreditation System**

- Higher education institutions will now be categorised as either **"Accredited" or "Not Accredited,"** eliminating the current grading system.
- "Not Accredited" includes two categories viz. **"Awaiting Accreditation" and "Not Accredited,"** based on their compliance with standards.
  - **Awaiting Accreditation:** Those institutes that nearly meet the requirements but need improvement
  - **Not Accredited:** Those institutions that are far below the standards for accreditation.
- Introduces a **maturity-based graded system** for accredited institutions to progress from "level one" to "level five."
- Incentivizes improvement, with the ultimate goal of achieving **"Institution of Global Excellence for Multi-Disciplinary Research and Education"** status.

**One Nation, One Data Platform**

- A new public platform, **"One Nation, One Data,"** will collect and display a **comprehensive dataset from universities.**
- **Objective:** To enhance transparency, credibility, and streamline processes such as permission, accreditation, and rating over time.
  - Replaces the existing manual of assessment and accreditation where experts are responsible to visit campus and verify the data submitted.
- To ensure credibility of data, the platform will also have a built-in mechanism to **cross-check the data's veracity.**

**Future Implications for IITs**

- There is uncertainty regarding whether IITs will be **mandated to participate in the new accreditation system.**
  - The **Radhakrishnan Committee** had recommended that the IITs be brought under a unified accreditation process.
- Currently, IITs follow their **internal systems for periodic evaluation and assessment** of their programmes.

#### Prelims Takeaway

- National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)
- One Nation, One Data Platform
- University Grants Commission (UGC)

## GS III

## 5. Minimal radioactive discharges from Indian nuclear plants: study - The Hindu

**Relevance:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

**News:**

### Prelims Takeaway

- Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant
- Fission and Fusion
- Criticality

## No reason to worry

Minimal public doses underscore the safe operation of Indian nuclear power plants

■ Radiological data of 20 years (2000-2020) from six Indian nuclear power plants were analysed; for the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Station, the data were from 2013 to 2020

■ The study focussed only on the concentrations of fission products and neutron-activated nuclides values within 5 km of each nuclear plant; the monitored values were “insignificant” beyond 5 km radius

■ Fission product noble gases, Argon 41, radioiodine, particulate radionuclides — cobalt-60, strontium-90, caesium-137 — and tritium released as gaseous waste were studied

■ The liquid discharge consists of fission product radionuclides — radioiodine, tritium, strontium-90, caesium-137 — and activation products like cobalt-60

■ In air particulates, the average radionuclides and the average iodine-131 activity concentration were below 1 mBq per cubic metre. For caesium-137 and strontium-90, the average concentrations were below 10 mBq per cubic metre

■ In rivers and lakes, caesium-137 and strontium-90 concentrations were below 5 mBq per litre; the concentration was less than 50 mBq per litre in sea water near the nuclear plants



## Editorials, Gists and Explainers

## 6. What is Ladakh's demand on Gilgit-Baltistan? - The Hindu

**Relevance:** Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

**Context:**

- The Leh Apex Body (LAB), and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)
- It was a part of an ongoing dialogue between the Centre and the newly-carved Union Territory over a series of fresh demands from the region.

<p><b>Key highlights</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These demands include <b>extending the territorial control of Ladakh up to Gilgit-Baltistan</b> in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.</li> </ul> <p><b>Current status of Ladakh</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ladakh, spread over 59,146 square kilometres, was a part of the Kashmir division of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir.</li> <li>• It was carved out as one of the Union Territories, the other being J&amp;K, out of the State on August 5, 2019 as the Centre ended the special constitutional position of the region provided to it under Article 370.</li> <li>• However, unlike the UT of J&amp;K, Ladakh does not have a legislature.</li> <li>• But it has two elected hill councils, the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council-Kargil (LAHDC) and LAHDC-Leh.</li> <li>• Ladakh is a Muslim-majority UT, with the Leh district dominated by Buddhists and Kargil by Shia Muslims.</li> <li>• The region witnessed a divided reaction to the Centre's moves to abrogate Article 370 and 35A, provisions that granted exclusive rights to locals over land, jobs and natural resources.</li> <li>• Leh for many decades, supported the demand for UT status.</li> <li>• However, Kargil, after the events of 2019, has been insisting on reunification with Kashmir.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What are the latest demands of the region?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the past two years, both the socio-political bodies of Leh and Kargil launched street agitations, protesting against the UT status without a legislature.</li> <li>• Both districts joined hands to launch a major campaign for the restoration of Statehood with a legislature.</li> <li>• Earlier, Ladakh would send four members to the J&amp;K Assembly and two members to the State's legislative council.</li> <li>• There is also a unanimous cry for special status under the Sixth Schedule and Article 371 of the Constitution of India on the lines of Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim and other northeastern States.</li> <li>• Ladakh also demands exclusive rights over recruitment.</li> <li>• It also demands that the twin hill councils should have the power to recruit lower rung staff for the region.</li> <li>• The Ladakh resident certificate should be the only basis for applying for these jobs in the region, said the key bodies of Ladakh in the memorandum.</li> </ul> <p><b>Why extension of territorial control?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior to 1947, the Ladakh district also comprised the Gilgit-Baltistan area, which is now under the occupation of Pakistan.</li> <li>• The memorandum highlights the fact and seeks extension of territorial control up to Gilgit-Baltistan.</li> <li>• It demanded reservation of seats for Gilgit-Baltistan once a legislature is granted to the region.</li> <li>• Ladakh also shares a long but volatile Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China and saw a violent skirmish between the troops of these countries in 2020.</li> <li>• The fresh memorandum to MHA underlines that "empowering the locals will foster stability in the region, further enhancing the foreign policy".</li> </ul>
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### What is the Centre's stand?

- The **17-member committee** included the Ladakh Lieutenant Governor and members from the KDA and LAB.
- In 2024, these bodies submitted a written memorandum **to pave the way for more structured talks between New Delhi and Ladakh over the list of demands.**

## 7. THE BURDEN OF MALNUTRITION - Indian Express

**Relevance:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### Context:

- The **need for a balanced diet** has become a challenge in India.
- **Malnutrition has given rise to various diseases**, which in turn has exaggerated the malnutrition problem.

**Malnutrition and health disorder: A Two-way Relationship**

- There is a two-way relationship between nutritional deficiencies and disorders.
- Consistent intake of food lacking in essential micronutrients can lead to iron deficiency anaemia and Vitamin A, and zinc deficiency, and impair immunity.
- Conversely, conditions such as celiac disease and infections like worm infestations can disturb the digestive system, leading to nutrient deficiencies.

**Government Programs and Challenges**

- Government programmes like Anaemia Mukh Bharat (AMB) are among the biggest targeted measures to tackle the disorder.
  - It involves administering iron and folic acid (IFA) tablets and other prophylactic measures to address anaemia.
- The Mid-Day Meal Scheme for school children is another such intervention.
- However, challenges in the effective implementation of such programs exist, despite their targeted nature.

**Role of Diet in Addressing Malnutrition**

- The burden of malnutrition is complex and needs to be addressed through multiple interventions with diet playing a significant role.
- A comparison between traditional and contemporary dietary patterns underscore a transition from diverse, well-balanced diets to processed, nutritionally lacking alternatives.
- Recognizing the role of reducing processed food consumption for better health outcomes is crucial.

**Challenges in Access to a Balanced Diet**

- According to FAO data, 46% of South Asia's population lacks access to an affordable balanced diet.
- **The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2023**
  - Around 74% of India's population could not afford a healthy diet, and 39% fell short of a nutrient-adequate diet.

**Large-Scale Food Fortification (LSFF)**

- Recent government interventions, particularly LSFF, is a timely strategy to enhance ongoing efforts.
- LSFF, aligned with micronutrient supplementation programs and behavioural change measures has immense potential to improve the efficacy of existing initiatives.
- Fortification in India is not a completely novel strategy.
- The adoption of iodised salt under the National Iodine Deficiency Disorders Control Programme in 1992 significantly reduced goitre rates.
- India's food fortification programme now includes adding micronutrients to staples such as wheat flour, rice, edible oils and salt.

**Awareness for Fortified Food**

- Awareness, particularly dispelling misconceptions regarding fortified foods, is critical for the acceptance of fortified foods among the targeted beneficiaries.
- Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns are crucial in addressing concerns related to the appearance and texture of fortified foods.
- An important step is to inform the beneficiaries about the stringent standards of fortification to build trust.

**Conclusion**

- Government initiatives aimed at **strengthening staple foods** should be complemented by efforts to **promote balanced diets**.
- The focus should extend **beyond adopting healthier eating habits** at the individual and community levels; it should also **involve state-level strategies**, such as the LSFF).

## 8. FPI disclosure norms: What are the concerns and why is Sebi seeking investor data from FPIs? - Indian Express

**Relevance:** Economy

**Context:**

- **Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs)** have been given a **seven-month extension to provide additional disclosures**, as mandated by SEBI.
- This decision comes in response to concerns about **potential misuse of the FPI route** and the need to **prevent round-tripping** by certain promoters.



<p><b>Background</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In August last year, SEBI instructed FPIs holding over 50% of equity AUM in a single corporate group or with a total holding in Indian equity markets exceeding Rs 25,000 crore to disclose detailed information.</li> <li>Objective: To prevent the possible round-tripping by certain promoters using the FPI route.</li> <li>FPIs are required to provide granular details of entities holding ownership, economic interest, or control in the FPI.</li> </ul> <p><b>Timeline for Compliance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing FPIs in breach of investment limits as of October 31, 2023, must reduce exposure by January 29, 2024.</li> <li>FPIs meeting criteria as of January end will have an additional 10/30 working days for disclosures, followed by six more months to reduce holdings if needed.</li> </ul> <p><b>Exemptions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sovereign wealth funds, certain global exchange-listed companies, public retail funds, and other regulated pooled investment vehicles with diversified global holdings are exempted from enhanced disclosures.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quantum of FPIs Affected</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SEBI's consultation suggested that FPIs with assets of around Rs 2.6 lakh crore may be considered high-risk.</li> <li>However, the actual number requiring enhanced disclosures is expected to be less than estimated.</li> <li>Speculation suggests recent FPI withdrawals from the domestic market may be driven, in part, by the impending SEBI deadline.</li> </ul> <p><b>Government Intervention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Press Note 3 (2020) amended FDI policy during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of stressed Indian companies at lower valuations.</li> <li>It required government approval for beneficial ownership changes in entities sharing a land border with India.</li> </ul>
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## 9. A closer look at Myanmar's discontent - Indian Express

**Relevance:** India and its neighbourhood- relations.

**Context:**

- February will mark the third anniversary of the **military coup in Myanmar**, which resulted in the **removal of the democratically elected government** under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi.
- The coup led to a **civil disobedience movement**, the formation of a **National Unity Government**, and the emergence of **People's Defence Forces (PDFs)**.

<p><b>Ethnic Armed Organizations' Offensive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An alliance including the Arakan Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and Ta'ang National Liberation Army launched coordinated attacks last October, causing significant losses for the military in Shan State.</li> <li>Paletwa town on the country's western borders, crucial to India's Kaladan project, is now under the control of the Arakan Army.</li> <li>The regions inhabited by the majority Bamar ethnic community, like Sagaing, Bago, and Magwe, also witnessed a surge in resistance.</li> <li>The PDFs gained ground against the military, indicating a widespread discontent and a failure of the military's objective to strengthen national unity.</li> </ul> <p><b>Territorial Loss and Popular Discontent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The military has conceded large territories to ethnic armed groups and PDFs, facing challenges in recruitment even from Bamar-dominated regions.</li> <li>Reports suggest a decline in military cohesion, with personnel surrendering to resistance movements.</li> <li>Internal displacement and refugee crises are fueled by reports of the military using force against civilians.</li> </ul> <p><b>Causes of Territorial Loss</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contrary to previous instances of territorial loss due to military incapacity, the current setbacks are attributed more to growing popular discontent.</li> <li>The military struggles to recruit, with instances of government officials, doctors, and police supporting the resistance.</li> <li>Punishments for military personnel failing to prevent desertions highlight increasing stress on military cohesion.</li> </ul>	<p><b>China's Defensive Measures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>China vigorously defends the Myanmar military on international platforms, preventing international censure.</li> <li>China's close relations with ethnic armed groups may have played a role in orchestrating a ceasefire in the Shan State.</li> <li>It is rumoured that China used the ethnic alliance to stamp out online scams and criminal syndicates that were fleecing millions from Chinese citizens.</li> </ul> <p><b>ASEAN's Limited Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has outlined a five-point consensus and has denied the Myanmar military a place at ASEAN summits.</li> <li>ASEAN special envoy to Myanmar was prevented from having meaningful interactions with all the relevant stakeholders.</li> <li>Despite repeated efforts, ASEAN has been unable to influence Myanmar's politics significantly.</li> </ul> <p><b>Thailand's Influence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thailand, with a significant border with Myanmar, has considerable influence.</li> <li>The Thai Foreign Minister has engaged with both Myanmar's military leadership and the imprisoned Aung San Suu Kyi.</li> <li>It has also made efforts to increase humanitarian assistance and interacts with Myanmar's exile organisations.</li> </ul> <p><b>India's Potential Role</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>India can adopt a more proactive humanitarian approach to help displaced communities in Myanmar, potentially reducing refugee inflows into India.</li> <li>In its engagement with Myanmar, India should factor in the three political realities viz. ongoing discontent against the coup, resilient resistance, and political fragmentation.</li> <li>Perhaps, India may need to re-calibrate its Myanmar policy after consultations with relevant stakeholders.</li> </ul>
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## 10. What are the RBI's guidelines on State 'guarantees'? - The Hindu

**Relevance:** Economy

**Context:**

- A working group constituted by the RBI recently proposed significant **recommendations on state government guarantees**.
- **Objective:** To address issues relating to guarantees extended by State governments.
- RBI anticipates that the proposed reforms will **enhance fiscal management for state governments**.

**Definition and Purpose of Guarantees**

- A 'guarantee' is a **legal obligation** for a State to make payments and protect an investor/lender from the **risk of default by a borrower**.
- It should not be confused with an **'indemnity' contract** that protects the lender from loss caused to them by the conduct of the promisor (or the principal debtor).
- Primarily, Guarantees are resorted to in **three scenarios at the State level**
  - Where a sovereign guarantee is a precondition for concessional loans from bilateral or multilateral agencies (to public sector enterprises)
  - To improve viability of projects or activities with the potential to provide significant social and economic benefits
  - To enable public sector enterprises to raise resources at lower interest charges or on more favourable terms.

### Working Group Recommendations

#### • Broader Definition

- Suggests using a broader definition of guarantees, encompassing all instruments creating obligations for future payments by the guarantor (State).
- It must make any distinction between conditional or unconditional, or financial or performance guarantees in order to assess the fiscal risk.

#### • Guidelines for Issuance

- Recommends guarantees should not be used to obtain finance through State-owned entities, which substitute budgetary resources of the State Government.
- Additionally, they should not be allowed to create direct liability/de-facto liability on the State.
- Recommends adherence to GoI guidelines, emphasizing guarantees for the principal amount and normal interest components only.
- Furthermore, they must not be extended
  - For external commercial borrowings
  - For more than 80% of the project loan (depending on the conditions imposed by the lender)
  - For private sector companies and institutions.
- Proposes appropriate preconditions, including guarantee fee, government representation, and audit rights.

#### • Risk Weight Assignment

- Recommends the states to assign appropriate risk weights (high, medium, low) considering past defaults.
- Urges conservative risk weight assignment, setting the lowest slab at 100%.

#### • Ceiling on Guarantees

- Advocates a desirable ceiling on issuance of guarantees to manage potential fiscal stress.
- Proposes a ceiling at 5% of Revenue Receipts or 0.5% of GSDP - whichever is less, for incremental guarantees issued during a year.
- Further, the guarantee fee should be reflective of project riskiness; suggests a minimum base fee of 2.5% per annum.

#### • Data Disclosure

- Recommends RBI advising banks/NBFCs to disclose credit extended to state-owned entities backed by government guarantees.
- Availability of data, both from issuer and the lender, may improve the credibility of the data reported by the State government.
- Suggests set up of a unit at the State level to track the same – alongside its compilation and consolidation.

#### • Guarantee Honouring

- Highlights the significance of promptly honouring guarantees to maintain credibility and avoid reputational and legal risks.
- Encourages states to exercise caution in extending fresh finance to entities with a history of commitment failures.

## 11. Analysing China's ties with Africa - The Hindu

**Relevance:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

**Context:**

- The complex relationship between China and Africa is gaining attention globally, with implications for India.

<p><b>Historical Context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chinese influence in Africa has ancient origins, with early explorations by figures like Zeng He in the 15th century.</li> <li>Common experiences and ideologies drove China-Africa relations in the 20th century, marked by opposition to colonialism and economic development goals.</li> <li>The Bandung Conference in 1956 and Premier Zhou Enlai's visits in the 1960s solidified diplomatic ties.</li> </ul> <p><b>Evolution of Relations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shift from 'war and revolution' to 'peace and development' in the 1980s.</li> <li>Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) established in the past decade, institutionalising relations.</li> <li>Economic cooperation became a key focus in the 1990s, with China's foreign minister starting annual visits in African capitals since 1991.</li> </ul> <p><b>Current State of Affairs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sino-African relations cover political, defense, economic, and cultural aspects.</li> <li>China's assertiveness in the western Indian Ocean and active participation in the FOCAC process.</li> <li>China-Africa trade grows significantly, reaching \$107 billion in 2008, with China importing over 20% of its oil from Africa.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Conflicting opinions on China's role:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>supporters emphasize mutual benefit, while critics label China as 'exploitative' and 'extractive.'</li> </ul> <p><b>India's Perspective</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>India has deep historical ties with Africa, but the gap between India and China in Africa is widening.</li> <li>Denying rivalry is not feasible; both nations vie for Africa's attention, assets, and markets.</li> <li>A balanced approach for India involves monitoring China's activities, enhancing engagement wisely, and leveraging natural advantages.</li> </ul>
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**Conclusion**

- China's presence in Africa is expanding, requiring India to increase its engagement thoughtfully and rapidly.
- A combination of greater activism, sensitivity, and synergy will position India to be seen as doing both better and more in Africa.

## Quick Look

### 1. ECOWAS

- The military regimes in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger recently announced their immediate withdrawal from ECOWAS.
- It is the West African nation's regional group which was established in 1975 through the Lagos Treaty.
- Objective: To have a single common currency and create a single, large trading bloc in areas of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, financial issues and social and cultural matters.
- Beyond the goals of economic cooperation, ECOWAS has attempted to quell military conflicts in the region.
- ECOWAS also operated a regional peacekeeping operation known as ECOMOG, led by Nigeria in the 1990s and early 2000s.
- Members: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d' Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo.
  - These countries have both cultural and geopolitical ties and shared common economic interests.
- Headquarters: Abuja, Nigeria.

### 2. Western Equine Encephalitis Virus (WEEV)

- In December 2023, the WHO was notified of a human case of Western Equine Encephalitis Virus (WEEV) in Argentina, the first since 1996.
- The outbreak has since grown to 21 confirmed human cases.
- WEEV is a mosquito-borne infection caused by the Western Equine Encephalitis Virus (WEEV).
- The virus belongs to the Togaviridae family of viruses with neurological symptoms in severe cases, and there is no specific antiviral treatment.
- It has an approximately 11.5 kilobases long single-stranded RNA genome.
- It is a recombinant of the eastern equine encephalitis virus (EEEV) and a Sindbis-like virus.
- Passerine birds are thought to be the reservoir and equine species as intermediate hosts.
- Exposures include veterinary work, construction and outdoor activities.

### 3. End-to-End Encryption (E2EE)

- Encryption is a way of protecting data from unauthorised access or tampering.
- It works by transforming the data into a secret code that only the intended recipient can decipher.
- This comes in useful for various cases, such as securing online communications, storing sensitive information, and verifying digital identities.
- There are two main types of encryption
  - Symmetric: It uses the same key to encrypt and decrypt the data.
  - Asymmetric: It uses a pair of keys viz. one public and one private. The public key can be shared with anyone, but the private key must be kept secret.
- End-to-end encryption protects data as it's transferred between a location – which is crucial wherever there's a rapid exchange of information.
- In an E2EE-enabled app, only the person on each end – the sender and receiver – can read any exchanged messages.

## 4. Sapinda Marriages

- Sapinda marriages involve individuals closely related within specified degrees, as per Section 3(f)(ii) of the HMA.
- The MHA prohibits sapinda marriages within a certain range of lineal ascent, ensuring that marriages do not occur between individuals with a common lineal ascendant within the defined limits.
- Sapinda marriages that violate Section 5(v) and lack an established custom permitting them are declared void.
- The sole exception to this prohibition arises when both parties' customs permit sapinda marriages, as defined in Section 3(a) of the HMA.

## 5. Places of Worship Act, 1991

- It was enacted to freeze the status of religious places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947
- It prohibits the conversion of any place of worship and ensures the maintenance of their religious character.
- Prohibition of Conversion (Section 3)
  - Prevents the conversion of a place of worship, whether in full or part, from one religious' denomination to another or within the same denomination.
- Maintenance of Religious Character (Section 4(1))
- Ensures that the religious identity of a place of worship remains the same as it was on August 15, 1947.

## 6. Grantham Inscriptions

- Two stone inscriptions of 'Grantham' and Tamil dating 11th and 16th centuries respectively were recently discovered at Pazhnchervazhi village near Kangayam.
- Grantha is an important historical script that was once used to write Sanskrit throughout South East Asia and greater Tamil Nadu.
- When the Malayalam language began to freely borrow words as well as the rules of grammar from Sanskrit, this script was adopted for writing that language and was known as Arya Ezhuthu.
- Both Grantha and Tamil scripts appear alike in modern forms. The evolution of both scripts from Brahmi was also more or less similar.
- The development of the Grantha script in Tamil Nadu may be divided into four periods viz. the archaic and ornamental (commonly known as Pallava Grantha), the transitional, the mediaeval; and the modern.

## Prelims Track Question

### Q1. Consider the following statements regarding Tasar silk

1. Tasar silk is produced from the cocoons of the silkworm species *Antheraea mylitta*.
2. India is the largest producer of Tasar silk in the world.
3. Tasar silk is primarily known for its golden-yellow color.

**How many of the statements given above is/are incorrect?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

### Q2. Consider the following statements regarding joint surveillance missions between India and France

1. Joint surveillance missions between India and France aim to enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean region.
2. The Varuna exercise is an example of joint surveillance missions conducted by India and France.
3. These missions primarily focus on counter-terrorism operations in the land border regions shared by India and France.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

### Q3. Consider the following statements regarding the WTO's Appellate Body

1. The WTO's Appellate Body is responsible for settling disputes related to trade issues among member countries.
2. The Appellate Body consists of seven members who are appointed by the WTO Director-General.

3. Members of the Appellate Body serve renewable four-year terms.
4. The Appellate Body's decisions are final and cannot be appealed further within the WTO dispute settlement mechanism.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. Only three
- D. All four

### Q4. Consider the following statements with reference to National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

1. It is a government organisation established in response to recommendations of National Policy in Education (1986).
2. It assesses and accredits Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to derive an understanding of the 'Quality Status' of the institution.
3. It is funded by the Ministry of Education and NITI Aayog.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

### Q5. Consider the following statements regarding Gilgit-Baltistan

1. Gilgit-Baltistan is a region located in the northern part of India.
2. It is an autonomous territory with its own elected legislative assembly.
3. Gilgit-Baltistan shares borders with Afghanistan and China.
4. The status of Gilgit-Baltistan is a subject of territorial dispute between India and Pakistan.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. Only three
- D. All four

**Q6. With reference to Anaemia Mukh Bharat, consider the following statements:**

1. It aims to reduce the prevalence of anaemia among children, adolescents and women in the reproductive age group of 15 - 49 years.
2. It is based on a life cycle approach, providing preventive and curative mechanisms through a 6X6X6 strategy.

**Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?**

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**Q7. With reference to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), consider the following statements**

1. In FDI the investor has no control over the management or functioning of the firm or business entity whose asset is bought.
2. FDI is much more volatile to adverse shocks than FPI.
3. In FDI, investments are made for the long term.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

**Q8. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project often seen in the news is developed by which of the following countries?**

- A. India and Sri-Lanka
- B. India and Nepal
- C. India and Bangladesh
- D. India and Myanmar

**Q9. Consider the following statements about State Development Loan (SDL)**

1. It is a bond issued by state governments to fund their fiscal deficit.
2. The yield on these papers is usually higher than the benchmark government bonds.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**Q10. Consider the following statements regarding Africa**

1. Africa is the second-largest continent in terms of both land area and population.
2. The Sahara Desert, the world's largest hot desert, is primarily located in Southern Africa.
3. The African Union (AU) is an organization aimed at promoting economic integration and cooperation among African countries.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

**Prelims Track Answer****Answer 1 Option A is correct****Explanation**

- Tasar silk is indeed produced from the cocoons of the silkworm species *Antheraea mylitta*.
- This species is commonly known as the Tasar silkworm and is native to India. The silk produced from these cocoons is referred to as Tasar silk. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- India is the largest producer of Tasar silk in the world. The production of Tasar silk is particularly significant in states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Bihar.
- These regions are known for their sericulture activities involving Tasar silkworm rearing and silk production. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- Tasar silk is not primarily known for its golden-yellow color. Unlike some other types of silk, Tasar silk is known for its natural color variations, which can range from beige and light brown to reddish-brown and even dark chocolate brown.
- The color of Tasar silk is influenced by factors such as the diet of the silkworms and environmental conditions during silk production. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**

**Answer 2 Option B is correct****Explanation**

- Joint surveillance missions between India and France are conducted with the objective of enhancing maritime security, especially in the Indian Ocean region.
- The two countries collaborate on naval exercises and joint patrols to monitor and safeguard maritime interests, including countering piracy and ensuring the freedom of navigation. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The Varuna exercise is an example of joint surveillance missions between India and France.
- Varuna is an annual bilateral naval exercise conducted by the Indian Navy and the French Navy. It involves various aspects of naval cooperation, including anti-submarine warfare, air defense, and joint surveillance to enhance maritime security. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

- Joint surveillance missions between India and France primarily focus on maritime security, especially in the Indian Ocean, and are not centered on counter-terrorism operations in the land border regions shared by the two countries.
- While both countries may collaborate on various aspects of defense and security, joint surveillance missions are specifically designed to address maritime challenges. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**

**Answer 3 Option A is correct****Explanation**

- The WTO's Appellate Body plays a crucial role in the dispute settlement mechanism of the World Trade Organization. It is responsible for hearing appeals from reports issued by panels in disputes brought by WTO members.
- The Appellate Body reviews legal issues and ensures that the panel's findings are consistent with WTO agreements. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The Appellate Body consists of seven members, but they are appointed by the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) and not the WTO Director-General.
- Members of the Appellate Body are individuals with recognized legal expertise and serve in their personal capacity, not as representatives of any specific country. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**
- Members of the Appellate Body serve non-renewable four-year terms. This is to ensure their independence and avoid any potential conflicts of interest. Once their term expires, they are not eligible for reappointment to the Appellate Body. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**
- The Appellate Body's decisions are not final in the sense that they cannot be appealed further within the WTO dispute settlement mechanism. The WTO agreements do not provide for a third level of appeal beyond the Appellate Body. However, if there is a disagreement over a legal interpretation,



WTO members can raise the issue in the WTO's General Council. **Hence, statement 4 is incorrect.**

**Answer 4 Option B is correct****Explanation**

- National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is a government organisation (HQ in Bangalore) in India established in 1994 in response to recommendations of National Policy in Education (1986). **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It is an autonomous body that assesses and accredits Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) such as colleges, universities/other recognised institutions to derive an understanding of the 'Quality Status' of the institution. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- It is funded by the UGC and evaluates the institutions in terms of their performance related to the teaching-learning processes, faculty, research, infrastructure, governance, financial wellbeing, student services, etc. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**

**Answer 5 Option C is correct****Explanation**

- Gilgit-Baltistan is not located in the northern part of India. It is a region situated in the northern part of Pakistan and borders the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect.**
- Gilgit-Baltistan has its own elected legislative assembly, and it gained a limited form of autonomy with the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009. However, its constitutional status remains a subject of debate, and it does not have the same level of autonomy as some other regions. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- Gilgit-Baltistan shares borders with Afghanistan and China. It is strategically located at the confluence of the Karakoram, Himalayan, and Hindu Kush mountain ranges. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
- The status of Gilgit-Baltistan is a subject of territorial dispute between India and Pakistan. Both countries have competing claims over the entire region of Jammu and Kashmir, which includes Gilgit-Baltistan. The territorial status and governance of the region are complex and have been a source

of tension between India and Pakistan. **Hence, statement 4 is correct.**

**Answer 6 Option D is correct****Explanation**

- Anaemia Mukt Bharat (AMB) Programme was launched in 2018 by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Objective: To reduce the prevalence of anaemia among children, adolescents and women in the reproductive age group (15-49 years). **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The programme aims to reduce the proportion of anaemia among children to 40%, pregnant women to 32% and lactating women to 40% by 2022.
- It is designed to reduce the prevalence of Anaemia by 3% points per year between the years 2018 and 2022 with 6 beneficiaries, 6 interventions, and 6 institutional mechanisms. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

**Answer 7 Option A is correct****Explanation**

- Foreign direct investment pertains to international investment in which the investor obtains a lasting interest in an enterprise in another country
- The investor has control over the management or functioning of the firm or business entity whose asset is bought. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect.**
- An investor is active under FDI.
- Here, direct investments are made in the assets.
- Investments made are long term in nature. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
- FDI is stable in nature when compared to FPI. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**

**Answer 8 Option D is correct****Explanation**

- Kaladan Project aims to link India and Myanmar via the Bay of Bengal.
- It was jointly identified by India and Myanmar to create a multi-modal mode of transport for the shipment of cargo from the eastern ports of India to Myanmar as well as to the North-Eastern part of India through Myanmar. **Hence, option D is correct.**
- It is being constructed by India under the Grant in Aid Scheme.
- Once completed, it will link Kolkata with the Sittwe seaport in Rakhine state in Myanmar,

primarily over the Bay of Bengal – covering over 500 km.

- The project envisaged four important stages viz.
  - Kolkata to Sittwe waterway
  - Sittwe to Paletwa inland (River Kaladan) waterway
  - Paletwa to India-Myanmar border post in Myanmar
  - Finally, linking the road to Lawngtlai in Mizoram as part of the project's last leg

**Answer 9 Option C is correct**

**Explanation**

- State Development Loan (SDL) is a bond issued by state governments to fund their fiscal deficit. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- SDLs pay interest on a half-yearly basis and repay the principal amount on maturity.
- These bonds are issued generally for 10-year but they can be issued with other maturities too.
- SDLs are less risky than AAA-rated corporate bonds as it has a sovereign guarantee.
- The yield on these papers is usually higher than the benchmark government bonds. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- SDL issues are managed by the Reserve Bank of India, however, RBI is not responsible for guaranteeing SDLs.

- Interest received from SDLs is taxable just like interest income from any debt instrument.

**Answer 10 Option A is correct**

**Explanation**

- Africa is the second-largest continent in terms of land area but is the second most populous continent, after Asia. It is home to a diverse range of cultures, languages, and ethnic groups. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect.**
- The Sahara Desert is not primarily located in Southern Africa.
- It is situated in the northern part of Africa, spanning across several countries, including Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Sudan, and Tunisia. Southern Africa, on the other hand, includes countries such as South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and others. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**
- The African Union (AU) is an organization aimed at promoting economic integration and cooperation among African countries. It was established in 2001 to succeed the Organization of African Unity (OAU).
- The AU's objectives include fostering unity, peace, and security on the continent, as well as promoting socio-economic development. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**



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