Mains Master

Analysing China's ties with Africa

Context : Africa, a continent rich in untapped potential and natural resources, is increasingly drawing the attention of China. In recent years, China's interest in Africa has surged, marking a significant shift in global dynamics. The growing importance of Africa on the world stage is underscored by the expanding Chinese footprint. By delving into the historical context, examining China's strategic goals, and recognizing Africa's rising influence, we gain valuable insights into how this evolving partnership may reshape the global order in the years ahead.

Background:

· The Sino-African relationship stretches back to the 1950s, with China supporting independence movements and later securing its UN Security Council seat through African backing.

· Since the 1990s, China's "Go Out Policy" encouraged investment in Africa, culminating in the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000.

· Today, China stands as Africa's largest trading partner, investor, and source of development aid.

Growing Chinese Influence:

· **Securing vital resources:** Africa supplies crucial minerals and rare earths that fuel China's thriving tech industry.

· **Boosting global stature:** China leverages African support in the UN and strengthens its international presence.

· **Promoting its currency**: China incentivizes African trade in yuan through "**panda bonds"** and debt restructuring initiatives.

· **Expanding market reach:** Africa offers a burgeoning market for Chinese exports and access to a readily available workforce.

Challenges with Chinese Diplomacy:

· **Concerns about debt traps:** Some African countries grapple with unsustainable debt burdens arising from Chinese loans.

· **Non-interference policy under scrutiny:** Critics argue this approach enables authoritarian regimes and undermines democratic principles.

· **Environmental impact of resource extraction:** Concerns regarding environmental degradation due to resource extraction activities have been raised.

· **Unethical labor practices:** Reports of exploitation of African workers in Chinese-owned enterprises have surfaced.

Lessons for India:

· **Building strategic partnerships:** India can deepen its ties with African nations through development assistance and mutually beneficial trade agreements.

· **Investing in infrastructure:** Investing in vital infrastructure projects across Africa can address connectivity and development needs.

· **Championing South-South cooperation:** Promoting knowledge sharing and technology transfer among developing nations can foster collaboration and growth.

· **Enhancing soft power:** Strengthening cultural ties and people-to-people exchanges can help build trust and influence in Africa.

Conclusion:

China's increasing influence in Africa presents both opportunities and challenges. By learning from both China's successes and its shortcomings, India can forge its own path towards building constructive and mutually beneficial partnerships with African nations.

A closer look at Myanmar's discontent

Three years after the coup:

· **Discontent simmers:** The February 2021 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's democratically elected government sparked massive civil disobedience. This resistance continues, fueled by anger towards the military junta's brutal crackdown and lack of progress towards promised elections.

· **Armed defiance spreads:** The deposed lawmakers formed the National Unity Government (NUG), which established the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) to fight back against the military. These PDFs, along with existing ethnic armed organizations, have made significant gains in various areas, controlling large swathes of territory, particularly in border regions.

· **Military struggles to regain control:** Despite deploying heavy weaponry and tactics against civilians, the junta is facing fierce resistance and struggles to hold onto territory. Their ability to recruit soldiers, especially from the majority Bamar community, is waning, leading to desertions and declining morale.

China's strategy:

· **Public shield:** On the international stage, China actively backs the junta, shielding it from condemnation and sanctions. This aligns with China's broader interests of stability and maintaining access to Myanmar's resources.

· **Backstage deals:** However, China also maintains close ties with several ethnic armed groups, particularly in the north. The recent ceasefire between these groups and the junta in Shan State was reportedly orchestrated by Beijing, reflecting its ability to wield influence behind the scenes.

· **Uncertain truce:** The long-term stability of this ceasefire remains uncertain. Neither the ethnic groups nor the junta fully trust each other, and Beijing's influence over their operations may become a point of contention.

ASEAN's limited role:

• **Stalled consensus:** The regional association ASEAN adopted a five-point consensus calling for dialogue and de-escalation, but their efforts have been hampered. The junta refuses to fully comply, and their envoy faces difficulties engaging with all relevant stakeholders.

• **Shifting voices:** While traditionally hesitant to criticize member states, some ASEAN countries are becoming more vocal in condemning the coup and the junta's human rights abuses. This marks a significant shift in regional dynamics.

Thailand's approach:

• **Balancing act:** Thailand, with its close proximity and trade ties to Myanmar, takes a more nuanced approach. They maintain communication with both the junta and Myanmar's exiled organizations, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

• **Humanitarian push:** Recognizing the escalating humanitarian crisis, Thailand has increased its assistance to displaced communities within Myanmar and those seeking refuge in Thailand.

India's options:

• **Active compassion:** To alleviate the suffering caused by the crisis, India could consider providing substantial humanitarian aid to displaced communities inside Myanmar. This would also help manage the flow of refugees into India.

• **Adapting to complexity:** India's long-standing ties with Myanmar necessitate a reevaluation of its policy in light of the evolving situation. Recognizing the three crucial realities – persistent discontent, resilient resistance, and the fragmented political landscape with multiple power players – is crucial for navigating this complex environment.

• **Engaging with all sides:** Instead of solely focusing on the junta, India could establish broader ties with other stakeholders, including the NUG, ethnic armed groups, and civil society organizations. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the situation and foster potential avenues for dialogue and peaceful resolution.

What are the RBI's guidelines on State 'guarantees'?

Guarantees Explained:

Imagine a State acting like a guarantor for a loan taken by a company. If the company can't repay the loan, the State steps in and ensures the lender gets their money back. This "safety net" is called a guarantee and it protects investors from borrower defaults. Governments often do this for State-owned businesses, local bodies, or cooperatives. In return, these entities pay a fee to the government for this guarantee.

RBI's Recommendations:

• **Wider Net:** The definition of "guarantee" would be expanded to include any agreement where the State promises to pay someone else's debt in the future, even if it's called something different. This ensures all potential risks are captured.

• **Guaranteeing Responsibly:** Guarantees shouldn't be used to simply replace the State's own budget with borrowed money. They also shouldn't create hidden liabilities for the State or extend beyond the principal loan amount and regular interest. Basically, guarantees should be used cautiously and not as a magic money fix.

• **No Free Passes:** Guarantees won't be given for fancy foreign loans, overly risky ventures, or private companies. They're meant for supporting responsible projects within the State's control.

• **Weighing the Risks:** Guarantees aren't one-size-fits-all. The government will assess the likelihood of a borrower defaulting before offering a guarantee, like giving a higher safety net to companies with a good track record.

• **Putting a Cap:** To avoid getting overloaded with guarantees, the government might set a limit on how much they can guarantee in a year. This helps manage the potential financial burden.

• **Transparency Matters:** Banks and other lenders will need to clearly disclose when they're giving loans based on State guarantees. This helps everyone understand the potential risks involved.

• **Keeping Track:** A central database will track all the guarantees issued by the government. This ensures everyone has access to accurate information and prevents any shady dealings.

Overall, these recommendations aim to make State guarantees more responsible, transparent, and less risky for everyone involved.

Why is Punjab in court over BSF's powers?

The Issue:

• In 2021, the Central government expanded the Border Security Force (BSF)'s jurisdiction from 15 km to 50 km inside the international border in Punjab, West Bengal, and Assam.

• Punjab objects to this, claiming it encroaches on its state powers as law and order falls under the state's purview.

Punjab's Arguments:

• The notification is unconstitutional and violates the federal structure of India.

• Extending BSF jurisdiction to 50 km covers 80% of major border towns in Punjab, impacting densely populated areas unlike sparsely populated deserts in Rajasthan or wastelands in Gujarat.

• This extension hinders daily life, especially for farmers cultivating land near the border.

Court's Concerns:

• Whether the notification exceeds the BSF Act's "local limits" definition.

• Whether all border states should be treated the same regarding "local limits."

• Whether the notification infringes on Punjab's legislative powers on law and order.

Punjab's Appeal:

• The Centre acted arbitrarily and unilaterally without consulting the state.

• This is an insult to the state police and people of Punjab.

• The notification should be withdrawn.

Next Steps:

• The Supreme Court will hear the case in April, analyzing both sides' arguments and potentially setting a precedent for BSF jurisdiction in border states.

In essence, this dispute boils down to a clash between national security concerns and state autonomy, with Punjab seeking to protect its local authority while the Centre emphasizes border protection.

What is Ladakh's demand on Gilgit-Baltistan?

📖 Ladakh's Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA)submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of Home Affairs with demands, including extending Ladakh's territorial control up to Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT
GILGIT-BALTISTAN

Gilgit-Baltistan key facts

➕ AREA
72,971 sq km

👥 POPULATION
2m+ (2013).
Shia majority,
14% urban

📖 LITERACY RATE:
Roughly 72%

💰 REVENUE EARNER:
Tourism, trekking
and mountaineering

At present, region has little say in its own affairs, directly ruled from Islamabad despite a pretense of autonomy

As a 'province, Pak can claim G-B will have greater legislative powers and control over its revenues

🏞️ Ladakh transitioned to a Union Territory without its own legislature, sparking protests seeking restoration of Statehood and special status under the Sixth Schedule and Article 371.

📜 The demands include exclusive recruitment rights, historical context of Ladakh's inclusion of Gilgit-Baltistan, and emphasis on empowering locals for regional stability and foreign policy objectives.

🤝 The Centre's response involved committee formation, with a concrete solution remaining elusive, and structured talks are expected following a written memorandum in 2024.

What is end-to-end encryption and how does it secure information?

🔒 Encryption involves converting readable information into an unreadable form using specific rules, with different protocols like Data Encryption Standard (DES) or Advanced Encryption Standard (AES), use keys to lock and unlock data.

🔑 End-to-end (E2E) encryption safeguards information during transmission and at rest, ensuring data is only decrypted by the intended recipient.

🔐 Symmetric encryption uses the same key for both encryption and decryption, while asymmetric encryption uses distinct public and private keys for enhanced security.

💬 Messaging apps implement E2E encryption to secure user communications, preventing even service providers from accessing message content.

🛡️ Potential vulnerabilities in E2E encryption include MITM attacks, which users can prevent by verifying key authenticity through fingerprints.

⚠️ E2E encryption may create a false sense of security, and legal requirements for backdoors can compromise user data security and privacy.

📊 Even with encrypted content, metadata analysis can be exploited for surveillance purposes, emphasizing the need for comprehensive security measures.

Metadata, often translated as "data about data," is information that describes and explains other data. It's like a label or a tag that gives you additional context about a piece of information. Imagine it as the detailed description on the back of a book; it doesn't contain the story itself, but it tells you the title, author, genre, publication date, and other helpful details.
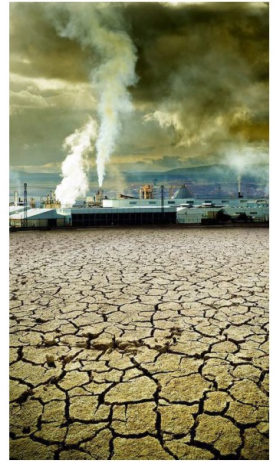

WHAT IS IT?

Acid rain has its origins in fossil fuels

Vasudevan Mukunth

Acid rain is rain that is acidic. When fossil fuels that contain sulphur are combusted, their emissions include sulphur dioxide (SO_2). When such combustion happens at a higher temperature, like inside the engine of a car, the combustion products also include nitrogen oxide and nitrogen dioxide (collectively called NO_x). Both SO_2 and NO_x are also produced naturally, such as when volcanoes erupt or when lightning passes through the atmosphere, but in and around cities, their principal source is the use of fossil fuels for transport and power generation.

Once SO_2 and NO_x rise into the air, they react with water and oxygen molecules to produce sulphuric acid (H_2SO_4) and nitric acid (HNO_3), both of which are corrosive. When these molecules dissolve in water droplets and the droplets precipitate, we have acid rain, acid snow, and even acid fog. The typical pH of acid rain is around 4.2-4.4. When acid rain flows into rivers and lakes, it can render the water inhospitable to some species; in soil, it destroys some bacteria. These effects can in turn adversely affect forests and other large ecosystems in complex ways.

To mitigate these effects, coal power plants have been able to reduce the SO, content in their atmospheric emissions by more than 90% using flue-gas desulphurisation. Many governments around the world have also been working together to

Industrial emissions are a major contributor to acid rain. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

minimise acid rain; an example in Asia is the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET).

Source : The Hindu

In a first, laughing gull spotted in India

🐦 A laughing gull, a migratory bird from North America, has been sighted for the first time in India at the Chittari estuary in Kasaragod district, Kerala.

📷 Birdwatcher C. Sreekanth, with 20 years of experience, spotted and photographed the bird, which traveled thousands of kilometers to the coastal region of the state.

Laughing gull spotted at the Chittari estuary. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

🌐 The discovery, confirmed by birding experts and the e-Bird application, elevates the total number of bird species found in India to 1,367, with Kasaragod district contributing 400 species to the state's count of 554.

🌿 The laughing gull's presence in Kasaragod adds to the region's rich biodiversity, alongside a multitude of other bird species in the estuary.