



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 23-02-2026

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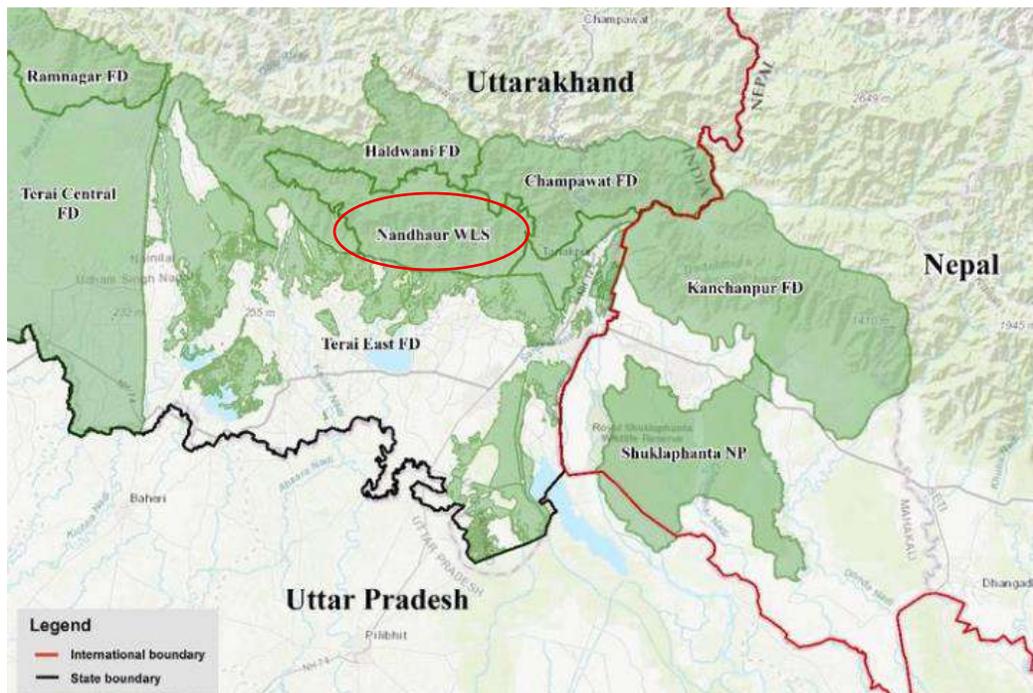
Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary

Syllabus: Prelims Bits - Mapping

Context:

- **First-ever documentation of Smooth-coated otters** in Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary by the Uttarakhand Forest Department.
- Indicates **healthy riverine ecosystem and wetland integrity** — an important conservation signal for the Terai Arc Landscape.

About Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary



Location & Landscape

- Located in **Uttarakhand** (Nainital & Champawat districts).
- Lies within the **Terai Arc Landscape (TAL)** — a globally significant biodiversity corridor.
- Forms part of the **Shivalik Elephant Reserve**.
- Serves as a **crucial connectivity corridor**:
 - Links **Jim Corbett National Park** and **Rajaji National Park** in the west
 - Connects to **Pilibhit Tiger Reserve, Dudhwa National Park**, and Nepal's Terai forests in the east.

Drainage & Rivers

- Bounded by:
 - **Gola River** (west)
 - **Sharda River** (east)
- **Nandhaur River** flows east → west in the north, then turns south, dividing the sanctuary before dissipating in the Tarai.

Vegetation

- Dominated by:
 - Tropical moist deciduous forests
 - Mixed deciduous forests
 - Riverine forests
 - Terai grasslands

Flora

- Over **100 tree species**, notably: Shisham, Bamboo, Teak, Chir pine

Fauna

- **Flagship species:** Asian elephant, Bengal tiger
- Other mammals: Leopard, sloth bear, Asiatic black bear
- Newly recorded: **Smooth-coated otter** (indicator of aquatic ecosystem health)

Conservation Significance

- Key **elephant and tiger corridor** in Terai Arc Landscape
- Maintains **India–Nepal transboundary wildlife connectivity**
- Important for **riverine biodiversity and wetland conservation**
- Otter presence suggests **improved aquatic prey base and habitat quality**

CJ-1000 Missile

Syllabus: Prelims Bits – Missiles.

Context:

- China recently displayed the **CJ-1000 land-based scramjet-powered hypersonic cruise missile** during a military parade in Beijing, highlighting advances in hypersonic strike capability.

About CJ-1000 Missile

- **Type:** Road-mobile hypersonic cruise missile
- **Propulsion:** Scramjet (Supersonic Combustion Ramjet) engine
- **Mobility:** Mounted on a 10-wheel diesel-electric hybrid transporter-erector-launcher (TEL)
- **Estimated Range:** ~ 2,500 km or more
- **Operational Significance:** Considered among the first operational land-based scramjet hypersonic missiles
- **Speed Regime:** Hypersonic (Mach 5+)



Strategic role

- Enables **deep precision strike capability**
- Enhances **anti-access/area denial (A2/AD)** posture
- Improves survivability due to high mobility and reduced warning time

Scramjet Technology – Key Features

- **Supersonic combustion:** Airflow remains supersonic inside the engine
- **Air-breathing propulsion:** Does not carry oxidiser → lighter and higher efficiency
- **Sustained powered flight** throughout cruise phase
- Requires **extreme material and thermal management technologies**

Scramjet Missiles vs Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGVs)

Feature	Scramjet Hypersonic Cruise Missile (CJ-1000)	Hypersonic Glide Vehicle (e.g., DF-17, Avangard)
Propulsion	Continuous powered flight via scramjet	Rocket boost + unpowered glide
Cruise Altitude	20–30 km (lower)	~60–80 km (higher)
Detection	Harder due to low altitude & terrain masking	Easier comparatively
Manoeuvrability	High manoeuvrability in cruise & terminal phases	Limited manoeuvrability in terminal stage
Accuracy	Higher precision potential	Relies more on inertial glide

Why Scramjet Missiles Are Considered More Dangerous

- **Low-altitude flight** reduces radar detection window
- **Sustained propulsion** allows **course correction and evasive manoeuvres**
- **Shorter reaction time** for missile defence systems
- **Higher terminal accuracy** against hardened or moving targets

Strategic Implications

- Intensifies **hypersonic arms race** among major powers
- Challenges existing **ballistic missile defence (BMD)** architectures
- Reinforces China's **theatre strike capability** in Indo-Pacific
- Raises concerns for **regional deterrence stability**

Indian Sandalwood

Syllabus:Prelims Bits – Species in News

Context:

- According to the **Sandalwood Development Committee (SDC)** constituted by the Union Government:
 - **Global annual demand:5,000–6,000 tonnes**
 - India remains a major natural source but production is insufficient to meet global demand.

- Renewed policy focus on **cultivation liberalisation and private sector participation.**

About Indian Sandalwood

- **Scientific name:** *Santalum album L.* (Family: **Santalaceae**)
- One of the **oldest and most valuable natural fragrance resources.**
- Common Indian names: **Chandan, Srigandha.**
- A **hemiparasitic evergreen tree** — derives partial nutrients from host plants through haustoria.

Indian Sandalwood
(*Santalum album*)

Santalwood Trees | Santalwood Heartwood | Santalwood Oil Extraction

Global Demand: 5,000–6,000 tonnes annually (SDC Report)

About Indian Sandalwood

- Botanical Name: *Santalum album L.*
- Known as "Chandan" & "Srigandha"

Economic Uses

- Perfumery & Cosmetics
- Aromatherapy
- Pharmaceuticals
- Soap & Handicrafts
- Religious Practices

Growth Conditions

Soil

- pH 6.7–7.5
- Well-Drained

Climate

- Temp. 12°C–35°C
- Hot & Humid

Growth & Regeneration

Takes 15–20 Years to Mature

Seeds | Root Suckers

Natural Regeneration

- Seeds
- Root Suckers

Heartwood & Roots Valuable

Major Producing States

- Karnataka
- Tamil Nadu
- Andhra Pradesh
- Telangana
- Madhya Pradesh
- Maharashtra
- Gujarat & Bihar

Threats to Sandalwood

- Illegal Logging & Smuggling
- Deforestation & Habitat Loss
- Pests & Diseases
- Slow Growth Rate

Govt. Initiatives

- Liberalized Cultivation Policies
- Farm & Agroforestry Promotion
- Research & Development Programmes

Map of India showing the distribution of Indian Sandalwood across various states.

Climatic & Edaphic Requirements

Soil

- Slightly **alkaline soils preferred**
- **pH: ~ 6.7–7.5**
- Requires **well-drained soils**; intolerant to waterlogging.

Climate

- Thrives in **hot, semi-arid to humid tropical climates**
- **Ideal temperature: 12°C–35°C**

Growth Characteristics

- **Long-gestation crop: ~ 15–20 years** for commercially viable **heartwood formation**.
- Natural regeneration through:
 - **Seeds**
 - **Root suckers** after tree removal
- Valuable portion: **heartwood and roots** (oil-rich).

Economic Uses

- Essential oil extraction (high-value export commodity)
- Perfumery and cosmetics
- Aromatherapy
- Pharmaceutical and antiseptic uses
- Soap and handicraft industry
- Religious and cultural applications

Major Producing States

- Karnataka (traditional stronghold)
- Tamil Nadu
- Andhra Pradesh
- Telangana
- Madhya Pradesh
- Maharashtra
- Gujarat
- Bihar

Reasons for Decline in Production

- Illegal logging and smuggling
- Habitat loss and deforestation
- Slow growth and delayed economic returns
- Pests and diseases (e.g., sandal spike disease)
- Historical strict state control policies reducing farmer participation.

Government Interventions

- Liberalisation of sandalwood cultivation and transit rules in several states.
- Promotion of **farm forestry and agroforestry models**.
- Establishment of **Sandalwood Development Programme** and research initiatives.

Treatise of Federalism

Syllabus: GS-2: Indian Polity – Federalism.

Context:

The Kurian Joseph Report

The report was initiated against the backdrop of increasing friction between the Union and the States (specifically Tamil Nadu) regarding legislative autonomy, fiscal powers, and the role of the Governor.

Core Argument: From Federal to Unitary?

The report argues that while the Constitution describes India as a "Union of States," the practice is sliding toward a **Unitary state**.

- **Article 1:** "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States." The report emphasizes that the Union cannot exist without the States.
- **The "Indestructible" Myth:** While the Union is often called "indestructible," the report posits that the federal structure itself is a **Basic Structure** of the Constitution (as per *S.R. Bommai case*).

Key Challenges Identified

The treatise highlights several "pain points" in the current federal setup:

- **Governor's Role:** Misuse of discretionary powers, delaying assent to bills passed by the State Legislature (Article 200), and acting as an agent of the Center rather than a constitutional bridge.

- **Legislative Encroachment:** The Union frequently uses the **Concurrent List** to legislate on subjects that have a heavy state impact without adequate consultation.
- **Financial Federalism:** * The transition from the Planning Commission to NITI Aayog.
 - The "Terms of Reference" of Finance Commissions perceived as penalizing states with better population control (like Tamil Nadu).
 - Heavy reliance on **Cess and Surcharges**, which are not shared with the states.

Proposed Reforms

The report suggests a "re-calibration" of the Center-State relationship:

- **Time-bound Assent:** Governors should be mandated to decide on Bills within a specific timeframe (e.g., 6 months).
- **Consultative Lawmaking:** Mandatory consultation with states before the Union legislates on Concurrent List items.
- **Fiscal Equity:** Increasing the divisible pool of taxes and limiting the Union's power to levy non-shareable Cesses.

Critical Perspective

While the report is a strong defense of "**Cooperative Federalism**," critics might argue that a strong Center is necessary for national integrity and uniform economic policies (like GST).

However, the Kurian Joseph report warns that "Uniformity is not Unity," and ignoring regional aspirations can lead to constitutional "atrophy."

Board of Peace for Gaza

Syllabus: GS-2: International Relations

Context:

- The "**Board of Peace**", proposed by Donald Trump, held its **first meeting in Washington** to deliberate **Gaza reconstruction and conflict management**.
- **India participated as an observer**, expressing support for Gaza peace efforts aligned with **UNSC Resolution 2803** while avoiding formal membership.
- The body's **expanded mandate from Gaza to global conflicts** has triggered concerns about creating a parallel structure to the UN.

About the Board of Peace

- Initially conceived as a **mechanism to end the Israel–Gaza conflict** and coordinate reconstruction.
- The mandate now includes **broader global conflict resolution**, raising legitimacy concerns.
- Critics argue the initiative could **dilute the centrality of the United Nations** in peacebuilding.

Composition of the Board

Total Members: 27

Key West Asian Members

- Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Turkey, Bahrain

Other Notable Members

- Argentina, Hungary, Vietnam, Cambodia, Pakistan
- Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif attended the inaugural meeting.

Observer Countries

- 22 observers including **UK, Germany, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, Poland, Netherlands, Japan, Oman, and the EU.**
- **India represented by Deputy Chief of Mission Namgya Khampa.**

Financial Commitments

- **9 member countries pledged:\$7 billion** for Gaza reconstruction.
- **United States pledged:\$10 billion**, framed as an investment in regional stability (allocation unspecified).



Why India Chose Observer Status

Strategic Flexibility

- Allows **engagement without endorsement** of a politically sensitive initiative.
- Provides an **exit option** if the forum loses relevance or legitimacy.

Multilateral Concerns

- India wary of **parallel institutions bypassing the UN framework**.
- Absence of **P5 UNSC members (Russia, China, France, UK)** reduces credibility.

Monitoring Pakistan Factor

- Pakistan's membership necessitates India's presence to **prevent internationalisation of bilateral issues**.
- Helps track narratives around Trump's mediation claims, which India rejects.

Durability of the Initiative

- Seen partly as a **leader-centric project**, creating uncertainty about long-term continuity.

Strategic & Economic Considerations

West Asia Diplomacy

- India supports a **two-state solution** and seeks stability amid ongoing ceasefire negotiations.
- Participation precedes high-level diplomatic engagements with Israel.

Connectivity & Economic Stakes

- Regional peace supports **IMEC (India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor)**.
- Observer role provides **situational awareness without negotiation commitments**.

India–US Relations

- Participation avoids signalling disengagement amid evolving trade and technology cooperation.
- Reflects **calibrated outreach balancing partnership with strategic autonomy**.

Key Concerns About the Board

- Vague charter and **possibility of mission creep** into other conflicts.
- Risk of **politicisation and selective conflict engagement**.
- Questions over **legitimacy without broad multilateral representation**.

Conclusion

India's observer participation represents **pragmatic diplomacy**—maintaining engagement with emerging peace initiatives while preserving **strategic autonomy, multilateral commitment, and regional interests**. The approach enables India to **monitor developments, protect core concerns, and retain policy flexibility**.