



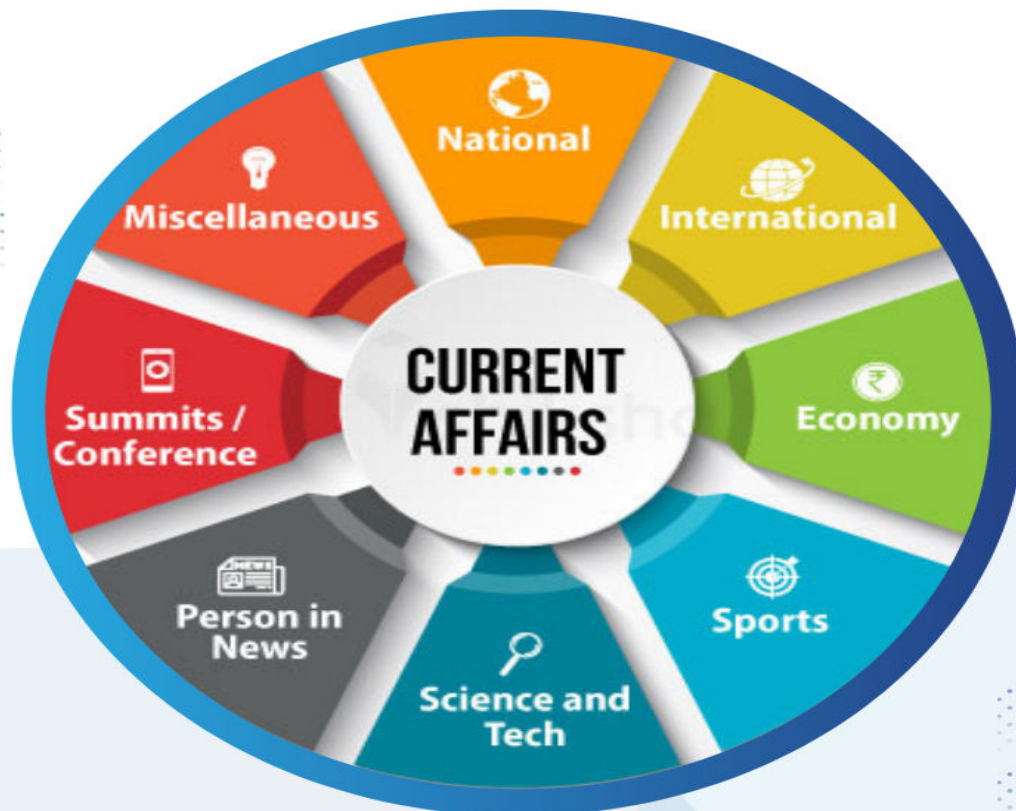
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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 04/04/2026 (SATURDAY)



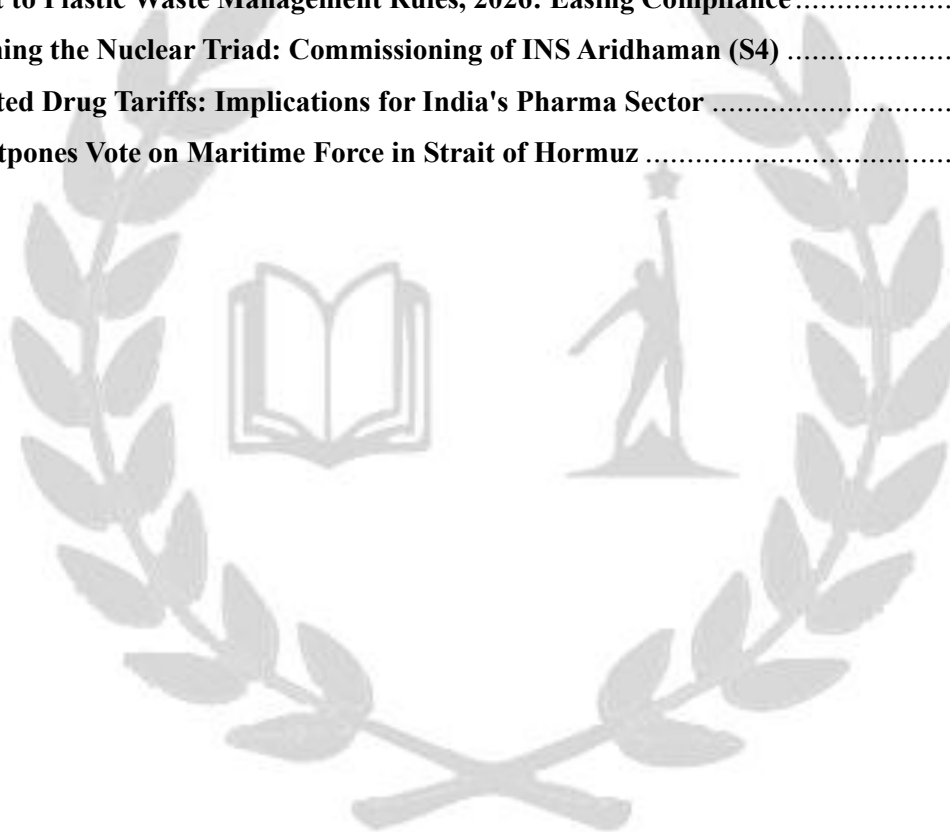
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Table of Contents

1. India-Russia Strategic Energy and Trade Partnership	2
2. Holistic Development vs. Tribal Rights: Great Nicobar Island (GNI) Project	3
3. Theyyam: The Ritualistic Dance of Northern Kerala	5
4. Namo Drone Didi Yojana: Empowering Women through Agritech	6
5. Strategic Analysis of the U.S.-Israel-Iran Conflict (2026)	7
6. India-Azerbaijan Relations: Navigating Strategic Friction for a Diplomatic Reset	9
7. Judicial Limits on Election Petitions: The Supreme Court's Mandate.....	10
8. Project 17A: Commissioning of Stealth Frigate INS Taragiri.....	11
9. Amendment to Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2026: Easing Compliance.....	13
10. Strengthening the Nuclear Triad: Commissioning of INS Aridhaman (S4)	15
11. U.S. Patented Drug Tariffs: Implications for India's Pharma Sector	16
12. UNSC Postpones Vote on Maritime Force in Strait of Hormuz	18



VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. India-Russia Strategic Energy and Trade Partnership

- **Energy Security Amidst Global Volatility:** Against the backdrop of escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia (U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict), Russia has reaffirmed its commitment to be a reliable energy partner by ensuring a "steady increase" in the supply of crude oil and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to India.

- **Fertilizer Diplomacy and Food Security:** Averting potential domestic shortages, Russia reported a 40% increase in the supply of mineral fertilizers to India; furthermore, both nations are advancing a joint project for the production of Carbamide (Urea) to bolster India's long-term agricultural self-reliance.



Narendra Modi with Russian Deputy PM Denis Manturov, in New Delhi, on Thursday. ANI

U.S. jet shot down in Iran; 1 rescued

TEHRAN

A U.S. fighter jet was shot down in Iran on Friday and one crew member was rescued, media reports said. The rescue occurred as the U.S. military was conducting a search operation with the support of Israel. » [PAGE 14](#)

India-bound oil heads to China?

CHENNAI

Ping Shun, an Iranian crude oil carrier that had been signalling it was heading to India for three days after crossing the Strait of Hormuz, is heading to China as per marine logistics and commodity markets analytics firm Kpler. » [PAGE 13](#)

- **Bilateral Institutional Mechanisms:** The discussions serve as a preparatory framework for the upcoming BRICS Summit in India and the 24th India-Russia Annual Summit in Russia, ensuring the momentum of the "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" remains consistent with the goals set in December 2025.
- **Connectivity and Trade Diversification:** Beyond energy, the dialogue emphasized the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Eastern Maritime Corridor (Chennai-Vladivostok) to streamline trade, reduce logistics costs, and enhance people-to-people ties.
- **Strategic Autonomy in Foreign Policy:** India's continued engagement with Russia despite Western sanctions underscores its commitment to Strategic Autonomy, prioritizing domestic energy needs and economic stability over external geopolitical pressures.
- **Key Definitions:**
 - **Carbamide (Urea):** An organic compound ($(\text{NH}_2)_2\text{CO}$) used extensively in India as a nitrogen-release fertilizer.
 - **LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas):** Natural gas cooled to -162°C for ease of non-pressurized storage and transport.
 - **Strategic Autonomy:** A functional independence in foreign policy that allows a nation to pursue its national interests without being constrained by alliances or the dictates of other powers.

Constitutional & Legal Context

- **Article 51:** The State shall endeavor to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations.
- **Trade Policy Framework:** Bilateral trade is governed under the Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological, and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC), which acts as the primary monitoring body for economic ties.



- **Energy Security Mandate:** These diplomatic efforts align with India's "Panchamrit" goals and the Integrated Energy Policy, ensuring a transition-ready energy basket while maintaining traditional supply lines.

Conclusion: The recent high-level engagement between New Delhi and Moscow signifies a deepening of the Indo-Russian "energy-fertilizer" nexus. By securing long-term commitments in the oil and gas sectors, India effectively mitigates the risks of global supply chain disruptions and "oil shocks." The transition from a buyer-seller relationship to joint production (as seen in the urea project) indicates a more integrated and resilient economic partnership.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III (Economy & Security):** Energy security, infrastructure, and agricultural supply chains.
- **Prelims:** Locations of energy corridors (INSTC), BRICS summit updates, and fertilizer types (Urea/Carbamide).

2. Holistic Development vs. Tribal Rights: Great Nicobar Island (GNI) Project

- **Infrastructure vs. Conservation Conflict:** The ₹72,000-crore GNI project involves a transshipment port, international airport, and a power plant. While strategically vital for India's presence in the Indo-Pacific, it threatens 130 sq km of primary forest and the habitats of the indigenous Shompen and Nicobarese tribes.
- **Tribal Relocation and Loss of Identity:** A draft "Comprehensive Tribal Welfare Plan" proposes the relocation of Nicobarese communities to "ancestral lands." However, locals allege a lack of transparency regarding specific sites, fearing the move will sever their cultural and spiritual connection to the land they have inhabited for centuries.
- **Violation of Consent Procedures:** The Tribal Council withdrew its No Objection Certificate (NOC) in 2022, claiming the administration suppressed information about the project's scale. Under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, the free, prior, and informed consent of the Gram Sabha is mandatory for the diversion of forest land.
- **Vulnerability of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs):** The Shompen tribe, categorized as a PVTG, are hunter-gatherers with limited contact with the outside world. Any large-scale demographic change or infrastructure activity in their biosphere reserve increases the risk of disease and cultural extinction.
- **Ecological Fallout and Tsunami Vulnerability:** The Great Nicobar Island is located in a high-seismic zone (Zone V). Critics argue that replacing protective mangroves and rainforests with heavy infrastructure increases the island's vulnerability to future tsunamis and rising sea levels.
- **Legal Scrutiny and Judiciary's Role:** The Calcutta High Court and the National Green Tribunal (NGT) are currently reviewing petitions against the project. The core legal dispute centers on





whether the administration "manufactured" consent and if the environmental impact assessment (EIA) adequately addressed the survival of local biodiversity.

Important Keypoints & Provisions

- **Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island:** A project spearheaded by NITI Aayog to leverage the island's location near the Malacca Strait.
- **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs):** Groups characterized by pre-agriculture level of technology, stagnant/declining population, and extremely low literacy. Shompens are one of the 75 identified PVTGs in India.
- **Constitutional Provision (Fifth & Sixth Schedules):** While GNI is a Union Territory, the spirit of these schedules protects tribal land from alienation.
- **The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006:** Specifically protects the right to hold and live in forest land for habitation or self-cultivation.
- **The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation (PANTPR), 1956:** Prohibits the entry of outsiders into tribal reserves without valid passes and restricts land transfers.

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Line Departments:** Specialized administrative units (e.g., Forest, Health, Education) responsible for implementing specific aspects of a larger government plan.
- **Tribal Council:** An indigenous representative body recognized by the government to manage internal community affairs and provide feedback on administrative policies.
- **Draft Comprehensive Tribal Welfare Plan:** A preliminary document outlining financial outlays and logistical steps for the rehabilitation and social security of indigenous people affected by state projects.

Conclusion: The Great Nicobar project represents a classic developmental dilemma between national security/economic growth and the preservation of indigenous rights and biodiversity. While the strategic location of the island is undeniable for India's maritime security, any "top-down" implementation that bypasses the genuine consent of the Nicobarese and Shompen people risks violating constitutional safeguards and international standards on indigenous rights. A balanced approach requires transparent consultation, scientific reassessment of ecological risks, and a "people-centric" development model.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Geography (A&N Islands, Sensitive Ecosystems); Social Issues (Tribal Welfare, PVTGs).
- **GS Paper II:** Governance (Constitutional provisions for STs); International Relations (Strategic importance of Malacca Strait/Indo-Pacific).
- **GS Paper III:** Environment (Biodiversity vs. Development); Internal Security (Strategic infrastructure).



3. Theyyam: The Ritualistic Dance of Northern Kerala

- **Ritualistic Art Form:** Theyyam is a popular ritual dance form of North Kerala (primarily Kolathunadu region), encompassing dance, mime, and music. It is rooted in the belief that the performer transitions from a human state to a divine entity, acting as a medium between the deity and the devotees.
- **Social and Caste Dynamics:** Historically, Theyyam has been a powerful tool of social expression. Performers usually belong to the marginalized or subaltern communities, yet during the performance, they are worshipped by all sections of society, including upper castes, temporarily dissolving social hierarchies.
- **Themes and Varieties:** There are over 400 types of Theyyam, such as Pottan Theyyam, Gulikan, and Vayanattu Kulavan. The themes often revolve around the stories of ancestral spirits, local heroes, or mythological figures who fought against injustice or sacrificed their lives for the community.
- **The "Fire" Element (Theechamundi):** Certain forms involve extreme physical rituals like jumping into or walking over embers (as seen in the Vayanattu Kulavan festival). These acts symbolize the purification of the soul and the absolute surrender of the physical body to the divine will.
- **Artistic Synthesis:** The performance is characterized by elaborate "Aniyalam" (costumes), "Mukhaprasadham" (intricate face painting using natural pigments), and "Thottam Pattu" (invocatory songs). The rhythmic accompaniment of traditional instruments like the Chenda and Elathalam is essential to create the trance-like atmosphere.
- **Economic and Cultural Tourism:** While primarily a religious rite, Theyyam has gained significant international attention as a unique cultural heritage. This has led to concerns regarding the "commercialization" of a sacred ritual, highlighting the need for balanced preservation of its authentic spiritual roots.



Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 25 & 26:** Guarantee the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate religion and manage religious affairs, providing the legal bedrock for conducting traditional rituals like Theyyam.
- **Article 29(1):** Protects the right of any section of citizens to conserve their distinct language, script, or culture, which is vital for the survival of localized folk traditions.
- **UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage:** While not yet individually inscribed like Koodiyattam, Theyyam is a significant candidate under the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" due to its unique oral traditions and craftsmanship.

Key Definitions

- **Tharavadu:** Refers to the ancestral home of a joint family in Kerala, often serving as the primary site for family deity worship and Theyyam performances.
- **Vayanattu Kulavan:** A specific deity in the Theyyam pantheon, believed to be an incarnation of Lord Shiva, often associated with hunting and the protection of the clan.



- **Mukhaprasadham:** The ritualistic application of colors on the face. Each pattern is specific to a deity and requires years of training to master.

Conclusion: Theyyam is more than a spectacle; it is a living bridge to Kerala's pre-Aryan and tribal past. It represents a unique cultural synthesis where folklore, spiritualism, and social commentary intersect. Preserving the sanctity of such rituals is essential for maintaining India's diverse cultural fabric, ensuring that development does not come at the cost of erasing indigenous identities.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I (Art and Culture):** Indian Culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times. Specifically relevant for regional festivals and ritualistic folk arts.
- **GS Paper I (Sociology):** Caste system and social movements; Theyyam as a form of "Sanskritization" or "Social Protest" through religious medium.

4. Namu Drone Didi Yojana: Empowering Women through Agritech

- **Leadership in Precision Farming:** Karnataka has emerged as the national leader under the Namu Drone Didi Yojana (NDDY), with 145 women from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) trained as drone pilots, followed by Uttar Pradesh (128) and Andhra Pradesh (108).
- **Scheme Objectives and Outlay:** Launched with a budget of ₹1,261 crore (2023-24 to 2025-26), the initiative aims to provide 15,000 drones to women SHGs to modernize agricultural practices and enhance rural livelihoods.
- **Socio-Economic Transformation:** The program successfully challenges traditional gender stereotypes by transitioning SHGs from conventional micro-enterprises (like food processing) to high-tech services, with some pilots earning up to ₹1 lakh per month during peak seasons.
- **Agricultural Efficiency:** Drones are utilized for the precision spraying of fertilizers and pesticides in crops like maize and paddy, which reduces input costs, minimizes health risks to farmers from chemical exposure, and ensures uniform nutrient distribution.
- **Aviation Hub Synergy:** Karnataka's success is attributed to its established status as an aviation and technology hub, facilitating better access to training centers (e.g., Mysuru) and technical infrastructure for drone maintenance.
- **National Training Progress:** As per recent parliamentary data, a total of 1,094 SHG members have been trained across India, marking a significant step toward the "Drone Shakti" initiative and the digitization of the primary sector.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 14 & 15:** The scheme promotes gender equality and the state's power to make special provisions for women to ensure their socio-economic advancement.
- **Article 39:** Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) mandate that the state shall direct its policy towards securing that citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.





- **Drone Rules, 2021:** The legal framework managed by the Ministry of Civil Aviation that simplifies drone certification and operation, making it accessible for civilian and agricultural use.
- **NRLM Framework:** The scheme operates within the structure of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), leveraging the existing network of SHGs for targeted intervention.

Key Definitions

- **Self-Help Groups (SHGs):** Small voluntary associations of rural people, typically women, who come together to solve their common problems through mutual help and self-effort.
- **Precision Agriculture:** A farming management concept based on observing, measuring, and responding to inter- and intra-field variability in crops using technology like GPS and drones.
- **Namo Drone Didi:** A specific term for women trained under this central scheme to operate drones for agricultural and commercial purposes in rural landscapes.

Conclusion: The Namu Drone Didi Yojana represents a critical intersection of women's empowerment and the "Digital Agriculture" mission. By decentralizing high-end technology to the grassroots level, the government is not only boosting rural incomes but also addressing the labor shortage in the agricultural sector. The success in Karnataka serves as a scalable model for other states to integrate technology with existing social capital (SHGs) to achieve the goal of "Viksit Bharat."

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population; Governance and the SHG movement; Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; IT and Space technology; Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country; E-technology in the aid of farmers.

5. Strategic Analysis of the U.S.-Israel-Iran Conflict (2026)

- **Strategic Stalemate vs. Tactical Success:** Despite the U.S. and Israel securing tactical victories by degrading Iran's military and industrial infrastructure, the broader strategic goal of "regime change" remains elusive. President Trump's recent address suggests a shift from unconditional surrender to a containment strategy, targeting power grids while abandoning previous goals like the liberation of the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Iranian Regime Resilience:** Contrary to Western intelligence assessments suggesting a popular uprising would follow a "decapitation strike," the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has consolidated power. The assassination of moderates has inadvertently empowered hardliners, ensuring the regime's political survival through a decentralized command structure.
- **Horizontal Escalation and Economic Leverage:** Tehran has successfully "regionalized" the conflict, targeting U.S.-aligned Arab states and leveraging its control over the Strait of Hormuz. By threatening 25% of the global oil and gas supply, Iran has triggered inflationary pressures, placing significant economic strain on energy-dependent Asian economies, including India.
- **Intelligence Miscalculation in Washington:** Internal friction within the Trump administration, evidenced by reports of a tense exchange between Vice-President J.D. Vance and PM Netanyahu, suggests that the U.S. may have been maneuvered into a conflict based on flawed intelligence that overestimated air power and underestimated Iranian endurance.



- **Erosion of Alliances:** The U.S. faces growing isolation as NATO allies distance themselves from the conflict. Regional partners in the Gulf, feeling exposed to Iranian retaliation, are exploring alternative diplomatic pathways such as the "Islamabad Quadrilateral Dialogue" (Pakistan, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt) to bypass Washington's influence.
- **Outcome of Attrition:** While Iran suffers immense physical and human loss, it gains "strategic respect" across the Global South. If the regime survives this period of sustained pressure, it will likely claim a strategic victory, as the U.S. has failed to achieve its stated primary objective of total regime collapse.



Constitutional & Legal Context

- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution:** Mandates that India strive to promote international peace and security and maintain just relations between nations—explaining New Delhi's balanced diplomatic stance in the Middle East.
- **War Powers Act (U.S. Context):** Relevant for understanding the domestic constraints on the U.S. President regarding prolonged military engagements without formal Congressional declarations of war.
- **UN Charter (Article 2(4) & 51):** The legal framework governing the "use of force" and the "right to self-defense," which both sides cite to justify military actions in the current conflict.
- **Maritime Law (UNCLOS):** Regulations concerning the "Innocent Passage" through the Strait of Hormuz, which is being challenged by Iran's blockade tactics.

Key Definitions

- **Horizontal Escalation:** A strategic move to expand a conflict to new geographic areas or involve different actors/sectors (like the economy) to pressure an adversary.
- **Decapitation Strategy:** A military strategy aimed at removing the top leadership of an enemy state or organization to cause a total collapse of command and control.
- **Islamabad Quadrilateral Dialogue:** A regional diplomatic initiative involving Pakistan, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt aimed at finding regional solutions to Middle Eastern instability.

Conclusion: The conflict underscores a significant shift in 21st-century warfare where military superiority does not automatically translate into political victory. Iran's ability to endure "maximum pressure" and retaliate through asymmetric and economic means has created a high-stakes war of attrition. For the global community, the prolonged instability in the Persian Gulf remains a primary threat to energy security and post-pandemic economic recovery.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian Diaspora (safety of Indians in the Gulf).
- **GS Paper III (Economy & Security):** Impact of global wars on supply chains and inflation; Energy security and diversification of oil imports.



6. India-Azerbaijan Relations: Navigating Strategic Friction for a Diplomatic Reset

- **Diplomatic Thaw Post-Operation Sindoor:** Following a period of strained relations triggered by India's "Operation Sindoor" (strikes on Pakistani sites in 2024-25) and Azerbaijan's subsequent condemnation, both nations have initiated a "reset" during the 6th round of Foreign Office Consultations in Baku.
- **Complex Geopolitical Alignments:** The bilateral relationship is complicated by a "de-facto" axis formation; Azerbaijan maintains a close strategic partnership with Pakistan (especially regarding Nagorno-Karabakh), while India has strengthened defense ties with Armenia, leading to mutual diplomatic apprehensions.
- **Energy Security and Investment:** Azerbaijan remains a vital energy partner for India, with crude oil accounting for 98% of its exports to New Delhi. Significantly, ONGC Videsh (OVL) holds a 2.7% participating interest in the ACG oil fields and a 2.3% stake in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline.
- **Counter-Terrorism Consensus:** The inclusion of "the fight against cross-border terrorism" in the official joint statement is a major shift, indicating that Baku may be moderating its stance on India's security operations in exchange for broader economic and technological cooperation.
- **Diversification of Bilateral Trade:** Beyond hydrocarbons, the discussions emphasized expanding cooperation into pharmaceuticals, technology, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges, aiming to move the relationship toward a more resilient, multi-sectoral partnership.
- **Strategic Connectivity (INSTC):** While not explicitly detailed in the brief, Azerbaijan is a crucial node in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). A stable relationship with Baku is essential for India's terrestrial connectivity to Russia and Europe, bypassing traditional maritime bottlenecks.



Constitutional & Legal Context

- **Article 51 (DPSP):** This diplomatic reset aligns with India's constitutional mandate to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations.
- **Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT):** While discussions are ongoing, the protection of ONGC Videsh's assets in Azerbaijan is governed by international commercial laws and bilateral agreements ensuring the security of foreign direct investment (FDI).
- **United Nations Charter:** Both nations reaffirmed their commitment to resolving differences through "open dialogue and discussion," adhering to the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes under the UN framework.

Key Definitions

- **Operation Sindoor:** A 2025 Indian military operation involving targeted strikes on terror launchpads/sites within Pakistani territory, which briefly became a flashpoint in Indo-Azerbaijani relations.
- **Nagorno-Karabakh:** A landlocked region in the South Caucasus that is the subject of a long-standing territorial and ethnic conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.



- **Foreign Office Consultations (FOC):** A formal institutional mechanism between the foreign ministries of two countries to review the entire gamut of bilateral relations and exchange views on regional and global issues.

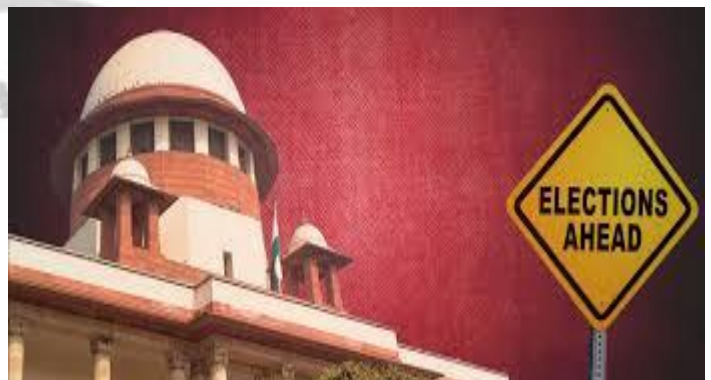
Conclusion: The 6th Foreign Office Consultations signify a pragmatic transition in India's "Extended Neighborhood" policy. By decoupling energy interests from the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, New Delhi is successfully practicing "Strategic Autonomy." For Azerbaijan, engaging with the world's fastest-growing economy offers a hedge against over-dependence on regional blocs. However, the true test of this reset will lie in how both nations navigate their respective "special relationships" with Armenia and Pakistan in the future.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III (Economy & Security):** Energy security and the role of Indian PSUs (ONGC Videsh) in global oil assets; Cross-border terrorism and internal security implications.

7. Judicial Limits on Election Petitions: The Supreme Court's Mandate

- **Primacy of Available Record:** The Supreme Court (SC) has ruled that election petitions challenging poll results must be adjudicated strictly based on the "material on record" existing at the time of the dispute. It is impermissible for courts to stall proceedings or order fresh investigations to unearth new evidence if neither party raised such issues before the initial tribunal.
- **Prohibition on Fishing Inquiries:** The Bench, led by Justice Vikram Nath, emphasized that courts cannot issue sweeping directions to call for witnesses or expert evidence post-facto. This prevents "fishing and roving inquiries" that aim to find evidence where none was initially presented, thereby maintaining the sanctity of the original trial.
- **Expeditious Disposal of Election Disputes:** By setting aside a High Court order that remanded a Sarpanch election dispute for fresh expert evidence, the SC reinforced the principle that election-related litigation should not be indefinitely prolonged. Delay in such cases undermines the democratic mandate of the elected representative.
- **Tribunal vs. Appellate Jurisdiction:** The ruling clarifies that the appellate court's role is to review the legality of the tribunal's decision based on the evidence presented therein. Appellate courts should not exercise "suo motu" powers to expand the evidentiary scope unless a specific procedural or legal error regarding existing evidence is identified.
- **Context of the Khalila Majra Case:** The dispute originated from a 2022 Sarpanch election where both candidates secured 302 votes, decided by a draw of lots. The SC intervention highlights that even at the grassroots (Panchayati Raj) level, the rigorous application of the Code of Civil Procedure (CPC) and election laws is essential to prevent judicial overreach.





- **Key Definitions:**

- **Election Petition:** A legal procedure to challenge the election of a candidate in a Parliamentary, Assembly, or Local Body election on grounds of malpractice, disqualification, or procedural errors.
- **Material on Record:** The collective body of evidence, documents, and testimonies formally submitted and accepted by the court or tribunal during the initial proceedings.
- **Draw of Lots:** A tie-breaking method used in elections where, if candidates receive equal votes, the winner is determined by a random selection process, as prescribed under relevant election rules.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 243-O:** Bars the interference by courts in electoral matters of Panchayats, except through an election petition presented to such authority as provided by State Legislature.
- **Article 329(b):** Provides that no election to either House of Parliament or State Legislature shall be called in question except by an election petition.
- **Representation of the People Act, 1951 (Section 80-122):** Lays down the detailed procedure for filing and trial of election petitions for State and Central legislatures.
- **Principle of Res Judicata:** While not directly applicable to fresh evidence, the spirit of finality in judicial proceedings dictates that parties cannot re-litigate issues with new evidence that could have been produced during the initial trial.

Conclusion: The Supreme Court's stance acts as a safeguard against judicial delays in the electoral process. By restricting the scope of adjudication to the "material on record," the court ensures that election results are not held hostage to endless evidentiary unearthing. This judgment balances the need for electoral integrity with the necessity of administrative stability, ensuring that elected officials can serve their terms without the looming shadow of protracted "roving" litigation.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity):** Salient features of the Representation of People's Act; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies; Grassroots democracy and the 73rd Amendment Act.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Role of the Judiciary in ensuring free and fair elections; Judicial overreach vs. Judicial activism in electoral disputes.
- **Prelims:** Powers of Election Tribunals, constitutional bars under Article 243-O and 329, and the role of High Courts in election petitions.

8. Project 17A: Commissioning of Stealth Frigate INS Taragiri

- **Enhanced Maritime Capabilities:** The commissioning of INS Taragiri, a Nilgiri-class guided-missile stealth frigate, at the Eastern Naval Command in Visakhapatnam significantly strengthens India's naval presence in the Bay of Bengal and the wider Indo-Pacific region.
- **Technological Advancement:** Representing a generational leap in naval engineering, the vessel features advanced stealth signatures (reduced radar cross-section), a "Combined Diesel or Gas" (CODOG) propulsion system, and sophisticated supersonic surface-to-surface missile systems.



- **Aatmanirbharta in Defence:** Built under Project 17A, the frigate boasts approximately 75% indigenous content, involving numerous Indian MSMEs and public sector undertakings, thereby reducing dependency on foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs).
- **Integrated Combat System:** The ship is equipped with state-of-the-art sensors, an advanced electronic warfare suite, and high-tech anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities, making it a versatile platform for multi-dimensional maritime operations.
- **Strategic Induction:** The presence of the Defence Minister and the Chief of Defence Staff at the ceremony underscores the ship's role as a cornerstone of the Eastern Fleet, particularly in the context of rising maritime competition and the need for credible deterrence.
- **Regional Security Architecture:** The induction aligns with India's "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision, enabling the Indian Navy to act as a "First Responder" and a "Preferred Security Partner" in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).



Important Keypoints & Technical Specifications

- **Project 17A (Alpha):** A follow-on to the Project 17 (Shivalik-class) frigates, involving the construction of seven stealth frigates with improved stealth features, advanced weapons, and sensors.
- **Integrated Construction Methodology:** The vessel was constructed using "modular integrated construction," where blocks were pre-outfitted before being joined, significantly reducing the build cycle time.
- **Weaponry:** It features the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile for surface-to-surface strikes and the Barak-8 Long Range Surface-to-Air Missile (LRSAM) for air defence.
- **Sensors:** Outfitted with the MF-STAR (Multi-Function Surveillance Track and Missile Guidance Radar) for 360-degree situational awareness.

Key Definitions

- **Stealth Frigate:** A naval vessel designed to use stealth technology to avoid detection by radar, visual, sonar, and infrared methods.
- **CODOG Propulsion:** A propulsion system for ships that need a maximum speed considerably faster than their cruise speed, using diesel engines for cruising and gas turbines for high-speed sprints.
- **Eastern Naval Command (ENC):** One of the three command-level formations of the Indian Navy, headquartered in Visakhapatnam, responsible for the maritime security of the eastern seaboard.

Constitutional & Legal Context

- **Article 51:** While promoting international peace, the State ensures national security as a prerequisite for global stability.
- **Entry 1 & 2 (Union List):** Defence of India and Naval, Military, and Air Forces are exclusive domains of the Union Parliament, providing the legal basis for such inductions.
- **Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020:** The policy framework that prioritizes "Make in India" and ensures transparency and speed in the induction of platforms like INS Taragiri.



Conclusion: The commissioning of INS Taragiri is a landmark event in India's journey toward becoming a blue-water navy. It serves as a testament to the country's growing prowess in indigenous warship design and construction. By integrating lethal firepower with advanced stealth, the Indian Navy is better positioned to safeguard its maritime interests and uphold a rules-based order in the volatile Indo-Pacific theatre.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Science & Technology):** Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Awareness in the fields of Space, IT, and Robotics.
- **GS Paper III (Security):** Security challenges and their management in border areas; Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.
- **Prelims:** Specifics of Project 17A, indigenous missile systems (BrahMos/LRSAM), and the geographical significance of the Eastern Naval Command.

9. Amendment to Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2026: Easing Compliance

- **Extended Flexibility for Deficits:** The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has introduced a provision allowing companies to carry forward any shortfall in their 2025-26 plastic recycling targets for three subsequent years. This shift from strictly annual compliance requires firms to meet at least one-third of the unfulfilled deficit each year until the target is fully achieved.
- **Formalization of Plastic Credits:** The new rules establish a system of tradable certificates, enabling companies to fulfill their Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) by purchasing credits from entities that have exceeded their recycling targets. This market-based mechanism aims to reduce overall compliance costs while providing operational flexibility.
- **Recycled Content Mandates:** For the 2025-26 period, rigid plastic packaging (Category I) must contain at least 30% recycled material, while flexible (Category II) and multi-layered plastics (Category III) have lower thresholds of 10% and 5% respectively. These targets are set to scale up significantly by 2028-29 to promote a circular economy.
- **Exemptions for Food Safety:** Recognizing the conflict between recycling and hygiene, the rules stipulate that recycled content targets will not apply where other regulations—such as food safety standards—restrict the use of recycled plastics. This could exempt a substantial portion of the food and beverage packaging sector.
- **Categorization of Plastic Waste:** The framework maintains a clear hierarchy of plastic types: Category 1 (Rigid, e.g., PET bottles) is the most easily recyclable; Category 2 (Flexible, e.g., grocery bags) has moderate difficulty; and Category 3 (Multi-layered, e.g., foil wrappers) remains the most challenging to collect and process.
- **The Compliance Gap:** Despite the 2024-25 mandate for companies to collect 100% of the plastic they introduce into the market, there is a lack of comprehensive public data to verify system-wide compliance. The current reporting remains heavily reliant on self-declarations via a centralized portal.





Important Keypoints & Provisions

- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):** A policy approach under which producers are given a significant responsibility—financial and/or physical—for the treatment or disposal of post-consumer products.
- **Reuse Obligations:** Beyond recycling, the rules mandate specific reuse targets for rigid packaging, such as 70% for large water containers and 10% for smaller containers (0.9-4.9 litres).
- **Rigid vs. Multi-layered Plastics:** Rigid plastics (shampoo bottles, milk jars) have higher recycling potential compared to multi-layered plastics (chips packets, beverage cartons) which are harder to segregate.

Constitutional & Legal Context

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment.
- **Environment Protection Act (EPA), 1986:** The umbrella legislation under which the Plastic Waste Management Rules are notified and amended.
- **National Green Tribunal (NGT) Act, 2010:** The legal body that adjudicates disputes related to environmental non-compliance and EPR violations.

Key Definitions

- **Plastic Credits:** A certificate representing a specific weight of plastic waste that has been collected and recycled beyond the mandatory target, which can be sold to other producers.
- **Tradable Certificates:** Marketable documents that allow companies to "offset" their recycling shortfall by funding recycling efforts elsewhere.
- **Gazette Notification:** An official public journal of the government used to notify the public of new laws, rules, or amendments.

Conclusion: The 2026 amendment represents a pragmatic "middle path" by the government, balancing ambitious environmental targets with the ground realities of industrial compliance. While the carry-forward provision and credit system prevent immediate legal bottlenecks for companies, they also risk diluting the urgency of the 100% collection mandate. For a successful rollout, the government must move beyond self-reported data and establish a transparent, third-party audited monitoring system to ensure that "flexibility" does not lead to "evasion."

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- **GS Paper III:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Circular economy and waste-to-wealth initiatives.
- **Prelims:** Categories of plastics, EPR framework, Ministry of Environment's role, and the difference between recycling and reuse targets.



10. Strengthening the Nuclear Triad: Commissioning of INS Aridhaman (S4)

- **Strategic Induction of S4:** India has formally commissioned its third indigenously built nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), INS Aridhaman (S4), at the Ship Building Centre (SBC) in Visakhapatnam. The vessel was inducted in a low-profile ceremony presided over by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, marking a significant milestone in India's strategic weapons program.
- **Enhanced Displacement and Firepower:** Unlike its predecessors—INS Arihant and INS Arighaat, which are approximately 6,000-tonne vessels—INS Aridhaman belongs to a larger class of roughly 7,000 tonnes. This increased size allows for significantly more firepower, specifically an expanded number of vertical launch tubes for K-series submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs).
- **Consolidation of the Nuclear Triad:** As an SSBN, INS Aridhaman represents the most survivable leg of India's nuclear triad (land, air, and sea-based delivery systems). This sea-based deterrent is critical for India's "No First Use" (NFU) policy, providing a credible "second-strike" capability in the event of a nuclear attack.
- **The Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) Legacy:** The project is a culmination of the long-standing ATV program managed by the Strategic Forces Command (SFC). The successful commissioning of S4, while the subsequent vessel S4* (reportedly to be named Arisudan) undergoes sea trials, demonstrates India's maturing capability in complex nuclear naval engineering.
- **Technological Autonomy and "Aatmanirbharta":** The construction of SSBNs involves extreme engineering challenges, including miniaturizing nuclear reactors for underwater propulsion. The successful induction of the third vessel confirms India's entry into an elite group of nations—including the U.S., Russia, China, and France—capable of designing and operating a functional nuclear triad.
- **Regional Deterrence and Maritime Security:** Commissioned alongside the stealth frigate INS Taragiri, INS Aridhaman enhances India's strategic posture in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). It provides a long-endurance, stealthy platform capable of remaining submerged for months, serving as a silent deterrent against regional geopolitical threats.



Important Keypoints & Operational Context

- **Strategic Forces Command (SFC):** The specialized tri-service command responsible for the management and administration of the country's tactical and strategic nuclear weapons stockpile.
- **K-Series Missiles:** Named after Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, these are SLBMs (like the K-15 and K-4) designed to be launched from the Arihant-class submarines.
- **SSBN vs. SSN:** While an SSBN (Submersible Ship Ballistic Nuclear) carries long-range nuclear missiles for strategic deterrence, an SSN (Submersible Ship Nuclear) is a nuclear-powered attack submarine used for hunting other ships or submarines.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51:** Promotion of international peace and security; however, maintaining a credible deterrent is viewed as a prerequisite for regional stability and preventing conflict.



- **Entry 1 & 2 (Union List):** The Defence of India and all related strategic assets fall exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Union Government.
- **National Security Act (NSA), 1980:** Provides the legal framework for the protection of sensitive strategic projects and information related to the nuclear program.

Key Definitions

- **Nuclear Triad:** The three-pronged military force structure that consists of land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines, and strategic aircraft with nuclear bombs and missiles.
- **Second-Strike Capability:** A country's assured ability to respond to a nuclear attack with powerful nuclear retaliation against the attacker.
- **Strategic Weapons Program:** A highly classified government initiative focused on the development of high-yield weapons and delivery systems for national defense.

Conclusion: The commissioning of INS Aridhaman is a silent but powerful statement of India's growing maritime and strategic maturity. By scaling up the size and lethality of the Arihant-class, India is moving from a "technology demonstrator" phase to a "credible operational deterrent" phase. In an era of shifting global alliances and maritime tensions, a robust sea-based nuclear capability ensures that India's strategic autonomy remains uncompromised.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Science & Technology):** Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Awareness in the field of nuclear and space technology.
- **GS Paper III (Security):** Role of the Nuclear Triad in national security; Challenges in the Indian Ocean Region; Various security forces and their mandate (Strategic Forces Command).
- **Prelims:** Comparison between Arihant and Aridhaman (tonnage/firepower), definition of SSBN, and the "No First Use" nuclear doctrine.

11. U.S. Patented Drug Tariffs: Implications for India's Pharma Sector

- **Targeted Trade Barriers:** U.S. President Donald Trump has signed an executive order imposing a 100% ad valorem duty on specific patented pharmaceuticals and associated active ingredients. This move follows a Section 232 investigation initiated in May 2025, which identified heavy reliance on foreign drug supplies as a potential national security risk.
- **India's Shield of Generics:** According to the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), India remains "more or less shielded" from this tariff hike. This is because the Indian pharmaceutical industry primarily exports low-cost generic medicines to the U.S., whereas the new tariffs specifically target high-cost "patented" drugs.
- **Dominance in the U.S. Market:** India's pharmaceutical exports to the U.S. reached \$9.7 billion in 2025. India provides approximately 40% of the generic drug volume consumed in the U.S., making it an indispensable partner for the American healthcare system's cost-containment efforts.
- **National Security vs. Trade:** The U.S. invocation of Section 232—traditionally used for steel and aluminum—highlights a growing global trend of "securitizing" supply chains. By labeling drug dependency a security threat, the U.S. seeks to incentivize "reshoring" or "friend-shoring" of critical medicine manufacturing.



- **Impact on Innovation and R&D:** While generic manufacturers are safe, the 100% tariff could impact Indian firms that have recently ventured into "New Chemical Entities" (NCEs) or patented specialty drugs. It creates a high entry barrier for Indian innovation in the premium U.S. pharmaceutical segment.



- **Potential for Supply Chain Realignment:**

Although India is currently protected, the move signals a volatile trade environment. It emphasizes the need for Indian pharma to further diversify its export destinations and strengthen its backward integration to reduce dependence on Chinese APIs (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients).

Important Keypoints & Policy Framework

- **Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act (1962):** A U.S. law that allows the President to impose restrictions on imports if they are deemed a threat to national security.
- **"Pharmacy of the World":** A moniker for India due to its status as the largest provider of generic drugs globally, accounting for 20% of global supply by volume.
- **API Dependency:** Despite finished dose dominance, India still imports a significant portion of its APIs from China, which remains a strategic vulnerability in the global pharmaceutical value chain.

Constitutional & Legal Context

- **Article 301:** While this pertains to trade and commerce within the territory of India, the spirit of "freedom of trade" guides India's objections to arbitrary international trade barriers at the WTO.
- **Patents Act, 1970 (India):** The legal framework that transitioned India from "product patents" to "process patents" and back to "product patents" (post-2005 TRIPS compliance), facilitating the rise of the generic industry.
- **TRIPS Agreement:** The WTO's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, which balances the protection of patented drugs with the public health necessity of generics.

Key Definitions

- **Ad Valorem Duty:** A tax based on the assessed value of an item (in this case, 100% of the drug's price) rather than on a fixed fee per unit.
- **Patented Drugs:** Medicines protected by a patent, granting the inventor exclusive rights to manufacture and sell the drug for a specific period (usually 20 years).
- **Generic Medicines:** Pharmaceutical products that are chemically identical to branded drugs but are sold under their chemical names at a much lower cost after the original patent expires.

Conclusion: The imposition of 100% tariffs on patented drugs by the U.S. is a clear manifestation of "economic nationalism." However, India's strategic positioning as a provider of "affordable healthcare" through generics acts as a natural hedge against such protectionist measures. While the immediate fiscal impact is negligible, the long-term lesson for the Indian pharma sector is to accelerate the "Production Linked Incentive" (PLI) schemes to ensure self-reliance in the entire value chain, from raw materials to patented innovation.



UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian Diaspora and their role in the U.S. healthcare sector.
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues; Science and Technology- developments and their applications.
- **Prelims:** Understanding Section 232, the difference between generic and patented drugs, and India's pharmaceutical export statistics.

12. UNSC Postpones Vote on Maritime Force in Strait of Hormuz

- **Delay in Authorization of Force:** The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has indefinitely postponed a scheduled vote on a draft resolution that sought to authorize the use of "defensive" force. The proposed mandate aimed to protect international commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz against persistent threats and attacks attributed to Iranian forces.
- **Strategic Significance of the Strait:** As the world's most critical oil transit chokepoint, the Strait of Hormuz facilitates the passage of approximately 21 million barrels of oil per day, or roughly 25% of global maritime oil consumption. Any prolonged disruption here poses a direct threat to global energy security and economic stability.
- **Divergence Among P5 Members:** The postponement reflects deep-seated divisions within the "Permanent Five" (P5) members. While the U.S. and its allies advocate for a "defensive" naval escort mechanism, veto-wielding members like Russia and China traditionally oppose the authorization of force under Chapter VII, favoring diplomatic de-escalation instead.
- **Legal Ambiguity of "Defensive Force":** The draft's focus on "defensive" force remains a point of contention. In international law, the line between defensive posturing and active combat is often blurred, leading to fears that such a resolution could inadvertently trigger a full-scale regional war between the U.S.-led coalition and Iran.
- **Impact on Global Energy Markets:** The mere news of a delayed UNSC intervention has contributed to market volatility. For energy-importing nations like India, the inability of the UN to guarantee safe passage through the Persian Gulf increases insurance premiums (war risk surcharges) and threatens the domestic fiscal deficit.
- **Regional Diplomatic Maneuvering:** The delay provides a temporary window for regional "middle powers" to pursue non-Western mediation. Initiatives like the Islamabad Quadrilateral Dialogue are being watched as potential alternatives to a UN-mandated military presence, which many regional states fear would exacerbate tensions.



Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **UN Charter (Chapter VII):** Specifically Articles 39 to 51, which empower the Security Council to determine the existence of any threat to peace and authorize military or non-military action to restore international security.
- **Article 51 of UN Charter:** Recognizes the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations.



- **UNCLOS (Part III):** Governs "Straits Used for International Navigation." It grants ships the "Right of Transit Passage," which must be continuous and expeditious. This is the legal basis for India's demand for unhindered trade through Hormuz.
- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution:** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with one another.

Key Definitions

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, serving as the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean.
- **Defensive Force:** Military action limited to protecting assets (ships) from immediate attack, theoretically distinct from offensive operations aimed at neutralizing enemy territory or regimes.
- **Chokepoint:** A strategic narrow passage that can be easily blocked to stop the flow of traffic, significantly impacting global trade and military movements.

Conclusion: The UNSC's hesitation to authorize force highlights the paralysis of the current global security architecture when faced with "Great Power" rivalry. While a military escort might offer short-term protection to tankers, the lack of a consensus-based resolution risks turning the Strait into a permanent combat zone. For India, which relies heavily on this route for 60% of its crude requirements, the impasse necessitates a dual strategy: augmenting "Operation Sankalp" (the Indian Navy's independent escort mission) while advocating for a multilateral diplomatic solution that respects maritime law without escalating to war.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III (Economy & Security):** Energy security and infrastructure; Maritime security challenges in the Indian Ocean Region and the Persian Gulf.
- **Prelims:** Mapping of the Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf, and Gulf of Oman; Understanding Chapter VII of the UN Charter and the role of the Strategic Forces Command in maritime protection.