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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

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1. Cannot Penalise Refusal to Sing National Song: SC

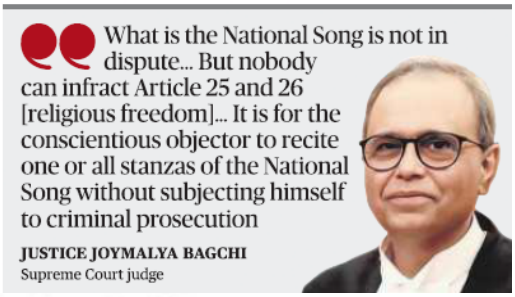
Key Highlights & Summary

- **SC Ruling on National Song**: The Supreme Court stated that individuals cannot be penalised for refusing to sing the National Song (*Vande Mataram*), safeguarding freedom of religion.
- **Plea by T.M. Krishna**: Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna challenged the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026, which penalised non-compliance with up to three years of imprisonment.
- **Protection of Conscientious Objectors**: Justice Joymalya Bagchi noted that conscientious objectors cannot be subjected to criminal prosecution for failing to recite all or parts of the song.
- **Reaffirmation of Precedent**: The Bench cited the landmark 1986 *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala* case, which upheld constitutional tolerance, religious freedom, and silent objection.
- **Secularism and Devotional Stanzas**: The petition highlighted that stanzas 3–6 of *Vande Mataram* are explicitly deity-invoking, violating secular principles and fundamental rights when forced.
- **Union Government's Response**: The Supreme Court has issued a notice seeking a formal response from the Union government regarding the constitutional validity of the amended law.

Essential Definitions

- **Conscientious Objector**: An individual who refuses to comply with certain laws, mandates, or duties based on personal, moral, or religious convictions.
- **Constitutional Tolerance**: The judicial principle that a democratic state must respect diversity of thought, conscience, and religious beliefs without imposing penal sanctions for passive non-conformity.

Legal and Constitutional Framework



- **Article 25**: Guarantees the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise, and propagate religion, protecting individuals from state-forced recitation of religious texts or lyrics.
- **Article 26**: Protects the freedom to manage religious affairs, preventing forced state compliance that infringes upon collective religious autonomy.

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- **Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act**: A statutory framework regulating conduct toward national symbols; the 2026 amendment introduced mandatory singing of *Vande Mataram* under criminal liability, now under judicial scrutiny.
- **Judicial Precedent (*Bijoe Emmanuel Case, 1986*)**: Established that standing respectfully without singing the National Anthem does not constitute disrespect or an offence, balancing national pride with fundamental rights.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's observation balances state interests in fostering patriotic pride with individual liberty guaranteed under the Constitution. By upholding religious freedom and constitutional tolerance, the judiciary reinforces that forced patriotism violates the fundamental feature of secularism and basic human rights.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity & Governance)**: Fundamental Rights (Articles 25 & 26), Judicial Precedents, Structure and Scope of Fundamental Freedoms versus State Obligations.
- **GS Paper II (Constitutional Law)**: Basic Structure Doctrine (Secularism), Constitutional Morality, and Judicial Review of Legislative Amendments.

2. Trade Agreement Unlikely Till U.S. Probes India's Competitor Countries

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Delay in Trade Agreement**: India and the U.S. are unlikely to finalize a trade deal until the U.S. completes fresh 'Section 301' investigations against India's regional competitors.
- **Targeting Regional Competitors**: New Section 301 probes aim to investigate countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and the Philippines over issues like forced labour and excess capacity.
- **Impact of Tariff Differential**: Under a planned interim deal, Indian goods would face an 18% general tariff rate, granting an advantage over competitors facing higher rates up to 20%.
- **Excess Capacity Probes**: India is on the probe list for 'excess capacity' and is likely to face an 8% tariff in this investigation to adjust its overall tariff rate up to 18%.
- **Shift from Reciprocal Tariffs**: The U.S. is leveraging Section 301 as an alternative mechanism after a Supreme Court ruling struck down 'reciprocal tariffs' imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).
- **Trade Policy Architecture**: India operates largely on a Most Favoured Nation (MFN) tariff basis, whereas the U.S. uses executive tariffs, requiring a structured preferential trade arrangement.



Essential Definitions

- **Section 301 Investigation**: A provision under the U.S. Trade Act of 1974 that allows the U.S. Trade Representative to investigate and respond to foreign trade practices deemed unfair, discriminatory, or restrictive to U.S. commerce.
- **Most Favoured Nation (MFN)**: A World Trade Organization principle requiring equal trade treatment for all member states, ensuring non-discriminatory tariffs on imports unless a specific bilateral agreement exists.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **U.S. Trade Act of 1974 (Section 301)**: Grants statutory power to the executive branch to impose unilateral sanctions or retaliatory tariffs on foreign nations violating trade agreements or engaging in unjustifiable practices.
- **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)**: A U.S. federal law allowing presidential regulation of international commerce during national emergencies; recent judicial rulings restricted its misuse for broad reciprocal tariffs.
- **Article 253 of the Indian Constitution**: Empowers the Parliament of India to enact laws giving effect to international agreements, treaties, and trade conventions signed with foreign nations.

- **WTO General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Article I**: Codifies the MFN clause to enforce non-discriminatory global trade standards among sovereign states.

Conclusion

The strategic delay in finalizing the India-U.S. trade agreement highlights the shift in American trade policy toward unilateral regulatory mechanisms like Section 301. To safeguard domestic manufacturing and export competitiveness, India must navigate international legal constraints while securing preferential market access.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations)**: India-U.S. Bilateral Relations, Impact of Policies of Developed Countries on India's Interests, and Global Trade Frameworks.
- **GS Paper III (Economy)**: Indian Economy and Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, External Sector, Tariffs, and Foreign Trade Agreements.

3. L-G Visits Police HQ, Directs Setting Up of Women-Centric Patrol Unit for Deterrence

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Establishment of Pink Force**: Delhi L-G Taranjit Singh Sandhu directed the Delhi Police to deploy a dedicated "Pink Force" of trained women personnel to patrol around schools, colleges, metro stations, and sensitive areas during vulnerable hours.
- **Model Inspiration**: The initiative draws inspiration from the Goa Police's Pink Force model to ensure visible deterrence and rapid response against street crimes targeting women.
- **Action Against Public Harassment**: Directions were issued to continue targeted enforcement against sexual harassment in public places under Operation Shishtachar.
- **Public Outreach and POCSO Awareness**: Each district police unit will appoint a nodal officer and execute a quarterly awareness calendar covering the POCSO Act, child safety, cybercrime, substance abuse, and road safety.
- **Anti-Drug and Cybercrime Initiatives**: The L-G emphasized intelligence-led action against drug trafficking under the Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan and capacity building for digital evidence preservation in cybercrime cases.
- **Digital Grievance Redressal**: The Delhi Police will introduce a digital tracking mechanism for Jan Sunwai complaints to ensure timely resolution and institutional accountability.

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Essential Definitions

- **Visible Deterrence**: A proactive policing strategy that uses high-visibility police presence, patrols, and dedicated units in vulnerable areas to discourage potential offenders from committing crimes.
- **Jan Sunwai**: A formal public grievance hearing mechanism designed to allow citizens direct interaction with authorities for time-bound resolution of police complaints.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 15(3) of the Indian Constitution**: Empowers the State to make special provisions for women and children, providing the constitutional foundation for gender-focused policing measures.

- **Article 239AA of the Indian Constitution**: Defines the special administrative status of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, placing public order and police under the governance of the Union Government through the Lieutenant Governor.
- **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012**: A comprehensive statutory framework providing legal protections to minors against sexual abuse, exploitation, and harassment.
- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023**: Outlines statutory criminal liability, penal measures, and procedure concerning crimes against women, sexual harassment, and public safety.

Conclusion

The creation of a women-centric patrol unit and digital grievance tracking marks a significant shift toward preventive, responsive, and technology-driven law enforcement in Delhi. Aligning local security measures with constitutional mandates ensures institutional safety, deters gender-based crimes, and enhances public confidence in public spaces.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Polity)**: Role of Civil Services, Mechanism for Protection and Betterment of Vulnerable Sections, Constitutional Status of NCT of Delhi.
- **GS Paper III (Internal Security & Cybercrime)**: Smart Policing Practices, Institutional Reforms in Law Enforcement, Digital Evidence Handling, and Anti-Narcotics Strategies.

4. Karnataka Houses Adopt Resolution Against Report on Western Ghats

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Unanimous Resolution**: The Karnataka Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council unanimously passed a resolution urging the Union Government to restrict the Ecological Sensitive Area (ESA) demarcation to notified forests only.
- **Rejection of Draft Notification**: The State opposed the Centre's seventh draft notification on Western Ghats ESA, which designated 20,668 sq. km across 10 districts based on the Kasturirangan Committee report.



- **Demand for Ground Survey**: Karnataka requested a year's deferment on finalization to execute a detailed physical ground survey of the proposed ESA regions.
- **Proposed Area Reduction**: The State's position advocates reducing the notified ESA coverage from 20,668 sq. km to approximately 16,000 sq. km.
- **State Expert Committee**: Karnataka announced the constitution of a committee to identify lacunae in the Kasturirangan report and suggest appropriate modifications.
- **Bilateral Consultation Requirement**: The resolution stresses that the final decision on ESA notification must follow the submission of the State's ground report and detailed Centre-State discussions.

Essential Definitions

- **Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA)**: A biologically rich and fragile zone declared under environmental laws to regulate human activities, minimize environmental degradation, and act as a buffer around protected ecosystems.
- **Kasturirangan Committee (HLWG)**: A High-Level Working Group appointed by the Union Ministry of Environment to balance ecological conservation and socio-economic development by demarcating 37% of the Western Ghats as ESA.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**: Grants legal authority to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to declare Eco-Sensitive Zones and ESAs to protect fragile ecosystems.
- **Article 48A of the Indian Constitution**: A Directive Principle of State Policy obligating the State to protect, improve, and safeguard the country's forests and wildlife.
- **Article 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution**: Mandates a fundamental duty upon every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Cooperative Federalism**: Article 246 framework balancing Central power on environmental governance with State jurisdiction over land, public order, and local economic development.

Conclusion

The Karnataka legislature's resolution reflects the tension between environmental conservation mandates and regional socio-economic developmental priorities. Sustainable conservation in biodiversity hotspots like the Western Ghats requires consultative environmental governance, ground-level verification, and dynamic Centre-State cooperation.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity & Governance)**: Federal Issues, Centre-State Relations, Legislative Resolutions, and Policy Implementation Challenges.
- **GS Paper III (Environment & Ecology)**: Biodiversity Hotspots, Western Ghats Conservation Framework, Eco-Sensitive Areas, and Sustainable Development Models.

5. Iran Hints at Hormuz Dialogue with US as Houthis Advance in Bab el-Mandeb Strait

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Diplomatic Signal at UNGA**: Iran expressed willingness to reopen the Strait of Hormuz to Gulf commercial shipping if the United States lifts its naval blockade, using the UN General Assembly as a diplomatic platform.
- **Proposal for De-escalation**: Iranian officials submitted formal diplomatic proposals to Washington via regional mediators, outlining conditions for structured negotiations and timelines.
- **Operation Epic Fury Context**: The diplomatic push follows months of heightened confrontation since the US launched "Operation Epic Fury" against Iran in February 2026.
- **Houthi Expansion in Bab el-Mandeb**: Iran-aligned Houthi forces advanced in Yemen, routing Saudi-backed forces and threatening strategic maritime trade routes at the southern entrance of the Red Sea.

- **Impact on Energy Security**: Houthi drone and missile strikes targeting Saudi Arabia threaten Gulf oil exports, accelerating regional instability across key maritime chokepoints.
- **Regional Security Framework**: Gulf nations, alongside Qatari mediation efforts, are evaluating a multilateral security framework to integrate Iran and Arab Gulf states into a joint stability architecture.

Essential Definitions

- **Strait of Hormuz**: A critical global maritime chokepoint connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, handling roughly one-fifth of the world's petroleum supply.
- **Bab el-Mandeb Strait**: A strategic maritime passage linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, serving as a key gateway for international trade via the Suez Canal.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982**: Regulates rights of transit passage through international straits, limiting unlawful blockades and guaranteeing freedom of navigation for commercial vessels.
- **Article 51 of the UN Charter**: Recognizes the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense in response to armed attacks on sovereign states.
- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution**: Directs the State to promote international peace and security, maintain just and honourable relations between nations, and foster respect for international law.



- **UN Security Council Resolutions on Yemen**: Establishes global sanctions and arms embargo frameworks regulating non-state armed actors operating in key trade corridors.

Conclusion

The convergence of diplomatic openings in the Strait of Hormuz and armed escalation in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait underlines the precarious security landscape in the Middle East. Sustainable peace requires balanced multilateral security frameworks, de-escalation by external powers, and strict adherence to international maritime law to protect global energy transit routes.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations)**: Bilateral & Multilateral Groupings, Impact of Middle East Instability on India's Energy Security, Strategic Chokepoints, and Global Diplomacy.
- **GS Paper III (Internal Security & Strategic Economy)**: Maritime Security, Protection of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), Global Supply Chain Resilience, and Import Vulnerabilities.

6. In His Final UN Speech, Guterres Calls for a 'World Built on Interdependence'

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Call for Global Interdependence**: UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged global leaders at the General Assembly to reject fragmentation and build a world sustained by dense economic, political, social, and technological connections.

- **Rejection of Unilateral Power**: Guterres rebuked "might-makes-right" thinking, emphasizing that military power alone cannot secure peace and urging superpowers to acknowledge their limitations.
- **Widening Fault Lines**: The speech highlighted worsening global crises, including accelerating geopolitical conflict, rising global temperatures, and unmanaged artificial intelligence risks.
- **Critique of Transactionalism**: The UN leader warned against transactional diplomacy, growing mutual mistrust, and extreme great-power competition that destabilizes international governance.
- **Prevalence of Global Conflicts**: The UNGA gathering comes amid ongoing wars and humanitarian crises across Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, and the Middle East.
- **Final UNGA Address**: Marking his final address as Secretary-General before leaving office at the end of the year, Guterres delivered an urgent plea for multilateralism and shared decision-making.

Essential Definitions

- **Multilateral Interdependence**: A structural approach to international relations where sovereign states rely on shared economic, technological, and political frameworks to solve transboundary challenges.
- **Transactionalism in Diplomacy**: A foreign policy strategy focused on immediate, bilateral, self-interested gains rather than long-term adherence to international law, norms, and collective security agreements.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution**: A Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) mandating the State to promote international peace and security, foster respect for international law, and encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration.
- **UN Charter Article 1(1)**: Outlines the primary purpose of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security through effective collective measures and peaceful adjustment of disputes.
- **UN Charter Article 97 & 99**: Defines the legal responsibility of the Secretary-General as the chief administrative officer and empowers them to bring threats to international peace before the Security Council.
- **Declarative Principles of Sovereign Equality**: Grounded in international customary law, rejecting unilateral coercion and enforcing non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states.

Conclusion

António Guterres' final address underscores the structural breakdown of traditional multilateral institutions under the weight of hyper-nationalism and unilateral conflict. Rebuilding effective global governance demands moving away from power politics toward rules-based multilateralism, shared security, and equitable technology regulation.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations)**: Important International Institutions (UN Agencies, Security Council), Global Multilateral Groups, and Challenges to Global Rules-Based Order.
- **GS Paper II (Polity & Governance)**: Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 51) and India's Foreign Policy Principles regarding Global Peace and Arbitration.

7. Trump Signs US-Denmark-Greenland Pact

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Trilateral Security Agreement**: US President Donald Trump signed a security agreement with Denmark and Greenland to expand the US military presence in the strategic Arctic region.
- **Preservation of Danish Sovereignty**: The pact stops short of an outright US acquisition, keeping the island under Danish control while securing long-term defense access for Washington.
- **Provision for Independence**: The agreement contains a clause specifying that its security obligations will remain applicable even if Greenland decides to seek full independence in the future.
- **NATO Cohesion & Defense**: The accord resolves months of diplomatic strain within NATO, establishing that any future independent Greenland must remain aligned with the Atlantic alliance.
- **Restriction on Adversaries**: The pact prohibits non-NATO nations from establishing military installations or securing sensitive foreign investments in Greenland.
- **Enhanced Air & Missile Security**: The deal grants broad operational freedom for US forces, including authority to deploy the "Golden Dome" air and missile defense architecture.



Essential Definitions

- **Semiautonomous Territory**: A region possessing substantial internal self-governing powers, local legislative authority, and administration while remaining constitutionally subject to a sovereign state for defense and foreign affairs.
- **Strategic Chokepoint (Arctic)**: A critical geographic corridor in the high north linking major oceans, vital for maritime routes, early-warning defense systems, and polar resource access.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Act on Greenland Self-Government (2009)**: A statutory framework recognizing the Greenlandic people's right to self-determination under international law and setting rules for local self-rule within the Kingdom of Denmark.
- **North Atlantic Treaty (1949) Article 5**: The core collective defense provision of NATO, establishing that an armed attack against one member state is considered an attack against all allies.
- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution**: A Directive Principle of State Policy instructing the Indian state to foster international peace, respect treaty obligations, and adhere to international law.
- **UN Charter Article 2(4)**: Mandates sovereign equality among states and prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any nation.

Conclusion

The trilateral agreement balances US security objectives in the Arctic with European territorial sovereignty and Greenlandic self-determination. By formalizing military access within multilateral alliances, the deal reinforces collective defense while preventing competitive foreign influence over critical polar infrastructure.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations)**: Bilateral and Multilateral Treaties, NATO Dynamics, Geopolitics of the Arctic Region, and Sovereignty versus Defense Guarantees.
- **GS Paper III (Strategic & Security Studies)**: Arctic Governance, Militarization of Polar Regions, Maritime Security, and Resource Geopolitics.

8. Global Order Under Stress, We Need Reformed Multilateralism: Jaishankar

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Co-Sponsorship of Inaugural P4M Summit**: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar co-chaired the inaugural Partners for Multilateralism, International Law, Peace & Prosperity (P4M) Summit on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly alongside global leaders.
- **Addressing the '4F' Global Crisis**: Jaishankar emphasized that the compounding "4F" crisis—comprising fuel, food, fertiliser, and finance—requires global frameworks, guardrails, and de-risking against supply disruptions.
- **Call for Reformed Multilateralism**: India reiterated that multilateralism is severely weakened by extreme competition and geopolitical conflict, advocating for more participative deliberations and transparent decision-making.



- **Push for UNSC Structural Reforms**: The summit highlighted the deep polarization of the 15-nation UN Security Council, with four Visegrad Group (V4) nations backing India's bid for a permanent seat.
- **Guarding Against Chokepoint Dominance**: The EAM called on like-minded nations to build resilience, diversify critical supply chains, and establish safeguards around emerging technologies and capabilities.
- **Bilateral & Regional Engagements**: On the summit sidelines, India held key bilateral talks with France, Ukraine, Slovakia, and the Visegrad Group to strengthen defense, economic, and maritime cooperation.

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Essential Definitions

- **Reformed Multilateralism**: An international governance approach advocating structural changes in global bodies like the UN to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities rather than post-WWII power distribution.
- **4F Crisis**: A term referencing the interrelated global shocks affecting Food, Fuel, Fertiliser, and Finance access, which severely impact developing economies and Global South stability.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution**: A Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) directing the State to promote international peace and security, maintain just relations, and foster respect for treaty obligations and international law.

- **UN Charter Article 108 & 109**: Establishes the legal process for constitutional amendments to the United Nations Charter, including changes to the composition and veto structure of the UN Security Council.
- **UN General Assembly Resolution 62/557**: Provides the legal mandate for Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) on equitable representation and expansion of UN Security Council membership.
- **International Law on Sovereign Equality (UN Charter Article 2(1))**: Enforces non-discriminatory participation of states in global decision-making bodies.

Conclusion

The P4M Summit highlights the growing imperative to overhaul global institutions that have failed to prevent conflicts and protect economic stability. By advocating for reformed multilateralism, India positioning itself as a bridge between the Global South and developed nations to create a balanced, rules-based world order.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations)**: Important International Institutions, Reforms in the UN Security Council, India's Foreign Policy, and Strategic Partnerships.
- **GS Paper III (Economy & Security)**: Global Supply Chain Resilience, Food and Energy Security, Emerging Technologies, and Economic Governance.

9. A World on the Brink, Diplomacy and Politics as Usual

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Paradox of Global Summitry**: Despite frequent multilateral summits like the UNGA, BRICS, P4M, and SCO, international diplomacy operates on routine protocols while systemic existential risks escalate.
- **Disconnect in Governance**: A sharp gap exists between global political mechanisms and cascading threats like climate change, nuclear proliferation, unmanaged artificial intelligence, and regional wars.
- **Leadership Constraints**: Contemporary global leaders face heavy domestic constraints, making them accountable to national electorates rather than acting as bridges for global interest.
- **Systemic Conflicts**: Ongoing geopolitical crises across Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, and the Middle East lack viable bargaining solutions within conventional frameworks of territory, power, and prestige.
- **Limits of Unilateralism**: Neither major power can single-handedly construct the international order; while powers constrain each other, they fail to generate effective collective action.
- **Illusion of Normalcy**: Diplomatic communiqués and summit liturgies create a false sense of security while structurally failing to safeguard humanity against catastrophic risks.

Essential Definitions

- **Transactional Diplomacy**: A foreign policy framework where nation-states engage in short-term, self-interested exchanges rather than adhering to enduring rules-based collective security systems.
- **Systemic Risk**: Interconnected vulnerabilities across global economic, ecological, technological, and security sectors that threaten the stability of the entire international order.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution**: Directs the State to promote international peace and security, maintain just relations between nations, and foster respect for treaty obligations and international law.
- **UN Charter Article 1**: Mandates the international community to take effective collective measures to prevent threats to peace, suppress acts of aggression, and achieve peaceful settlement of disputes.
- **Principle of Sovereign Equality (UN Charter Article 2(1))**: Entitles all sovereign states to equal standing while imposing shared responsibility to maintain global public goods and international law.
- **Customary International Environmental Law**: Establishes transboundary harm principles and no-harm rules obligating states to protect common heritage regions and climate stability.

Conclusion

Global governance is stuck in a dangerous paradox where diplomatic activity continues normally while existential risks compound continuously. Bridging the gap between national political incentives and global interest requires reforming multilateral institutions, prioritizing collective security, and building genuine political will to manage global shared risks.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations)**: Global Governance Frameworks, Challenges to Multilateralism, UN System Reforms, and International Diplomacy.
- **GS Paper II (Polity)**: Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 51) and Foreign Policy Conduct.

10. Saving the Rhino, Restoring Grasslands

Key Highlights & Summary

- **National Population Recovery**: The Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros population in India has risen from roughly 1,500 in the 1980s to over 4,000 as of September 2024.
- **National CAMPA Phase I (2026–2031)**: A five-year initiative supported by National CAMPA brings together Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal for translocations, habitat management, and Range expansion.
- **Grassland Assessment Project**: A 2026–2031 national project by WII, ICFRE, and FSI will evaluate grassland extent, carbon potential, biodiversity, and establish a National Grassland Atlas.
- **Climate-Resilient Management**: Strategy focuses on maintaining higher ground access, ecological corridors, and dispersal routes to combat extreme flooding events in floodplain habitats.
- **Technological Integration**: Modern tools including spatial monitoring, genetic tracking, and decision-support systems complement ground patrols by forest guards and local mahouts.
- **Regional & International Cooperation**: India aligns with Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia, and Malaysia under the 2019 New Delhi Declaration for Asian Rhinos.

Essential Definitions

- **Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*)**: A megaherbivore species native to the Brahmaputra floodplains and Terai grasslands, classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

- **Ecological Connectivity**: The unimpeded movement of species and the flow of natural processes that sustain life across landscapes and protected corridors.



Saving the rhino, restoring grasslands

BHUPENDER YADAV

FOR INDIA, the greater one-horned rhinoceros is much more than an iconic species. It is an integral part of the ecological and cultural landscape of the Brahmaputra floodplains and the Terai grasslands. The animal's historical range extended across the northern Indian Subcontinent, along the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra river systems. Today, its wild population in the country is concentrated mainly in Assam, UP and West Bengal. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India is now pushing for the expansion of the rhino range.

The rhino conservation strategy is guided by the understanding that conservation should not be limited to safeguarding existing rhino concentrations but should work toward establishing secure populations across suitable parts of their historical range. The National Conservation Strategy for the rhinoceros, launched in 2019, provides a framework for strengthening existing populations, restoring the species to suitable former habitats, maintaining genetic security and habitat connectivity, promoting scientifically planned translocations and building climate resilience into rhino conservation.

The rhino's story in India is a story of recovery. The animal's numbers have increased from around 1,500 in the 1980s to more than 4,000 as of September 2024.

The five-year Phase I (2026-2031), proposed for support through the National CAMPA Authority, brings together Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, with a focus on scientific monitoring, protection, habitat restoration and management, translocation planning, coexistence and capacity building. It seeks not only to consolidate the existing populations but also to support the species' expansion into suitable areas in Bihar and Arunachal Pradesh.

The rhino's habitats are also important for swamp deer, wild buffalo, elephants, tigers, grassland birds and several smaller species. Grasslands are dynamic ecosystems that require science-based management to prevent degradation, inappropriate succession and the spread of invasive species. The Rhino Conservation Action Plan provides for mapping grasslands and wetlands, identifying invasive species, prioritising habitats for intensive restoration and developing protected area-specific management protocols.

This species-focused effort is complemented by a national initiative. A five-year (2026-2031) project on the Comprehensive Assessment of Indian Grasslands, to be implemented by the Wildlife Institute of India, Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education and Forest Survey of India, will assess grassland extent, ecological condition, biodiversity, degradation, ecosystem services and carbon potential. It will support a National Grassland Atlas, restoration priorities and long-term management guidelines.

Flooding is intrinsic to landscapes such as Kaziranga. But the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme climatic events can create new conservation pressures. Maintaining access to higher ground, securing ecological connectivity, protecting dispersal routes and managing habitats will be important. The National Conservation Strategy recognises climate-resilient management as part of the protection framework for the species.

Technology, too, has an expanding role. Modern surveillance, spatial monitoring, veterinary diagnostics, genetic tools and decision-support systems can reinforce traditional fieldcraft. No technology, however, can substitute the forest guards, watchers, mahouts, veterinarians and field officers who patrol these landscapes. Equally important are the communities living around rhino habitats. The future of the species depends on conservation being seen not as an isolated governmental activity but as a shared enterprise.

India's experience has also shown the importance of cooperation beyond state and national boundaries. At the Second Asian Rhino Range States Conservation Meeting held in New Delhi in 2019, India joined Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Nepal in adopting the New Delhi Declaration to strengthen conservation cooperation for Asian rhinoceros species. The Centre and the rhino-bearing states have since continued to work within this broader framework.

On World Rhino Day, September 22, we take satisfaction in the distance travelled. In protecting rhinos, we are also protecting the rivers, grasslands, wetlands, forests and communities that together make these landscapes among India's richest treasures. The rhino's recovery is a national achievement. Its future is a national responsibility.

The writer is Union Cabinet Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change

Grasslands are dynamic ecosystems that require science-based management to prevent degradation, inappropriate succession and the spread of invasive species

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (Schedule I)**: Grants the highest legal protection status to the Indian Rhinoceros against hunting, poaching, and trade.
- **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016**: Provides the statutory framework for National CAMPA to finance habitat restoration, wildlife conservation, and ecological monitoring.
- **Article 48A of the Indian Constitution**: Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution**: Establishes a fundamental duty for every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.

Conclusion

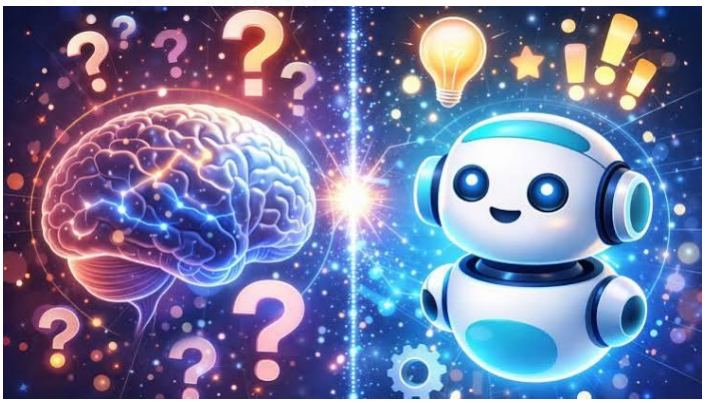
The recovery of India's rhino population demonstrates the success of science-based habitat management, active community involvement, and technological deployment. Expanding grasslands and securing ecological corridors ensures long-term species survival while preserving essential ecosystem services across the Subcontinent.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Environment & Ecology)**: Conservation of Biodiversity, Protected Area Networks, Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and Habitat Restoration.
- **GS Paper III (Governance & Institutions)**: Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), Inter-State Conservation Projects, and International Declarations.

11. AI is Now a Great-Power Game: Three Difficult Questions for India

Key Highlights & Summary



- **Bipolar AI Concentration**: Front-line technological power in artificial intelligence remains concentrated in the United States and China, transforming AI governance into a great-power game.
- **Emergence of US-China AI Dialogue**: Direct talks between Washington and Beijing aim to manage the security risks of frontier models, establish incident notification systems, and maintain strategic stability.
- **Navigating Tech Rivalry**: India faces the challenge of navigating the technological contest between the US and China while staying integrated with US-led initiatives like Pax Silica.

- **Global South Outreach Competition**: China leverages computing infrastructure, advanced frontier models, and open-source AI initiatives to position itself as a technology partner for developing nations.
- **Risk of Tech Condominium**: A bilateral US-China consensus risks creating discriminatory technology control regimes, potentially limiting market access and technological growth for emerging powers.
- **Imperative for Indigenous Capabilities**: India's long-term digital sovereignty depends on rapidly scaling domestic AI compute capacity, semiconductor manufacturing, research talent, and capital.

Essential Definitions

- **Frontier Models**: Advanced, large-scale artificial intelligence foundation models capable of performing a wide variety of complex tasks, presenting both breakthrough capabilities and national security risks.
- **Tech Condominium**: A geopolitical scenario where two dominant superpowers establish exclusive bilateral rules and regulatory controls over critical technologies, restricting access for other nations.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Information Technology Act, 2000**: Serves as the primary statutory framework regulating digital platforms, cyber security, data processing, and intermediary liability in India.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**: Establishes legal standards for data governance, processing, and privacy, directly impacting training datasets for AI algorithms.
- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution**: A Directive Principle of State Policy encouraging the State to promote international peace, foster respect for international law, and uphold equitable global governance structures.
- **National AI Strategy (NITI Aayog)**: Sets national policy objectives for responsible AI development, ethical deployment, and technological self-reliance under the "AI for All" initiative.

Conclusion

As AI becomes a central pillar of great-power competition, reliance on international declarations alone is insufficient for national security. India must balance strategic partnerships with trusted global allies while building robust domestic hardware, software, and data infrastructure to preserve its technological sovereignty.

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UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations)**: Bilateral and Multilateral Groupings, Impact of Superpower Rivalry on India's Interests, Global Governance of Emerging Technologies.
- **GS Paper III (Science & Technology)**: Artificial Intelligence, Semiconductor Ecosystems, Digital Infrastructure, and Cyber Security Challenges.

12. Using Trade Treaty Policy to Strengthen Arbitration

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Expanding Treaty Network**: India has expanded its foreign economic partnerships through recent Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the UAE, Israel, New Zealand, UK, EFTA, and Oman.

- **Revisiting ISDS Omission**: Modern Indian FTAs often omit Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms; future agreements can explicitly clarify that India's reliable domestic commercial arbitration ecosystem justifies this omission.
- **Distinguishing Treaty vs Contract Disputes**: Recent BITs, such as the India-Uzbekistan BIT, draw clear boundaries by excluding pure contractual breaches from treaty-based ISDS claims.
- **Exhaustion of Local Remedies**: BIT provisions requiring investors to exhaust domestic judicial or administrative remedies prior to ISDS can be satisfied through commercial arbitration seated within India.
- **Third-Party Funding Policy Nuance**: While India restricts Third-Party Funding (TPF) in sovereign ISDS disputes, treaty language should explicitly permit and regulate TPF in commercial arbitration to match global standards.



- **Global Arbitration Hub Goal**: Strategic alignment between trade treaty architecture and enforcement mechanisms will bolster investor confidence and establish India as an international hub for commercial dispute resolution.

Essential Definitions

- **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)**: A international neutral tribunal mechanism allowing foreign investors to bring legal claims directly against host governments for alleged breaches of treaty obligations.
- **Third-Party Funding (TPF)**: An agreement where an uninvolved third party finances a party's legal or arbitration costs in exchange for a agreed share of the monetary award.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996**: The primary statutory framework governing domestic arbitration, international commercial arbitration, and the enforcement of foreign arbitral awards in India.
- **Article 253 of the Indian Constitution**: Empowers Parliament to enact laws giving effect to international treaties, bilateral investment agreements, and conventions.
- **Article 51(c) of the Indian Constitution**: A Directive Principle encouraging the State to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in dealings between organized peoples.
- **New York Convention (1958)**: A multilateral treaty enforced under the 1996 Act ensuring mutual recognition and enforcement of foreign arbitral awards among contracting states.

Conclusion

By harmonizing BIT and FTA negotiations with domestic dispute resolution reforms, India can balance host-state regulatory autonomy with foreign investor protections. Strengthening commercial arbitration through predictable enforcement and clear treaty guidelines will solidify India's position as a preferred global business and arbitration destination.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Fast-Track Justice)**: Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Mechanisms, Statutory Framework for Commercial Disputes, and Ease of Doing Business Reforms.
- **GS Paper III (Economy & Trade)**: Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Bilateral Investment Treaties, International Trade Policy, and Commercial Legal Infrastructure.

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