

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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The ₹72,000-crore Great Nicobar Island Project—envisioning a transshipment port, airport, power plant, and township—has been hailed as a strategic and economic gamechanger. However, it has sparked controversy after the Nicobarese Tribal Council alleged that the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 was bypassed and that their consent for forest diversion was misrepresented. This raises questions of tribal rights, environmental justice, and development governance in ecologically fragile and strategically sensitive regions.

Key Issues in the News

1. Allegation of False Reporting

- The Andaman and Nicobar administration claimed that tribal rights under FRA had been identified and settled.
- A certificate (Aug 2022) suggested Gram Sabha consent for diversion of 13,075 hectares of forest land.
- The Tribal Council asserts that no such settlement of rights or consent process was carried out.

2. Conflict of Legal Frameworks

- FRA, 2006: Recognises individual and community rights of forest dwellers; requires prior settlement of rights and consent of Gram Sabha before diversion of forest land.
- Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Act, 1956 (PAT56): Empowers the Administrator to regulate land use in tribal areas.
- The administration reportedly argued that FRA need not apply, as PAT56 already protects Nicobar's forests.

3. Concerns of Local Tribes

- Massive diversion of forest land threatens traditional livelihoods and ecosystems.
- Vulnerable tribal groups risk displacement, cultural erosion, and livelihood insecurity.
- Alleged exclusion of Nicobarese representatives from Gram Sabha meetings raises questions of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).

4. Centre's Position

- Maintains that due process was followed and clearances were legally obtained.
- Cites Gram Sabha approval of August 12, 2022.
- Yet, the tribal council disputes this, highlighting governance opacity.

Broader Implications

1. Tribal Rights vs. Developmental Imperatives

- The case exemplifies the tension between large-scale infrastructure projects and indigenous rights.
- Ignoring FRA undermines constitutional safeguards (Article 21, Article 46).

2. Environmental Sustainability

- Diversion of 13,000+ hectares of dense tropical forest risks irreversible ecological damage in a biodiversity hotspot.
- Impacts climate resilience, species conservation, and disaster vulnerability.

3. Strategic Significance vs. Social Justice

Forest rights of tribals not settled for Great Nicobar project: council

Tribal representatives' body complains to Minister; says Andaman and Nicobar administration gave a 'false' report to Centre stating that tribespeople's rights under FRA were settled with regard to diversion of forest land for the ₹72,000-cr. project

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration made a false representation to the Centre claiming that rights of the tribal people under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, had been 'identified and settled', which eventually led to forest clearances being granted for the ₹72,000-crore mega infrastructure project on the Great Nicobar Islands, a council representing the Nicobarese has said in a complaint to Union Minister of Tribal Affairs Jai Oram.

The proposed Great Nicobar Island Project will include a transshipment port, an airport, a power plant, and a township. Local tribespeople had raised several concerns, including the diversion of nearly 13,075 hectares of forest land for the project and its impact on vulnerable groups in the area. Soon after taking charge



The proposed project on the islands will include a transshipment port, an airport, a power plant, and a township. ISTOCKPHOTO

in 2024, Mr. Oram told *The Hindu* on Friday that his Ministry would look into the issues raised by them.

Earlier this year, he said their concerns are "being examined", without going into the details.

Certificate issued

"In the last two months, we have found that the administration in AMNI issued a certificate in 2022 saying the FRA rights were identified and settled, and that the consent for diversion of forest land was taken only after this," a member of the Tribal Council of Little Nicobar

and Great Nicobar told *The Hindu* on Friday.

The council is the key representative body of the Nicobarese on the islands, and has been interacting with the administration on various issues.

The council, in a letter to Mr. Oram dated July 21, clarified that it had not given its consent for the project. "We write to you to inform that the process of settlement of forest rights under the FRA has not even been initiated. Therefore, there is no question of forest rights being settled." The council said it had recently been made

aware of an August 2022 "certificate", issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Nicobar District that claimed the opposite.

According to this forest diversion certificate under the FRA issued on August 18, 2022, a copy of which was seen by *The Hindu*, the administration said: "The complete process for identification and settlement of rights under the FRA has been carried out for the entire protected forest area of 121.87 sq. km. and deemed forest of 8.8 sq. km. falling under the project."

However, as reported by *The Hindu* earlier, the Union Territory administration has told the Ministry in its monthly reports that it need not implement the FRA on the islands as the forests there are already protected under the Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Act of 1956 (PAT56).

While the PAT56 gives the administrator of the islands full authority to divert forest land, the FRA allows such diversion only

after rights are first settled and then consent is taken from the Gram Sabhas concerned. It was not clear if the diversion of forest land for the project was made under the FRA or PAT56.

"The Centre has maintained that due process was followed for getting clearances. A Gram Sabha meeting held on August 12, 2022, had consented to the diversion of forest land, it said. However, the council says the Nicobarese of Great Nicobar were not part of the meeting."

'Exploring options'

A council member who spoke to *The Hindu* on condition of anonymity said, "We are waiting for the Minister to reply. If it does not come, we will see what other options are available to us." The member said the council's complaint was marked delivered by the post office on July 30, adding that it had also sent an email to Mr. Oram's office but was yet to get a response.

Daily News Analysis

- The project strengthens India's maritime presence in the Indian Ocean Region.
- However, bypassing democratic safeguards could alienate indigenous communities, causing long-term governance and security concerns.

4. Legal and Administrative Accountability

- Highlights a governance dilemma: Can administrative discretion under colonial-era laws override democratic processes under FRA?
- Raises larger questions about federal oversight, transparency, and accountability in environmental and tribal governance.

Way Forward

- Ensure Due Process: FRA compliance—settlement of rights and genuine Gram Sabha consent—must precede forest diversion.
- Harmonise Legal Frameworks: Clarify the interplay between PAT56 and FRA to prevent administrative overreach.
- Inclusive Development: Adopt FPIC principles to secure tribal participation in decision-making.
- Independent Review: A parliamentary or judicial oversight mechanism could review environmental and tribal safeguards for projects in ecologically sensitive zones.
- Balanced Approach: Strategic and economic goals should not override constitutional guarantees of tribal rights and environmental justice.

Conclusion

The Great Nicobar project represents the classic development dilemma—nation-building vs. indigenous rights and ecological sustainability. For India, a constitutional democracy, the legitimacy of development lies not just in economic outcomes but in procedural fairness and justice to vulnerable communities. Upholding FRA and engaging with the Nicobarese tribals meaningfully would strengthen both India's democratic credentials and long-term strategic interests.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The Great Nicobar Island Project highlights the tension between India's developmental ambitions and the constitutional safeguards for indigenous communities. Discuss the challenges in balancing tribal rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 with strategic infrastructure projects. Suggest measures to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. **(250 Words)**

The recent India-China decision to restart border trade through the Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand has triggered a strong response from Nepal. The pass lies in the Kalapani–Lipulekh–Limpiyadhura tri-junction region, which has long been a point of dispute between India and Nepal. Kathmandu has termed the move “unexpected and unacceptable”, while maintaining that it will not allow the issue to derail its dialogue with New Delhi. This reflects the delicate balance in Nepal’s foreign policy amidst regional rivalries.

Background

- **Lipulekh Pass:** A strategic Himalayan pass linking India with Tibet (China), used for border trade and the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra.
- **Territorial Dispute:** The Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipulekh area is claimed by both India and Nepal:
 - India’s stance: Considers Kalapani region part of Pithoragarh district (Uttarakhand), tracing borders from the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli with Nepal.
 - Nepal’s stance: Claims Limpiyadhura as the origin of the Kali River, making the disputed region fall within Nepal’s territory. In 2020, Nepal even amended its political map to include Kalapani, Lipulekh, and Limpiyadhura.

Key Issues in the Current Development

1. India-China Engagement Without Nepal

- India and China decided to restart border trade via Lipulekh during Chinese FM Wang Yi’s Delhi visit.
- Nepal views this as undermining its sovereignty, as it was not consulted despite being a direct stakeholder.

2. Nepal’s Concerns

- Fears legitimisation of India’s claim over Lipulekh if bilateral or trilateral arrangements are made excluding Nepal.
- Raises issues of sovereignty, national pride, and domestic political sensitivity.
- Opposition parties in Nepal often use this issue to mobilise nationalist sentiment.

3. India’s Position

- Sees Lipulekh as a bilateral issue with China (trade/transit), consistent with its territorial claims.
- Considers Nepal’s claim politically motivated and settled historically.

4. China’s Role

- Willingness to engage India bilaterally on Lipulekh signals strategic pragmatism.
- But its acceptance of trade through the disputed pass may strain China-Nepal ties, where Beijing traditionally enjoys goodwill.

Broader Implications

1. Strain in India-Nepal Relations

‘India-China trade through Lipulekh unacceptable’

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

A decision by India and China to restart border trade through the Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand has come under fire in Nepal, as it lies in the contested Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura region, which is claimed by Nepal.

This development is “unexpected and unacceptable” to Nepal, but Kathmandu will not let it disrupt dialogue with India, said a leading member of Nepali Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli’s party, the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist.

India and China took the decision on border trade during the August 18 and 19 visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Delhi, at a time when South Block had also extended an invitation to the Nepali Prime Minister to visit India. “This kind of an agreement between India and China is unexpected and unacceptable to us,” said Pradeep Gyawali, CPN-UML deputy general secretary.

Daily News Analysis

- Adds to recurring mistrust, such as the 2020 border map dispute.
- Could fuel anti-India rhetoric in Nepal's domestic politics.

2. India-China-Nepal Triangle

- Highlights Nepal's geopolitical dilemma: balancing close ties with India and China while safeguarding sovereignty.
- Possibility of Nepal tilting more towards China if its concerns are ignored.

3. Regional Security and Connectivity

- Lipulekh is strategically significant for India's security vis-à-vis China.
- The dispute complicates regional connectivity projects and trilateral cooperation in the Himalayas.

4. Diplomatic Sensitivities

- India must avoid the perception of ignoring Nepal in decisions concerning disputed areas.
- China's willingness to deal bilaterally with India without Nepal's involvement shows its selective approach to territorial sensitivities.



Way Forward

- Dialogue & Confidence-Building: India and Nepal should revive boundary talks under the Joint Technical Committee (last met in 2019).
- Respect for Sensitivities: India could adopt a more consultative approach with Nepal on decisions involving disputed territories.
- Decoupling Strategic & Economic Concerns: Trade facilitation through Lipulekh should not be conflated with territorial settlement.
- Regional Stability: All three countries—India, Nepal, and China—should prioritise peaceful resolution of border disputes for Himalayan stability.

Conclusion

The Lipulekh trade issue highlights the fragility of India-Nepal relations when sovereignty and territorial claims are involved. For India, balancing strategic imperatives with China while sustaining trust with Nepal is essential. Ignoring Nepal's sensitivities risks pushing it closer to China, while meaningful dialogue could reaffirm India's role as a reliable partner in South Asia.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the Lipulekh Pass, consider the following statements:

1. It connects Uttarakhand in India with Tibet (China).
2. It is used for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra.
3. The Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipulekh region is disputed between India and China.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (A) 1 and 2 only
(B) 2 and 3 only
(C) 1 and 3 only
(D) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (A)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Critically analyze the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura dispute between India and Nepal. How do recent India-China trade agreements through Lipulekh complicate India-Nepal relations? Suggest a way forward. **(150 Words)**



The visit of Chinese Foreign Minister **Wang Yi** to Delhi for the 24th round of **Special Representatives' talks on the boundary question** marks a significant step in normalising ties after the **Galwan Valley clashes of June 2020**. Both sides announced confidence-building measures, including resumption of border trade, easing of travel restrictions, and renewed commitment to boundary resolution. While this reflects cautious optimism, deeper strategic challenges remain.

Key Outcomes of the Visit

1. Confidence-Building Measures

- Border trade to resume at three points.
- Direct flights between India and China to restart.
- Expansion of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra slots.
- Relaxation of visas.

2. Economic Engagement

- Talks on lifting Chinese export restrictions (fertilizers, rare earths, boring machinery).
- China pressed India to reconsider restrictions on Chinese FDI post-2020.

3. Boundary Talks

- Agreement to expedite settlement of the **3,500 km unresolved border**.
- India agreed to build on the **2005 Political Parameters and Guiding Principles** framework for settlement.
- NSA Ajit Doval noted that "borders have been quiet" since disengagement in Ladakh.

4. High-Level Political Signalling

- PM Modi to travel to Tianjin for **SCO Summit** and meet Xi Jinping.
- Shows willingness to resume top-level engagement.

Underlying Strategic Concerns

1. Unresolved LAC Issues

- Disengagement has not meant **demilitarisation or de-escalation** in Eastern Ladakh.
- China continues infrastructure buildup near the border.

2. China's Ties with Pakistan

- Wang Yi visited **Kabul and Islamabad** after Delhi, working on extending **CPEC-BRI into Afghanistan** — a move India opposes.
- China's diplomatic support to Pakistan after the **Pahalgam attacks** and **Operation Sindoor** reinforces security concerns.

3. Geopolitical Competition

- China's alignment with Pakistan and Taliban complicates India's regional security calculus.
- Ambassador Xu's remarks on Pakistan being a "victim of terrorism" reveal Beijing's narrative divergence with Delhi.

A productive visit

India and China seem ready to put behind the memory of Galwan clashes

Judging by the statements and readouts from both sides, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's two-day visit to India this week was extremely productive. While Mr. Wang was in Delhi at the invitation of NSA Ajit Doval for the 24th Special Representatives talk on the boundary question, he also met External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar for bilateral talks and the normalisation process after the four-year military standoff at the Line of Actual Control. Mr. Wang was also received by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who said that he would travel to Tianjin for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting. Mr. Modi will meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping. In Delhi, India and China agreed to resume border trade at three points, restart direct flights, expand the Kailash Mansarovar yatra slots for pilgrims and relax visas. While there were positive discussions on the lifting of export restrictions by China on fertilizers, rare earth products and boring machinery, it is unclear whether there was headway on China's demand that India lift its scrutiny of Chinese FDI in Indian companies. The two sides agreed to expedite the process of boundary resolution of the 3,500 km India-China border. Significantly, the Modi government agreed to build on the 2005 agreement of Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question. Meanwhile, the Chinese Ambassador Xu Feihong said that China opposes the U.S.'s "bully" move of imposing 50% tariffs on India.

The outcomes indicate that Delhi has decided it can now "move ahead" from the PLA transgressions, Galwan clashes and the standoff. While Mr. Doval said that the "borders have been quiet", the government was made uncomfortably aware that even with a stable border, other long-standing problems will continue to shadow ties. Mr. Wang later left for Kabul to work with Pakistan and the Taliban on a plan to extend the BRI and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor — India is opposed to both — into Afghanistan. He then flew to Islamabad for a strategic dialogue with his Pakistani counterparts. China's diplomatic support to Pakistan after the Pahalgam attacks and during Operation Sindoor did not come up during Mr. Wang's visit, but provide an ominous overhang to ties, as did Ambassador Xu's contention that Pakistan too is a victim of terrorism. While the U.S.'s attack on Indian trade and economy may be spurring New Delhi's efforts, the reset with China must not come from a perceived position of weakness, and the next steps must be taken keeping in focus the strategic challenge.

Daily News Analysis

4. U.S. Factor

- China sought to rally India against U.S. trade tariffs (50% on Indian goods).
- India risks being pulled into **great power rivalry** between the U.S. and China.

Broader Implications for India

1. Bilateral Dimension

- Engagement reflects India's attempt to **"manage" China without conceding sovereignty claims**.
- Restoring economic ties is important but cannot overshadow security concerns.

2. Strategic Autonomy

- India must balance ties with China and the U.S., avoiding alignment that weakens its bargaining position.

3. Regional Security

- China's outreach to Pakistan and Afghanistan underscores India's need to **secure its Himalayan borders** and **strengthen Indo-Pacific partnerships**.

4. Diplomatic Signalling

- By meeting Wang Yi and agreeing to SCO participation, India projects itself as a **responsible player** willing to engage even with adversaries.

Way Forward

- **Firmness with Engagement:** Continue talks on boundary while pressing for complete disengagement and de-escalation.
- **Strengthening Border Infrastructure:** To counterbalance China's LAC buildup.
- **Diversify Economic Dependence:** Reduce vulnerability to Chinese exports and FDI.
- **Strategic Balancing:** Deepen Quad, Indo-Pacific partnerships without closing dialogue with Beijing.
- **Regional Vigilance:** Closely monitor CPEC-BRI extensions into Afghanistan and their security fallout.

Conclusion

The Wang Yi visit signals that **India and China are willing to move beyond Galwan** toward cautious normalisation. However, true reset will require more than trade and travel—it hinges on **resolving boundary disputes, managing China-Pakistan nexus, and maintaining India's strategic autonomy**. India must pursue engagement without appearing to compromise from a position of weakness, keeping long-term security challenges in sharp focus.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : The recent visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Delhi indicates an attempt to reset India-China relations after the Galwan clashes. Critically examine whether such diplomatic engagements can lead to long-term stability in bilateral ties. **(150 Words)**

The recent filing of FIRs against a researcher from **Lokniti-CSDS** and the **ICSSR's show-cause notice** to the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) represent a worrying pattern in India's academic ecosystem. While the controversy began with a mistaken post on social media, the administrative and political response highlights the **shrinking space for independent research and evidence-based critique** in India.

Key Developments

1. Triggering Incident

- Lokniti co-director Sanjay Kumar posted erroneous data on electoral roll reductions in Maharashtra.
- He later deleted the post and expressed regret.
- Despite this, state and central governments escalated the issue into **legal and institutional action**.

2. Institutional Targeting

- ICSSR raised questions about Lokniti-CSDS funding, echoing actions against other think tanks like **Centre for Policy Research (CPR)**, whose FCRA licence and tax-exempt status were cancelled.
- This suggests a **pattern of administrative harassment**.

3. Global Ranking Decline

- India fell into the **bottom 20% among 179 countries** in the **2024 Academic Freedom Index** (V-Dem Institute).

Significance of Lokniti-CSDS

- Conducts **National Election Studies (NES)**, shaping empirical research on Indian politics.
- Maintains comprehensive political data archives.
- Recent survey on **verification documents for voter lists** highlighted voter exclusion risks in Bihar and elsewhere.
- Provides **critical evidence-based insights** into governance and electoral processes.

Broader Concerns

1. Academic Freedom vs. Political Sensitivities

- Mistakes in research or data presentation are being equated with **deliberate misinformation**.
- This discourages researchers from engaging in public discourse.

2. Weakening Institutional Autonomy

- Increasing government intervention in funding and licensing of research bodies.
- Creates a climate of **self-censorship and intellectual conformity**.

3. Erosion of Data Integrity

Targeting research

Attacks on research institutions reflect India's declining academic freedoms

Mistakes and misinterpretations must not be confused with cases of malicious misinformation. The filing of FIRs against a researcher associated with Lokniti, a programme of the CSDS, and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)'s show cause notice to the CSDS, represent yet another troubling chapter in the recent erosion of academic freedoms in India. The trigger seems to be a post on X by Lokniti co-director Sanjay Kumar, which had erroneous data about reductions in the electoral roll in some constituencies in Maharashtra. Expressing regret, Mr. Kumar deleted the post. Yet, the BJP governments in Maharashtra and at the Centre have weaponised what is a mistake to launch broader attacks on the institution, despite the post having no connection to the Opposition's allegations about inflated electoral roll numbers during the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections. The ICSSR's insinuations about the CSDS-Lokniti's funding arrangements echo the treatment meted out to other premier institutions. The Centre for Policy Research faced tax surveys that resulted in the cancellation of its foreign funding licence and tax-exempt status. This targeting suggests a coordinated effort to silence independent research voices rather than address administrative concerns. Such acts have led to India's ranking falling to the bottom 20% among 179 nations in the 2024 Academic Freedom Index published by the V-Dem Institute.

Institutions such as CSDS-Lokniti serve a vital democratic function by conducting empirical research that helps understand policy implications. Through its National Election Studies and comprehensive data archive, Lokniti has helped transform the study of Indian politics to one based on rigorous, large-scale empirical inquiry. Its survey on the verification documents listed by the ECI during its Special Intensive Revision exercise in Bihar, among voters across five States and one Union Territory, exemplifies this. Rather than acknowledging the finding that the availability of such documents is rather low among a large cohort of voters in India, and places onerous burdens on voters in the event of a country-wide SIR, the ICSSR has characterised this research as an attempt to malign the ECI. How can policy effectiveness be assessed without rigorous empirical investigations such as well-designed and transparent opinion surveys? The current government has also undermined its own statistical apparatus. The delayed Census and suppressed statistical surveys point to discomfort with independent and critical analysis. As India navigates complex development challenges, it desperately needs the kind of critical feedback and evidence-based analysis that institutions such as the CSDS provide. Silencing these voices through administrative harassment and funding restrictions serves neither good governance nor national interest.

Daily News Analysis

- Delays in **Census 2021**.
 - Suppression of certain government surveys (e.g., on jobs, consumption).
 - Undermines trust in **official statistics** and restricts evidence-based policymaking.
4. **Democratic Implications**
- Independent research institutions are essential for **policy feedback loops** in a democracy.
 - Silencing them weakens accountability, transparency, and citizen participation.

Implications for Governance

- **Short-term political gains** through controlling narratives may lead to **long-term policy failures**.
- Lack of credible data impairs India's ability to design and implement effective welfare, electoral, and development programs.
- International reputation suffers, affecting collaborations, funding, and soft power.

Way Forward

1. **Safeguard Institutional Autonomy:** Reinforce protections for research organisations under laws like FRA, UGC regulations, and constitutional guarantees of free expression.
2. **Independent Oversight:** Establish an independent **Research Ethics and Autonomy Commission** to address disputes, instead of administrative harassment.
3. **Transparent Funding Norms:** Create clear, non-political mechanisms for regulating research funding (including foreign funding).
4. **Strengthen Data Ecosystem:** Resume Census, NSSO surveys, and ensure open access to official data.
5. **Promote a Culture of Debate:** Mistakes should be corrected through **academic scrutiny and peer review**, not legal intimidation.

Conclusion

The targeting of CSDS-Lokniti and similar institutions reflects a **disturbing erosion of India's academic freedoms**, at a time when the country urgently needs independent, evidence-based analysis to navigate complex governance challenges. A healthy democracy requires not conformity, but the **courage to question, critique, and refine policies**. Silencing research weakens not just academia, but also India's democratic and developmental future.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Recent administrative and political actions against independent research institutions reflect a shrinking space for academic freedom in India. Critically examine the implications of this trend for governance and democracy. **(150 Words)**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has emerged as an influential regional grouping with growing relevance in Eurasian geopolitics. Ahead of the Tianjin Summit (August 31–September 1, 2025), China has called for regional solidarity and multilateralism, framing it as a counter to hegemonism and unilateralism. The summit, chaired by Chinese President Xi Jinping, is expected to be attended by leaders from India, Russia, Pakistan, and even the UN Secretary-General, highlighting its expanding global resonance.

China calls for regional solidarity ahead of SCO summit in Tianjin

Vighnesh P. Venkitesh

BEIJING

It is important to have regional solidarity amid turbulence in international landscape, China said on Friday as it prepared to host heads of states and international organisations for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tianjin on August 31 and September 1.

Chinese President Xi Jinping will chair the summit, which is expected to be attended by a host of world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and UN

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Briefing reporters about the summit, China's Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Bin said it will follow new visions to overcome "cultural wars and cold war mentality", while looking into new measures to advance development, maintain security, and promote prosperity. The meeting, hosting more than 20 world leaders, comes against the backdrop of uncertainties in global trade, triggered by the tariffs imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump.

"In today's world, outdated mindsets of hegemonism and power politics still have influence, with

certain countries attempting to prioritise their own interests above others, seriously threatening world peace and stability," Mr. Liu said without naming any specific country while emphasising on the need to strengthen regional cooperation.

The SCO aims at stability to foster lasting peace, harmony, and friendship while addressing uncertainties in international environment, Mr. Liu said, adding that the summit will focus on practising multilateralism and safeguarding regional stability.

(The writer is in Beijing at an invitation from the China Public Diplomacy Association)

Key Highlights of the News

1. China's Position

- China stressed "solidarity amid turbulence" in the global landscape.
- It indirectly criticised U.S. protectionism and power politics, citing threats to world peace and stability.
- It advocated new visions beyond "cultural wars" and "Cold War mentality."

2. Summit Agenda

- To advance regional development and prosperity.
- To strengthen collective security against terrorism, extremism, and emerging threats.
- To reinforce multilateralism and regional stability.

3. Backdrop of Global Challenges

- Ongoing trade uncertainties due to U.S. tariffs under Trump.
- A volatile international environment with shifting power equations.
- Regional security concerns in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

4. India's Stakes

- India participates as a full member (since 2017), balancing its interests with Russia and Central Asian states, while carefully navigating ties with China and Pakistan.
- For India, SCO provides a platform to:
 - Access energy resources and connectivity projects.
 - Engage in counter-terrorism cooperation.
 - Enhance its Eurasian outreach, complementing its Act East and Connect Central Asia policies.

Analytical Dimensions

- **China's Strategy:** By projecting itself as the champion of multilateralism, China seeks to counter U.S. influence and build legitimacy as a regional stabiliser. However, its assertiveness in South China Sea and boundary disputes with India cast doubts on its commitment to genuine multilateralism.
- **SCO's Significance:** The grouping's strength lies in its diversity (India, China, Russia, Pakistan, Central Asian states) and focus on Eurasian stability. Yet, this diversity also creates divergences, limiting collective decision-making.
- **Implications for India:**
 - Opportunity: To showcase leadership in regional connectivity, trade, and counter-terrorism.
 - Challenge: To navigate differences with China and Pakistan without compromising on sovereignty and national interests.

Conclusion

The Tianjin SCO Summit reflects China's attempt to rally regional solidarity against a backdrop of global uncertainty and geopolitical flux. While the SCO provides India with a strategic platform for regional engagement, its effectiveness depends on managing intra-bloc rivalries and ensuring that the principles of multilateralism translate into action. For India, active but cautious participation remains the most pragmatic approach—leveraging opportunities in energy, connectivity, and security while safeguarding its strategic autonomy.

Daily News Analysis

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Evaluate the strategic significance of SCO for India in enhancing its Eurasian outreach. How can India balance its interests with China and Pakistan within the grouping? **(150 Words)**



Set the guardrails for AI use in courtrooms

In July this year, the Kerala High Court published a set of guidelines for Artificial Intelligence (AI) use by the district judiciary ("Policy Regarding Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools in District Judiciary"). As the first policy in the country directly addressing AI use in judicial processes and setting out strict safeguards, it is timely. AI tools, from document translation to defect identification in filings, are expected to improve speed and efficiency, which are attractive incentives for a court system which has five crore pending cases.

There are issues

But seemingly innocuous tasks such as AI-enabled translations and transcription are not without risks. For example, a Supreme Court of India judge reported the translation of 'leave granted' into 'chhutti sweekaar' (holiday approved) in Hindi. In the case of *Noel Anthony Clarke vs Guardian News & Media Ltd.* (2025) EWHC 550 (KB), an AI-transcription tool repeatedly transcribed the claimant's name, "Noel", as "no". OpenAI's Whisper, an AI-powered speech recognition system, was reported to occasionally make up or "hallucinate" entire phrases and sentences, especially when people spoke with longer pauses between their words.

Search engine bias in AI-enabled legal research could nudge users toward results influenced by user patterns, potentially 'invisibilising' relevant precedents. A study published in the *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* found that legal Large Language Models (LLM) can make up case laws and cite incorrect sources to substantiate claims.

At a more structural level, AI risks reducing adjudication into rule-based inferences, overlooking the combination of human judgment, specific context, and relevance of precedents that impact judicial decision-making.

Some market tools are currently being used in courts on a non-commercial test basis, such as transcription of oral arguments and witness

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As the use of Artificial Intelligence becomes more common in courts, clear frameworks are crucial to guide its safe and responsible use

depositions. Without specified time-frames, success parameters, or framework for access, storage, and use of non-public, sensitive or personal data, such pilots warrant careful consideration. AI tools offered to courts on a test basis risk creating dependencies without clear pathways to sustainable adoption. Moreover, new technological paradigms demand essential infrastructure such as reliable Internet connectivity and hardware.

A quick analysis of publicly available tenders for AI services across courts shows that even if adoption is cautious, courts are not necessarily designing risk management frameworks to address ethical and legal risks. While human checks and balances, such as manual vetting of AI-translated judgements by retired judges, advocates and translators are in place, AI systems learn from available data, with a possibility of error as they encounter new information in new contexts. Scholars note that hallucinations in LLMs are a feature, and not a bug, requiring human oversight and careful adoption in high-risk scenarios.

As courts increasingly integrate AI use in their daily work, the combination of AI's ethical risks and the complexity of the legal system requires effective guardrails to mitigate risks. Since the majority of court procedures remain paper-based, any transition to advance AI deployment must not further debilitate an already imperfect system.

First, there is a need for critical AI literacy among judges, court staff and lawyers. In addition to capacity building to use AI tools, programmes are also required to understand the limitations of the systems deployed. Judicial academies and bar associations, in collaboration with AI governance experts, are well placed to facilitate such capacity building.

Second, guidelines are needed to shape individual use of generative AI for research and judgment writing. If AI is used in the adjudication process, litigants must have a right to be

informed. Similarly, litigants and lawyers have a right to know if AI is being used in certain courtrooms. Given the potential for errors arising from AI use, courts should examine whether litigants may be permitted to opt-out of pilots or fully-deployed AI if they have any concerns about safeguards or human oversight.

Third, courts need to adopt standardised procurement guidelines to support the evaluation of a proposed AI system's reliability and suitability for the task at hand. Pre-procurement steps will also help courts diagnose the exact problem and whether AI is the best solution. Procurement frameworks can guide assessment of technical criteria around explainability, data management and risk mitigation.

On the eCourts project

These frameworks will enable decision-makers to monitor vendor compliance and performance, which may be beyond the routine expertise of judges and the registry.

The Vision Document for Phase III of the eCourts Project (e-Committee, Supreme Court of India) acknowledges the need to create technology offices to guide courts in assessing, selecting, and overseeing the implementation of complex digital solutions, including infrastructure and software. Such scaffolding to aid and assist decision-making on AI use and adoption is one way to overcome gaps in technical expertise. Dedicated specialists can give courts clearer guidance in adopting AI tools as part of comprehensive planning.

As courts inch towards AI adoption, it is important not to lose sight of the ultimate purpose of AI in the system – to serve the ends of justice. In this rapidly evolving technological landscape, clear guidelines on the use and the adoption of AI in courts are essential to ensure that the drive for an efficient court system does not eclipse the nuanced reasoning and human decision-making that is at the heart of the adjudicatory process.

GS. Paper 03 Science and technology

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Discuss the opportunities and risks of Artificial Intelligence adoption in India's judicial system. Suggest measures to ensure responsible deployment. (150 words)

Context :

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into judicial systems worldwide is transforming how courts function. In India, the Kerala High Court recently became the first to publish guidelines for AI use in district judiciary, marking a milestone in judicial reforms. With over five crore pending cases, AI tools offer scope for efficiency in translation, transcription, and defect identification. However, their unchecked use poses ethical, legal, and structural challenges, necessitating guardrails for responsible adoption.

Key Issues Highlighted

1. Errors and Hallucinations

- Translation inaccuracies (e.g., "leave granted" → "chhutti sweekaar").
- AI-transcription errors ("Noel" → "no"), undermining accuracy.
- Generative AI hallucinations fabricating case laws or citations.

2. Bias and Transparency Risks

- Search engine bias influencing legal research.
- Lack of clarity on whether litigants and lawyers are informed when AI is used.

3. Structural Challenges

- Dependency on private vendors without robust procurement frameworks.
- Sensitive data handling without proper guidelines on storage and access.
- Lack of supporting infrastructure (connectivity, hardware).

4. Judicial Decision-Making Risks

- Risk of reducing adjudication to mechanistic rule-based inferences.
- Threat to human reasoning, contextual interpretation, and judicial discretion.

Recommended Guardrails

1. AI Literacy and Capacity Building

- Training judges, lawyers, and staff to use AI tools critically.
- Judicial academies and bar associations collaborating with AI experts.

2. Transparency and Informed Consent

- Litigants' right to know if AI is used in adjudication.
- Possibility of opting out of AI-assisted processes.

3. Standardised Procurement Guidelines

- Frameworks to evaluate AI systems for reliability, explainability, and suitability.
- Pre-procurement assessment to check whether AI is the best solution.

4. Institutional Support Mechanisms

- Technology offices under the eCourts Project Phase III to oversee AI adoption.
- Dedicated specialists to monitor compliance, vendor accountability, and system performance.

Broader Significance

- **For Efficiency:** AI can address backlog by expediting routine processes.
- **For Justice Delivery:** Guardrails ensure that speed does not undermine fairness.
- **For Democratic Legitimacy:** Transparent AI adoption strengthens litigant trust in judiciary.
- **For Long-Term Sustainability:** Balanced adoption prevents overdependence on untested technology.

Conclusion

AI in courtrooms represents both promise and peril. While its use can enhance efficiency, poor safeguards risk eroding judicial credibility and fairness. The Kerala High Court's initiative signals a positive step, but a **national framework on AI use in judiciary**, embedded in transparency, human oversight, and ethical safeguards, is essential. Ultimately, AI must remain a tool to assist — not replace — human judgment, ensuring that efficiency never overshadows the fundamental goal of justice.

