

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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The long-standing debate on judicial appointments resurfaced after Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant orally stated that the Supreme Court may consider a plea seeking the revival of the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) and the discontinuation of the Collegium system.

- This development comes nearly a decade after the Supreme Court struck down the 99th Constitutional Amendment and the NJAC Act (2015), restoring the Collegium system on grounds of judicial independence, a part of the basic structure. The present plea calls the 2015 decision a "great wrong", reviving discussions on separation of powers, transparency, and democratic accountability in appointments to constitutional courts.

CJI says court will consider plea seeking to revive NJAC, end the Collegium system

The Hindu Bureau
 NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Wednesday orally said the court would consider a plea seeking to revive the National Judicial Appointments Commission and bring an end to the Collegium system of judicial appointments to the constitutional courts.

The plea, which arraigns the Chief Justice of India and even the Supreme Court Collegium as respondents along with the Union government and a clutch of parties, submitted that the striking down of the NJAC by the court was a "great wrong because it meant substitution of the will of the people by the opinion of the four judges".

The oral mentioning of the application was made

History revisited

1993: Collegium system of judicial appointments **came into existence** by virtue of a Constitution Bench judgment

2014: The National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, 2014 and the Constitution (99th Amendment) Act, 2014 came into existence **to substitute** the Collegium system

2015: A Bench declared the 99th Constitutional Amendment Act and the NJAC Act unconstitutional, **reviving the Collegium system**



by advocate Mathews J. Nandipati, who has sought permission to argue the case in-person.

The NJAC, which briefly gave the government an equal role along with the judiciary in the appoint-

ment of judges to constitutional courts, was struck down by the court in 2015 as unconstitutional.

The plea urged the 2015 judgment to be rendered *void ab initio* as it revived the Collegium system, which was a "synonym for nepotism and favouritism."

"Since the Collegium came into existence, appointments to higher judiciary have been a 'riddle wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma' to borrow an expression from Winston Churchill... The Parliament, which represents the will of the people, had enacted the 99th Constitutional Amendment Act and the NJAC Act. However, the enactments were "quashed and set aside" by this court, reducing the Parliament to an inferior tribunal," it said.

Key analysis

1. Background: Collegium vs. NJAC

- Collegium System: Evolved through the Three Judges Cases, giving primacy to the judiciary in appointing judges to the Supreme Court and High Courts.
- NJAC (2014–2015): Introduced through the 99th Constitutional Amendment; included judiciary, executive, and laypersons in the appointment process.

Daily News Analysis

- 2015 Judgment: SC declared NJAC unconstitutional, citing violation of the Basic Structure Doctrine, especially judicial independence.

2. What the Current Plea Argues

The petition makes strong assertions:

- The 2015 judgment "substituted the will of the people with the opinion of four judges."
- Calls Collegium a "synonym for nepotism and favouritism."
- Argues that Parliament, representing the people, was reduced to an "inferior tribunal."
- Seeks the 2015 judgment to be declared void ab initio.
- Points to lack of transparency in Collegium functioning—often termed a "riddle wrapped in a mystery... inside an enigma."

3. Why This Matters: Contemporary Significance

- Recurring friction between judiciary and executive regarding delays and transparency in appointments.
- Parliamentarians and the Union government have repeatedly voiced concerns about opacity.
- The court has recently released resolutions and reasons for Collegium recommendations, but criticisms persist.
- The revival plea—though legally complex—reopens a politically and constitutionally sensitive debate.

4. Constitutional Issues Involved

a) Judicial Independence

- SC held that allowing the executive an equal say might threaten the independence of the judiciary.
- Forms part of the basic structure (as per Kesavananda Bharati, S.P. Gupta, Second Judges Case).

b) Separation of Powers

- The 99th Amendment attempted a collaborative scheme; critics say it tilted the balance toward the executive.

c) Parliamentary Supremacy vs. Constitutional Supremacy

- Petition argues Parliament's decision cannot be overturned merely on "judicial opinion."
- However, judicial review of constitutional amendments is well-established (Minerva Mills, I.R. Coelho).

5. Key Questions Before the Court Now

- Can a nine-year-old Constitution Bench verdict be reopened?
- Can the 99th Amendment and the NJAC Act be revived without a fresh constitutional amendment?
- Is the Collegium system constitutionally mandated, or merely an evolved convention?

Conclusion

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The CJI's statement that the Court may consider the plea to revive NJAC marks a significant moment in the ongoing discourse on judicial appointments in India. While the petition challenges the legitimacy and transparency of the Collegium system, the judiciary has consistently viewed its primacy as essential to preserving judicial independence, a cornerstone of the Constitution's basic structure. Whether the Supreme Court will revisit, reaffirm, or reinterpret the 2015 judgment remains to be seen, but the issue is set to reopen a pivotal constitutional debate with far-reaching implications for the balance of powers in India's democracy.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC), consider the following statements:

1. It was established through the 99th Constitutional Amendment Act.
2. The NJAC included members from the judiciary, executive, and civil society.
3. The Supreme Court upheld the NJAC as constitutionally valid.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans : a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The Supreme Court's willingness to consider pleas on reviving the NJAC has renewed the discourse on judicial appointments in India. Analyse the constitutional, institutional, and democratic dimensions of this debate. **(150 Words)**

India has strongly objected to China's "arbitrary" detention of an Indian citizen from Arunachal Pradesh at Shanghai airport, calling it an action that undermines ongoing efforts to rebuild mutual trust.

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), through its spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, emphasised that peace and tranquillity along the border remain the prerequisite for the overall development of India-China ties. The incident has once again brought to the forefront the sensitivity around China's claims on Arunachal Pradesh, as well as the fragile nature of bilateral engagement post-2020.

Arbitrary actions by China 'unhelpful' in improving people-centric ties: India

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Days after Chinese officials detained an Indian citizen from Arunachal Pradesh at Shanghai international airport, Randhir Jaiswal, official spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry, said, "arbitrary actions" by China are "most unhelpful" in nurturing "people-centric" initiatives.

Mr. Jaiswal further said that "peace and tranquillity" on the India-China border is the "prerequisite" for the development of ties.

Mr. Jaiswal's remarks came a day after the External Affairs Ministry said a "strong demarche" was sent to the Chinese side soon after the detention of Pema Wang Thongdok became known.

"Arbitrary actions by China as I referred to in-



Randhir Jaiswal

volving an Indian citizen from Arunachal Pradesh are most unhelpful towards efforts being made by both sides to build mutual trust and understanding and gradually move towards normalisation of bilateral relations," said Mr. Jaiswal.

Mr. Jaiswal emphasised that Arunachal Pradesh is an "integral and inalienable part of India and this is a fact that is self evident. No amount of denial by the Chinese side will change this indisputable reality."

Ms. Thongdok had said

that she was detained in Shanghai airport over claims "that my Indian passport was invalid as my birthplace is Arunachal Pradesh, which they claimed is Chinese territory."

"Maintenance of peace and tranquillity in the border regions is a prerequisite for the continued and overall development of India-China bilateral relations. Our position in this regard has always been very clear and consistent. Since October 2024, both sides have worked closely to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border regions," Mr. Jaiswal said.

China Eastern Airlines started its Shanghai-Delhi service on November 9, 2025, after the Indian and Chinese leadership met on August 31, 2025 on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Tianjin.

Key analysis

1. What happened?

- An Indian citizen, Pema Wang Thongdok, from Arunachal Pradesh was detained at Shanghai airport.

Daily News Analysis

- Chinese officials alleged that her Indian passport was “invalid” because her birthplace—Arunachal Pradesh—was “Chinese territory”.
- India immediately issued a strong demarche to China demanding her release and explanation.

2. India's official position

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated:

- China's arbitrary actions are “most unhelpful” in strengthening people-to-people ties.
- Arunachal Pradesh is an integral and inalienable part of India, and no repeated claims by China can alter this fact.
- Since October 2024, both sides have been working to maintain peace and tranquillity on the border—essential for normalising relations.

This highlights India's consistent stance that border stability is foundational to any diplomatic or economic engagement with China.

3. Why this incident matters

a) China's continuing assertion over Arunachal Pradesh

- China routinely issues stapled visas, renames places in Arunachal Pradesh, and protests Indian leaders' visits.
- Detaining an Indian citizen at an international airport over birthplace marks an escalation in administrative claims.

b) Fragile bilateral ties post-Galwan (2020)

- Despite multiple rounds of Corps Commander talks, disengagement is incomplete in key sectors.
- India maintains that normalisation is impossible without peaceful borders, a view reiterated in this statement.

c) Undermining confidence-building measures (CBMs)

- India and China restarted flights (Shanghai–Delhi route) only in November 2025 after the leaders' meeting at the Tianjin SCO Summit (August 2025).
- Such incidents threaten the delicate rebuilding of trust, trade, and travel.

4. Broader geopolitical relevance

- Reflects China's assertive stance under its “standard map diplomacy”.
- Reinforces India's effort to internationalise China's aggressive postures through diplomatic messaging.
- Impacts people-centric initiatives like:

Daily News Analysis

- tourism
- academic exchanges
- business mobility
- cultural contacts

These are essential for stabilising long-term ties.

Conclusion

India's sharp response to China's detention of an Arunachal Pradesh citizen underscores the continued tension surrounding sovereignty claims and the precarious trajectory of India–China relations. By reiterating that peace and tranquillity at the border are non-negotiable prerequisites for bilateral normalisation, India signals that unilateral or arbitrary Chinese actions will impede trust-building. Going forward, both countries must rely on dialogue, adherence to agreements, and respect for each other's territorial integrity to rebuild a stable and predictable relationship.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : China's repeated administrative and diplomatic claims over Arunachal Pradesh have implications for bilateral trust and regional stability. Discuss. (150 words)



A recent study by researchers at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Germany, has demonstrated that ordinary WiFi signals — specifically Beamforming Feedback Information (BFI) — can be used to identify individuals with extremely high accuracy, even without accessing the WiFi network. The finding highlights an emerging threat at the intersection of digital privacy, everyday technologies, and covert surveillance, raising significant concerns for policy-making, cybersecurity, and personal data protection.

Key analysis

1. How WiFi Can Identify People

- Modern WiFi uses beamforming, which requires connected devices to periodically send BFI reports describing how they perceive the wireless channel.
- These BFI packets are unencrypted, publicly broadcast, and can be intercepted by any device within range, even without the password.
- The study shows that these BFI signals carry enough information to identify individuals from their gait.

2. Key Findings of the Study

- Researchers created a setup with two access points and four listening points using the 6 GHz WiFi band.
- 197 volunteers performed various walking tasks — normal, brisk, turnstile, carrying backpack or crate.
- A neural network trained on raw signal data showed:
 - 99.5% accuracy in identifying more than 160 individuals using BFI alone.
 - BFI outperformed CSI, which was previously believed to be the main threat but requires specialised hardware.
 - Identification remained effective across different walking styles, though with slight accuracy drop during unusual movements.

3. Why This Is a Serious Privacy Concern

a) No Hacking Needed

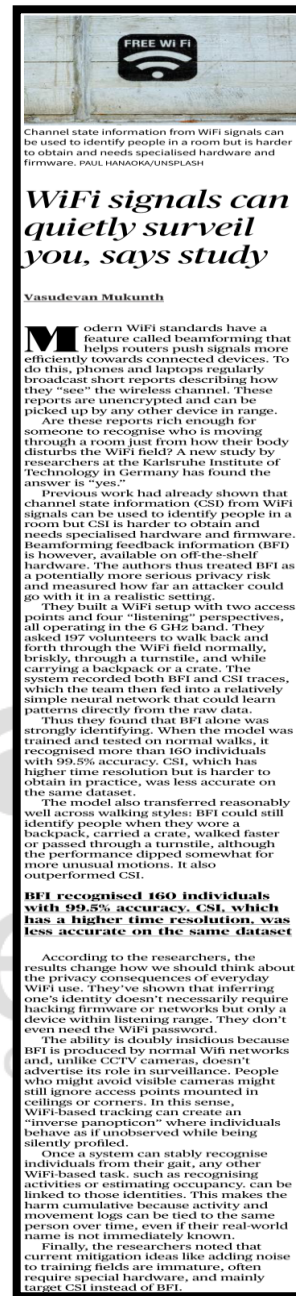
- Attacker only needs a device within listening range.
- No access to WiFi password or firmware is required.

b) Invisible Surveillance (“Inverse Panopticon”)

- WiFi access points do not reveal their surveillance potential, unlike CCTV cameras.
- Individuals behave as if unobserved while being silently profiled.

c) Cumulative Harm

- Once identity is inferred from gait:
 - Activity patterns



- Occupancy levels
- Daily

movements

can be linked to the same person over time, creating detailed behavioural profiles.

d) Everyday Infrastructure as Surveillance Tools

- WiFi routers exist everywhere — homes, offices, malls, airports — making potential misuse widespread.

4. Implications for India

a) Right to Privacy (Puttaswamy Judgment, 2017)

- Shows how non-personal, ambient signals can still reveal personal identity.
- Strengthens the need for robust data protection frameworks beyond traditional personal data.

b) Gaps in India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA), 2023

- DPDPA focuses on personal data voluntarily provided.
- Does not fully cover non-consensual physiological signatures, such as gait patterns extracted from WiFi signals.

c) National Security and Counter-surveillance

- Covert tracking could be exploited by:
 - Hostile actors
 - Corporate surveillance
 - State overreach
 - Criminals targeting individuals in restricted areas

d) Need for Updated Cyber Norms

- Regulators may need to mandate:
 - Encryption of beamforming metadata
 - Privacy-by-design protocols
 - Standards for routers and access points

5. Limitations and Mitigation Challenges

- Researchers noted existing mitigation methods (e.g., adding noise) are:
 - Underdeveloped
 - Hardware-dependent
 - Mostly aimed at CSI, not BFI
- Suggests the world is unprepared for this form of surveillance.

Conclusion

The study underscores that everyday technologies such as WiFi — designed for connectivity — can unintentionally become sophisticated tools for covert biometric surveillance. The ability to identify individuals from unencrypted BFI signals challenges traditional notions of privacy and calls for urgent updates in cybersecurity norms, data protection legislation, and international standards. For countries like India, the findings highlight the need to expand the scope of the digital rights debate, ensuring that technological advancement does not compromise citizen autonomy and constitutional privacy protections.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to Beamforming Feedback Information (BFI) seen in modern WiFi systems, consider the following statements:

1. BFI packets are encrypted and cannot be accessed without the WiFi password.
2. BFI can reveal human gait patterns that may be used to identify individuals.
3. BFI is generated as part of the normal functioning of WiFi networks.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2
- B. 2 and 3
- C. 1 and 3
- D. 3 only

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : What ethical concerns arise when ambient technologies such as WiFi routers can silently profile individuals? Discuss with reference to concepts of consent, autonomy, and the “inverse panopticon.” **(250 words)**



Classes
Quality education

The Indian rupee has depreciated sharply — nearly 7% between late November 2024 and November 2025, sliding from ₹83.4/\$ to about ₹89.2/\$. While rupee fluctuations are not new, the present depreciation highlights deep-seated structural vulnerabilities, especially India's heavy reliance on crude oil imports, which account for over 20% of total imports. In the backdrop of global dollar strength, widening current-account deficit (CAD), and costly oil transitions, the editorial argues that stabilising the rupee requires long-term reforms beyond monetary tools — particularly a decisive shift away from imported fossil fuels.

Key analysis

1. Context: Why the Rupee is Under Pressure

Several global and domestic factors mirror earlier episodes such as the 2018 depreciation:

- Global dollar strength and U.S. interest rate hikes have pressured emerging market currencies.
- Higher U.S. tariffs have affected Indian exporters, prompting them to cut prices, worsening trade balance.
- Widening CAD, driven by:
 - Increased bullion imports as a hedge in uncertain global conditions.
 - High crude import bill, especially as India shifts from discounted Russian oil to costlier U.S. oil.

These factors reduce India's external resilience, making the rupee more vulnerable to global shocks.

2. RBI's Limited Role Under a Managed-Float Regime

- India follows a floating-but-managed exchange rate, where RBI's role is to smooth volatility, not fix the rate.
- Large-scale forex interventions:
 - Between late 2024 and 2025, RBI sold around \$50 billion to stabilise the rupee.
 - In Feb 2025, RBI conducted a \$10 billion dollar/rupee buy-sell swap to infuse long-term rupee liquidity.
- Despite these actions, the rupee continued to weaken — showing that monetary tools alone cannot offset structural weaknesses.

3. Why Oil Dependence Makes Rupee Volatile

India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil. The impact:

Limited room
India must reduce dependence on oil imports to stabilise the rupee

Between late November 2024 and now, the rupee has depreciated about 7%, sliding from roughly ₹83.4 a dollar to about ₹89.2. This is not unprecedented as in 2018, it slid 11%-12% against the dollar. The comparison is instructive because the political and trade backdrops have echoes of that earlier period. In 2018, during the first term of U.S. President Donald Trump, global dollar strength, rising U.S. interest rates and trade tensions pressured emerging market currencies, including the rupee. The RBI used its first longer-term currency-swap as a systemic liquidity check. In 2019, it completed a \$5 billion three-year dollar/rupee swap. And in February 2025, it carried out a \$10 billion dollar/rupee buy-sell swap auction to infuse long-term rupee liquidity into the banking system under global stress. Such swaps are a standard tool by central banks to supply liquidity, shore up forex reserves and prevent disorderly currency depreciation when the dollar surges or capital flows reverse. The steep rupee slide in November arises in a context of external pressures — a widening current-account deficit, driven partly by higher imports of bullion, as a hedge in uncertain times, and exporters scrambling to maintain competitiveness amid high U.S. trade tariffs. In such a hostile global macro-environment, the RBI's mandate is limited: under the floating-but-managed regime, it can only 'smoothen volatility' rather than fix the exchange rate.

Between November last year and now, the RBI sold a net of roughly \$50 billion in forex to stabilise the rupee. Even so, the slide has proceeded, highlighting the external pressures. That said, there is room for cautious optimism. India's foreign exchange reserves are comfortable — close to \$693 billion. On the domestic front, retail inflation has slumped: headline CPI inflation came in at just 0.25% in October 2025, well below the RBI's target-band of 2%-6%. This gives the RBI space to tolerate modest currency depreciation without triggering aggressive rate hikes especially as India transitions from cheaper Russian crude to relatively costlier U.S. oil imports. With crude accounting for over a fifth of total imports in FY25, rupee depreciation combined with costlier oil imports could exert upward pressure on inflation. Given this environment, monetary stabilisation alone cannot suffice. The Centre must address India's long-standing vulnerability: heavy dependence on oil. Steps such as faster transport electrification must be treated as strategic imperatives and pursued with urgency. These must be done with a well thought-out trade policy, as opposed to a raft of bilateral trade deals that India has focused on, in the hope that these would diversify trade routes. If anything, trade agreements with Japan, the UAE and ASEAN have tilted the trade balance against India.

Daily News Analysis

1. Higher oil prices → Larger import bill → Wider CAD → Rupee depreciation
2. Rupee depreciation → Costlier oil imports → Imported inflation
3. Global shifts (e.g., Russia discounts ending) → Higher energy costs

This creates a self-reinforcing cycle where oil dependence repeatedly destabilises macroeconomic stability.

Although retail inflation has fallen dramatically (October 2025 CPI = 0.25%), depreciating rupee combined with expensive oil threatens future inflation.

4. Why the Editorial Calls for Structural Reforms

The central message: India must cut oil dependence to reduce external vulnerability.

a) Rapid Electrification of Transport

- Transport consumes a major share of petroleum.
- Faster adoption of EVs, electric buses, green hydrogen for freight, and rail electrification reduces the oil import bill.

b) Stronger Energy Security Strategy

- Diversifying energy sources (solar, wind, nuclear, biofuels) lowers exposure to oil price shocks.
- Strategic petroleum reserves must be expanded.

c) Rethinking Trade Strategy

- India has recently focused on bilateral FTAs (Japan, UAE, ASEAN), hoping to diversify trade routes.
- But many of these agreements have tilted the trade balance against India.
- A more coherent industrial + trade policy is necessary to support exports and reduce vulnerability to import-heavy sectors.

5. Why Monetary Stabilisation Alone Won't Work

Even with:

- \$693 billion in comfortable forex reserves
- Very low inflation, allowing RBI space to tolerate depreciation

the structural challenge remains: As long as India depends heavily on imported oil, the rupee will remain vulnerable to global energy prices and dollar strength.

Conclusion

Daily News Analysis

The sharp rupee depreciation in 2024–25 reflects the limits of monetary interventions in the face of deep structural weaknesses — foremost among them India's overwhelming dependence on imported crude oil. For lasting currency stability, India must treat energy diversification, transport electrification, and coherent trade policy as national priorities. Reducing oil dependence is not merely an environmental or economic goal but a strategic imperative for strengthening India's external sector, stabilising the rupee, and safeguarding long-term macroeconomic sovereignty.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following factors:

1. Rising global crude oil prices
2. Higher U.S. interest rates
3. Widening Current Account Deficit
4. Increase in domestic inflation

How many of the above can directly lead to depreciation of the Indian rupee?

- A. Only two
- B. Only three
- C. All four
- D. Only one

Ans : c)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : "India's high dependence on crude oil imports is a fundamental source of rupee volatility." Discuss. **(150 words)**

Page 10 : GS 2 : International Relations

The U.S.–China relationship today defines the climate of global geopolitics — marked by mistrust, strategic anxiety, and technological rivalry. Yet both countries remain deeply interdependent. In this tense landscape, Hong Kong emerges as a symbolic and practical “middle space”, where dialogue is still possible even as political positions harden. The sixth China–United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF) Forum (2025) used Hong Kong as a vantage point to rethink the tools needed to navigate today’s fractured global order. For India, these discussions offer significant lessons for maintaining strategic autonomy in a complex, multipolar world.

How to navigate a complex global paradigm

In the tense relationship between the United States and China, Hong Kong emerges as a middle space — a vantage point from which to imagine a way forward. The city's unique position offers a metaphorical middle ground for dialogue, emphasising the need for new frameworks to navigate today's complex rivalries



A city of multitudes: The Hong Kong skyline in 2023, reverts

WORLD INSIGHT
Nirupama Rao

In November 17 and 18, 2025, Hong Kong hosted the sixth meeting of the China–United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), titled “Circles for Peace”. Even though the U.S. and China remain locked in a tense, mistrustful relationship, they are also tied together more tightly than either side likes to admit. Here, Hong Kong, which has always lived between worlds, offers an uneasy middle space; a vantage point from which to imagine a way forward.

Complex rivalries
The discussions at the sixth U.S.–China Hong Kong Forum showed that trust had thinned, and that both the U.S. and China now operate as if expecting sudden shocks. Participants spoke with candour, and with a sense of fatigue. Old frameworks such as engagement, “guardrails”, and managed competition no longer felt adequate for today’s complex rivalry.

A persistent theme was the shrinking room for manoeuvre. Strategic anxieties that once belonged to specialists have entered the public sphere, shaping domestic politics and narrowing the range of acceptable positions. It has also seeped into the human dimension of the relationship. American student members in China are far below pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels, and Chinese student enrolments in the U.S., once well above these levels, have also declined. The deeper loss is familiarity — younger generations are encountering each other through narratives shaped by fear rather than through lived experience. Even though presidents of both the nations anchor the relationship, personality-driven diplomacy is not enough in today’s world.

Further, technology, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) were the biggest topics of conversations. It was observed that AI now resembles an international public good — too consequential to be monopolised or managed by any single country. A credible governance regime, participants said, must rest on equity, transparency and accountability. This, however, brought up broader concerns about the overlap between civilian innovation and defence applications, especially in parts of the private sector. There would be an eventual need for an international governance mechanism for AI, and possibly for space (“the galaxy”) as well. For if competition moves beyond the earth, who determines the rules?

The wider diplomatic climate also featured in the discussions, with the Taiwan question being a key issue. China argued that the discussion had become overwhelmingly militarised, and warned that American policy appeared to be drifting towards what Beijing views as a “one China, one Taiwan” (a position which advocates for the independence of Taiwan posture. New mechanisms and a new vocabulary are needed to deal with the issue before it hardens into confrontation by default. One question discussed was whether the U.S. and China are prepared for another EP-3 incident (in 2001) — a accidental collision at sea or in the air that could escalate before political systems can respond. The region needs a crisis-prevention mechanism insulated from political wrangling.

Singapore’s Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen offered the broadest frame. He described this period as a “dialectic moment”, where competing pressures reshape the global order but outcomes remain uncertain. The U.S., Europe and China will inevitably influence the emerging structure, he said, but the rest of the world should not allow the global commons to become collateral damage in major-power rivalry. The world does not need another hegemon. It needs powers

Hong Kong’s future depends on preserving its cosmopolitan function — its connectivity, and cultural hybridity that allow ideas to cross borders even when politics cannot

capable of co-organising the future.

Hong Kong’s role
Throughout the forum, Hong Kong was in focus. While the city’s limited geography stands out as a metaphor for the wider planetary condition, it is also becoming more China-centric, even as it tries to remain globally fluent. Its future depends on preserving its cosmopolitan function — its transparency, connectivity, and cultural hybridity that allow ideas to cross borders even when politics cannot. Hong Kong reminds one that the world’s middle spaces still matter, revealing pathways that pure geopolitics often miss.

People-to-people ties emerged as a gentle theme of hope in the meeting. Participants noted that official relations may be strained, but human contact remains the bulwark that prevents larger relationships from capitulating.

Hong Kong, despite the pressures of recent years, continues to make such encounters possible.

Lessons for India
The conversation in the forum were a reminder that great-power relations may determine the climate of the world, but the weather is shaped by everyone else. India cannot control the forces buffeting the U.S.–China relationship, but can decide how to navigate them, and how to ensure that its own future is not written by default. Rigid binaries are unsustainable. India’s task is not to imitate U.S. rhetoric nor to accept Chinese narratives at face value. It is to build domestic strength — technological, economic and institutional — to navigate a

fractured world without losing strategic autonomy. The forum’s emphasis on youth, cultural ties and the social contract around technology offered reminders that relationships are not made or unmade by summits alone. They are shaped by steady habits of engagement.

The shape of a new order
The clearest insight from the forum was that the U.S.–China relationship will not be restored to its old shape. The political atmospherics will remain turbulent. But the alternative to managed rivalry is not victory; it is a world of cascading risks — climate stress, pandemics, fragile supply chains, and polarised societies.

One participant put it simply: this was “A story we have to write together”. The phrasing carries weight. It shifts the conversation from competition to stewardship, from ideology to survival. The next order, if it emerges at all, will depend less on grand bargains and more on practical cooperation on energy, health, finance, and AI governance.

As the forum ended and one stepped out into the evening, the view from the conference venue stayed, of a South China Sea almost motionless, and meditative, in quiet contrast to the anxieties that shape the region — a reminder of how places, like people, survive by embracing complexity and allowing themselves room to rethink. The U.S. and China will continue to compete, sometimes fiercely. The future needs steady hands to shape it.

India has its own long arc with China, marked by caution and correction. Yet, in this moment of global uncertainty, the challenge for all three countries is the same: to choose responsibility over reflex, and to widen the narrow spaces where dialogue is still possible.

Hong Kong, in its imperfect, resilient way, showed that those spaces still exist.

Nirupama Rao is Foreign Secretary (retired) and Founder-Trustee, The South Asian Symposium Foundation.

THE GIST

▼ The discussions at the sixth U.S.–China Hong Kong Forum showed that trust had thinned, and that both the U.S. and China now operate as if expecting sudden shocks.

▼ Hong Kong reminds one that the world’s middle spaces still matter, revealing pathways that pure geopolitics often miss.

▼ The clearest insight from the forum was that the U.S.–China relationship will not be restored to its old shape. The political atmospherics will remain turbulent.

Key Analysis

1. A New Era of Complex Rivalries

The Hong Kong forum revealed fundamental shifts in the U.S.–China dynamic:

- Old frameworks—engagement, guardrails, managed competition—no longer suffice.

Daily News Analysis

- Both powers operate as if anticipating sudden shocks across military, technological, and economic domains.
- Trust deficits are deepening.
- Domestic politics in both countries have narrowed the space for nuance or compromise.

This has spilled over into public perceptions, shrinking people-to-people links and reducing academic exchanges. Future generations may know each other through narratives of fear rather than lived experience.

2. Technology & AI: The New Frontline

AI dominated the forum's discussions:

- AI now resembles an international public good — too consequential to be controlled by one state.
- Governance must rest on equity, transparency, and accountability.
- Concerns grow about civil–military overlap in AI, especially in the private tech sector.
- Participants highlighted the need for:
 - Global AI governance mechanisms
 - Rules for space and satellite competition

The central fear: without agreements, competition could cross borders, oceans, and eventually enter space ("the galaxy") without any rules to govern it.

3. Taiwan, Crises, and the Risk of Accidents

- The Taiwan issue remains a flashpoint. China worries that U.S. policy is edging toward a "one China, one Taiwan" stance.
- Forum participants revisited past crises such as the 2001 EP-3 collision, warning that another accident—at sea or in the air—could escalate faster than political systems can manage.
- A crisis-prevention mechanism insulated from political swings is urgently needed.

4. A "Dialectic Moment" in World Order

Singapore's former Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen framed the moment as dialectical — where competing pressures reshape the global order, but outcomes remain uncertain.

Key takeaways:

- No nation (not even the U.S. or China) should aspire to be the next hegemon.
- The world needs co-organisers of the future, not dominant powers.

Daily News Analysis

- Middle spaces like Hong Kong show how cosmopolitan, connected, and transparent platforms can facilitate dialogue even amid rivalry.

5. Hong Kong's Role: A Liminal Space in a Polarised World

Despite a China-centric tilt, Hong Kong's value lies in:

- Its cultural hybridity
- Its ability to connect divergent systems
- Its openness to ideas that cannot move formally through diplomatic channels

It stands as a metaphor for the global condition — countries caught between rival blocs, seeking pathways that geopolitics often obscures.

People-to-people links, even if modest, remain a source of hope, anchoring stability when official channels falter.

6. Lessons for India

The U.S.–China equation shapes the global climate, but India must choose how to navigate the storm.

a) Preserve Strategic Autonomy

India should neither echo U.S. rhetoric nor accept Chinese narratives uncritically. Instead, it must strengthen:

- Domestic technological capacity
- Economic resilience
- Institutional strength

b) Avoid rigid binaries

The world is not bipolar; it is fragmented and fluid. India must stay flexible.

c) Engagement beyond geopolitics

Youth exchanges, cultural diplomacy, and a robust social contract around technology matter as much as summits.

d) Prepare for cascading risks

If U.S.–China rivalry deepens, global governance will weaken—impacting:

- Climate negotiations
- Supply chain stability

- Pandemic response
- AI and space rules

India must anticipate these systemic risks and hedge accordingly.

Conclusion

The U.S.–China relationship will not return to earlier patterns of stable engagement; turbulence is the new normal. Yet the alternative to managed rivalry is not victory—it is a world of compounding, cascading risks, from climate disasters to technological chaos. The Hong Kong forum underscored that the next world order will be shaped less by grand strategies and more by practical cooperation on shared global challenges.

For India, the challenge is clear: preserve strategic autonomy, invest in national capabilities, and occupy its own “middle spaces” in global diplomacy. The future will require responsibility, imagination, and steady hands — and above all, the willingness to create new vocabularies for dialogue in an increasingly complex world.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements:

1. RBI conducts dollar/rupee buy-sell swap auctions primarily to inject long-term rupee liquidity.
2. India's foreign exchange reserve in 2025 is below \$600 billion.
3. Crude oil imports account for over 20% of India's total imports.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 2 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans :

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Monetary policy has limited space in stabilising the rupee under external stress.” Explain in the context of India's managed floating exchange rate regime. **(150 Words)**

GS. Paper 3 Environment

UPSC Mains Practice Question : COP30 attempted to shift global climate negotiations from "targets" to "implementation". Discuss the significance of this shift in the context of the Paris Agreement. (250 words)

Context :

The 30th Conference of Parties (COP30) at Belém, Brazil, came at a pivotal moment — a decade after the Paris Agreement and in a year when global temperatures breached the 1.5°C threshold for the first time. Marked by the symbolism of the Amazon rainforest, COP30 attempted to shift global climate discourse from negotiation to implementation, emphasizing adaptation, just transitions and renewed multilateralism.

Background: Why COP30 Was Significant

- 10 years since Paris (2015–2025) — time for a stocktake of achievements and failures.
- 1.5°C breach in 2024 — signalling escalating urgency.
- Deep geopolitical divides remained, with developed nations pushing fossil-fuel phase-out timelines, while developing and petro-states demanded finance and flexibility.
- U.S. absence weakened the developed-country bargaining coalition.

Key Outcomes and Thematic Shifts at COP30

1. Shift from Targets to Implementation

The Brazilian Presidency insisted that global climate politics must move beyond high-level commitments.

"Mutirão" — a Brazilian idea of collective mobilisation — was highlighted to revive trust in multilateralism.

This shift meant:

- More emphasis on operationalising finance (for adaptation, transition, and resilience).
- Greater push to put national climate actions on track, rather than merely announcing long-term intentions.

Fighting the fire

COP30 sought to change the narrative by focusing on 'implementation'

The 30th edition of the Conference of Parties (COP) concluded in Belém, Brazil, a city chosen for its proximity to the Amazon rainforest. The symbolism was high this year. It is 10 years since the Paris Agreement was signed by 195 countries — a pact to ensure that the globe did not heat up beyond 2°C of pre-industrial times and, as far as possible, contain it to 1.5°C. That was a goal easier stated than done; 2024 ended up being the first time that temperatures breached the 1.5°C territory though it will require several more such transgressions for 1.5°C to be the 'new normal'. In all the years since, COPs have been about systematically getting all countries to move on the path of restructuring their economies away from their fossil-fuel hardwiring; apportioning responsibility — and finance — in ways to actualise these goals, and finally work towards addressing the damage that climate change had already done to societies, livelihoods and ecologies. While there has been success, in that most countries — even the United States — recognise that renewables are the future of energy, it has been challenging for countries to execute the transformation while also growing their economies and keeping their competitive edges sharp. This has led to the formation of the two broad blocs — one led by developed countries and affiliated allies that has pushed for hard targets and road maps to phase out fossil fuels, and the other by developing countries or petro-states who reject such prescription and demand more money and action from the developed countries.

The Brazil COP sought to bring a change in the narrative by stressing 'implementation', and reminding the world that multilateralism and 'mutirão' (coming together) were indispensable to the Paris Agreement. While the absence of the U.S. weakened the developed country blocs, this year saw greater thrust on topics such as 'adaptation' and 'just transition' — concepts that acknowledge the everyday effects of climate change and stress practical preparatory steps and finance pledges to help countries burnish climate defences. India, which has been one of the prominent voices for developing country coalitions, was welcoming of the Brazil Presidency's acknowledgement of concerns but did not declare its updated Nationally Determined Contributions (actions on adopting clean energy). The COP's negotiation process often leaves one wondering about the net gains made, given that pollution, deforestation and climate denialism seem more voluble and visible but, as it is often said, this is humanity's only opportunity to mitigate a cataclysm of its making.

2. Increased Focus on Adaptation

Historically, climate negotiations have been mitigation-heavy. COP30 recalibrated focus toward climate adaptation, acknowledging:

- Climate change is already disrupting lives, livelihoods, agriculture, water cycles and ecosystems.
- Countries require support for climate-resilient infrastructure, early-warning systems, coastal protection, etc.
- Developing countries demanded scaled-up adaptation finance, as existing flows are far below needs.

3. Just Transition Took Centre Stage

"Just transition" recognises that:

- Shifting away from fossil fuels has social and economic costs, especially for developing economies.
- Workers, communities and industries dependent on coal, oil and gas need planned rehabilitation.
- COP30 discussions acknowledged that climate responsibility must be balanced against developmental imperatives.

This reintroduced fairness into global climate politics.

4. Continued Divide on Fossil-Fuel Phase-Out

Two broad blocs remained:

(A) Developed Nations

- Advocated sharper, verifiable timelines for fossil-fuel phase-out.
- Yet lacked credibility because:
 - Many still invest heavily in natural gas exploration.
 - Climate finance pledges remain under-fulfilled.

(B) Developing Countries & Petro-States

- Argued that forced phase-outs threaten economic security.
- Insisted on:
 - Higher grants and low-cost finance.
 - Recognition of differentiated responsibilities.

COP30 did not produce a hard global "fossil phase-out" timeline, revealing persistent fault lines.

India's Position at COP30

1. Supportive of Brazil's Narrative

India welcomed the implementation-first agenda, aligning with its long-standing position on:

- Climate justice
- Equity and CBDR (Common but Differentiated Responsibilities)
- Demand for predictable finance

2. No Updated NDC Declaration

India did not announce its next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Reasons include:

- Lack of clarity on future climate finance.
- Domestic industrial transition still evolving.
- Desire to negotiate from a stronger economic position.

3. Strong Voice for Developing Country Coalitions

India reiterated:

- That developing countries cannot compromise on growth.
- That global mitigation efforts must be accompanied by technology transfer, capacity support and climate funding.

Broader Issues Highlighted at COP30

1. Climate Finance Deficit

- \$100 billion/year target still unmet.
- Adaptation finance < 25% of total climate finance.
- Loss and Damage Fund remains severely under-capitalised.

2. Weak Multilateralism

- Absence of the U.S. resembled the void seen during earlier COPs.
- Rising geopolitical tensions risk turning climate cooperation into competition.

3. On-Ground Realities Worsening

- Pollution and deforestation persist globally.
- Extreme weather events are more frequent.
- Climate denialism and political pushback resurface in several countries.

Challenges Ahead

- Closing the ambition–implementation gap: Nations over-promise but under-deliver.
- Ensuring fairness: Developed countries' historical emissions burden remains inadequately addressed.
- Financing low-carbon transitions: Global South requires trillions, not billions.
- Transitioning without economic shocks: Particularly for coal- and oil-dependent regions.

Way Forward

- Rebuilding trust in climate finance through transparent, verifiable flows.
- Deepening North–South cooperation around technology sharing (green hydrogen, batteries, carbon capture).
- Strengthening adaptation strategies at national and local levels.
- Reforming the COP process to ensure accountability of pledges and timelines.

- Empowering indigenous and forest communities — especially relevant in Amazon nations.

Conclusion

COP30 in Brazil signalled a necessary shift in global climate politics: from aspirational commitments to hard-grounded implementation. While divides persist and climate challenges intensify, the renewed emphasis on adaptation, just transition and multilateral cooperation offers a realistic pathway forward. With the 1.5°C threshold already breached, this decade represents humanity's narrow window to avert irreversible ecological upheaval — making sustained, collective and equitable action more urgent than ever.

