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# **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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## **Index**

- 1. India believed that Panchsheel pact settled border with China, says CDS**
- 2. CJI's office received 8,630 complaints against judges from 2016 to 2025: Minister**
- 3. New seats of governance meant to meet people's aspirations: PM**
- 4. India tested, from U.S. sanctions to one-sided trade deal**
- 5. IAF, Royal Thai Air Force hold air combat training exercise**
- 6. Telecom service providers do not own spectrum: SC**

# 1. India believed that Panchsheel pact settled border with China, says CDS

## Why in the News?

India's Chief of Defence Staff Anil Chauhan recently stated that India believed the 1954 Panchsheel Agreement had effectively settled the northern border with China, while China viewed the agreement as limited to trade and pilgrimage. His remarks, made at the inauguration of the Bharat Himalayan International Strategic March (BHISM), have revived debate on the historical roots of the India–China boundary dispute and the strategic importance of the Himalayan frontier.



## Background

The Panchsheel Agreement of 1954, formally titled the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India, was signed between India and the People's Republic of China. It articulated the Five Principles of Peaceful **Coexistence**:

- Mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty
- Mutual non-aggression
- Mutual non-interference in internal affairs
- Equality and mutual benefit
- Peaceful coexistence

After China consolidated control over Tibet in 1950, India lost the buffer that historically existed between British India and Tibet. By 1954, India formally recognised Tibet as part of China and gave up its extraterritorial rights inherited from the colonial era.

India assumed that by recognising Chinese sovereignty over Tibet and specifying six Himalayan passes for trade and pilgrimage (Shipki La, Mana, Niti, Kungri Bingri, Darma, Lipulekh), the border had implicit legitimacy. However, China never accepted that these provisions settled the boundary question. This mismatch in expectations later contributed to escalating tensions culminating in the Sino-Indian War of 1962.

## Features

### Assumption Gap in Border Legitimacy

- India believed Panchsheel indirectly validated existing frontier understandings, such as the McMahon Line in the eastern sector and its claims in Ladakh. China viewed the agreement as administrative and commercial rather than territorial.

### Collapse of the Tibetan Buffer

- The disappearance of Tibet as a strategic buffer transformed a civilisational frontier into a hard geopolitical boundary, intensifying security dilemmas.

### Infrastructure and Strategic Reorientation

- Modern India now treats the Himalayan frontier as a primary defence theatre, investing heavily in roads, airstrips, tunnels, and logistics networks.

### Emergence of a Himalayan Policy Lens

- Issues like climate change, glacier melt, river systems, disaster preparedness, and military logistics now require integrated Himalayan planning.

### Institutional Response

- The creation of forums like BHISM signals a move toward knowledge-driven strategic policy for the Himalayas.

## Challenges

### Unresolved Boundary Dispute

- The absence of a mutually accepted border continues to generate military friction along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

### Strategic Distrust

- Historical misperceptions dating back to Panchsheel deepen present-day suspicion.

### Geography

- Extreme terrain complicates infrastructure, logistics, and civilian development.

### Climate Vulnerability

- Glacier retreat, floods, and landslides threaten both human security and military installations.

### Civil–Military Balance

- Border development must balance defence needs with ecological sustainability and local livelihoods.

## Way Forward

### Historical Realism in Diplomacy

- India must base negotiations on documented boundary history, not assumptions of implied settlement.

### Integrated Himalayan Doctrine

- Develop a unified Himalayan strategy linking defence, ecology, water security, and disaster management.

### **Infrastructure with Sustainability**

- Accelerate border infrastructure while adopting green engineering standards.

### **Strategic Dialogue Mechanisms**

- Strengthen military and diplomatic communication channels with China to avoid escalation.

### **Knowledge Ecosystem**

- Support think tanks like BHISM to generate region-specific policy inputs.

### **Local Community Integration**

- Empower border communities as stakeholders in national security.

### **Conclusion**

The CDS's remarks underline a crucial lesson: strategic misunderstandings can echo across decades. India's assumption that Panchsheel settled the border reveals how diplomatic optimism once overshadowed hard geopolitical realities. Today, the Himalayas are no longer a distant frontier but the centre of India's security, environmental, and geopolitical future.

## **2. CJI's office received 8,630 complaints against judges from 2016 to 2025: Minister**

### **Why in the News?**

The Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal informed the Lok Sabha that the office of the Supreme Court of India received 8,630 complaints against sitting judges between 2016 and 2025. The disclosure, made in response to a parliamentary question, has reignited debate over judicial accountability, transparency, and the adequacy of the existing in-house complaint mechanism for the higher judiciary.

### **Background**

India's higher judiciary - the Supreme Court and High Courts - enjoys constitutional independence under the doctrine of separation of powers. Judges of the higher judiciary are removed only through impeachment under **Articles 124 and 217** of the Constitution, making accountability mechanisms deliberately stringent to protect judicial independence. To address complaints of corruption or misconduct, the judiciary operates an "in-house procedure" evolved through internal resolutions rather than a statutory law. Under this mechanism:

- Complaints are handled by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) or the respective High Court Chief Justices
- Proceedings are confidential
- No public database or transparent reporting structure exists
- Outcomes are rarely disclosed

This system attempts to balance independence with discipline but has long been criticised for opacity.

### **Features of the Issue**

#### **Volume of Complaints**

- The data reveal a steady inflow of complaints, peaking at over 1,000 per year in several recent years, suggesting growing public willingness to report misconduct.

### Lack of Action Transparency

- The Minister did not clarify how many complaints led to inquiry, dismissal, or disciplinary action, raising concerns over accountability gaps.

## Court scrutiny

Under the judiciary's in-house mechanism, complaints against judges are handled internally by the CJI and Chief Justices of the High Courts, with no public disclosure on outcomes



### Non-statutory Mechanism

- The in-house procedure lacks statutory backing, formal timelines, or mandatory disclosure norms.

### Executive–Judiciary Boundary

- Any attempt by the executive to regulate judicial discipline risks being seen as interference with judicial independence.

### Public Trust Dimension

- Perception of secrecy can weaken institutional legitimacy even if internal scrutiny is rigorous.

## Challenges

### Transparency vs Independence

- Too much secrecy erodes trust; too much exposure risks politicising the judiciary.

### Absence of Statutory Framework

- India still lacks a comprehensive judicial accountability law after the failure of past reform attempts like the Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill.

### **Institutional Self-Regulation Limits**

- Peer review may appear biased or protective.

### **No Public Reporting System**

- Citizens cannot track complaint outcomes.

### **Fear of Frivolous Complaints**

- Motivated allegations may target judges.

## **Way Forward**

### **Statutory Judicial Complaints Authority**

- Create an independent, constitutionally compliant oversight body insulated from executive control.

### **Transparent Reporting**

- Annual anonymised public reports on the number, type, and disposal of complaints.

### **Clear Timelines**

- Time-bound inquiry procedures to prevent indefinite pendency.

### **Whistleblower Protection**

- Safeguards for complainants acting in good faith.

### **Judicial Ethics Charter**

- Codified conduct standards with public awareness.

### **Parliamentary–Judicial Dialogue**

- Structured consultation to design reforms without undermining the separation of powers.

## **Conclusion**

The revelation of 8,630 complaints is not merely a statistic - it highlights the tension between judicial independence and democratic accountability. A mature constitutional democracy must protect judges from political pressure while ensuring credible mechanisms to address misconduct. Strengthening transparency, without compromising autonomy, is essential to preserving public faith in the judiciary - the final guardian of constitutional rights.

## **3. New seats of governance meant to meet people's aspirations: PM**

### **Why in the News?**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the new Prime Minister's Office complex -named Seva Teerth - and two Central Secretariat buildings called Kartavya Bhavan 1 and 2 in New Delhi. The government described them as symbols of citizen-centric governance and milestones in India's

journey toward Viksit Bharat, while framing the move as a departure from colonial-era administrative architecture.

## Background

The inauguration is part of the larger Central Vista Redevelopment Project - a massive redesign of India's administrative heart in New Delhi. The original North Block and South Block were constructed during British rule after the capital shifted from Kolkata to Delhi in 1912. Designed to reflect imperial authority, these buildings became symbols of colonial governance. Post-independence, India continued to use these spaces despite the rapid expansion of the administrative machinery. Over time, space shortages, structural ageing, and technological limitations made modernisation necessary.

### The new complexes aim to:

- Consolidate ministries
- Improve administrative efficiency
- Provide modern infrastructure
- Reflect indigenous architectural aesthetics
- Symbolically mark a post-colonial identity shift

The architecture incorporates sandstone, Buddhist stupa-inspired domes, and motifs drawn from Chalukyan and Hoysala temple traditions.



## Key Features

### Heritage vs Modernisation Debate

- Critics argue redevelopment risks erasing historical urban character.

### Cost and Public Spending Concerns

- Questions arise about prioritisation during socio-economic challenges.

### Environmental Impact

- Large-scale construction in central Delhi raises ecological concerns.

### **Political Polarisation**

- Project framed differently by supporters and opposition.

### **Administrative Transition Risks**

- Relocation of ministries may cause short-term disruption.

### **Way Forward**

#### **Transparent Cost Communication**

- Regular public disclosures on expenditure and benefits.

#### **Heritage Integration**

- Preserve and repurpose colonial-era structures as living history.

#### **Sustainable Governance Architecture**

- Adopt green building standards and long-term urban planning.

#### **Citizen Engagement**

- Frame redevelopment as public infrastructure, not elite space.

#### **Institutional Continuity**

- Ensure smooth administrative migration to prevent governance slowdowns.

### **Conclusion**

The inauguration of Seva Teerth and Kartavya Bhavan marks more than a physical relocation of offices - it represents a political and symbolic reimagining of India's governance spaces. Whether viewed as modernisation, decolonisation, or contested urban redesign, the project underscores a key question for contemporary India: how should a post-colonial democracy design the spaces from which it governs? The answer will shape not only architecture but the narrative of state power, identity, and citizen engagement in the decades ahead.

## **4. India tested, from U.S. sanctions to one-sided trade deal**

### **Why in the News?**

India and the United States have announced a framework for an interim bilateral trade agreement amid reports that Washington linked tariff relief to India's energy and foreign policy choices - especially Russian oil imports. The debate has triggered concerns over whether economic negotiations are spilling into strategic autonomy, raising questions about India's long-standing doctrine of multi-alignment.

### **Background**

India-U.S. relations have deepened over the past two decades across defence, technology, and trade. However, economic ties have often been punctuated by tariff disputes and sanctions threats. The current episode follows earlier tensions:

- U.S. sanctions pressure on India over Iranian and Venezuelan oil (2019)

- Tariff disputes under protectionist trade measures
- Strategic friction over Russia after the Ukraine conflict

India traditionally follows strategic autonomy - maintaining independent decision-making while engaging multiple power centres, including Russia, the U.S., Europe, and the Global South. Cheap energy imports from Russia became critical after global oil price shocks, making energy security central to India's economic stability.

The interim trade framework reportedly coincides with U.S. executive measures that condition tariff relief on India aligning more closely with Washington's geopolitical priorities.

## Features

### Trade-Security Linkage

- Economic concessions appear tied to foreign policy alignment, blurring lines between commerce and geopolitics.

### Energy Security Trade-off

- Reducing Russian oil imports may raise domestic energy costs and inflation risks.

### Market Access Commitments

- Large-scale promises to buy American goods could distort India's trade balance and crowd out other partners.

### Diplomatic Signalling

- India's choices will be closely watched by the Global South and BRICS partners.

### Precedent Setting

- If accepted, this model could shape future U.S. demands in defence and strategic agreements.



## Challenges

### Strategic Autonomy Erosion

- Perception that India's foreign policy is externally constrained.

### **Economic Vulnerability**

- Higher oil prices can worsen inflation and fiscal pressure.

### **Credibility Risk**

- Partners may question India's reliability in long-term trade commitments.

### **Global South Leadership**

- India risks weakening its voice as an advocate of multipolarity.

### **China Factor**

- Vacated strategic space in Iran or Russia may be filled by China.

### **Way Forward**

#### **Transparent Negotiation Framework**

- Parliamentary scrutiny and public disclosure of trade terms.

#### **Diversified Energy Basket**

- Expand renewables, Middle East sourcing, and strategic reserves.

#### **Issue Separation Doctrine**

- Keep trade negotiations institutionally distinct from security alignment.

#### **Multi-Vector Diplomacy**

- Balance ties with the U.S., Russia, the EU, and the Global South simultaneously.

#### **Strategic Communication**

- Clearly articulate India's red lines to international partners.

#### **Domestic Economic Shielding**

- Strengthen manufacturing competitiveness to reduce tariff vulnerability.

### **Conclusion**

India stands at a delicate crossroads where economic pragmatism intersects with geopolitical identity. A trade agreement with the United States can boost growth, but if it narrows India's diplomatic flexibility, the long-term costs may outweigh short-term gains. The true test is not whether India trades more with America, but whether it can do so without trading away the strategic autonomy that has anchored its global posture since independence.

## **5. IAF, Royal Thai Air Force hold air combat training exercise**

### **Why in the News?**

The Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Royal Thai Air Force conducted a bilateral air combat training exercise in the Indian Ocean Region from February 9–12. The exercise showcased advanced fighter interoperability and India's long-range deployment capability using aerial refuelling, reinforcing defence ties between India and Thailand.

## **Background**

### **Air Combat Simulation**

- Focus on beyond-visual-range engagement, defensive manoeuvres, and coordinated tactics.

### **Extended Maritime Operations**

- Aerial refuelling allowed a sustained presence over the Indian Ocean Region.

### **Interoperability Training**

- Pilots practised joint communication protocols and mission coordination.

### **Strategic Signalling**

- Demonstrates India's operational readiness in the Indo-Pacific.

### **Confidence Building**

- Strengthens defence diplomacy and mutual trust.



## **Challenges**

### **Complex Interoperability**

- Different aircraft systems and doctrines require constant adaptation.

### **Regional Security Sensitivities**

- Military exercises can be viewed cautiously by other regional actors.

### **Logistics and Sustainment**

- Long-range deployments demand high operational efficiency.

### **Technology Integration**

- Data-sharing compatibility remains a challenge.

## **Way Forward**

## **Regularised Joint Exercises**

- Institutionalise annual or rotational air drills.

## **Tri-Service Integration**

- Link air exercises with naval and coast guard operations.

## **Defence Technology Cooperation**

- Explore joint maintenance, training simulators, and avionics collaboration.

## **Indo-Pacific Security Architecture**

- Embed exercises within broader multilateral frameworks.

## **Humanitarian Coordination**

- Expand drills to include disaster relief and search-and-rescue missions.

## **Conclusion**

The India–Thailand air combat exercise is more than a tactical drill - it reflects the maturing strategic partnership between two Indo-Pacific democracies. By demonstrating long-range reach and interoperability, both air forces signal readiness to cooperate in securing the Indian Ocean commons. As regional geopolitics grows more complex, such partnerships will be essential to balancing deterrence, diplomacy, and stability.

## **6. Telecom service providers do not own spectrum: SC**

### **Why in the News?**

The Supreme Court of India has ruled that telecom service providers do not own spectrum and cannot treat it as an asset during insolvency or liquidation under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code. The Court held that spectrum is a scarce natural resource owned by the people of India, with legal title vested exclusively in the Union government.

### **Background**

Telecom spectrum refers to radio frequencies used for wireless communication - mobile networks, broadcasting, and data transmission. Because it is finite and essential for public communication, Indian constitutional jurisprudence treats the spectrum as a public trust resource. This principle gained prominence after the 2G spectrum case (2012), where the Supreme Court held that natural resources must be allocated transparently and fairly to serve the public good.

Under India's telecom regime:

- Spectrum remains government property
- Companies receive licences to use it
- Use is conditional and revocable
- Fees are regulatory, not commercial purchase payments

### **Features**

#### **Spectrum is Not Corporate Property**

- Licensees gain only a limited right to use, not ownership.

#### **Public Trust Doctrine**

- The Union holds spectrum in trust for citizens.

### **IBC Cannot Override Telecom Law**

- The insolvency framework cannot rewrite telecom regulatory rights.

### **Sovereign vs Commercial Relationship**

- Dues owed to the government are regulatory obligations, not operational debts.

### **Limited Privilege Principle**

- Licences are conditional, revocable, and subject to public interest.



## **Challenges**

### **Telecom Sector Financial Stress**

- Companies under insolvency may find restructuring harder.

### **Investor Confidence**

- Uncertainty over asset treatment may affect lending.

### **Regulatory Complexity**

- Overlap between insolvency law and sectoral regulation.

### **Spectrum Efficiency**

- Financially weak operators may underutilise assigned spectrum.

### **Legal Precedent Ripple Effect**

- May influence the treatment of other licensed natural resources.

## **Way Forward**

### **Clear Regulatory–IBC Interface**

- Create statutory clarity on how sectoral assets are handled.

## **Telecom Insolvency Framework**

- Design sector-specific restructuring guidelines.

## **Financial Safeguards**

- Stronger risk assessment for lenders financing spectrum-based firms.

## **Efficient Spectrum Reallocation**

- Mechanisms to quickly reassign unused spectrum.

## **Strengthen Regulatory Coordination**

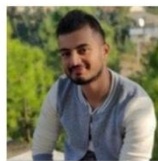
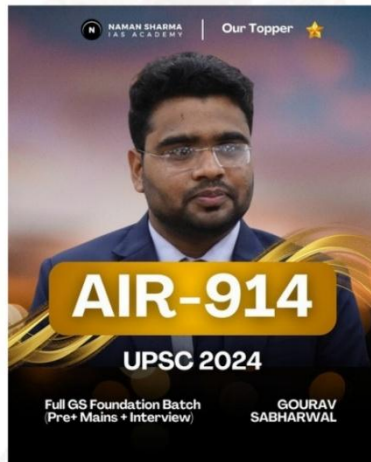
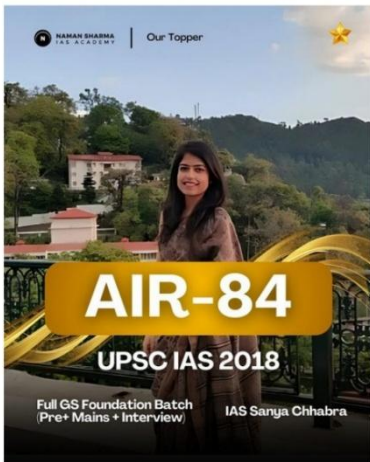
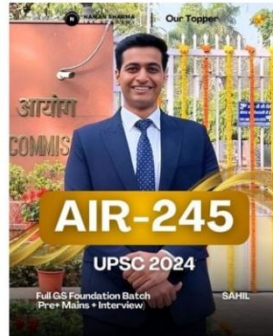
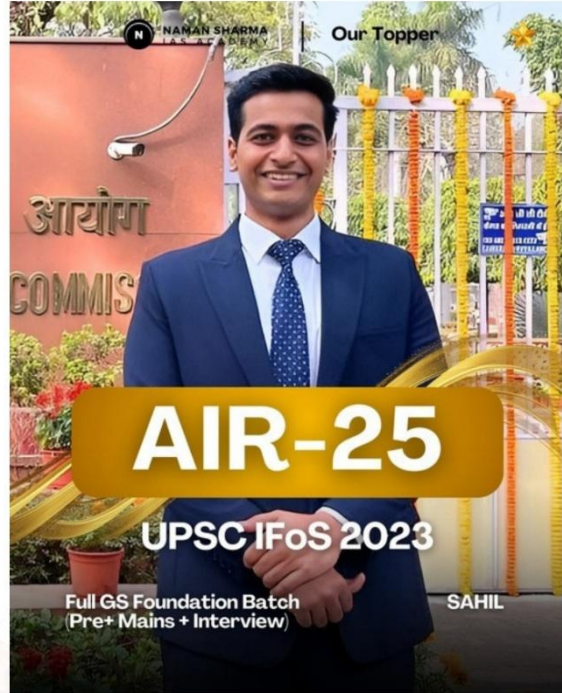
- Better DoT–IBC institutional communication.

## **Conclusion**

The judgment reinforces a foundational constitutional idea: natural resources are not commodities to be privately owned but public assets to be stewarded responsibly. While it protects the public trust doctrine, it also exposes tensions between financial restructuring and sectoral regulation. The challenge ahead is to design insolvency mechanisms that preserve public ownership of spectrum while ensuring the telecom sector remains competitive, investable, and technologically dynamic.



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