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BRICS IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD ORDER, A TEST OF RELEVANCE

- The **18th BRICS Summit**, held in New Delhi on September 12–13, 2026, demonstrated the grouping's ability to reconcile divergent interests through the unanimous adoption of the New Delhi Declaration.
- Under India's chairmanship, the summit reinforced strategic autonomy, **multipolarity** and **consensus-building**.
- However, institutional weaknesses, geopolitical rivalries and economic inequalities continue to limit BRICS' effectiveness.

The New Delhi Declaration: Major Achievements

- The declaration addressed **global governance**, trade, finance, energy, climate change, technology, health and agriculture.
- Its major objectives included:
 - Promoting local-currency trade and interoperable cross-border payment systems.
 - Implementing the BRICS Economic Partnership Strategy 2030 and the Global Value Chain Action Plan for 2026–2030.
 - Reforming the United Nations and international financial institutions to improve developing countries' representation.
 - Supporting de-escalation in West Asia and humanitarian access to Gaza.
 - Strengthening cooperation in artificial intelligence, food security and sustainable development.

The Message and the Approach

- **Reforming Global Governance**
 - Existing international institutions inadequately reflect contemporary economic and demographic realities.
 - India advocated reforms to the United Nations, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to provide emerging and developing economies with greater representation.

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- **Strategic Autonomy and Diplomatic Engagement**
 - India's approach reflected strategic autonomy and multi-alignment, allowing cooperation with competing powers without excessive dependence on any single country.
- **Artificial Intelligence and Sustainable Development**
 - The declaration recognised artificial intelligence (AI) as a driver of economic growth, improved public services and sustainable development.
 - It encouraged cooperation in computing resources, research, skills and innovation.

Implications for India

- The summit enhanced India's diplomatic visibility and demonstrated its ability to facilitate dialogue.
- Nevertheless, BRICS membership does not automatically guarantee economic benefits or political leverage.
- India should pursue a balanced foreign policy, combining engagement with BRICS, cooperation with Western economies and partnerships across the developing world.
- Its influence will ultimately depend on domestic economic strength, diplomatic credibility and effective international coalitions.

The Way Forward

- **Institutional reform:** Advance realistic proposals for more representative global governance.
- **Economic integration:** Strengthen local-currency trade, payment systems, investment and value chains.
- **Conflict management:** Develop consultation mechanisms to prevent bilateral disputes from obstructing cooperation.
- **South-South cooperation:** Deliver measurable benefits through healthcare, agriculture, renewable energy and technology.
- **Strategic autonomy:** Enable India to pursue national interests through diversified international partnerships.

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REWILDING THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD: A CRITICAL STEP, A LONG ROAD AHEAD

Recently, India achieved a conservation milestone — two captive-bred male Great Indian Bustards (GIBs) were released into the wild for the first time, at Desert National Park, near Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.

- The GIB is a large, ground-dwelling bird found in savannahs, grasslands, and deserts.
- Until the late 19th/early 20th century, it was spread across 11 states — from Haryana in the north to Tamil Nadu in the south, and Rajasthan in the west to Odisha in the east.
- **Causes of Decline**
 - Hunting and egg poaching.
 - Conversion of open habitats into croplands and mining areas.
 - Collisions with renewable energy power lines — the GIB's poor frontal vision and heavy body make it hard to detect or avoid overhead wires.
- **Population Collapse**
 - From an estimated 1,260–1,400 birds in the early 1970s, numbers have crashed to just around 150 today.
 - Of these, around 130 (± 20) are in Rajasthan — the rest scattered across Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh, facing local extinction risk.

Project GIB: The Conservation Breeding Effort

- A long-term bustard and lesser florican conservation project was launched by the Centre and Rajasthan government in 2012–13, expanded from 2014 with funding for a **conservation breeding programme**.
- From 2019, wild GIB eggs were collected from Desert National Park and nearby areas, artificially incubated at two centres — Sam and Ramdevra (Rajasthan) — and hand-reared.
- These hand-reared birds have since bred at the centres, producing 98 birds so far.

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- Of these: 2 released (Oct 4, 2026); 11 earmarked for future wild release; the rest remain in captivity for continued breeding.

Challenges to Long-Term Recovery

- **Scaling Beyond Rajasthan:** Similar rewilding efforts will be needed in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh — but only after habitat improvement.
- Experts noted that grassland restoration and protection outside Rajasthan is crucial for wider revival, with Gujarat likely to follow if the Rajasthan pilot succeeds.
- **The Grassland Protection Gap**
 - Unlike forests, **grasslands are not traditionally treated as “protected areas”** in public or policy perception, making them vulnerable to land-use conversion.
 - This also affects livelihoods of pastoralists and livestock-rearing communities.

Legal Safeguards and Persistent Threats

Demarcation of “priority areas” — 14,013 sq km in Rajasthan and 740 sq km in Gujarat.

Undergrounding of 80 km of power lines in Rajasthan, to be completed between 2027 and 2028.

- Creation of “powerline corridors” to accommodate re-routed overhead lines.
- **Remaining Threats**
 - Experts warn rewilding won’t be sustainable unless power lines are undergrounded soon.
 - Limestone mining threatens the open, flat terrain bustards need — the Supreme Court did not order specific anti-mining measures, and mining operations are proposed on the northern side of Desert National Park, near the release site itself.

Conclusion

The release of two captive-bred bustards marks a symbolic breakthrough, but survival of the species hinges on far more than breeding success — it depends on protecting grasslands long dismissed as “wastelands,” undergrounding power lines on schedule, and curbing mining in critical habitats.

Unless these systemic threats are addressed with the same urgency as captive breeding, rewilding risks becoming a short-lived experiment rather than a lasting recovery.

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THE RIGHT TO PROTEST: CONSTITUTIONAL FREEDOM, POLICE POWERS, AND LEGAL REMEDIES

The Constitutional Right to Protest

- The right to protest flows from **Article 19(1)(a)** and **19(1)(b)** of the Constitution:
 - Article 19(1)(a): Protects freedom of speech and expression.
 - Article 19(1)(b): Guarantees the right to assemble peacefully and without arms.
- However, neither right is absolute:
 - Article 19(2) permits restrictions on speech, including on grounds of public order.
 - Article 19(3) allows “reasonable restrictions” on peaceful assembly in the interest of public order.
- **Key Supreme Court Precedent:**
 - **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (2018):** The apex court held that holding peaceful demonstrations is a fundamental right, essential for citizens to air grievances.
 - The Court found that authorities had failed to adequately regulate demonstrations and permitted a system of prior permission, to be sought from the Police Commissioner or a delegated authority.

How the Permission System Works?

- Delhi Police guidelines for protests at Jantar Mantar require:
 - Applications submitted to the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), ordinarily at least 10 days before the event.
 - Late applications “may also be considered” depending on space availability and time for arrangements — the 10-day rule is not an absolute bar.
 - Applications assessed on a “first-come, first-serve” basis, reviewed by the Special Branch, traffic police, and New Delhi district police.
 - The DCP weighs whether the protest could obstruct traffic, endanger safety, or disturb public tranquillity.

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- Permission may be revoked for unforeseen reasons (VIP security, intelligence inputs), but reasons must be recorded and conveyed to organisers.
- Protests are capped at 1,000 people at Jantar Mantar; larger gatherings must shift to Ramlila Ground (capacity: 50,000).
- Experts noted that the permission mechanism is meant to be facilitative, not prohibitive.

Recourse When Permission Is Denied

- **Step 1 — Approach Police Again:** Organisers can seek reconsideration, respond to the stated reasons, or propose a smaller gathering, shorter duration, or alternative venue.
- **Step 2 — No Formal Appeal Exists:** The DCP's decision is "final and binding" under the standing order — there is no built-in appeal against refusal (as distinct from revocation, which requires recorded reasons).
- **Step 3 — Judicial Remedy:** If refusal appears arbitrary, unsupported by guidelines, or inconsistent with the right to peaceful assembly, organisers can approach the Delhi High Court under Article 226 of the Constitution.
- **Consequences of Defying Denial:** Protesting despite denial can attract **Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)** (formerly Section 188 IPC) — disobeying a lawful order by a public servant, inviting imprisonment or fine.
 - However, this must be read alongside the constitutional right to protest; the absence of a genuine alternative venue could be challenged as an unreasonable restriction.

Prohibitory Orders: A Separate Legal Track

- A prohibitory order is a magistrate's order barring specified activities (e.g., assembly of five or more persons) under **Section 163 of the BNSS** (earlier Section 144 CrPC).
- Remedies against such orders:
 - **Section 163(5):** An aggrieved person can apply to the issuing magistrate to rescind or alter the order.
 - **Section 163(7):** The magistrate must give the applicant an early opportunity to be heard; if rejected, reasons must be recorded in writing.

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LIVING PLANET REPORT 2026

- It is published biennially by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).
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 - It is a comprehensive study of trends in global biodiversity and the health of the planet.
 - This year it is the 16th edition of the report.
- It utilises the **Living Planet Index (LPI)** to track average trends in wildlife populations.
 - The LPI is a measure of the state of the **world's biological diversity** based on **population** trends of **vertebrate species** from terrestrial, **freshwater** and **marine habitats**.
 - It measures the **average rate of change in population size** across the species monitored.

Key Highlights of Living Planet Report 2026

- **Global Trend:** The average size of **monitored vertebrate populations** declined 73% over 52 years between 1970 and 2022.
- **Ecosystem-wise Decline:** The **strongest declines** were seen in **freshwater ecosystems** with average population sizes plunging 85%, followed by **terrestrial ecosystems**, at 69% and **marine ecosystems** at 59%.
- **Region wise decline:** At a regional level, the steepest declines since 1970 have been recorded in **Latin America** and the **Caribbean** (-95%), **Africa** (-80%), and **Asia and the Pacific** (-49%).
- **Recovery of Biodiversity:** The report highlights **recoveries in populations** of green turtles, bluefin tuna, tigers and southern African elephants,
 - The report **noted rise in global wild tiger numbers** between 2010 and 2025 — from 3,200 to around 5,700 individuals.
- **Causes of Wildlife Decline:** Habitat loss and degradation, overexploitation of resources, climate change, and impact of invasive species, pollution and disease are some of the dominant drivers of changes across ecosystems and wildlife populations.

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SAREX-2026



- It is a **multi-agency exercise** aim to strengthen **maritime safety and rescue operations** aligned with “India's 'SAGAR' and 'Mahasagar' visions.”

- It is being **conducted by the Indian Coast Guard**.
- **SAREX-2026 Theme:** “Leveraging Technology to Strengthen SAR Preparedness and Maritime Safety.”
- It had participants **from 30 countries**. Their participation facilitated exchange of **best practices, enhanced global interoperability** and reaffirmed India’s role as a dependable maritime Search and Rescue partner in the region.
- **Participating forces and Assets:** The assets deployed included Coast Guard ships, three Dornier aircraft, three **Advance Light Helicopters**, one **Chetak helicopter**, IAF C-130J and **Mi-17 aircraft**, two Indian Navy ships, along with civil and state resources and shore-based support units.

PLAN BEE SYSTEM



- It is an **innovative acoustic deterrent system** developed by the **Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR)**.

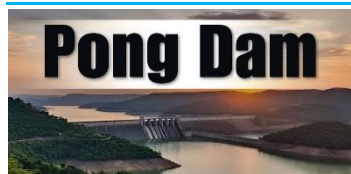
- It is developed to **prevent wild elephants** from straying onto railway tracks and being hit by trains.
- **Working:** The system uses **amplified honeybee sounds** to discourage elephants from approaching railway tracks.
- **Other measures:** The NFR has deployed an **AI-based Intrusion Detection System (IDS)** using **Distributed Acoustic System (DAS)** technology, which provides real-time alerts about elephant movement near railway tracks in vulnerable areas.

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Key Facts about Northeast Frontier Railway:

- It is headquartered at **Maligaon near Guwahati, Assam.**
- It operates across the **Northeastern states**, as well as **seven districts of West Bengal** and **five districts of north Bihar.**

KEY FACTS ABOUT PONG DAM



Pong Dam

- The Pong Dam, also known as the **Beas Dam**, is an **earth-fill embankment dam** constructed on the **river Beas** in the wetland of Shivalik hills in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh.
- The **construction** of the dam began in the year 1961 and was **completed** in 1974, and at that time it was known as the **tallest of its type in the country.**
- It was constructed for **generating hydroelectricity** and for irrigation purposes.
- **The** base of the dam **contains a powerhouse.**
- The construction of a dam created an **artificial lake** called the **Maharana Pratap Sagar**, after the great ruler of Mewar.
 - Known widely as the **Pong Reservoir** or the Pong Dam Lake, it was **declared a bird sanctuary** in 1983 due to its **waterfowl diversity.**
 - Over time, the reservoir emerged as a sanctuary for migratory birds, leading to its designation as a **Ramsar Wetland Site** in 2002.
 - It is home to several species of avifauna, some of which include Barheaded Geese, Red-neck Grebe, northern lapwing, common teal, spot-billed duck, Eurasian coot, black stork, egrets, etc.
 - The lake is also an **important fish reservoir** that acts as a fish breeding ground for commercial purposes.
 - The **Dhauladhar mountains** ensconce the Pong Dam lake from all sides.
 - Since the lake is an **extension of the perennial Beas river** that flows from the **Rohtang Pass**, it contains water throughout the year.