

CURRENT AFFAIRS: 23.05.2026

India abstains on UNGA resolution on ICJ climate opinion

The resolution was adopted in the 193-member General Assembly on May 20, with 141 votes in favour, eight against and 28 abstentions, including by India

India abstained from voting on a **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** resolution that calls on states to **comply with climate change obligations** based on an advisory **opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ)**.

- **Voting Outcome:** The resolution, originally moved by the **Pacific island nation of Vanuatu**, was adopted by the **193-member UNGA** with **141 votes in favor, 8 against (including the US and Russia), and 28 abstentions (including India)**.
- **ICJ Advisory Opinion on Climate Change:** Ruled that countries have an explicit **legal obligation to combat anthropogenic climate change** and protect environmental systems for both present and future generations.
 - The ICJ ruled that a **state's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** fall under the **principle of due diligence**. Countries must exercise strict administrative enforcement and ensure their climate goals represent their **"highest possible ambition"**.
- **Legal Status of the Opinion:** While an **ICJ advisory opinion is non-binding**, it carries substantial "legal weight and moral authority" that will shape the evolution of customary international environmental law and domestic climate litigation globally.

Key Reasons Behind India's Abstention

- **Defending the UNFCCC's "Sacrosanct Architecture":** India expressed serious concern that the resolution attempts to elevate a **non-binding ICJ advisory opinion to a binding or quasi-binding status**.
 - India asserted that its climate obligations arise **solely from outcomes negotiated under the UNFCCC**, not from judicial mandates.
- **Protecting NDCs:** The resolution prescribes specific mitigation pathways and external benchmarks.
 - India argued that this threatens the **bottom-up, nationally determined architecture of the Paris Agreement** and exposes domestic climate targets (NDCs) to international judicial or quasi-judicial scrutiny.
- **Glaring Omission of Climate Finance:** India strongly objected to the complete absence of the term **"climate finance"** in the text.
 - India's representative termed it a **"serious omission,"** highlighting that the resolution imposes sweeping obligations without reaffirming the fundamental duty of developed countries to provide predictable financing, technology transfer, and capacity building.
- **Dilution of CBDR-RC & Just Transition:** The draft failed to adequately distinguish the responsibilities of historical emitters from developing economies.
 - India reiterated the core principle of **Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)**, insisting that any energy transition must be **just, orderly, and equitable**, ensuring it does not derail poverty eradication and economic growth in the Global South.
- **Solidarity with Small Island Developing States (SIDS):** Despite these foundational disagreements, India deliberately chose to **abstain rather than vote against** the resolution (unlike the US or Russia).

- This move signaled India's continued solidarity with the existential climate vulnerabilities and "historical injustice" faced by SIDS like Vanuatu.



The Jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ)



The ICJ is a permanent international court created in 1945 by the United Nations Charter as "the principal judicial organ of the United Nations."



The ICJ's functions are set out in the Statute of the ICJ—an annex to and "an integral part" of the UN Charter.



The ICJ was created to provide a peaceful means for resolving disputes.



Only states, and not government officials or other individuals, may be parties in cases before the ICJ. Some UN bodies may also appear before the ICJ to seek its opinion.

Two Types of ICJ Case Jurisdiction

1. Contentious Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction to Decide Disputes Between States

All states that are parties to the case must consent to the ICJ's jurisdiction in one of **three** ways:

i Consent to Compulsory Jurisdiction

A state may consent to the compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ to resolve disputes with another state accepting the same obligation. The United States consented in 1946 but withdrew from the ICJ's compulsory jurisdiction in 1985.

ii Consent to Jurisdiction in a Treaty

A state may consent to jurisdiction by including a specific clause in a treaty known as a compromissory clause. Most of the cases involving the United States have been based on compromissory clauses setting forth the terms for all future disputes related to the treaty.

iii Consent to Jurisdiction Over a Specific Dispute

A state may consent to jurisdiction via a special agreement reached between the parties to resolve a particular dispute after it has occurred. For example, in 1981, the United States and Canada entered into a special agreement regarding a maritime boundary.

2. Advisory Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction to Answer a Question of International Law

The ICJ has jurisdiction to decide questions of international law that are submitted by:

i The UN Security Council

The Security Council, which has "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security," may request an advisory opinion on any legal question. The United States is a permanent member of the Council.

ii The UN General Assembly

The General Assembly, which is the "main policy-making organ" of the UN, may request an advisory opinion on any legal question. The United States is a member of the General Assembly.

iii Another U.N. body or specialized agencies

The UN Charter provides that "[o]ther organs of the United Nations and specialized agencies . . . may also request advisory opinions of the Court on legal questions arising within the scope of their activities." An example is the International Fund for Agricultural Development, of which the United States is a member.

The Effect and Enforcement of ICJ Decisions

- The UN Charter requires parties to **contentious cases** to comply with judgments.
- If a state does not comply, an opposing state party in the case may request enforcement by the Security Council.

Advisory opinions are nonbinding.

The ICJ's opinions in all cases can contribute to the development of international law and are generally considered to be authoritative by many states and the international community more broadly.

ICJ in Practice: Examples from the Court's Docket



Nicaragua v. Germany

In March 2024, Nicaragua filed a case against Germany alleging that Germany's provision of arms to Israel for use in its military campaign in Gaza violates:

1. international humanitarian law as codified in the Geneva Conventions, and
2. the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (Genocide Convention).

Nicaragua invoked two bases of the ICJ's contentious-case jurisdiction:

1. compulsory jurisdiction, which Nicaragua and Germany had accepted; and
2. jurisdiction under the compromissory clause of the Genocide Convention. (Article IX)



Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change

In April 2023, the General Assembly requested an advisory opinion on the international legal obligations related to climate change. Ninety-one states and entities filed statements on the matter, the highest number to have been filed in an advisory proceeding.

In July 2025, the ICJ issued its opinion. The ICJ concluded that states have certain obligations to protect the climate system under various sources of international law and may be responsible for a failure to meet those obligations.

How does the Gaganyaan's life-support system operate?

What are the systems designed to support astronauts aboard the spacecraft while in orbit?

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Indian Space Research Organisation Gaganyaan Mission aims to send Indian astronauts into a 400-km low Earth orbit. To ensure astronaut survival in space, the spacecraft is equipped with an advanced **Environmental Control and Life Support System (ECLSS)** that recreates Earth-like living conditions by regulating air, water, pressure, temperature, humidity, and waste management in a microgravity environment.

- Gaganyaan is a **short-duration mission**, so supplies like oxygen and water are carried from Earth and waste is stored for disposal later. Long-duration missions recycle waste into breathable air and clean water.

Core Subsystems of an ECLSS

- **Air Revitalisation:** The **Air Revitalisation System (ARS)** supplies fresh oxygen and actively removes exhaled carbon dioxide using **lithium hydroxide canisters with activated charcoal**.
 - Small ECLSS fans circulate air to prevent lethal **pockets of CO₂ and oxygen** from forming due to the lack of natural convection in microgravity.
- **Thermal and Humidity Regulation:** The cabin maintains a strict temperature of **20-26°C and 30-70% humidity**.
 - Active cooling systems use **heat exchangers to expel metabolic and electronic heat into space**, while condensing units manage moisture to prevent short-circuits and microbial growth.
- **Atmospheric Pressure:** The cabin pressure is strictly maintained at **101.3 kilopascal (kPa) to mimic Earth's sea-level conditions**, utilizing electronic sensors and safety valves to balance breathable gas levels.
- **Water Management:** Due to microgravity, water forms floating **globules** that threaten electronics and pose inhalation hazards.
 - Gaganyaan utilizes **pressurized bladders** to mechanically force potable water from specially designed pouches directly to the astronauts.
- **Waste Disposal:** Microgravity necessitates **suction-based airflow systems** to manage human waste, preventing it from floating.
 - Faeces and urine are collected, **chemically treated to inhibit bacterial growth and toxic ammonia buildup**, and stored in sealed containers for Earth disposal.
- **Fire Suppression:** Since microgravity causes fires to expand spherically, Gaganyaan uses **smoke detectors and fine water mist fire extinguishers**, which effectively cool the fire while simultaneously scrubbing toxic smoke particles from the cabin air.

About Gaganyaan Mission

- **Gaganyaan** is the **1st human space flight programme of ISRO**.
- **Objective:** To demonstrate indigenous capability of **human space flight to low earth orbit**.
- **Launch vehicle:** **GSLV-Mk III**, also called the **LVM-3** (Launch Vehicle Mark-3).
- **Payloads:**
 - **Crew Module:** It is the spacecraft carrying human beings.
 - **Service Module:** It will support the crew module and is powered by liquid propellant engines.
- This mission consists of:
 - **Two unmanned missions (G1 & G2):** 2nd uncrewed mission (G2) will carry "**Vyommitra**" (a female-looking humanoid robot developed by ISRO to function on-board the Gaganyaan).
 - **One manned mission (G3):** The Orbital Module of the crewed mission will carry three Indian astronauts, including a woman into space for **7 days**. It will orbit the Earth at a **low-earth-orbit** at an altitude of **300-400 km**.
- India will become the **4th** nation in the world to launch a **Human Spaceflight Mission** after **USA, Russia, and China**.
- **Russia** and **France** are cooperating with India for Gaganyaan mission.

Human rated LVM3 – HLVM3

- It is a **three-stage vehicle** with a 110 ton core **liquid propellant stage** (L-110) and a strap-on stage with **two solid propellant motors**, each with 200 tons propellant (S-200).
- The **upper stage** will be **cryogenic fueled** with a propellant loading of 25 tons (C-25).
- The LVM-3 has a lift-off mass of 640 tonnes, and it can carry a payload of up to **4,000 kilograms** into **geosynchronous transfer orbit** (GTO) at 35,000 km.
- HLVM3 consists of **Crew Escape System** (CES) powered by a set of quick acting, high burn rate solid motors which ensures that **Crew Module** along with **crew** is taken to a safe distance in case of any emergency either at launch pad or during ascent phase.

Crew Escape System (CES)

- The **CES** is a part of the module that ensures "**the crew is taken to a safe distance in case of any emergency either at launch pad or during ascent phase.**"
- The **Gaganyaan-1** mission's crew module will **not have** the **Environment Control and Life Support System**, which ensures an Earth-like environment inside the module.
- Gaganyaan-1 will mainly test the **safe re-entry of the crew module** and proper orientation of the module when it splashes down in the sea.
- A **second unmanned flight** is planned with a **pressurised crew module**, in which the **complete life support system will be tested**.
- This flight will carry the robot '**Vyommitra**' which will record all parameters to study the impact of the flight on humans.
- **Test Vehicle Abort Mission-1 (TV-D1)** will demonstrate the **performance** of the Crew Escape System.

Why neuro-symbolic AI may be more suitable for Indian education

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NIVEDHIKA KRISHNAN

Technology experts and educational researchers have highlighted the potential of **Neuro-Symbolic Artificial Intelligence (NSAI)** as a more suitable, reliable, and effective framework for the Indian education system compared to traditional generative models like **Large Language Models (LLMs)**.

Summary

- **Neuro-Symbolic AI (NSAI)** combines neural networks with symbolic reasoning to create explainable, multilingual, and fact-based AI systems that align with National Education Policy goals of conceptual and inclusive learning.
- NSAI can reduce AI hallucinations, bridge vernacular barriers, and support rural education through lightweight offline deployment, but challenges such as digital divide, teacher training, linguistic diversity, and data privacy must be addressed for effective implementation in India.

What is Neuro-Symbolic AI?

- **Hybrid Architecture:** Unlike standard LLMs that rely entirely on statistical next-word prediction, **NSAI fuses data-driven neural networks with rule-based symbolic logic systems.**
- **The Neural Component (Perception):** Utilizes **deep learning** (neural networks) for pattern recognition.
 - It excels at processing unstructured, "messy" data such as recognizing a student's handwriting, analyzing a spoken query in a regional language, or extracting features from an image.
- **The Symbolic Component (Reasoning):** Relies on explicit, human-readable logic rules, constraints, and **Knowledge Graphs / Ontologies.**
- **The Synergy:** In an NSAI system, the neural network acts as the "**eyes and ears**," converting unstructured data into symbols, while the symbolic engine acts as the "**logical brain**," applying strict rules to those symbols to generate a verifiable, fact-based answer.
 - This integration helps AI become more accurate, explainable, and human-like in decision-making.
- **Importance of Neuro-Symbolic AI:** The technology **improves transparency, trustworthiness, and explainability** in AI systems.
 - It is considered important for developing **human-centric AI capable of handling complex real-world problems responsibly.**
- **Applications:** NSAI has applications in healthcare, robotics, autonomous vehicles, cybersecurity, scientific research, and advanced decision-support systems where both pattern recognition and logical reasoning are essential.

What are the Limitations of Traditional LLMs in the Indian Classroom?

- **Infrastructure and Energy Mismatch:** Frontier models like **GPT-4** require massive data centers with staggering energy footprints.

- This is a severe mismatch for India, where **only 47% of rural schools possess functional computers**, and high-bandwidth internet remains severely constrained, widening the digital divide rather than democratizing education.
- **The Vernacular Data Trap:** Standard models are heavily English-dominant. When evaluated against **India's 22 constitutionally recognized languages and regional dialects**, purely statistical models suffer from **low contextual data availability**.
 - They often resort to clunky translations that distort conceptual accuracy.
- **Cultural Disconnect:** Western-trained models risk **embedding foreign cultural biases or missing critical local context**, making them unreliable for culturally rooted pedagogy.
- **"Hallucination" Crisis:** When pushed beyond its training data, an LLM will **confidently invent historical dates, fabricate scientific formulas**, or cite non-existent academic papers.
 - A student or an overworked teacher relying on the AI may not possess the immediate subject matter expertise to spot these errors. This creates a **"hallucination crisis" that corrupts the learning process and actively teaches incorrect information**.
- **Amplification of Rote Learning:** Because traditional generative AI acts as a **statistical pattern-matcher rather than a logical processor**, it gives answers without encouraging **conceptual clarity**, failing to stimulate original scientific reasoning or align with the core goals of the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.
- **The "Black Box" Problem:** If an LLM gives a student the wrong answer to a calculus problem, it cannot explain *why* it made the error. This lack of interpretability prevents teachers from tracing the student's learning gap.