



# Daily Current Affairs



## To The Point by Dhananjay Gautam

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## 1 Earth's Desertification Crisis: UNCCD COP16 to Address Global Land Challenges

**Context:** The 16th Session of the Conference of Parties (COP16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will take place from December 2-13, 2024, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Marking the 30th anniversary of the UNCCD, this pivotal event will focus on urgent global challenges such as **desertification, land degradation, and drought.**

**Key Highlights of COP16**

Theme: "Our Land and Our Future"

This year's theme underscores the vital role of **land restoration** and **resilience-building** in achieving **sustainable development** and tackling **climate change.**

**A Historic Venue**

Holding COP16 in **Saudi Arabia**, a region severely impacted by **desertification** and **drought**, emphasizes the immediate need for solutions tailored to regions facing such extreme conditions.

Largest UN Land Conference to Date With participation from **197 parties** across the globe, COP16 is set to be the **largest-ever UN land conference**, bringing together policymakers, experts, and stakeholders.

**A Dual Approach**

1. **Negotiation Track:** Focuses on **political declarations** and decisions to guide global efforts on **land degradation** and **drought resilience.**
2. **Action Agenda:** Highlights **voluntary commitments, multi-stakeholder dialogues, and practical implementation strategies.**

**Key Objectives of COP16**

- **Accelerating Land Restoration:** Aimed at achieving a **land-degradation-neutral world by 2030.**
- **Enhancing Resilience:** Tackling **droughts, dust storms,** and other land-related crises.
- **Promoting Soil Health:** Improving **land rights** and ensuring **sustainable livelihoods.**
- **Unlocking Economic Opportunities:** Using **land restoration** to generate **jobs,** alleviate **poverty,** and boost **climate resilience.**

**The Riyadh Action Agenda**

A flagship outcome of COP16, the **Riyadh Action Agenda** will focus on scaling up solutions through **thematic days** dedicated to:

- **Land conservation and restoration.**
- **Building drought resilience.**
- Strengthening partnerships for **actionable results.**

**The Global Context: A Growing Crisis**

- **3.2 billion people** are affected by **desertification** worldwide.
- **Droughts** have increased by **29% since 2000,** exacerbated by **climate change** and **unsustainable land use.**
- **Land degradation** has led to economic losses of **\$11 trillion globally.**

**Projected Impacts by 2050**

- Over **216 million people** could face **internal displacement** due to **climate-induced land degradation** and drought.
- To meet global targets, **1.5 billion hectares of degraded land** must be restored by **2030.**

**Root Causes of the Crisis**

- **Erratic Rainfall:** Unpredictable weather patterns limit natural water resources.
- **Over-reliance on Groundwater:** Depleting reserves due to unsustainable extraction.
- **Decline in Recharge Systems:** Loss of natural groundwater replenishment sources like **ponds** and **lakes.**
- **Unsustainable Practices:** Poor agricultural and land management practices exacerbate degradation.





## Why COP16 Matters

### A Call to Action

COP16 is expected to declare a **global emergency** on **land degradation** and **desertification**, urging nations to prioritize action over dialogue.

### Economic and Social Benefits

- **Land restoration** offers opportunities for **job creation**, **poverty reduction**, and **improved climate resilience**.
- Investment in **sustainable land management** can drive economic growth.

### Global Cooperation

The summit emphasizes **collaborative action** among countries, **non-state actors**, and the **private sector** to tackle **land degradation** on a **war footing**.

COP16 in Riyadh represents a crucial step in addressing one of the most pressing challenges of our time. Through ambitious objectives and actionable strategies, it aims to ensure a sustainable future for both people and the planet.



## 2 Strengthening the Election Commission of India: Challenges and Reforms

**Context:** The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** has faced increasing calls for strengthening its **independence** and enhancing its **role in electoral integrity**. These demands aim to bolster **voter trust** in the democratic process.

**Constitutional Framework of the Election Commission:**

#### A Constitutional Body

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** was established on **January 25, 1950**, as a constitutional body to ensure **free and fair elections**.

#### Nationwide Jurisdiction

The ECI operates as a **common authority** for both the **Central and State Governments**, overseeing elections across the country.

#### Functions and Powers

The ECI supervises, directs, and controls elections for:

- **Parliament**
- **State Legislatures**
- **President and Vice-President**

#### Composition of the ECI

- The **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** heads the commission.
- Up to **two Election Commissioners** can be appointed (a provision added in 1989).
- All members have **equal powers and responsibilities**.

#### Appointment Process

The **President of India** appoints the CEC and Election Commissioners based on a **committee's recommendation**, comprising:

- The **Prime Minister**
- The **Leader of the Opposition** in Lok Sabha
- A **Union Minister** nominated by the Prime Minister

#### Tenure and Removal

- Members serve for **six years** or until they turn **65**, whichever comes first.
- The **CEC** can only be removed in a manner akin to a Supreme Court judge, while other commissioners can be removed upon the **CEC's recommendation**.

#### Relevant Constitutional Articles

- **Article 324:** Grants the ECI the authority to supervise and control elections.
- **Article 325:** Prohibits discrimination based on **religion, race, caste, or sex** in electoral rolls.
- **Article 326:** Mandates **adult suffrage** for Lok Sabha and state legislature elections.
- **Article 329:** Prevents courts from intervening in electoral matters, except through election petitions.

#### Challenges in India's Electoral System

1. **Declining Voter Turnout:** Caused by **lack of awareness**, logistical barriers, and **political disillusionment**.
2. **Electoral Violence:** Threats and violence disrupt the electoral process, particularly in rural and conflict-prone areas.
3. **Media Manipulation and Misinformation:** **Social media** and **deepfake videos** have been exploited to influence voter opinions.
4. **Gender Disparity:** Women remain **underrepresented**, with only **13.6% of Lok Sabha members** being women in 2024.
5. **Influence of Black Money:** Unregulated funding channels allow the use of **black money**, undermining electoral accountability.





6. Criminalization of Politics: **46% of elected members** in 2024 faced **criminal charges**, highlighting a lack of transparency.
7. Political Defections: Despite the **Anti-Defection Law**, defections and **horse trading** continue to destabilize governments.
8. Wealth Disparity Among Candidates: **93% of Lok Sabha members** in 2024 were crorepaties, making it hard for others to compete.

### Reforms Needed for a Stronger ECI

1. Enhancing Funding Transparency
  - Introduce **state funding** for political parties, subject to independent audits.
  - Create a **National Election Fund** to ensure equitable distribution of donations.
2. Ensuring Impartial Appointments: Strengthen the independence of Election Commissioners to **maintain electoral integrity**.
3. Addressing Criminalization
  - Ban candidates facing **serious criminal charges** from contesting elections.
  - Improve **voter education** to ensure informed decision-making.
4. Reducing Wealth Disparities
  - Enforce stricter caps on **candidate expenditure**.
  - Mandate audits of **political party spending**.
5. Reforming the Anti-Defection Law
  - Amend the **Tenth Schedule** to curb defections effectively.
  - Impose **stricter penalties** for violations.
6. Increasing Voter Turnout: Conduct **awareness campaigns** to encourage participation and highlight the importance of voting.

### The Way Forward

- Enact **comprehensive laws** to address funding, criminalization, and defection issues.
- Learn from **global electoral systems** for greater transparency and efficiency.
- Strengthen collaboration between the **executive, legislature, judiciary**, and ECI.
- Promote **voter education** on clean politics and democracy's value.

A robust and independent Election Commission is vital for upholding the **integrity of India's democracy** and ensuring elections remain free, fair, and transparent. By addressing these challenges and implementing reforms, India can strengthen public trust and fortify its democratic foundations.

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## High-Altitude Sickness: A Hidden Danger for Trekkers

**Context:** The recent death of a trekker from Kerala due to **High-Altitude Sickness (HAS)** or **Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS)** while scaling a peak in Uttarakhand has highlighted the risks of trekking in mountainous regions.

**Understanding High-Altitude Sickness:****What is High-Altitude Sickness?**

**High-Altitude Sickness** occurs when people ascend rapidly to elevations above **2,400 meters**, without proper acclimatisation. It is triggered by **reduced air pressure** and **low oxygen levels** at higher altitudes, leading to **hypoxia**, or insufficient oxygen in the body's tissues.

**Key Factors That Increase the Risk**

- **Popular trekking routes** often exceed **3,000 meters**, where the risk of AMS is significantly higher.
- Insufficient time for **acclimatisation** leaves trekkers vulnerable to the effects of altitude.

**Recognising Symptoms****Early Signs of AMS:**

- **Headaches**
- **Nausea**
- **Fatigue**
- **Shortness of breath**

**Severe Cases Can Lead To:**

- **High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE):** Fluid buildup in the lungs causing breathlessness and potentially fatal respiratory issues.
- **High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE):** Swelling in the brain, leading to **confusion, hallucinations, and even coma.**

**How Does the Body React at High Altitudes?**

- The body compensates for low oxygen by **increasing breathing rates**, which may cause **hyperventilation.**
- To enhance oxygen transport, the body produces more **red blood cells**, thickening the blood and straining the heart.

**Treatment and Prevention Strategies:****Immediate Actions for AMS:**

1. **Descent:** The fastest and most effective treatment is moving to a lower altitude.
2. **Oxygen Support:** Supplemental oxygen or a **portable hyperbaric chamber** can help alleviate symptoms.

**Medical Interventions:**

- **Acetazolamide:** Aids acclimatisation and reduces symptoms of AMS.
- **Dexamethasone:** Helps manage swelling in severe cases like HACE.

**Precautions for Trekkers:**

- Ascend gradually, allowing the body sufficient time to **acclimatise.**
- Stay hydrated and avoid alcohol, which can exacerbate symptoms.
- Recognise early signs of AMS and avoid pushing further if symptoms worsen.

**High-Altitude Sickness is preventable and treatable with proper preparation and awareness.** Trekkers must prioritise **safety over ambition** when exploring mountainous terrains.



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## High Seas Treaty: A Milestone for Ocean Conservation

**Context:** India has recently signed the **Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement**, also known as the **High Seas Treaty**, during the **United Nations General Assembly 2024** in New York.

What Are the High Seas?

## Defining the High Seas

The **high seas** refer to **international waters** that lie beyond the jurisdiction of any nation. These are areas:

- Beyond **12 nautical miles** of territorial waters.
- Beyond **200 nautical miles** of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).

## Global Importance

- High seas cover **65% of the ocean's surface** and make up **43% of the Earth's total area**.
- They are part of the **global commons**, belonging to no nation but shared by all, requiring collective responsibility for their conservation.

## Significance of the High Seas

1. **Food Security:** The ocean is the primary source of protein for **3 billion people worldwide**.
2. **Economic Vitality:**
  - Accounts for **90% of global freight transport**.
  - Supports industries like fishing and submarine communications.
3. **Renewable Energy:** Potential for clean energy generation from waves and currents.
4. **Biodiversity Hotspot:** Home to between **500,000 and 100 million species**, with only **250,000 species recorded**.
5. **Climate Regulation:**
  - Produces over **50% of the Earth's oxygen**.
  - Absorbs **25% of carbon dioxide emissions** and stores over **90% of excess heat** from global warming.

## About the High Seas Treaty

## Overview

The **High Seas Treaty** is a **legally binding agreement** aimed at regulating human activities in international waters to ensure **sustainable resource use** and **biodiversity protection**.

## Key Features

- **Adoption:** Agreement on **biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ)**.
- **Signatories:** 105 countries, with 14 having ratified it as of now.
- **Legality:** Comes into effect **120 days after 60 countries ratify it**.
- **India's Role:** Signed but not yet ratified.

## Objectives of the Treaty

1. **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs):** Establish and regulate MPAs to protect fragile ecosystems.
2. **Sustainable Resource Use:** Ensure equitable sharing of benefits from **marine genetic resources (MGRs)**.
3. **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs):** Mandate EIAs for major activities affecting the oceans.
4. **Capacity Building:** Support technology transfer and skill development in developing nations.

## Why Is the High Seas Treaty Essential?

## Urgent Need for Protection

- Only **1.44% of high seas** are currently protected, while the **UN COP15 Biodiversity Conference** has set a target of protecting **30% of the planet's lands and oceans by 2030**.

## Global Challenges

- **Overexploitation and Pollution:**





- Overfishing and the dumping of **17 million tonnes of plastic annually** are threatening marine ecosystems.

- **Climate Impact:**

- Addressing ocean acidification, habitat destruction, and biodiversity loss.

How Does It Align with India's Interests?

### Maritime Policies

- Promotes **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)** and aligns with India's **Blue Economy** initiatives.

**Strategic Benefits:** Strengthens India's position in the Indo-Pacific under the **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** initiative.

### Challenges Ahead

**Marine Protected Areas:** Weak enforcement mechanisms and low protection levels make achieving the **30% restoration target** by 2030 difficult.

### Marine Genetic Resources

- Risk of **monopolization** by technologically advanced nations.
- **Intellectual property disputes** over benefit-sharing.

### Implementation Barriers

- High costs of EIAs.
- Limited resources and expertise in **Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** and **landlocked countries**.
- Geopolitical tensions hindering global cooperation.

### What Lies Ahead?

#### Path to Implementation

1. **Ratification:** At least **60 countries must ratify the treaty** for it to come into effect.
2. **Institutional Mechanisms:**
  - Establish monitoring, compliance, and enforcement frameworks.
3. **Support for Developing Nations:**
  - Provide resources, financial aid, and technology transfer to facilitate treaty compliance.

### Global Collaboration

- Enhanced cooperation is essential to protect the **64% of the ocean categorized as global commons**, ensuring sustainable use for future generations.

The **High Seas Treaty** represents a landmark moment in ocean conservation. By bridging global cooperation and sustainability, it offers hope for protecting one of Earth's most vital and vulnerable ecosystems.

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## 5 Understanding AUKUS: The Trilateral Security Pact

**Context:** China's ambassador to New Zealand has cautioned that **New Zealand joining AUKUS** could negatively impact its relationship with China.

**What Is AUKUS?**

**Introduction:**

**AUKUS** is a **trilateral security partnership** involving the **United States, United Kingdom, and Australia**, established in **2021**. It focuses on **technology sharing** to bolster security in the **Indo-Pacific region**.

The partnership is widely regarded as a **strategic response to China's growing influence** and activities in this geopolitically crucial area.

**Purpose and Goals:**

- **Strengthening Defense Interests:** AUKUS builds upon the longstanding bilateral relationships among the three countries to **enhance their collective defense capabilities**.
- **Deterring Aggression:** A key goal is to act as a **deterrent against Chinese assertiveness** in the Indo-Pacific region.

**Key Pillars of AUKUS:**

**Pillar 1: Nuclear Submarine Fleet for Australia**

- Supports Australia in acquiring its **first conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs)**.
- These submarines are not armed with nuclear weapons, adhering to Australia's commitments under the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**.
- The initiative will make **Australia the seventh country globally** to possess nuclear-powered submarines.

**Pillar 2: Advanced Military Capabilities:**

**Focuses on collaboration in eight critical defense areas:**

1. **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**
2. **Quantum Technologies**
3. **Cybersecurity**
4. **Innovation and Information Sharing**
5. **Undersea Warfare**
6. **Hypersonic and Counter-Hypersonic Systems**
7. **Electronic Warfare**

**Submarine Component: A Key Highlight**

**Development and Design:**

- Australia will acquire **eight nuclear-powered attack submarines**, known as **SSN-AUKUS**.
- These submarines will feature a **British design** with **American technology** and combat systems.

**Strategic Advantages:**

**Nuclear-powered submarines provide:**

- **Extended Range:** Greater operational distance without refueling.
- **Endurance:** Ability to remain submerged for extended periods.
- **Stealth:** Enhanced ability to evade detection.

**Global Impact:**

- This partnership makes **Australia the second country, after the UK**, to receive U.S. nuclear submarine technology.
- AUKUS significantly bolsters Australia's **undersea capabilities** in the Indo-Pacific.





## AUKUS and Nuclear Non-Proliferation:

The alliance has emphasized that the **new submarines will not carry nuclear weapons**, ensuring compliance with the **NPT**, which prohibits Australia from acquiring or deploying nuclear weapons.

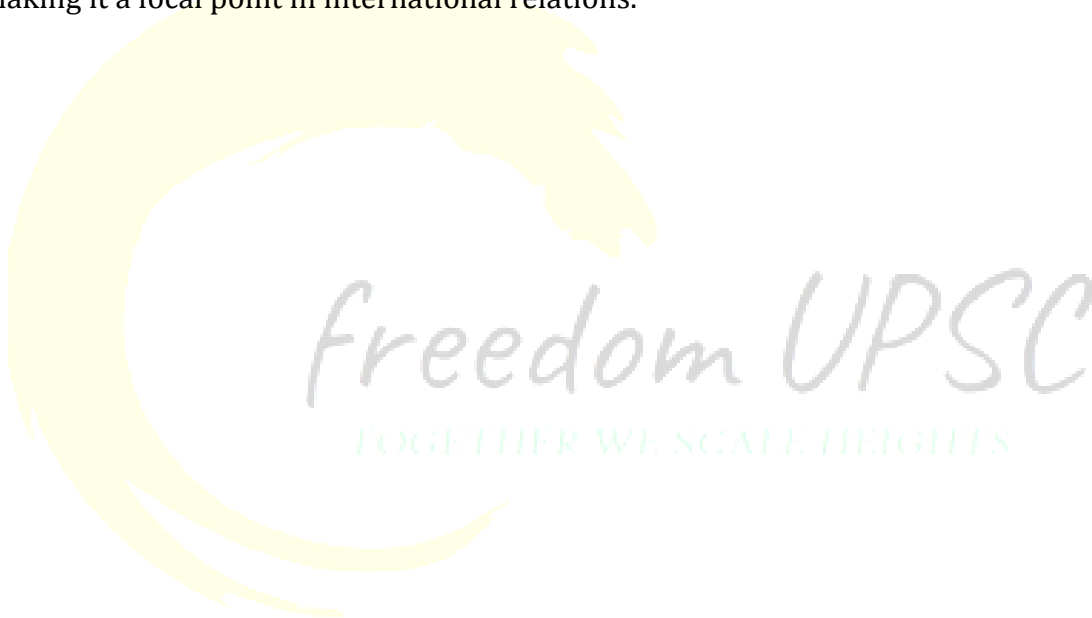
### Why Is AUKUS Significant?

- **Indo-Pacific Security:** Strengthens regional stability and counters **geopolitical challenges**, particularly those posed by China's growing assertiveness.
- **Technology Sharing:** Enhances innovation and defense capabilities through collaboration in advanced technologies.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Reinforces the defense ties among the U.S., UK, and Australia, strengthening alliances in the region.

### Controversy and Global Implications:

- **China's Concerns:** Beijing views AUKUS as a threat to its interests and has expressed strong opposition.
- **Geopolitical Shifts:** The pact signals a growing emphasis on multilateral alliances to maintain **regional balance of power** in the Indo-Pacific.

The **AUKUS agreement** represents a critical step toward reinforcing security and technological innovation in the Indo-Pacific. While it offers strategic advantages to its members, it also reshapes the global defense landscape, making it a focal point in international relations.



## 6 Eklavya Digital Platform: A New Era in Military Education

**Context:** The Indian Army recently launched the **Eklavya Digital Platform**, an **online learning initiative** designed to modernize training and education for its officers.

**What Is the Eklavya Digital Platform?****Development and Hosting**

- Created under the guidance of the **Army Training Command** with the **Army War College** as the sponsoring agency.
- **BISAG-N** (Bhaskaracharya National Institute of Space Applications and Geoinformatics), Gandhinagar, developed the platform, supported by the **Directorate General of Information Systems**.
- Hosted on the **Army Data Network** with a **scalable architecture** that allows seamless integration of multiple Indian Army training establishments and a vast range of courses.

**Significance:**

The platform supports the Indian Army's vision of a **"Decade of Transformation"** and aligns with the **2024 theme: "Year of Technology Absorption."**

**Features of the Eklavya Platform****Course Categories:**

- 1. Pre-Course Preparatory Capsules:**
  - Offers study material for all offline courses conducted at Category 'A' training establishments.
  - Focuses on **basic concepts**, allowing physical courses to concentrate on **advanced and application-based content**.
- 2. Assignment-Specific Courses:**
  - Tailored for **specific roles or appointments**, enabling officers to gain **domain specialization** in their chosen fields.
- 3. Professional Development Suite:**
  - Includes courses on **Strategy, Operational Art, Leadership, Organisational Behaviour, Finance, Emerging Technology**, and more.

**Knowledge Highway**

- A **searchable repository** of journals, research papers, and articles, offering a **single-window resource** for in-depth knowledge.

**Flexibility in Learning**

- Officers can **register for multiple courses simultaneously**, encouraging continuous professional growth.

**Impact of Eklavya:****Modernizing Military Education**

- Facilitates **continuous professional military education** by offering diverse and specialized courses.
- Enhances the **quality of physical training** by shifting foundational learning online.

**Specialization and Skill Development**

- Prepares officers for **specialist appointments** and aids in **domain specialization**, improving operational efficiency.

**Resource Optimization:**

- Reduces the load on physical training infrastructure while enriching course content.

**Conclusion**

The **Eklavya Digital Platform** is a milestone in the Indian Army's journey toward **digital transformation** and **modern military education**. By integrating technology with learning, the platform equips officers with the skills and knowledge to address the **dynamic challenges of modern warfare** effectively.