

Current Affairs 12th August 2025 by Right IAS

Global Plastic Treaty Negotiations

Background Since 2022, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has led efforts to create a legally binding treaty to address plastic pollution on land and in oceans. Negotiations are being held under the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution.

Two Main Blocs High Ambition Coalition (HAC) Chaired by Norway and Rwanda. ~80 countries, including EU members. Pushes for production caps or cuts in plastic and its base polymers to contain pollution. Like Minded Countries (LMC) Includes Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, China, Cuba. Not a formal bloc but aligned as major petrochemical producers. Opposes production caps; supports waste management and behavioural change instead.

India's Position India has aligned with LMC. Argues that capping primary polymer production would harm trade and supply, given plastic's widespread utility. Supports focusing on waste management infrastructure and public awareness.



Negotiation Rules Decisions require near unanimous agreement majority voting not

allowed. This makes resolving the rift between the blocs difficult. Trade Patterns in Plastics Asia dominates global trade in primary plastic polymers (ethylene, propylene, styrene & derivatives like polyethylene and PET). 11 exporters, 18 importers in Asia. USA is the largest exporter in North America; several European countries are both importers and exporters. Africa & South America: negligible trade volumes. In 2025, the US (not part of either bloc) refused to back any production cuts.



Industry Perspective All India Plastic Manufacturers Association opposes caps, citing unmet demand if alternatives are not available at scale. Advocates capacity building for waste management and anti-littering measures.



Economic Trends Observers note weak business case for new petroleum and polymer refining investments. Example: China's petrochemical refining is running at 50% capacity. Global refiners see declining margins and demand for polymer products.

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EDE-like antibodies

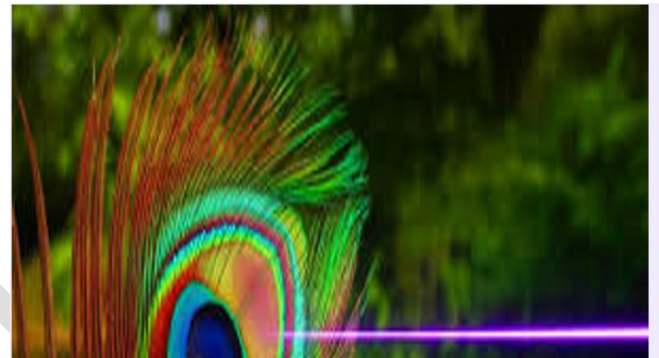
EDE-like antibodies are a type of antibody that targets a specific region on the dengue virus (DENV)'s envelope (E) protein, known as the envelope dimer epitope (EDE). These antibodies are particularly interesting because they are associated with protection against symptomatic and severe dengue fever, especially in individuals with multiple dengue exposures

Protective Role: These antibodies are associated with a reduced risk of symptomatic and severe dengue illness
Cross-reactivity: EDE-like antibodies can be cross reactive, meaning they can bind to and potentially neutralize different serotypes of DENV
Implications
Understanding EDE-like antibodies may:
Improve vaccine design to target high EDE-like antibody response. Help identify reliable correlates of protection in vaccine trials. Could lead to better therapeutics and preventive strategies

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Peacock Feathers as Natural Laser Cavities

Peacock eyespots: Known for shimmering colours created by microscopic keratin rods and layered structures that reflect specific wavelengths. New finding: When infused with a laser dye (rhodamine 6G), the inner structure acts like a laser cavity — bouncing light internally, amplifying it, and emitting narrow beams.



Significance Feathers' nanostructure + dye create a biological photonic cavity. Could reveal hidden feather micro-patterns not visible with regular microscopes. Demonstrates how natural photonic structures can be tuned for laser emission.
Patterns: Yellow areas: Favoured 574 nm, required less power. Brown areas: Favoured 583 nm, but required more power. Green zones: Strongest glow overall (due to rhodamine 6G absorbing green light well and re-emitting yellow–orange).

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Piprahwa Relics Repatriation

Background Piprahwa relics: Physical remains linked to Lord Buddha and early followers. Excavated in 1898 from a stupa in Uttar Pradesh during British rule. Removed during colonial period, later reappeared in Sotheby's Hong Kong auction (May). Indian government

intervened, halting the auction and repatriating the relics. Currently housed in the National Museum for public display.

Cultural Diplomacy Success Coordinated diplomatic effort: Multiple ministries + Indian missions abroad involved. Persuaded Sotheby's to postpone and cancel auction. Public-private partnership: Godrej Industries Group acquired relics via negotiated settlement. Demonstrates combining private sector resources with state authority.

Set a precedent for future recoveries. Enhanced India's image as a steward of Buddhist heritage internationally.

Structural Weaknesses Exposed Fragmented ownership from colonial-era excavation complicated legal status. India's reactive response — intervention only after public auction announcement. Gaps in legal, administrative, and preventive frameworks for heritage protection. Reliance on diplomatic pressure — not a scalable long-term solution. Weak international legal mechanisms to prevent sale of sacred relics.



Suggested Reforms 1. Centralised, digitised registry of cultural assets

(domestic & overseas) Linked with international customs and auction houses. Real-time monitoring & early alerts. Proactive tracking of cultural heritage items.

4. International advocacy for binding global norms banning commercialisation of sacred relics. Scale up public-private partnerships: Involve philanthropic foundations, heritage trusts. Mobilise resources & expertise for recovery and conservation.

Significance Illustrates potential of state private sector collaboration in heritage recovery. Raises awareness about India's role in protecting Buddhist heritage. Highlights urgent need for systemic reforms to prevent heritage loss in the future.



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CCI Vs Google

Background Supreme Court Involvement: On August 8, the Supreme Court admitted appeals filed by: Alphabet Inc. (Google's parent company) — challenging the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal

(NCLAT) judgment. Competition Commission of India (CCI) – seeking restoration of its original order

CCI's Allegations Against Google

1. 2. Investigation Origin: Began in 2020 after complaints from app developers and industry groups. Findings (2022): Mandatory Use of Google Play Billing System (GPBS): Developers forced to use GPBS for in-app purchases, paying 15%–30% commission. Exemption for YouTube: Google's own app was exempt from GPBS fees, giving it cost advantage

Bundling of Google Apps: Smartphone makers required to pre-install Google apps (Search, Chrome, YouTube, etc.) to access Play Store. Anti-competitive Effects: Limited consumer choice, harmed rivals, and stifled innovation. Penalty & Remedies: Fine of ₹936.44 crore. Directions to decouple payment system from Play Store, ensure billing transparency, and not misuse data for competitive advantage.

Google's Defence Android as Open Source: Free to manufacturers; OEMs not forced to install Google's proprietary apps if they choose a version without Play Store. Pre-installation Justification: Claimed efficiency and convenience; users can still download competitors' apps. GPBS Justification: Safe, reliable transactions; industry-standard commissions; supports global infrastructure. Exemptions for Own Apps: Due to different business models, not anti-competitive. Market Competitiveness: Pointed to growth of Indian apps (PhonePe, Paytm, Hotstar) as evidence of a healthy market.



NCLAT's Judgment (March 2025 & May 2025) Upholdings: Confirmed abuse of dominance in billing policy and app bundling Penalty Reduction: Cut from ₹936.44 crore to ₹216.69 crore, citing disproportionality. Modification of Remedies: Some directions struck down as overbroad; later reinstated two key directives (billing data transparency and no data misuse). Outcome: Partial victory for all sides; none fully satisfied.

What's at Stake Consumers: Pro-CCI ruling More choice, possibly lower prices, better privacy, fairer app rankings. Risk of Android fragmentation if Google's control loosened. Smartphone Makers (OEMs): Could gain flexibility in pre installing competing services and using alternative Android versions. Indian Startups/App Developers: Opportunity to compete on a level playing field; better bargaining power. Google: Risk of global business model disruption; precedent for similar regulation worldwide



Road Ahead Supreme Court Focus: Legal definition of “abuse of dominance” under Indian law and economic realities of platform markets.

Impact: Strong pro-CCI ruling → India emerges as global leader in digital market regulation. Pro-Google ruling → Maintains current status quo. Significance: With Android powering over 95% of Indian smartphones, the decision will affect how hundreds of millions access apps, payments, and mobile services.



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Topic → Rules-Based International Order & Its Evolution under U.S. Policies

Introduction – Nature of the Rules Based International Order (RBIO) The RBIO

emerged after WWII, often called Pax Americana, built around U.S.-led institutions and norms. Initially designed to prevent global conflict and rebuild economies, notably through the Marshall Plan. Institutions like the WTO, IMF, World Bank, and others formed a framework for governance, trade, and economic flows, largely backed by U.S. power. These institutions also acted as guardrails to curb potential rivals to the U.S.’s unipolar dominance.



The U.S.’s Dual Role – Coercion and Openness Historically, the U.S. has employed both coercive tactics (e.g., restricting Japan’s textile exports in 1955) and openness (e.g., integrating developing countries into global institutions).

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Limits of U.S. Dominance The RBIO is not a rigid hierarchy; Asian nations have gained significant agency due to rapid economic growth, social change, and institutional capacity. The U.S. cannot unilaterally impose its will in a complex, interconnected, multi-alliance world. The balance of power is shaped by mutual dependencies and sectoral strengths across nations



Transformations Under the Trump Administration Trump's policies may not destroy the RBIO but transform it significantly. Major changes stem not from U.S.-Asia relations but from U.S. actions toward Europe: Undermining NATO's ideological and financial stability, exposing Europe to Russian threats. Middle East

policy shifts: Strong alignment with Israel under Netanyahu's leadership Impact on Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and other regional actors. Domestic policy effects spilling into international relations: Increased barriers for foreign students (e.g., social media checks for U.S. visas).

Features of the Emerging "New Order" – Flux Americana Old RBIO elements will remain but in altered form. Likely characteristics: More bilateral agreements replacing multilateral frameworks. Greater use of economic sanctions, often violating WTO norms. Rise in skirmishes and limited wars. Use of drones and AI in conflict resolution. Weakening of global institutions that promote cooperation and human rights.



This phase, called Flux Americana, represents the RBIO's evolution under growing geopolitical turbulence.

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FACT--> "Silletas" refers to the elaborate, handcrafted floral displays carried by silleteros during the Medellín Flower Festival in Colombia.



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