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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Beyond the AI Arms Race: Why Cooperative Governance Must Replace Containment

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Beyond the AI Arms Race: Why Cooperative Governance Must Replace Containment

 **The Indian Express**

23 June 2026

GS2
GS3

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Is a global AI safety regime achievable when the two leading powers treat frontier models as instruments of strategic dominance rather than shared risk?"

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WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS

When the world's two most capable AI powers describe their work in the vocabulary of an arms race, the framing itself becomes a policy. The Indian Express argues that the United States and China have imported a twentieth-century, zero-sum strategic mindset into a twenty-first-century technology whose defining risks are shared rather than rival. The piece is not naive about competition. It is making a sharper claim: that treating every model advance as a relative loss for the other side crowds out precisely the cooperative governance, on safety standards, evaluation and incident-sharing, that frontier AI most urgently needs.

For the UPSC aspirant, this is a rare editorial that sits cleanly across two papers at once. It is GS2 in its treatment of great-power rivalry, international groupings and India's diplomatic positioning, and GS3 in its substance on the science, the compute economy and the governance of an emerging technology. The same essay also feeds an Essay paper on technology and cooperation, and a GS4 reflection on the ethics of dual-use power.

The Lift Line

Strip the editorial to one sentence and it reads: the danger of frontier AI is not that the wrong country wins the race, but that the race itself prevents anyone from building the brakes.

THE CORE ARGUMENT, UNPACKED

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The arms-race frame and why it is a category error

An arms race assumes a zero-sum contest: a unit of capability gained by one side is a unit of security lost by the other, so the rational response is to accumulate faster and deny the rival. That logic governed the nuclear age and, by the editorial's reading, now governs Washington's and Beijing's AI postures.

The instruments are visible. The United States has used export controls on the most advanced AI chips and the equipment that makes them, aiming to preserve a compute and frontier-model lead. China has responded with a determined push for indigenous semiconductors, domestic foundation models and self-reliance, refusing to accept a permanent ceiling on its capability. Each move is read by the other as hostile, and the spiral tightens.

The editorial's central move is to question whether the underlying assumption holds for AI. The most consequential risks of advanced models are not rival but common. A capable model that can write novel cyber-attack code, lower the barrier to bio-misuse, or behave unpredictably at the frontier is dangerous regardless of which flag flies over the data centre. These are negative externalities that leak across borders. In that world, the security-maximising response is not to out-accumulate the rival but to coordinate on guardrails, because a safety failure anywhere is a safety failure everywhere.

How to Think About This

When an editorial attacks a "mindset", test it by asking what the mindset assumes and whether the assumption survives the facts.

- **Name the assumption.** The arms-race frame assumes AI capability is zero-sum and that risk is borne nationally.
- **Stress-test it.** Frontier-model harms, cyber, bio, misinformation, loss-of-control, are transnational and shared. So the assumption fails for the highest-stakes layer of the technology.
- **Separate the layers.** Where AI is a conventional military or economic advantage, competition is real and legitimate. Where it is a source of systemic, shared risk, competition is self-defeating. Good policy treats these two layers differently rather than collapsing them.
- **Locate India.** India is neither pole. Its interest lies in a rules-based, access-oriented order, which is exactly the cooperative reframing the editorial wants. This is your "way forward" hook in any answer.

This layered reasoning, competition where rivalry is genuine, cooperation where risk is common, is the analytical spine you should reproduce in a Mains answer.

THE GOVERNANCE BACKDROP YOU MUST KNOW

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From Bletchley to New Delhi: the cooperative track

A parallel, cooperative story has been unfolding alongside the rivalry. The AI Safety Summit series began at Bletchley Park in the United Kingdom in November 2023, where the Bletchley Declaration recognised the risks of frontier AI and committed signatories to collaborate on safety. Successor summits carried the agenda forward, building a fragile international habit of talking about AI risk together.

India brought this arc home. It hosted the India AI Impact Summit at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, in February 2026, the first such global summit anchored in the Global South. The gathering produced the New Delhi Declaration, endorsed by more than ninety countries and international organisations, and was structured around three “Sutras”, People, Planet and Progress. Frontier-model developers also signed a set of New Delhi commitments on trustworthy and inclusive deployment.

The editorial’s point is that this cooperative track exists but remains thin and aspirational while the two leading powers privilege strategic advantage over verifiable, enforceable commitments. Declarations without compliance mechanisms are a beginning, not a regime.

India’s distinctive position

India is not trying to win the arms race on the terms set by Washington and Beijing, and that is its strategic advantage. Its posture rests on several pillars:

| PILLAR | WHAT IT PROVIDES |
|---|--|
| IndiaAI Mission (https://ujjyari.com/schemes/indiaai-mission/) (approx. Rs 10,371.92 crore outlay) | Sovereign compute, with 38,000-plus GPUs deployed and subsidised access, scaling toward 100,000 GPUs |
| “AI for all” / democratising AI | Frames AI as a public good and development tool, not only a strategic weapon |
| GPAI (Global Partnership on AI) | A plurilateral platform for responsible AI in which India has been an active chair and member |
| Summit-hosting and Global South convening | Diplomatic standing to set a safety-and-access agenda |
| Compute sovereignty (https://ujjyari.com/vocab/sovereignty/) | Reduces dependence on either pole while keeping the door open to cooperation |

This combination lets India argue, with credibility the great powers lack, that AI should be governed as a shared challenge of safety and inclusion rather than a contest of containment.

The Five Eyes signal

This editorial pairs with the day's news that the Five Eyes intelligence alliance has issued joint guidance on AI-driven cyber threats. The juxtaposition is instructive. Even the most security-minded coalition now recognises that AI risk is a shared, defensive problem requiring coordinated standards. That is the cooperative logic the editorial wants generalised, rather than confined to one bloc and weaponised against another.

THE COUNTER-VIEW, TAKEN SERIOUSLY

A serious answer must engage the realist rebuttal rather than wave it away.

First, AI is genuinely dual-use. The same model weights that power a tutoring app can accelerate cyber operations or autonomous weapons targeting. Where the technology confers direct military advantage, expecting states to forgo competition is unrealistic, and security guardrails such as export controls have a legitimate rationale.

Second, calls for cooperation can be self-serving. A trailing power may invoke “shared safety” to slow a leader, and openness can become a channel through which an adversary extracts capability it could not build alone. Naive cooperation can transfer exactly the dangerous capability the regime is meant to contain.

The resolution is not to choose between the frames but to **disaggregate** (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/disaggregate/>) them. Legitimate national-security guardrails on the most sensitive capabilities can coexist with a ring-fenced cooperative commons for safety research, model evaluation, red-teaming standards and incident reporting. The editorial's error, if any, is rhetorical compression; the underlying prescription survives the realist test once the layers are separated.

WAY FORWARD

- **Quarantine safety as a global commons.** Keep defensible national-security controls, but carve out safety evaluation, red-teaming protocols and incident-sharing as cooperative obligations insulated from rivalry.
- **Give declarations teeth.** Move the New Delhi and Bletchley commitments from voluntary statements toward shared benchmarks, third-party evaluations and reporting mechanisms with follow-up accountability.
- **Let India anchor the third path.** Use the IndiaAI Mission, GPAI and summit credibility to fuse compute sovereignty with inclusive access, offering the Global South an alternative to choosing a pole.
- **Build technical interoperability** (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/interoperability/>) **of standards.** Even rivals can converge on common definitions of dangerous capability and common test suites, the AI equivalent of arms-control verification.

- **Invest in domestic safety capacity.** India needs its own evaluation institutions and talent so that it shapes standards rather than importing them.

PYQ AND EXAM LINKAGE

- **GS2 (IR):** Connects to recurring questions on India's role in plurilateral and multilateral (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/multilateral/>) groupings and on managing relations amid great-power competition. The 2020 question on whether globalisation and “the New World Order” are compatible maps onto AI governance as the newest contested commons.
- **GS3 (Science and Technology):** Links to PYQs on the implications of emerging technologies for national security and development, and on India's strategy for self-reliance in critical technologies. Use IndiaAI compute sovereignty as the contemporary case study.
- **GS4 (Ethics):** The dual-use dilemma is a textbook case for discussing responsibility, the precautionary principle and the ethics of power asymmetry (<https://ujivari.com/terms/asymmetry/>) in technology.
- **Essay:** A natural fit for prompts on technology and cooperation, or on whether competition or collaboration better serves human progress.

FACTS CORNER

- **Bletchley Declaration:** Adopted at the first AI Safety Summit, Bletchley Park, United Kingdom, November 2023; recognised frontier-AI risks and committed signatories to safety cooperation.
- **India AI Impact Summit 2026** (<https://ujivari.com/terms/india-ai-impact-summit/>): Held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, February 2026; first global AI summit hosted in the Global South; produced the New Delhi Declaration, endorsed by 90-plus countries and organisations; anchored on three “Sutras”, People, Planet and Progress.
- **IndiaAI Mission:** Cabinet-approved outlay of about Rs 10,371.92 crore; 38,000-plus GPUs deployed with subsidised access (roughly Rs 115 to Rs 150 per GPU-hour), scaling toward 100,000 GPUs; administered under MeitY.
- **GPAI:** Global Partnership on AI, a multi-stakeholder initiative for responsible AI development in which India has served as an active member and chair.
- **Export controls:** The United States restricts exports of the most advanced AI chips and semiconductor manufacturing equipment to preserve a compute and frontier-model lead.
- **Five Eyes:** Intelligence-sharing alliance of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; has issued joint guidance on AI-related cyber threats.

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● **KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

Treating AI as a Cold-War-style arms race, where one nation's advance is another's loss, is a category error: frontier-model risks are shared and transnational, so containment-first strategies erode the collective safety architecture that the technology actually requires.

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- US export controls on advanced chips and China's countervailing self-reliance push have hardened a bipolar logic that crowds out the multilateral coordination needed for safety standards, evaluation regimes and incident reporting.
- The Bletchley-to-New Delhi summit arc shows a parallel cooperative track exists, but it remains aspirational while the dominant powers privilege strategic advantage over verifiable commitments.
- India's IndiaAI Mission and its "AI for all" stance position it as a credible Global South convener able to reframe AI as a development and public-good challenge rather than a containment contest.

⚠ **COUNTER**

Realists argue that AI's dual-use nature, with direct military and cyber applications, makes strategic competition unavoidable, and that calls for cooperation can become a tool for laggards to slow leaders or for adversaries to extract capability through openness.

→ **WAY FORWARD**

Build a layered governance order: keep legitimate national-security guardrails but ring-fence safety research, model-evaluation and incident-sharing as cooperative commons; institutionalise the New Delhi Declaration follow-up; and let India anchor compute-sovereignty plus inclusive access as a third path.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

The framing of artificial intelligence as a zero-sum strategic competition between great powers risks undermining the cooperative governance that frontier-model safety demands. Critically examine this proposition in the context of recent AI safety summits and India's evolving tech-policy posture. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The diffusion of frontier AI has revived a great-power contest, but the logic of an arms race fits the technology poorly, because the gravest risks of advanced models are shared rather than zero-sum.

BODY

The United States has leaned on export controls over advanced semiconductors and equipment to preserve a compute lead, while China has answered with an aggressive drive for indigenous chips and models. This bipolar framing treats every capability gain as a relative loss for the rival, mirroring nuclear-era deterrence.

Yet frontier-model harms, from autonomous cyber-attack tooling and bio-misuse to systemic misinformation and loss-of-control scenarios, do not respect borders, so they demand shared evaluation standards, red-teaming, incident reporting and agreed safety thresholds. The summit process from Bletchley Park to the New Delhi Declaration, endorsed by over 90 countries in February 2026, signals a cooperative track, but it stays thin while the leading powers privilege containment.

India occupies a distinctive position: the Rs 10,371.92 crore IndiaAI Mission with 38,000-plus GPUs, the "AI for all" democratisation stance, GPAI engagement and its summit-hosting role let it push a safety-and-access agenda rather than a domination one.

CONCLUSION

A durable order will not abolish strategic competition, but it must quarantine safety as a global commons; India's credibility as a Global South convener gives it the standing to lead that reframing.


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