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? 81st UN General Assembly Highlights India's Push for Reformed Multilateralism, Supply-Chain Resilience and Global South Representation

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Recent Developments:

- The **81st United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** opened on **8 September 2026** and is being held under the theme **"Restoring Trust, Managing Transformation: A United Nations That Delivers for All."** The General Debate during High-Level Week is scheduled from **22 to 28 September 2026**.
- External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar** co-chaired the inaugural **Partners for Multilateralism, International Law, Peace & Prosperity (P4M) Summit** in New York with European Council President **António Costa**.
- Jaishankar argued that intense strategic competition, geopolitical tensions and conflicts are placing the global order under stress and require stronger **multilateral cooperation**.
- He highlighted the interconnected **"4F crisis" of fuel, food, fertiliser and finance** and called for international frameworks, guardrails, diversification and de-risking of vulnerable supply chains.
- During the first **V4+India Foreign Ministers' Meeting**, the Visegrád Group countries — Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia — backed India's aspiration for **permanent membership of the UN Security Council (UNSC)**.

Global Order Under Stress:

Drivers of the Current Multilateral Crisis:

- The global system is undergoing **strategic rebalancing**, but intensified geopolitical competition has made cooperation more difficult.
- Ongoing conflicts, economic fragmentation, climate risks, technological disruption and supply-chain vulnerabilities increasingly have **cross-border consequences**.
- The UN system faces concerns regarding its **representativeness, effectiveness and decision-making capacity**, particularly when major conflicts expose limitations in collective security mechanisms.
- The UN itself has placed **renewed multilateralism, UN reform and inclusive global governance** among the six priorities of the 81st session.

Areas Requiring International Cooperation:

- Effective multilateral cooperation remains important for **peace and international security, climate action and climate justice, emerging technologies, development finance, counter-terrorism, resilient supply chains, disaster management and pandemic preparedness**.
- These challenges cannot be addressed effectively through isolated national responses because disruptions in one region can rapidly affect global markets, food systems, energy security and financial stability.

The 4F Crisis and Supply-Chain Resilience:

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Fuel, Food, Fertiliser and Finance:

- The **4F crisis** refers to interconnected vulnerabilities involving **fuel, food, fertiliser and finance**.
- Energy disruptions can increase transportation and production costs, while fertiliser shortages can directly affect agricultural output and food prices.
- Financial stress can restrict the ability of developing economies to absorb external shocks and finance development.
- The crisis therefore demonstrates how **geopolitical disruptions can become economic and developmental crises**.

De-risking and Diversification:

- Jaishankar called for **frameworks and guardrails** for emerging technologies and new capabilities and advocated **de-risking and diversification** wherever chokepoint dominance threatens critical supplies.
- **De-risking** seeks to reduce excessive exposure to a particular supplier, market, technology or strategic route without necessarily abandoning economic interdependence.
- **Diversification** creates alternative sources and routes, thereby reducing vulnerability to geopolitical shocks, sanctions, conflicts and sudden supply disruptions.
- For India, this approach supports **strategic autonomy** and complements its efforts to develop resilient and geographically diversified supply chains.

Reformed Multilateralism:

India's Core Position:

- India advocates **reformed multilateralism** because many global institutions were designed according to the geopolitical realities of the post-Second World War period.
- India seeks institutions that provide **more participative deliberations, transparent decision-making and greater representation of contemporary global realities**.
- India also stresses that international institutions must uphold **international law, rules and norms** as the foundation of predictable global cooperation.
- The Permanent Mission of India has linked this approach with comprehensive **UN reform, revitalisation of the General Assembly and strengthening of ECOSOC**, alongside Security Council reform.

UN Security Council Reform:

- The UNSC has **15 members**, comprising **5 permanent members** — China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States — and **10 elected members**.
- India seeks **permanent membership in an expanded UNSC** and argues that the Council should better reflect contemporary geopolitical and economic realities.
- India's position forms part of its broader **Global South representation** agenda.
- The V4 countries' support for India's permanent membership during the first V4+India ministerial meeting adds another European voice to the broader debate on UNSC reform.

India–Visegrád Group Engagement:

V4+India Format:

- The **Visegrád Group (V4)** comprises **Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia**.
- The first **V4+India Foreign Ministers' Meeting** was held on the margins of the 81st UNGA in New York.
- Discussions covered **political and diplomatic cooperation, trade and economy, defence and security, technology, space, connectivity and people-to-people relations**.

- The format expands India's engagement with **Central Europe** and provides an additional plurilateral platform alongside bilateral relations and India-EU engagement.

India's Wider Diplomatic Engagement at UNGA:

Strategic and Regional Dialogues:

- Jaishankar's UNGA engagements included discussions with partners on **Ukraine, the Gulf, maritime security, strategic cooperation and UNSC reform**.
- India's diplomatic approach seeks to maintain dialogue with multiple stakeholders while protecting its **independent foreign-policy choices**.
- This approach is consistent with India's emphasis on **strategic autonomy, issue-based partnerships and multi-alignment**.

UNGA 81 and India's Global South Agenda:

Development and Representation:

- India continues to position itself as a prominent voice for the **Global South**, particularly on development finance, climate finance and institutional reform.
- India's official priorities for the 81st UNGA emphasise **South-South cooperation**, development concerns and stronger representation for developing countries.
- India has also highlighted its engagement with **LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS** through mechanisms such as the India-UN Development Partnership Fund and IBSA Fund.

Technology and Emerging Challenges:

- Global governance increasingly needs mechanisms for **Artificial Intelligence, digital technologies, cyber risks and other emerging capabilities**.
- The 81st UNGA itself identifies **digital governance, AI, science and technology** as a major priority under its "Innovation with Inclusion" pillar.
- India's approach combines technological cooperation with the need for **responsible governance, inclusion and strategic resilience**.

Significance for India:

Strategic and Economic Significance:

- **Strategic autonomy:** Diversified partnerships and supply chains reduce excessive dependence on individual geopolitical blocs or suppliers.
- **Global South leadership:** Institutional reform strengthens developing countries' participation in global decision-making.
- **Economic security:** Resilient supply chains reduce exposure to disruptions involving energy, food, fertilisers and critical inputs.
- **Rules-based order:** Respect for international law provides a framework for managing disputes and international cooperation.
- **Multilateral reform:** Greater representation and transparency can improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of global institutions.

Challenges and Way Forward:

Key Challenges:

- **Great-power rivalry** can obstruct consensus within multilateral institutions.

- **UNSC veto politics** can limit collective action on major conflicts.
- Institutional reform requires agreement among countries with different strategic interests.
- Developing countries continue to face constraints involving **development finance, climate finance, technology access and debt vulnerabilities**.
- Supply-chain diversification can increase short-term costs even while improving long-term resilience.

Way Forward:

- Multilateral institutions should become **more representative, transparent, accountable and responsive**.
- UNSC reform should remain focused on **credible representation and effective decision-making**.
- Global cooperation should combine **de-risking, diversification and resilient supply chains** with open and predictable trade.
- Emerging technologies require **internationally compatible governance frameworks and safeguards**.
- Global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, terrorism, food insecurity and technological disruption require **collective solutions rather than fragmented responses**.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Key Concepts:

- **Multilateralism:** Cooperation among multiple countries through common institutions, rules and decision-making mechanisms.
- **Reformed Multilateralism:** Updating global institutions so that their representation, procedures and decision-making reflect contemporary geopolitical realities.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** Maintaining independent foreign-policy choices while engaging simultaneously with multiple major powers and groupings.
- **De-risking:** Reducing excessive strategic dependence without necessarily ending economic interdependence.
- **Chokepoint:** A critical route, technology, resource or supply node whose disruption can significantly affect wider economic or strategic systems.
- **Multi-alignment:** Maintaining simultaneous relationships with different power centres based on issue-specific national interests.

UPSC Linkages:

- **GS-II:** International Relations, UN reforms, UNSC reform, Global South, multilateral institutions, India's foreign policy.
- **GS-III:** Energy security, food security, fertiliser security, supply-chain resilience, technology governance and economic security.
- **Essay:** Reforming global governance for a multipolar world; balancing national interest with collective action.
- **Prelims:** 81st UNGA theme, V4 composition, P4M, 4F crisis, UNSC structure and India's reform position.