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India's First Comprehensive National Counter-Terrorism Policy & Strategy: PRAHAAR

Why in News?

- On **23 February 2026**, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) officially released India's **first-ever unified National Counter-Terrorism Policy and Strategy**, titled **PRAHAAR** (a Hindi word meaning "strike" or "decisive blow").
- The 9-page document, uploaded on the MHA website, formalises a **zero-tolerance**, **proactive**, **intelligence-led**, **whole-of-government** and **whole-of-society** approach to terrorism.
- Earlier versions were conceptualised in 2021-22; publicly flagged by Home Minister Amit Shah in November 2024; finalised after the **Pahalgam terror attack** (22 April 2025) and multiple high-level reviews.
- The policy explicitly states that **terrorism is not linked to any religion, ethnicity, nationality or civilisation** – a strong ideological messaging point.
- Released exactly one day after India's **first National Security Strategy** outline (22 Feb 2026), signalling a major doctrinal consolidation on internal & external security.

Key Visual – Home Minister Amit Shah releasing the PRAHAAR document at North Block (23 Feb 2026)

Core Philosophy: PRAHAAR Acronym (7 Strategic Pillars)

P - **Prevention** (intelligence-led, pre-emptive disruption) R - **Response** (swift, proportionate, calibrated force) A - **Aggregation** of national capacities (whole-of-government coordination) H - **Human rights** & rule-of-law based actions A - **Attenuation** of conditions conducive to terrorism (radicalisation, socio-economic drivers) A - **Alignment** & shaping of international counter-terror efforts R - **Recovery** & societal resilience post-attack

Threat Landscape Highlighted in PRAHAAR

India faces **multi-domain, multi-front, hybrid terrorism**:

Three-front threats (water / land / air)

1. **Land-based**
   - Cross-border infiltration & state-sponsored terrorism (Pakistan-backed groups, frontal organisations, over-ground workers)
   - Sleeper cells, radicalised modules, separatist/insurgent groups
   - Nexus with organised crime (arms, narcotics, hawala)
2. **Sea-based (Maritime)**
   - Coastal infiltration (26/11 model)
   - Arms & explosives smuggling via sea routes
3. **Air-based & emerging domains**
   - Drone weaponisation & logistics drops (Punjab, J&K)
   - Cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure
   - Social media, encrypted apps, dark web for propaganda, recruitment, funding & attack coordination

Additional threats

- **CBRNED** (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive, Digital) materials

- Global networks (al-Qaeda, ISIS-K) inciting Indian modules
- Hybrid warfare: deepfakes, AI-enabled propaganda, encrypted coordination

Key Operational & Strategic Features of PRAHAAR

Criminalisation & Deterrence

- All terrorist acts, support, financing, propaganda criminalised under existing laws (UAPA, BNS, BNSS, BSA, PMLA).
- No ambiguity – strict punishment for terrorists, financiers, OGWs, propagandists.

Terror Financing Disruption

- Target hawala, illegal NGOs/charities, drug & human trafficking, cryptocurrency, shell companies.
- Strengthen FIU-IND, FATF compliance, digital transaction monitoring, international cooperation.

Technology & Cyber Focus

- Counter online radicalisation, dark-web platforms, encrypted apps.
- Protect critical infrastructure from cyber & drone threats.
- Invest in indigenous tech & private-sector collaboration.

Intelligence & Agency Synergy

- Strengthen **Multi Agency Centre (MAC)** under IB.
- Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI), real-time sharing.
- Unified SOPs, Joint Anti-Terror Task Forces (Centre-State).
- NIA as nodal high-quality investigation agency; NSG as national CT force.

Counter-Radicalisation & Community Outreach

- Graded response to radicalisation levels.

- Engage moderate religious leaders, NGOs, civil society.
- Prison de-radicalisation, community outreach, awareness campaigns.
- Address socio-economic drivers (education, skills, employment).

Cross-Border & State-Sponsored Terrorism

- Zero tolerance for state sponsorship.
- Diplomatic, military, intelligence responses.
- International pressure on sponsoring states.

CBRNED Preparedness

- Specialised training, emergency protocols, monitoring of hazardous materials.
- Coordination with defence, disaster management agencies.

Major Challenges Acknowledged

- Rapid evolution of **technology-driven terrorism** (drones, AI, deepfakes, encryption).
- Transnational networks & safe havens abroad.
- Radicalisation in prisons & online spaces.
- Resource & capacity gaps in state police/ATS.
- Need for continuous legal & procedural updation.

Significance for India (UPSC Perspective)

Internal Security (GS-3)

- Institutionalises shift from **reactive policing** to **preventive, intelligence-led strategy**.
- Strengthens border, coastal & critical infrastructure security.
- Seamless Centre-State coordination mechanism.

Economic Security

- Protects vital sectors: ports, railways, aviation, defence PSUs, space, atomic energy, power.

International Positioning

- Projects India as responsible global CT leader.
- Enhances leverage in FATF, UNSC 1267 Committee, bilateral CT dialogues.

For UPSC CSE & State PSC
• **GS-3 Internal Security** – core topic (three-front threats, agencies, financing, radicalisation, CBRN). • **Current Affairs** – landmark doctrinal release (23 Feb 2026) – compare with earlier fragmented approach. • **Essay / Ethics** – zero-tolerance vs. human rights; whole-of-society approach. • **Prelims** – PRAHAAR acronym, NSG nodal role, MAC, NIA, key laws.

Mexico: Massive Cartel Violence After Killing of 'El Mencho'

Why in News?

- Mexican security forces **killed** Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes, alias **"El Mencho"** (59), supreme leader of the **Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG)**, in a high-risk special forces raid on **22 February 2026** in Tapalpa, Jalisco state.
- His death triggered **immediate nationwide retaliation** by CJNG: over **250 roadblocks** across **20+ states**, burning of vehicles, buses, businesses & banks, attacks on security forces.
- **25 National Guard troops** killed in six separate clashes in Jalisco; **30+ suspected cartel members** killed; total fatalities **exceed 70**.

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- Guadalajara (Jalisco capital) turned into a **ghost town**; schools, universities, pharmacies & gas stations shut; travellers stranded.
- President **Claudia Sheinbaum** held emergency press conference, urged calm and claimed "greater calm" restored by Monday; government rushed **2,500+ additional troops** to Jalisco (host state for 2026 FIFA World Cup matches).
- US provided **critical intelligence support**; White House welcomed the operation.

El Mencho – Mexico's most-wanted drug lord (DEA bounty $10–15 million)

2. Background: Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) & El Mencho

- CJNG emerged in **2010** after splitting from Sinaloa Cartel; now **Mexico's most powerful and violent cartel**.
- Controls key Pacific drug corridors; major global supplier of **fentanyl, methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin**.
- Known for **military-grade tactics**, use of drones, armoured vehicles, extreme brutality (massacres, videos of torture).

- Diversified into extortion, fuel theft, human trafficking, avocado "blood fruit" racket.
- **El Mencho**: Former Jalisco state police officer; rose through ranks; took over CJNG ~2012 after "El Más Loco" killed.
- Family: Son **Ruben "El Menchito" Oseguera González** convicted & imprisoned in US (2019); another son killed earlier.

- US designated CJNG a **terrorist organisation**; El Mencho on DEA's "most wanted" list for over a decade.

CJNG territorial presence (dominant in Jalisco, Michoacán, Colima, parts of 20+ states)

3. Sequence of Events

1. **Raid** → Mexican Army + National Guard special forces tracked El Mencho via his girlfriend's movements → mountain hideout in Tapalpa → intense firefight → 6 bodyguards killed → El Mencho wounded, taken into custody, died while being airlifted to Mexico City.
2. **Retaliation** → CJNG activated "Plan de Contingencia" → simultaneous attacks & blockades from Sunday night → burning buses & vehicles in Guadalajara, Michoacán → direct assaults on National Guard patrols.

3. **Spread** → Violence reached neighbouring states; Indian Embassy in Mexico also issued advisory for Indian nationals.

4. Government & International Response

- **President Claudia Sheinbaum** (first female President, Morena party): "Mexico is calm… greater calm today… peace & security guaranteed."
- Security Secretary **Omar García Harfuch**: Gave exact casualty figures; confirmed 2,500 troops rushed to Jalisco.
- **US Role**: Intelligence sharing praised; Trump administration called it "great development" in fight against fentanyl.
- Travel advisories issued by **US, UK, Canada, Australia**; some airlines cancelled flights.

Mexican President holds briefing on killing of drug lord

5. Major Challenges Highlighted

- **Power vacuum & succession war** likely inside CJNG → risk of splintering or intensified turf wars with Sinaloa Cartel.
- **Limits of militarised approach**: Mexico's "War on Drugs" (since 2006 under Calderón) has caused **>400,000 deaths**; cartels still thrive.
- **Hybrid threats**: Cartels function as **near-state actors** with better weapons, tech & corruption networks than some state forces.
- **Economic hit**: Tourism, avocado exports, World Cup preparations disrupted.
- **Fentanyl crisis**: US overdose deaths (~70,000/year) largely from CJNG-supplied drugs.

6. Significance & Global Context

- Biggest blow to a Mexican cartel since **El Chapo's** capture (2016).
- Demonstrates **US-Mexico security cooperation** under new Trump administration.
- Highlights **narco-terrorism** as a transnational threat – similar to India's concerns with **narco-terrorism in Punjab & J&K** (drug money funding separatism).

- Lessons for **counter-organised crime strategy**: Intelligence-led operations + whole-of-government approach (compare with India's new **PRAHAAR National Counter-Terrorism Policy** released just one day earlier on 23 Feb 2026).

For UPSC CSE & State PSC
Prelims • Cartel names (CJNG), key personalities (El Mencho, Sheinbaum), Mexico's geography (Jalisco, Michoacán), US-Mexico border issues. **GS-2 (IR & Polity)** • Bilateral relations (US-Mexico security cooperation), role of non-state actors in IR, global drug trafficking networks. **GS-3 (Internal Security)** • Transnational organised crime, narco-terrorism, challenges of militarised internal security, critical infrastructure protection, border management lessons. **Essay / Interview** • "State versus Cartel: Can hard power alone defeat organised crime?" • "Drug trafficking as a hybrid threat to national security – India & Mexico compared."

Kerala Vizhinjam Seafood Incident: Suspected Tetrodotoxin (TTX) Poisoning

1. Why in News?

- On **16 February 2026 night**, a six-member family from Nilamel (Kollam district) consumed seafood at **Asmak Hotel/Restaurant** in **Vizhinjam**, Thiruvananthapuram.
- Within hours (late night/early 17 Feb), multiple members developed severe symptoms: numbness, paralysis, respiratory distress → **two deaths** (Shaji, 42-50; Rasheeda Beevi, 58-68), one critical (Regimol/Shaji's wife), later stabilized.
- By 18-19 Feb: **Additional cases** reported – three more people (Thiruvananthapuram residents) sought treatment with mild symptoms after eating at the same place.
- **Food Safety Commissionerate** sealed the hotel; no evidence of bacterial spoilage or stale fish found during inspection.

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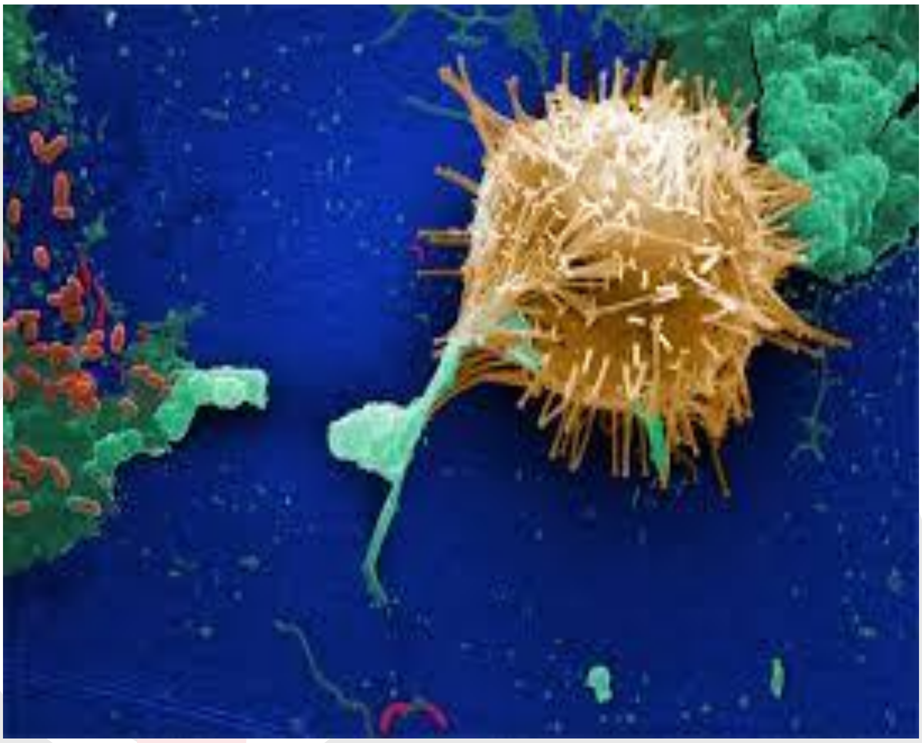
- Treating doctors & Food Safety officials suspect **neurotoxin contamination**, specifically **Tetrodotoxin (TTX)** – a naturally occurring, heat-stable, extremely potent marine neurotoxin.



- Samples (fish, roe/eggs, mussels) sent to **Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), Kochi** & state lab for detailed chemical/toxin analysis → results awaited to confirm TTX or other marine biotoxins (e.g., ciguatoxin, saxitoxin).
- Health Minister Veena George directed immediate probe; police case registered against hotel owner.

2. Key Facts of the Incident

- **Menu consumed**: Fish roe/eggs, small prawns, squid, shellfish, porotta, appam, soft drinks/bottled water.
- **Onset**: Rapid (within hours) → neurological symptoms (paralysis, respiratory failure) → fatalities in <24 hours.
- **No bacterial evidence**: Post-mortem/autopsy ruled out typical bacterial food poisoning (e.g., Salmonella, Vibrio); no spoilage detected.
- **Suspicion shifted** → Naturally occurring marine algal/marine biotoxins → doctors pinpoint TTX due to symptom profile & rapid fatality.

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- **Recent context**: TTX recently detected in some red snapper (champalli) samples from Tamil Nadu coast; similar marine toxin cases reported.

3. What is Tetrodotoxin (TTX)?

- One of the **most powerful natural neurotoxins** known (1,200 times more toxic than cyanide).
- **Source**: Produced by marine bacteria; accumulates in certain fish (mainly **pufferfish/Tetraodontidae family** – liver, ovaries, skin, roe/eggs highest concentration).
- Also found in some other marine species (blue-ringed octopus, certain gastropods, recently in some non-puffer fish due to bioaccumulation).
- **Heat-stable** – cooking/frying does **not** destroy it.
- **No antidote**; treatment supportive (ventilation, symptomatic care).
- **Symptoms**: Tingling/numbness (lips, tongue), vomiting, paralysis (ascending), respiratory arrest → death in 4-6 hours if severe.
- **Lethal dose**: ~1-2 mg can kill an adult.

TTX is classically linked to pufferfish (fugu in Japan – prepared only by licensed chefs) but increasingly reported in other fish due to environmental changes/algal blooms.

4. Why TTX Suspected Here?

- Rapid neurological onset + paralysis + fatality consistent with TTX (not typical bacterial histamine/scombroid or ciguatera).
- Fish roe/eggs consumed → high-risk part if from contaminated/puffer-like species.
- Doctors note: "Clinically consistent with TTX poisoning" – short duration, predominant neurological symptoms, death within hours.
- Ruling out: Bacterial spoilage, allergy (though initial speculation), or other common toxins.

5. Broader Implications & Challenges

- **Food Safety & Regulation**: Highlights gaps in marine fish toxin surveillance in India (no routine TTX testing in seafood supply chains).
- **Public Health Risk**: Kerala's coastal population heavily relies on seafood; increasing reports of marine biotoxins due to harmful algal blooms (climate change, pollution).
- **Recent precedent**: India's **first confirmed freshwater pufferfish TTX case** (Gujarat, Jan 2026) – riverine risk emerging.
- **Economic angle**: Tourism & fishing-dependent Vizhinjam (near upcoming International Transshipment Terminal) → reputational hit if toxin contamination confirmed.
- **Prevention needed**: Public awareness on avoiding pufferfish/unknown roe; mandatory toxin screening for high-risk species.

6. Government & Official Response

- **Food Safety Dept.**: Hotel sealed; samples to CIFT & state lab (preliminary results expected soon).
- **Health Dept.**: Monitoring for more cases; advisory on seafood consumption.
- **Police**: Case under Food Safety Act + possible IPC sections (negligence causing death)

For UPSC CSE & State

Prelims

- Toxins: TTX (source, symptoms, no antidote), difference from ciguatoxin/saxitoxin/histamine.
- Marine biotoxins, pufferfish, harmful algal blooms.
- Food Safety & Standards Act 2006, FSSAI role.

GS-2 (Governance & Health)

- Public health emergencies, food safety regulation, inter-departmental coordination (Health + Food Safety + Fisheries).

GS-3 (Disaster Management, Environment, Security)

- Emerging biological/chemical threats from natural toxins (link to environment – algal blooms, climate change).
- Food security & supply chain risks in coastal states.
- Compare with bio-toxin threats vs. man-made (e.g., CBRN in PRAHAAR policy).

Essay/Interview

- "Natural toxins in food chain: A silent public health emergency in coastal India."
- Balancing traditional seafood diet with modern safety standards.

Canada-India Relations: PM Mark Carney's Visit to India

1. Why in News?

- On **23 February 2026**, Canadian Prime Minister **Mark Carney** announced his first major overseas tour: a **three-nation Indo-Pacific visit** to **India**, **Australia**, and **Japan** from **26 February to 7 March 2026**.
- India is the **first and most prominent stop** → Carney arrives in **Mumbai** on **27 February 2026** (or late 26th), meets business leaders, then travels to **New Delhi** for bilateral talks with PM **Narendra Modi** on **2 March 2026**.
- Official statement from PMO Canada describes India as one of Canada's **"strongest Indo-Pacific partners"** → focus on **elevating and expanding** ties in **trade, energy, technology (including AI), talent & culture, defence & security**.

- Described across media as a **major diplomatic & economic reset** after years of strained relations (2023-2025) due to the **Hardeep Singh Nijjar killing** allegations and Khalistani separatism issues.
- Comes amid Canada's broader strategy to **diversify trade & reduce over-dependence on the United States** (especially post-Trump tariffs/"America First" policies).

2. Background: Mark Carney as Canadian PM & Context of Strained Ties

- **Mark Carney** (former Bank of England & Bank of Canada Governor, UN climate envoy) became Canadian PM after Liberal victory in **2025 elections** (following Justin Trudeau's exit amid low popularity).
- Relations hit historic low in **June 2023** → Canada accused Indian government agents of involvement in killing of Khalistani separatist **Hardeep Singh Nijjar** in Surrey, BC → India rejected allegations as "absurd", expelled diplomats, suspended visa services.
- Tensions continued 2023-2025: Canada expelled Indian diplomats, India restricted Canadian diplomats, trade talks stalled, high commissioners recalled.

Partial thaw:

- Modi invited to G7 Kananaskis (June 2025) → sideline meeting with Carney.
- High commissioners restored.

- G20 2025 → agreement to launch **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** negotiations → target to **double bilateral trade to CAD 70 billion (~USD 51 billion) by 2030**.

3. Itinerary & Key Focus Areas of the Visit

- **Mumbai (27 Feb onward)**: Business engagements, investment promotion, meetings with Indian industry leaders (energy, critical minerals, tech).
- **New Delhi (2 March)**: Official bilateral meeting with PM Modi → expected deliverables:
  - Progress on **CEPA negotiations** (launched 2025).
  - New partnerships in **clean/fossil fuel energy transition**, **nuclear energy**, **critical minerals** (lithium, cobalt for EV batteries).
  - **AI & technology** cooperation (talent mobility, joint R&D).
  - **Defence & security** → practical collaboration on law enforcement, intelligence sharing, countering transnational threats (officials hope to address India's concerns sensitively).
  - **Talent & culture** → student mobility, skilled migration pathways.
- Broader message: "In a more uncertain world, Canada is focused on what we can control – diversifying trade, attracting investment, creating new partnerships."

4. Significance & Strategic Importance

For Canada

- **Trade diversification** away from US amid tariff threats & protectionism.
- India = fast-growing market, huge diaspora (~1.4 million Canadians of Indian origin), critical minerals & energy partner.
- **Indo-Pacific strategy** alignment (Quad partner India, close ally Australia & Japan).

For India

- Strengthens **Indo-Pacific positioning** (Quad, I2U2, etc.).

- Access to Canadian **critical minerals**, clean tech, investment in semiconductors/energy.
- Opportunity to reset narrative on security concerns while advancing economic agenda.
- Demonstrates India's diplomatic leverage – Carney visiting early in term signals priority.

Global Context

- Reflects **multipolar realignment**: Middle powers seeking alternatives amid US-China rivalry.
- Link to India's **PRAHAAR Counter-Terror Policy** (released 23 Feb 2026) → security cooperation may feature subtly.

5. Major Challenges & Sensitivities

- **Lingering Nijjar case**: Trial of four arrested suspects ongoing in Canada; India wants sensitive handling to avoid derailment.
- **Khalistani activism**: Canada's Sikh diaspora & freedom of expression vs. India's concerns over separatism/terrorism.
- **Expectations mismatch**: India prioritizes economic gains; Canada seeks balanced reset including security dialogue.
- No formal joint statement yet on "reset" language – cautious optimism.

For UPSC CSE & State PSC

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Prelims

- Bilateral trade target (CAD 70 bn by 2030), CEPA status, key personalities (Mark Carney background), recent G7/G20 meetings.

GS-2 (International Relations)

- India-Canada relations: evolution, strains (2023 Nijjar), reset under Carney.
- Indo-Pacific strategy, Quad synergy, middle-power diplomacy.
- Role of diaspora in foreign policy.

GS-3 (Economy & Security)

- Trade diversification, critical minerals & energy security.
- Technology & AI cooperation, defence ties in multipolar world.

Essay / Interview

- "Economic pragmatism vs. security red lines: Can India & Canada rebuild trust?"
- "Diversification of partnerships in a protectionist world order."

Delhi-NCR Air Pollution: Supreme Court Directs Centre on Shifting Coal-Based Industries & 300 km Ban on New TPPs

1. Why in News?

- On **23 February 2026**, a Supreme Court bench headed by **Chief Justice of India Surya Kant** (with Justices Joymalya Bagchi & Vipul M Pancholi) heard long-pending matters on Delhi-NCR air pollution (stemming from MC Mehta PILs since 1985-86).

- The Court sought responses from Union Ministries (**Environment, Forest & Climate Change - MoEFCC**, **Power**, **Petroleum & Natural Gas - MoPNG**) on **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)** recommendations for **phasing out / shifting coal-based industries** from Delhi-NCR.

- Key proposal under consideration: **No new coal-based thermal power plants (TPPs)** to be established within **300 km radius** of Delhi to curb emissions.

- Court directed NCR states (**Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan**) to issue **public notices** inviting suggestions/objections from stakeholders (including industries) on phasing out coal-based units.

- Next hearing on vehicular pollution aspects fixed for **12 March 2026**.
- Bench emphasized long-term structural measures beyond seasonal GRAP (Graded Response Action Plan) actions.

2. Key Directions & Proposals from Supreme Court

- **Joint proposal from Ministries** (MoEFCC + Power + MoPNG): Identify all coal-based industries in NCR → assess feasibility of shifting them out → explore viable **alternative fuels** (e.g., PNG - Piped Natural Gas, biomass, electricity).

- **Interim feasibility study** by Delhi, Haryana & other authorities on logistics, relocation sites & operational modalities.
- **Ban on new coal-based TPPs** within 300 km of Delhi: Court to examine CAQM's explicit recommendation citing high SO_2, NOx, PM emissions from such plants.
- **Public consultation**: UP, Haryana, Rajasthan to issue notices under Court's authority → treat responses as part of action plans.
- **Delhi Govt role**: File detailed action-taken report on operationalising CAQM's long-term recommendations (agency-specific responsibilities assigned).

3. Role of Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)

- Established under **CAQM in NCR & Adjoining Areas Act, 2021** (after repeated SC nudges).

- Statutory body with overriding powers over states/Centre on air quality in NCR + adjoining districts (Punjab, Haryana, UP, Rajasthan).
- Recent status report (Jan/Feb 2026) highlighted:
  - Need to eliminate coal as fuel in NCR industries.
  - Develop PNG infrastructure in industrial areas with uniform/affordable pricing.
  - No new coal-based TPPs within 300 km radius (considering cumulative emissions impact).
  - Long-term measures for vehicular emissions, construction dust, stubble burning.
- CAQM has identified implementing agencies → SC directed Delhi Govt to operationalise them.

4. Broader Context: Delhi-NCR Air Pollution Crisis

- Delhi AQI frequently "Severe"/"Very Poor" in winters due to stubble burning (30-40%), vehicular emissions (~30%), industrial/TPP emissions, dust, Diwali fireworks.
- Coal-based industries & TPPs in NCR & periphery (e.g., Haryana's Panipat, Sonipat; UP's Baghpat, Gautam Budh Nagar; Rajasthan's Alwar) contribute significantly to PM2.5, SO_2.
- Existing major TPPs nearby: Badarpur (shut), Dadri (NTPC), Rajiv Gandhi (Hisar), etc. – new ones proposed in past faced opposition.
- Judicial history: SC banned old diesel vehicles, enforced CNG shift, closed Badarpur TPP (2018), directed GRAP enforcement.

5. Major Challenges Highlighted

- **Economic & employment impact**: Shifting industries could affect lakhs of jobs in brick kilns, steel rolling, ceramics, etc.
- **Alternative fuel viability**: PNG availability limited; cost higher than coal in many areas.
- **Inter-state coordination**: Pollution travels across borders → need uniform enforcement.

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- **Energy transition**: India's coal dependence for power (~70% generation) vs. clean air goals.
- **Implementation gaps**: Past CAQM directions often delayed by states.

For UPSC CSE & State PSC

Internal Security & Environment (GS-3)

- Air pollution as **public health emergency** (millions affected annually).
- Judiciary's proactive role in environmental governance (Art. 21 - right to clean air).
- Link to **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**, **CAQM Act 2021**, **Energy Transition**.

GS-2 (Governance & Polity)

- Federalism challenges: Centre-state coordination on transboundary pollution.
- Role of statutory bodies (CAQM) vs. executive inaction.

GS-3 (Disaster Management & Environment)

- Compare with stubble burning solutions (Happy Seeder, bio-decomposers).
- Sustainable development: Balancing industrial growth & pollution control.

Essay / Interview

- "Judicial activism vs. policy paralysis: Can courts deliver clean air for Delhi?"
- "Coal phase-out in NCR: Economic costs vs. health benefits."

President Droupadi Murmu Unveils Bust of C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) at Rashtrapati Bhavan – Symbolic Step in Decolonisation

Why in News?

- On **23 February 2026**, President **Droupadi Murmu** unveiled a bust of **Chakravarti Rajagopalachari** (popularly known as **Rajaji** or **Rajagopalachari**) at **Rashtrapati Bhavan**.
- The bust replaces the earlier bust/statue of British architect **Edwin Lutyens** (chief designer of New Delhi and Rashtrapati Bhavan itself during colonial era).
- Location: Grand Open Staircase near **Ashok Mandap**, opposite Mahatma Gandhi's statue.
- Event held during **Rajaji Utsav** (celebration of Rajaji's life & contributions) – exhibition on Rajaji open to public from **24 February to 1 March 2026** at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

- President hailed it as part of a series of steps to **shed vestiges of colonial mindset**, embrace India's heritage, culture, timeless traditions, and honour freedom fighters' extraordinary contributions to Bharat Mata.
- **PM Narendra Modi** (in message read by Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat) called it an **important act of mental decolonisation** – placing India's democracy as politically independent and culturally self-assured.
- Attendees: Vice President **C.P. Radhakrishnan**, Rajaji's family members, Union ministers.

Who was C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji)?

- Born **1878**, Salem (Madras Presidency); died **1972**.
- Freedom fighter, lawyer, journalist, statesman.
- Key roles:
  - Close associate of **Mahatma Gandhi**; participated in Non-Cooperation, Salt Satyagraha, Quit India.
  - First & **only Indian Governor-General** of independent India (21 June 1948 - 26 January 1950) – after Lord Mountbatten.
  - Chief Minister of Madras (1952-54) – introduced **Hindi education** (controversial), educational reforms.

- Founder of **Swatantra Party** (1959) – first major opposition to Congress; advocated free-market, anti-licence raj.
- Bharat Ratna (1954) – first recipient from South India.

- Known for intellectual depth, integrity, opposition to socialism, advocacy for linguistic states, Hindu-Muslim unity efforts.
- Literary contributions: Tamil & English writings; simplified Mahabharata & Ramayana.

Significance of the Move

- **Symbolic Decolonisation**: Rashtrapati Bhavan (formerly Viceroy's House) designed by Lutyens as symbol of British imperial power.
  - Replacing Lutyens' bust with Rajaji's (first Indian to occupy the highest constitutional post post-independence) marks **mental/cultural decolonisation**.
  - Aligns with broader efforts: renaming Rajpath → Kartavya Path, removal of colonial symbols, emphasis on indigenous icons.
- **Rajaji Utsav**: Exhibition highlights Rajaji's life, thoughts, contributions – promotes national pride in freedom fighters.
- **President's Message**: India must take inspiration from icons like Rajaji, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Mahatma Gandhi to build **Viksit Bharat** – connecting heritage with future aspirations.
- **PM's Emphasis**: Reflects resolve to honour nation-shapers & shed colonial remnants; Rajaji provided stability during transition (1948-50).

Broader Context: Decolonisation Drive in India

- Part of ongoing cultural-nationalist push:
  - Renaming roads, institutions (e.g., Mughalsarai → Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, Connaught Place discussions).
  - Emphasis on pre-colonial/ freedom-era icons in public spaces.

- Contrast with colonial symbols (Lutyens' Delhi as "power corridor").

- Lutyens' great-grandson expressed regret over removal (reported in media).
- Links to **cultural self-confidence** narrative in New India.

For UPSC CSE & State PSC

Prelims

- Personalities: C. Rajagopalachari – roles (Governor-General 1948-50, CM Madras, Swatantra Party founder, Bharat Ratna 1954).
- Key facts: Only Indian GG post-independence; replaced Lutyens bust (2026).
- Events: Rajaji Utsav (Feb-March 2026).

GS-1 (History & Culture)

- Freedom struggle leaders beyond Congress mainstream (Rajaji's ideological differences with Nehru).
- Post-independence transition (1947-50): Role of Governor-General.

GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Symbolic governance: Role of President, cultural symbolism in nation-building.
- Decolonisation & national identity in contemporary India.

GS-4 (Ethics)

- Integrity, intellectual independence (Rajaji's life).
- Balancing heritage pride with modern progress.

Essay / Interview

- "Decolonisation of the mind: From symbols to substance in post-colonial India."
- "Honouring freedom fighters: Role of public memory in nation-building."

WhatsApp-Meta Privacy Policy Case: Supreme Court Hearing

Why in News?

- On **23 February 2026**, a Supreme Court bench headed by **Chief Justice of India Surya Kant** (with Justices Joymalya Bagchi & Vipul M Pancholi) heard appeals by **Meta Platforms Inc.** and **WhatsApp LLC** against **National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)** order upholding **₹213.14 crore penalty** imposed by **Competition Commission of India (CCI)**.

- WhatsApp (represented by Senior Advocate **Kapil Sibal**) asserted:
  - It **does not share user data** with Meta (parent company).
  - End-to-end encryption (E2EE) protects personal messages/calls – inaccessible even to WhatsApp/Meta.
  - No reading of private chats, no selling of user data, no use of message content for targeted ads.
- WhatsApp committed to **full compliance** with NCLAT directions on **user consent** for any non-core data sharing (including advertising) by **16 March 2026**.

- Court disposed of stay pleas; directed WhatsApp/Meta to file **compliance affidavit** with CCI → matter remains pending for deeper examination of privacy policy.
- Earlier (3 Feb 2026): SC strongly criticised "take-it-or-leave-it" policy as misleading "silent consumers", monopoly abuse, and "decent way of committing theft" of private data.

Key Visual – WhatsApp privacy policy update notification (2021) that triggered CCI probe

(Representational: WhatsApp's 2021 privacy update screen prompting data sharing consent)

Background & Timeline of the Case

- **2021 Privacy Policy Update** (Jan 2021): WhatsApp mandated sharing of certain user data (device info, IP, interactions, etc.) with Meta companies for "integration, security, ads" – made acceptance compulsory ("take-it-or-leave-it").
- **CCI Investigation** (2021): Found abuse of dominance under **Competition Act, 2002** → coercive consent, unfair conditions, leveraging OTT dominance into online advertising.

CCI Order (Nov 2024):

- Imposed **₹213.14 crore penalty** on Meta/WhatsApp.
- 5-year ban on sharing WhatsApp data with Meta for advertising.

NCLAT Ruling (Nov 2025, clarified Dec 2025):

- Upheld ₹213.14 crore penalty.
- Set aside 5-year ad ban (no blanket prohibition).
- Directed enhanced safeguards:
  - Transparent explanation of data shared & purpose.
  - Non-mandatory sharing for non-core services.
  - Prominent opt-out/revocable consent option (in-app notification + settings tab).
  - Applies to both advertising & non-advertising purposes.

- **Supreme Court Appeals** (2025-26): Meta/WhatsApp challenged penalty & directions; CCI cross-appealed for re-imposition of ban.

Key Statements in SC

WhatsApp/Meta (Kapil Sibal):

- Technology emphasises privacy; no violation.
- Comply with NCLAT by 16 Mar 2026 → users get clear choice on data sharing.
- Blanket ban would hurt small businesses (reliant on targeted ads), user experience, legitimate functions.

CCI (Madhavi Divan):

- Data sharing has many facets: privacy + market/consumer protection.
- CCI's original 5-year ad ban still under challenge → silent consumers exploited.

SC Observations:

- Privacy right (Art. 21) paramount.
- Will not allow exploitation of Indian citizens' data.

- CCI to examine compliance affidavit.

Broader Implications & Challenges

- **Data Privacy vs. Competition Law**: Intersection of **Personal Data Protection Act** (pending full enforcement) & Competition Act – coercive consent as anti-competitive.
- **User Impact**: Millions of "silent consumers" (rural/elderly/digital dependents) unaware of implications.
- **Global Tech Regulation**: India's assertive stance (like EU GDPR) on Big Tech dominance, data monopolies.
- **Business Angle**: Targeted ads fund free services; ban could affect small Indian businesses using Meta ads.
- **E2EE Assurance**: WhatsApp reiterated no access to message content – only metadata/device data potentially shared.

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Prelims

- Key bodies: CCI (Competition Act 2002), NCLAT, Supreme Court.
- Penalty amount: ₹213.14 crore.
- Landmark dates: 2021 policy, Nov 2024 CCI, Nov 2025 NCLAT, Feb 2026 SC hearing.
- Laws: Competition Act (abuse of dominance, Sec 4), Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 (context).

GS-2 (Governance & Polity)

- Judicial activism in data privacy (Art. 21 - right to privacy from Puttaswamy judgment).
- Regulation of Big Tech: CCI's role in digital markets.

GS-3 (Economy & Technology)

- Digital economy: Data as asset, competition in OTT/advertising markets.
- Consumer protection, market dominance, anti-trust in tech.
- Compare with global cases (EU fines on Meta, US antitrust suits).

GS-2 (IR)

- India's digital sovereignty & regulation of foreign tech giants.

Essay / Interview

- "Balancing innovation & privacy: Regulating Big Tech in a digital democracy."
- "Data as the new oil: Competition law's role in preventing exploitation."

India Among Top Four Contributors to Global Pesticide Toxicity: Landmark Study in Science

Why in News?

- A major peer-reviewed study published in **Science** journal (5 February 2026) titled **"Increasing applied pesticide toxicity trends counteract the global reduction target to safeguard biodiversity"** revealed that **China, Brazil, the United States, and India** together account for **53-68%** (nearly 70%) of the world's **Total Applied Toxicity (TAT)** from pesticides.

- TAT measures the **ecological toxicity** of pesticides applied in agriculture, weighted by the amount used and their toxicity to non-target species (insects, pollinators, birds, fish, soil organisms, plants).

- India's TAT has **increased** significantly (2013-2019 data), driven by higher volumes on key crops and use of more toxic active ingredients (especially insecticides).

- The study warns that rising pesticide toxicity threatens the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** (adopted at COP15, 2022) target to **reduce pesticide risk by 50% by 2030**.
- **Only Chile** is on track to meet the target; India, US, Brazil, and several African countries show upward trends.
- Indian media (The Hindu, The Quint, etc.) highlighted India's role on 23 February 2026, amid concerns over the pending **Pesticides Management Bill 2025** (expected in Parliament March 2026).

Key Findings of the Study (Science, Feb 2026)

- Analysed **625 pesticides** across **201 countries** (2013-2019 data).
- TAT increased for most species groups:
  - Insects: +42.9% (highest rise).
  - Soil organisms: +30.8%.
  - Other groups (pollinators, birds, fish, plants): notable increases.
- Only ~**20 pesticides** per species group drive >90% of national TAT → focus on high-impact chemicals (e.g., insecticides dominant).
- Major crops contributing 76-83% of global TAT: **fruits, vegetables, maize, soybean, rice, other cereals**.

- Top contributors (53-68% global TAT): **China > Brazil > US > India**.
- Rise due to:
    - Expanding farmland & intensified agriculture.
    - Shift to more toxic active ingredients (especially insecticides).
- India-specific: Continues use of at least **66 pesticides banned elsewhere** (e.g., **paraquat** banned in EU but used in India).

Implications for India

- **Biodiversity & Ecology**: High TAT harms non-target species → pollinator decline, soil health loss, aquatic ecosystem damage.
- **Human Health**: Residues in food chain, farmer exposure (e.g., Yavatmal cotton belt incidents), chronic effects.
- **Agriculture**: India's pesticide consumption rising (low per hectare but high volume due to area); reliance on chemical-intensive farming for food security.
- **Regulatory Gaps**:
    - Outdated **Insecticides Act 1968** (experts call it inadequate for modern misuse/overuse).
    - Pending **Pesticides Management Bill 2025**: Aims to promote low-toxicity/bio-based alternatives, incorporate traditional knowledge, but critics fear it may not sufficiently curb highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs).
- India banned/restricted several HHPs (e.g., chlorpyrifos additions via Stockholm Convention 2025), but many remain in use.

Global Context

- UN target (COP15): Halve pesticide risk by 2030 → current trends moving opposite direction.
- Other nations: EU leads in bans (e.g., chlorpyrifos, paraquat); China/Brazil also high users.

- Call for action: Coordinated global reduction, shift to IPM (Integrated Pest Management), biopesticides, precision agriculture.

Major Challenges Highlighted

- Balancing food production vs. ecological/health risks in large agrarian economies.
- Overuse/misuse in smallholder farming (poor regulation, cheap HHPs).
- Export/import issues: Indian produce faces residue rejections abroad.
- Climate change: Intensified pest pressure may increase pesticide dependence.

For UPSC CSE & State

Prelims

- Key terms: Total Applied Toxicity (TAT), Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs), Kunming-Montreal Framework (COP15 target).
- Top countries: China, Brazil, US, India.
- Laws: Insecticides Act 1968, proposed Pesticides Management Bill 2025.

GS-3 (Environment & Ecology)

- Pesticide pollution as biodiversity threat.
- Sustainable agriculture: IPM, organic farming, bio-pesticides.
- Global commitments: UN Biodiversity targets, Stockholm/Rotterdam Conventions.

GS-3 (Agriculture)

- Pesticide regulation, farmer health, food safety (FSSAI residue limits).
- Link to soil health, pollinator decline (food security).

GS-2 (Governance)

- Need for updated pesticide law vs. outdated 1968 Act.
- Federal issues: State-level enforcement gaps.

Essay / Interview

- "Chemical-intensive agriculture: Boon for productivity or bane for biodiversity?"
- "India's pesticide dilemma: Feeding 1.4 billion vs. protecting ecosystems."

India as Major Contributor to Rising Global Pesticide Toxicity: Science Journal Study

Why in News?

- A landmark peer-reviewed study titled **"Increasing applied pesticide toxicity trends counteract the global reduction target to safeguard biodiversity"** was published in **Science** journal on **5 February 2026** (Vol. 391, Issue 6785, pp. 616-621).
- Lead researchers: Jakob Wolfram et al. from RPTU Kaiserslautern-Landau (Germany).
- Key headline: Global **Total Applied Toxicity (TAT)** of pesticides has **increased** (2013-2019 data) for most species groups, directly countering the UN's **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** target (COP15, 2022) to **reduce pesticide risk by at least 50% by 2030**.
- **India** is one of the **top four contributors** (along with **China, Brazil, US**), accounting for **53-68%** (nearly 70%) of global TAT – highlighted in Indian media (The Hindu, The Quint, etc.) on 23-24 February 2026.
- The study warns of severe threats to **non-target species** (pollinators, soil organisms, birds, aquatic life) and calls for urgent coordinated action.

What is Total Applied Toxicity (TAT)?

- New metric: **Mass of pesticide applied × ecotoxicity** (weighted by toxicity to specific non-target species groups).
- Analysed **625 pesticides** across **201 countries** and **eight species groups** (terrestrial insects, soil organisms, pollinators, birds, fish, plants, etc.).
- TAT rose significantly:
  - Terrestrial insects: **+42.9%** overall (6.4% annual average).
  - Soil organisms: **+30.8%**.
  - Other groups: notable increases.
- Only ~**20 pesticides** per species group drive **>90%** of national TAT – focus on high-impact insecticides (e.g., neonicotinoids, pyrethroids).

Key Findings Relevant to India

- **Top contributors**: China > Brazil > US > **India** → 53-68% global TAT.
- Major crops driving TAT (76-83% global): **Fruits, vegetables, maize, soybean, rice, other cereals** – aligns with India's staple/agri-export crops.
- India's TAT increased due to:
  - Higher volumes applied (intensified farming, expanding area).
  - Use of more toxic active ingredients (insecticides dominant).
  - Continued use of several **Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs)** banned elsewhere (e.g., paraquat in some contexts).
- Only **Chile** on track for 2030 reduction target; India, US, Brazil, several African nations show upward trends.

Broader Implications for India

- **Biodiversity Loss**: Declining pollinators (bees, wasps), soil health (earthworms, microbes), aquatic ecosystems – threatens food security long-term.
- **Human Health**: Chronic exposure (farmers, residues in food/water); links to farmer health crises (e.g., Yavatmal incidents).
- **Agriculture & Economy**: Pesticide resistance in pests, export rejections due to MRL violations, cost of overuse.
- **Regulatory Context**:
  - Outdated **Insecticides Act 1968** → calls for urgent replacement.
  - **Pesticides Management Bill 2025** (pending in Parliament, expected March 2026): Aims to promote low-risk/bio-pesticides, traditional knowledge, stricter registration.
  - India banned/restricted several HHPs recently (Stockholm Convention additions), but enforcement gaps remain.

Global & Policy Context

- **UN Target (COP15 2022)**: Halve pesticide risk by 2030 – current trajectory opposite.
- **Drivers**: Agricultural intensification, shift to toxic insecticides, lack of coordinated global reduction.
- **Solutions proposed**: Shift to **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**, biopesticides, precision application, ban HHPs, promote natural enemies (e.g., parasitoid wasps in rice/paddy systems).

For UPSC CSE & State PSC

Prelims

- TAT metric, top countries (China, Brazil, US, India), UN target (50% risk reduction by 2030).
- Key laws: Insecticides Act 1968, Pesticides Management Bill 2025.
- Conventions: Kunming-Montreal (COP15), Stockholm/Rotterdam on HHPs.

GS-3 (Environment & Ecology)

- Pesticides as driver of biodiversity decline (non-target effects).
- Sustainable agriculture: IPM, biopesticides, organic farming.
- Global environmental governance: UN biodiversity targets.

GS-3 (Agriculture)

- Pesticide overuse vs. food security; resistance issues.
- Soil health, pollinator crisis (link to yield stability).

GS-2 (Governance)

- Need for modern pesticide regulation; Centre-state enforcement.

Essay / Interview

- “Chemical agriculture: Feeding India or poisoning its future?”
- “Balancing productivity and ecology in the era of climate change.”

The Quiet Crisis of Adolescent Mental Health in India

1. Why in News?

- An opinion-lead article titled **"The quiet crisis of adolescent mental health in India"** was published in **The Hindu** on **23-24 February 2026**, highlighting the growing, under-addressed burden of mental health issues among children and adolescents.
- It draws on clinical observations, population data, and recent policy acknowledgements (e.g., **Economic Survey 2025-26** released January 2026).
- The piece coincides with ongoing discussions post-**ANCIPS 2026** (Annual National Conference of Indian Psychiatric Society, January 2026), where experts revealed **nearly 60% of mental disorders** diagnosed in individuals **below 35 years**, with early onset in adolescence.

- Union Budget 2026-27 (announced February 2026) prioritised mental health: second NIMHANS campus in North India, trauma care expansion, workforce training – signalling policy shift amid rising youth distress.
- Broader context: Rising screen addiction, digital stress, academic pressure, and unregulated online exposure exacerbate the issue, as noted in NCERT surveys and UNICEF reports.

Extent of the Problem (Key Statistics)

- **Prevalence**:
    - National Mental Health Survey (2015-16) & follow-up studies: **7-10%** of Indian adolescents have diagnosable mental health conditions.

- 5-7% of school-aged children have ADHD.
- Recent estimates (ANCIPS 2026): **60%** of all mental disorders diagnosed below age 35; median onset **19-20 years**.
- School-going children: **25.92%** show depression symptoms; **13.70%** anxiety (Delhi study).
- UNICEF/NCERT: **7.3%** of 18-29 youth face mental morbidity; **11%** anxiety, **14%** extreme emotions, **43%** mood swings among students.
- Global comparison: Half of mental disorders begin by age 14; 75% by mid-20s.

- **Suicide & Self-Harm**: Suicide leading cause of death in 15-29 age group; India among highest youth suicide rates globally.
- **Treatment Gap**: Only **0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000** population (vs. global benchmark >3); severe shortage of child/adolescent specialists, psychologists, psychiatric social workers.
- **Urban-Rural Divide**: Higher in urban metros (nearly double rural areas).

Root Causes & Contributing Factors

- **Early Vulnerability**: Biological (hormonal changes), environmental (family neglect, trauma, chronic stress), cognitive (poor emotional regulation).
- **Digital Environment**: Unregulated social media, cyberbullying, screen addiction → anxiety, low self-esteem, disrupted sleep, weakened social bonds.
- **Academic & Social Pressures**: Intense competition, parental expectations, unemployment fears, peer comparison.
- **Other Triggers**: Pandemic aftermath, urbanisation, economic stress, fragmented family support.

Consequences & Broader Impact

- Poor academic performance, dropout, behavioural issues.

- Long-term: Chronic disorders, reduced productivity, economic loss (projected USD 1 trillion globally 2012-2030).
- Inter-generational: Untreated issues affect future parenting, societal well-being.

Recommended Interventions (from Article & Experts)

- **Family Level**: Backdrop support, emotional availability, limit screen time.
- **School Level**: Integrate mental health in curriculum, train teachers/counsellors, peer support, safe spaces.
- **Community/Policy**: Early screening, destigmatisation campaigns, tele-counselling expansion.
- **Professional**: Increase child psychiatrists/psychologists; evidence-based therapies (e.g., DBT for suicidality).
- **Systemic**: Strengthen NIMHANS, district-level services, integrate into Ayushman Bharat; preventive strategies in Economic Survey 2025-26.
- Emerging: AI/digital tools (e.g., Imperial College project for rural girls), whole-school programs (SAMA feasibility in Karnataka).

Government & Policy Response (2026 Updates)

- **Economic Survey 2025-26**: Acknowledged rising youth challenges; proposed prevention.
- **Union Budget 2026-27**: Second NIMHANS campus, trauma care in districts, workforce training, focus on vulnerable groups.
- Ongoing: Tele-MANAS expansion, school-based pilots.

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Prelims

- Key stats: 7-10% adolescent prevalence, 60% disorders below 35, psychiatrist ratio (0.75/100,000).
- Bodies: NIMHANS, Indian Psychiatric Society (ANCIPS), UNICEF, NCERT surveys.
- Policies: National Mental Health Survey 2015-16, Mental Healthcare Act 2017, Budget 2026 announcements.

GS-2 (Governance & Health)

- Public health challenges: Treatment gap, stigma, urban-rural divide.
- Policy interventions: Budget allocations, institutional expansion, early intervention.

GS-1 (Society)

- Vulnerable groups: Adolescents/youth in demographic dividend context.
- Social issues: Digital addiction, family dynamics, academic stress.

GS-3 (Disaster Management/Health)

- Mental health as public health emergency; link to suicide prevention, productivity loss.

Essay / Interview

- "Silent epidemic: Addressing adolescent mental health in a digital India."
- "Investing in youth mental well-being: Prerequisite for Viksit Bharat."

India AI Impact Summit 2026: A Landmark Global Event on AI for Inclusive Growth

Why in News?

- The **India AI Impact Summit 2026** (officially **India-AI Impact Summit**) was held from **16-20 February 2026** at **Bharat Mandapam**, New Delhi – the **first-ever global AI summit hosted in the Global South**.
- Inaugurated by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** on **19 February 2026**; co-addressed by **French President Emmanuel Macron** and attended by heads of state (e.g., Brazilian President Lula da Silva), UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and CEOs from OpenAI (Sam Altman), Anthropic (Dario Amodei), Google (Sundar Pichai), Nvidia, Microsoft, Google DeepMind (Demis Hassabis), Reliance (Mukesh Ambani), and others.
- Record attendance: **250,000+ visitors**, **300+ exhibitors** from India & 30+ countries, **10+ thematic pavilions**, **$200 billion+** in pledged investments/collaborations.

- Culminated in **AI Impact Summit Declaration** (19 February 2026) signed by multiple countries – focused on **People, Planet, and Progress**: ethical AI, inclusive growth, public good applications (health, agriculture, education, climate).

- Anchored in **IndiaAI Mission** (MeitY); positioned India as a voice for Global South in AI governance, shifting from "safety/action" (previous summits: Bletchley Park 2023, Seoul 2024, Paris 2025) to **impact & implementation**.
- Side controversies: Massive traffic chaos, organisational glitches, shirtless Youth Congress protest (20 Feb) against Indo-US trade deal, no-show by some invitees (e.g., Bill Gates), robot-dog demo fraud allegations.

PM Narendra Modi with global AI leaders (Sam Altman, Dario Amodei, Sundar Pichai) at the summit's group photo (19 Feb 2026)

Key Highlights & Outcomes

- **Theme**: Democratisation of AI – making benefits accessible, inclusive, and impactful for all, especially developing nations.
- **Major Announcements**:
    - Google DeepMind: Partnerships for science, student empowerment, agriculture, renewable energy.

- IndiaAI Mission advancements: Compute infrastructure, talent development, ethical frameworks.
- Bilateral meetings: PM Modi with Sam Altman (OpenAI), UN chief Guterres, multiple heads of state.
- Roundtables: PM with 16 AI/deeptech startup CEOs.

- **Declaration Focus**:
  - AI for social good: Healthcare diagnostics, precision agriculture, education personalisation, climate modelling.
  - Ethical safeguards: Human rights, bias mitigation, data privacy.
  - Global cooperation: Capacity-building for Global South, reducing digital divide.
- **India's Positioning**: Showcased indigenous AI (e.g., PARAM-2 supercomputer upgrade), talent pool, startup ecosystem; aimed to attract investment while advocating for equitable AI rules.

Significance for India

- **Strategic**: First Global South host – elevates India's role in global AI governance (post-Paris 2025 co-chair with France).
- **Economic**: $200 billion+ pledges → boost to startups, compute infra, jobs in AI/tech.
- **Social Impact**: Emphasis on inclusive AI (e.g., for farmers, rural health, women-led innovation via AI by HER challenge).
- **Geopolitical**: Middle-power diplomacy – India as bridge between US/China-led models and developing world needs.
- **Domestic Push**: Aligns with **Viksit Bharat** vision; reinforces IndiaAI Mission (₹10,000+ crore outlay).

Challenges & Criticisms

- Logistical issues: Traffic gridlock, venue overcrowding, last-minute evictions for VIPs.

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- Protests: Youth Congress demo (shirtless) linked to broader political discontent.
- Amnesty International critique: Declaration failed to strongly curb harmful government/corporate AI uses (surveillance, etc.).
- Execution gaps: Some called it chaotic despite scale.

For UPSC CSE & State PSC

Prelims

- Event: India AI Impact Summit 2026 (16-20 Feb, Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi).
- Key figures: PM Modi (inaugurator), Macron (co-address), Altman, Pichai, Ambani.
- Previous summits: Bletchley Park (safety), Seoul, Paris (action).
- Declaration date: 19 Feb 2026.

GS-2 (International Relations)

- India's leadership in Global South AI diplomacy.
- Multilateral forums: Shift from safety to impact; role in shaping global norms.

GS-3 (Technology & Economy)

- AI for inclusive growth: Applications in agri, health, education, climate.
- IndiaAI Mission, compute access, talent ecosystem.
- Digital divide, ethical AI, investment attraction ($200 bn pledges).

GS-2 (Governance)

- Policy: MeitY's role, ethical frameworks, public good focus.

Essay / Interview

- "AI as a tool for inclusive development: India's vision at the Global South summit."
- "From safety to impact: India's role in redefining global AI governance."

India's Energy Shift Through the Green Ammonia Route

Why in News?

- An op-ed in **The Hindu** titled **"India's energy shift through the green ammonia route"** (published 23 February 2026, updated 24 February) highlighted India's pioneering **green ammonia auction model** under the **National Green Hydrogen Mission (NGHM)** as a potential game-changer for global clean energy adoption.

- Key trigger: Successful conclusion of **Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI)** tender (June 2024-August 2025) for **724,000 tonnes/year** of green ammonia supply to 13 fertilizer plants → record-low discovered price of **₹49.75/kg** (~$569-572/MT), 35-50% below global benchmarks (e.g., H2Global ~$1,153/MT).
- At **India Energy Week (IEW) 2026** (January 2026), PM Narendra Modi positioned green hydrogen/ammonia as central to India's $500 billion energy investment opportunity.
- Recent developments: MoUs for large-scale projects (e.g., NTPC Green Energy-Assago green urea at Pudimadaka), export visibility from 2028, and policy push for cost convergence.

Green ammonia production schematic – combining green hydrogen (from renewables) with nitrogen for zero-carbon fertilizer/fuel (Representational)

What is Green Ammonia & Why the Focus?

- **Green ammonia** (NH_3): Produced by Haber-Bosch process using **green hydrogen** (electrolysed via renewable energy) + nitrogen (air separation) → **zero direct CO_2 emissions**.
- Unlike **grey ammonia** (natural gas-based, ~2% global CO_2 emissions), green ammonia is net-zero fuel/chemical.
- Strategic uses in India:

- **Fertilizer sector** (world's 2nd largest consumer): Replace imported natural gas/urea dependency.
- **Energy carrier**: Marine bunkering, power generation, hydrogen transport (easier to ship/store than pure H_2).
- **Industrial feedstock**: Steel, refineries, chemicals.

- Global context: Leading green hydrogen derivative adoption; EU/S. Korea tenders drive demand.

Key Policy & Mechanism: National Green Hydrogen Mission (NGHM, 2023)

- Target: **5 MMT green hydrogen** by 2030 (may slip to 2032); derivatives like green ammonia/methanol included.
- **SIGHT Programme** (Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition): ₹17,490 crore outlay (2025-30):
  - Component I: Electrolyser manufacturing incentives.
  - Component II: Production incentives (Mode 2A for green ammonia: fixed incentives declining over 3 years – ₹8.82/kg Yr1 → ₹5.30/kg Yr3).
- **SECI Aggregated Demand Auction** (2024-25): 724,000 tpa to fertilizer units → 10-year fixed-price offtake → market certainty for investors.
- Incentives: ISTS waiver (25 years), renewable power banking, state subsidies (Odisha, Rajasthan, UP offer capital/land rebates).

Major Projects & Investments (2025–2026 Updates)

- **Pudimadaka Green Hydrogen Hub** (Andhra Pradesh): NGEL-Assago MoU (Feb 2026) → 7 GW electrolysers + 20 GW RE → 2.5 MMTPA green chemicals (ammonia, methanol, urea, e-SAF).
- **AM Green** (Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh): 1 MTPA plant under construction; FID 2024; exports to Uniper (Germany) from 2028.

- **Hynfra-Yamna JV** (Visakhapatnam): Up to 1 MTPA ammonia + 3 GW RE; ~$4 billion investment.
- Others: JSW Energy green H_2 to steel; multiple GW-scale proposals in Odisha, Rajasthan, Gujarat.

Achievements & Cost Breakthroughs

- **Price discovery**: ₹49.75/kg (~$569/MT) – competitive vs. grey ammonia imports.
- **Market participation**: 15 bidders → 7 winners; broader than EU/H2Global tenders.
- **Export potential**: First shipments 2028; India eyes 10% global green H_2 market share post-2030.
- **Domestic push**: Fertilizer shift reduces import bill; supports net-zero in hard-to-abate sectors.

Challenges & Way Forward

- **Cost barriers**: High capex for electrolysers/RE; need further scale & tech maturity.
- **Infrastructure**: Delivery points, transport (ports, pipelines), storage.
- **Demand certainty**: Beyond fertilizer – expand to shipping, steel, power.
- **Global alignment**: Match EU/S. Korea import standards; mitigate risks in value chain.

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Prelims

- NGHM targets (5 MMT green H_2 by 2030), SIGHT outlay (₹17,490 cr), SECI tender (724,000 tpa, ₹49.75/kg).
- Key bodies: MNRE, SECI, NGEL.

GS-3 (Environment & Energy)

- Green hydrogen/ammonia as net-zero pathway; hard-to-abate decarbonisation (fertilizer, steel, shipping).
- Energy security: Reduce fossil imports, leverage RE abundance.

GS-3 (Economy & Infrastructure)

- Investment ($500 bn opportunity), job creation, export potential (2028 onward).
- Compare with global (EU H2Global, S. Korea CHPS).

GS-2 (Governance)

- Policy certainty: Aggregated demand, incentives, offtake guarantees.

Essay / Interview

- "Green ammonia: India's bridge to energy independence and global clean fuel leadership."
- "From grey to green: Transforming fertilizer & energy security through hydrogen derivatives."

India-Brazil Relations: Strengthening Strategic Partnership Amid Global Trade & Geopolitical Shifts

Why in News?

- An op-ed in **The Hindu** titled **"Stick together: India and Brazil have realised the importance of their relationship"** (published 23 February 2026) urged both nations to deepen bilateral ties amid rising protectionism, US tariff threats under Trump 2.0, and global supply-chain disruptions.
- Key trigger: **Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva**'s visit to India (late January-early February 2026) – first high-level exchange since Trump's return – focused on trade, energy, agriculture, and multilateral coordination.
- Lula and PM Narendra Modi agreed to:

- Double bilateral trade to **$30 billion by 2030** (from ~$15-16 billion in 2025).
- Fast-track **India-Brazil CEPA** negotiations (target conclusion 2027).
- Strengthen coordination in G20, BRICS, UNSC reform, and WTO.

- Lula publicly supported India's push for **UNSC permanent seat**; both countries condemned unilateral tariffs and protectionism.
- Context: US threats of **10-60% tariffs** on imports (including from India & Brazil) → opportunity for South-South cooperation to reduce dependence on US/EU markets.

PM Narendra Modi & President Lula da Silva during bilateral meeting in New Delhi (February 2026) – focus on trade, energy & multilateralism

Background: India-Brazil Strategic Partnership

- Established **2006**; elevated to **Strategic Partnership** in 2019.
- Key pillars:
  - **Trade & Economy**: Bilateral trade ~$15-16 bn (2025); India exports petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, machinery; Brazil exports crude oil, sugar, soy, beef.
  - **Energy & Biofuels**: Ethanol blending cooperation; green hydrogen/ammonia collaboration (both NGHM partners).
  - **Defence & Space**: Joint projects (e.g., Embraer aircraft, ISRO-CSA satellite launches).

- **Multilateral**: Co-founders of BRICS (2009), IBSA (2003), G20, BASIC climate group; aligned on UNSC reform, WTO agriculture subsidies, climate finance.

- Recent momentum:
    - Lula's 2023 G20 presidency (Rio Summit) → India handed over G20 baton.
    - 2025 BRICS expansion → both support inclusive multilateralism.

Current Challenges & Opportunities (2026 Context)

- **US Tariff Threats**: Trump administration's "America First" policies → 10-60% tariffs on steel, aluminium, agri products → hits Brazil (soy, beef) & India (textiles, pharma, steel).
- **Reciprocal Tariffs**: India & Brazil face pressure to retaliate or negotiate bilaterally with US.
- **Global South Coordination**: Lula & Modi see opportunity to:
    - Diversify markets (Africa, ASEAN, Latin America).
    - Push WTO reforms (agriculture subsidies, e-commerce moratorium).
    - Strengthen BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) lending.
- **CEPA Push**: Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations accelerated; aim to cover goods, services, investment, IP, digital trade.
- **Energy Synergy**: Brazil's ethanol expertise + India's green hydrogen/ammonia push → joint projects in biofuels, green ammonia exports.

Significance of "Sticking Together"

- **Trade Diversification**: Reduces vulnerability to US/EU protectionism.
- **Geopolitical Leverage**: Two largest democracies in Global South → stronger voice in UN, WTO, climate talks.
- **South-South Solidarity**: Counter unilateralism; promote multipolar order.
- **Economic Gains**: CEPA could boost agri exports (India: rice, spices; Brazil: pulses, oilseeds), pharma generics, tech transfer.

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- **Strategic Alignment**: Shared interests in UNSC reform, climate finance, fossil fuel transition.

Challenges Highlighted

- **Asymmetric Trade**: Brazil enjoys surplus; India seeks balanced gains.
- **Non-Tariff Barriers**: Brazil's strict sanitary/phytosanitary norms for Indian agri/pharma.
- **Domestic Politics**: Lula's left-leaning policies vs. India's market-oriented reforms → negotiation friction.
- **US Pressure**: Both face bilateral talks with Washington → risk of divide-and-rule.

For UPSC CSE & State PSC

Prelims

- Bilateral trade target ($30 bn by 2030), key forums (BRICS, IBSA, G20, BASIC).
- Leaders: Lula da Silva (Brazil), Narendra Modi (India).
- Recent events: Lula visit Jan-Feb 2026, G20 handover.

GS-2 (International Relations)

- India's South-South diplomacy; Global South leadership.
- Multilateral coordination: UNSC reform, WTO, BRICS, IBSA.
- Response to US protectionism (Trump tariffs).

GS-3 (Economy)

- Trade diversification, CEPA negotiations, energy cooperation (biofuels, green ammonia).
- Impact of global tariffs on Indian exports.

GS-2 (Governance)

- Role of strategic partnerships in multipolar world.

Essay / Interview

- "South-South cooperation in a protectionist world: Lessons from India-Brazil ties."
- "From BRICS to bilateral: Strengthening Global South solidarity."

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Rethinking Tribal Women's Inheritance Rights in India: Supreme Court Verdict & Constitutional Debate

Why in News?

- In a landmark judgment delivered on **8 October 2025** (reported & analysed extensively in February 2026), a Supreme Court bench comprising Justices **Sanjay Karol** and **Justice K.V. Viswanathan** held that the **Hindu Succession Act, 1956** (as amended in 2005) **does not apply** to members of **Scheduled Tribes** unless Parliament expressly extends it.
- The ruling arose in **Ram Charan v. State of Jharkhand** (Civil Appeal No. … of 2025), where the Court upheld customary tribal law that denied daughters equal inheritance rights in ancestral property.
- The verdict has reignited debate on:
    - Tension between **customary tribal law** and **gender equality** (Art. 14, 15, 21).
    - Scope of **"Hindu"** under the Hindu Succession Act and exclusion of Scheduled Tribes under **Section 2(2)**.
    - Need for a **separate law** or parliamentary extension to secure tribal women's inheritance rights.
- The article in **The Hindu** (23 February 2026) by **Shailaja Saboo** (Junior Fellow, Centre for Contemporary Studies) titled **"Rethinking tribal women's inheritance rights"** called the judgment a missed opportunity to advance gender justice within tribal communities.

Key Legal Provisions & Judicial Observations

- **Hindu Succession Act, 1956 - Section 2(2)**: "This Act shall not apply to members of any Scheduled Tribe unless the Central Government by notice otherwise directs."
- **2005 Amendment**: Granted daughters equal coparcenary rights (Section 6) in Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) property – but subject to Section 2(2) exclusion for STs.
- **Court's Reasoning (Oct 2025)**:

- The term **"Hindu"** in the Act is broad but excludes Scheduled Tribes unless notified.
- Customary tribal laws (often patrilineal) prevail unless Parliament intervenes.
- Overriding tribal customs with statutory law would violate **Article 371A** (Nagaland), **371G** (Mizoram), **Sixth Schedule** autonomy, and cultural rights under **Article 29**.
- "Hindusation" or conversion cannot automatically bring tribals under the Act.

- **Key Quote**: "The Act cannot be applied to Scheduled Tribes in the absence of a notification… Customary law continues to govern inheritance among indigenous populations."

Broader Context: Customary vs. Statutory Law in Tribal Communities

- Most tribal societies (especially in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Northeast) follow **patrilineal succession**:
  - Property passes to sons; daughters often excluded or given limited rights (e.g., maintenance, stridhan).
  - Exceptions exist (e.g., Khasi, Garo matrilineal systems in Meghalaya).
- **Customary law protected** under:
  - Article 371A, 371G, Sixth Schedule.
  - Constitutional recognition of tribal identity & autonomy.
- **Gender discrimination** widely documented:
  - Tribal women face economic disempowerment, landlessness, domestic violence.
  - Contrast with Hindu Succession Act 2005 amendment (Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma, 2020 – daughters' equal rights retrospective).

Supreme Court's Opportunity & Missed Chance

- The Court could have:
  - Interpreted Section 2(2) narrowly or struck it down as violative of Art. 14/15.

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- Directed Parliament to notify extension of the Act to STs (as suggested in the judgment itself).
- Recognised evolving customs or constitutional morality overriding discriminatory traditions.

- Instead, it deferred to legislative domain → left tribal women without statutory parity.

Way Forward Suggested in Discourse

- **Parliamentary action**: Extend Hindu Succession Act (or enact separate **Tribal Women's Inheritance Act**) with safeguards for cultural autonomy.
- **State-level reforms**: Codify progressive customary laws (e.g., Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh models).
- **Judicial creativity**: Future benches could apply **constitutional morality** test (Navtej Johar, Joseph Shine) to strike down discriminatory customs.
- **Community-led change**: Awareness, women's collectives, economic empowerment.

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Prelims

- Key provision: **Section 2(2) Hindu Succession Act, 1956**.
- Landmark case: Ram Charan v. State of Jharkhand (Oct 2025).
- Related judgments: Vineeta Sharma (2020), Madhu Kishwar v. State of Bihar (1996 - customary law vs. equality).

GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Conflict between **personal customary law** & **fundamental rights** (Art. 14, 15, 21).
- Protection of tribal identity vs. gender justice.
- Role of Parliament in extending statutes to STs (Section 2(2)).

GS-1 (Society)

- Tribal women's socio-economic status, land rights, gender discrimination in customary law.
- Matrilineal vs. patrilineal systems among tribes.

GS-2 (Social Justice)

- Intersection of caste/tribe & gender; economic disempowerment of tribal women.

Essay / Interview

- "Custom vs. Constitution: Balancing tribal autonomy with gender equality in inheritance rights."
- "Can uniform civil code coexist with tribal cultural protections?"

On the Independence of the Election Commission of India (ECI): Ongoing Concerns & Judicial Scrutiny

Why in News?

- An article in **The Hindu** titled **"On the independence of the Election Commission"** (published 24 February 2026, by C.B.P. Srivastava, President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance) described the ECI as the **bedrock of Indian democracy** but highlighted growing concerns over its **impartiality**, **autonomy**, and **fairness** in recent electoral processes.

- Key triggers:

- **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls in states like Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu → massive deletions (e.g., ~65 lakh names in Bihar, ~74 lakh in Tamil Nadu), citizenship verification demands, algorithmic errors alleged.
- Supreme Court hearings (January-February 2026) on SIR challenges → CJI Surya Kant-led bench directed ECI to publish disaggregated data, expand acceptable documents, appoint judicial officers for adjudication in West Bengal (rare intervention).
- Opposition resolution (INDIA bloc) to remove CEC Gyanesh Kumar amid allegations of bias.
- Broader erosion: Post-**Anoop Baranwal (2023)** judgment → **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023** (excluded CJI from appointment committee) remains under challenge (hearing pending, no stay).
- Recent SC refusals: Declined PILs on Assam SIR (19 Feb 2026), other procedural matters.

- Context: Ahead of **2026 Assembly elections** (West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala), trust deficit in ECI intensified by voter deletions, non-disclosure of data, CCTV footage destruction policy (45 days), and perceived executive influence.

Protesters holding placards demanding fair voter verification during SIR exercise (Representational image from opposition rallies)

Constitutional Framework & Landmark Developments

- **Article 324**: ECI superintendence, direction & control of elections; independence implied as part of **basic structure** (free & fair elections).
- **Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (March 2023)**:
  - 5-judge Constitution Bench (Justice K.M. Joseph) ruled executive-only appointments unconstitutional → interim committee: PM + LoP + CJI until Parliament legislates.

- **2023 Act**: Replaced CJI with Union Cabinet Minister (nominated by PM) → government majority → challenged (Jaya Thakur & others) → no stay; hearing pending (2026).
- **Recent SC Stance (2025-26)**:
  - No blanket stay on 2023 Act or SIR.
  - Directed transparency (disaggregated deletion data, searchable format).
  - Extraordinary order (Feb 2026): Calcutta HC to appoint judicial officers for West Bengal SIR adjudication → address "trust deficit".
  - Refused to halt SIR in Assam (final rolls already prepared).

Key Issues Highlighted in 2026 Discourse

- **SIR Controversies**:
  - Massive deletions without individual reasons → algorithmic flaws alleged.
  - Documents demanded (Aadhaar, passport, etc.) → SC expanded list, criticised initial narrowness.
  - ECI claimed citizenship verification mandate → petitioners called it "NRC-like" without statutory backing.
- **Appointment Independence**:
  - 2023 Act criticised as nullifying Anoop Baranwal spirit → executive dominance.
  - Pending SC challenge → prolonged delay weakens watchdog role.
- **Transparency & Accountability**:
  - Refusal to share Form 17C data, CCTV destruction (45 days) → fuels fraud allegations.
  - Voter fraud claims (e.g., Rahul Gandhi on 2024 Lok Sabha) → ECI responses questioned.
- **Institutional Erosion**:

- Perceived bias in model code enforcement, expenditure monitoring.
- Opposition calls for CEC removal → rare but symbolic.

Significance & Broader Implications

- **Democracy Pillar**: ECI independence essential for free & fair elections (basic structure doctrine).
- **Judicial Role**: SC balancing non-interference in administrative processes vs. protecting constitutional morality.
- **Electoral Integrity**: Voter deletions risk disenfranchisement ahead of 2026 polls.
- **Global Perception**: India's electoral democracy under scrutiny amid rising majoritarianism concerns.

For UPSC CSE & State PSC
Prelims • Article 324, Anoop Baranwal judgment (2023), 2023 CEC Act. • Key cases: Mohinder Singh Gill (1978 - ECI plenary powers), recent SIR orders. **GS-2 (Polity & Governance)** • Independence of constitutional bodies (ECI as fourth branch). • Executive vs. judiciary on appointments (Anoop Baranwal vs. 2023 Act). • Federalism: Centre-state tensions in electoral roll revisions. **GS-2 (Constitution & Rights)** • Right to vote (Art. 326), equality (Art. 14), free & fair elections as basic structure. **Essay / Interview** • "Is the Election Commission truly independent in contemporary India?" • "Judicial interventions in electoral processes: Boon or overreach?"

India's Russian Oil Imports Under Pressure: US-India Interim Trade Deal & Tariff Dynamics

Why in News?

- On **23 February 2026**, The Hindu published an analysis titled **"What happens to India's Russian oil imports, $500 bn on U.S. imports?"** amid uncertainties following the **US Supreme Court ruling** (late February 2026) striking down President Trump's use of **IEEPA (International Emergency Economic Powers Act)** for unilateral tariffs.

Key developments:

- **US-India Interim Trade Framework** (announced 2 February 2026): US reduced tariffs on Indian goods from **50%** (including 25% penalty for Russian oil) to **18%**; removed additional 25% Russia-linked duty (effective 7 February 2026 via Executive Order).
- India committed to **halt direct/indirect Russian oil imports** (quid pro quo per White House); intend to purchase **$500 billion** of US goods (energy, tech, aircraft, coal) over 5 years; lower tariffs on US industrial/agri products.
- **SCOTUS ruling** invalidated Trump's tariff authority → India deferred planned Washington visit (23-25 Feb) to finalise details → talks paused; Trump threatened **15% global tariffs** under new law.

- Russia's share in India's crude imports fell sharply: **~35-40%** peak (2024-25) → **21.2%** in January 2026 (lowest since Oct 2022); volumes **~1.1 mbpd** (Jan) → projected **1.0-1.2 mbpd** (Feb) → **0.8-1.0 mbpd** (March).

Chart: Decline in Russian crude share in India's imports (2022-2026) – from <5% pre-Ukraine war to peak ~40%, now ~21% (Representational trend)

Background: India's Russian Oil Surge & US Pressure

- Post-2022 Ukraine invasion: India became top buyer of discounted Russian crude (Urals/ESPO grades) → savings of **$5-10/bbl** vs. Brent.
  - 2024-25 average: **~1.7-2.0 mbpd** (35-40% share).
  - Discount: $10-20/bbl below Brent → helped control inflation, current account deficit.
- Trump 2.0 (2025 onward):

- August 2025: Imposed **25% reciprocal + 25% Russia penalty** = **50%** on Indian exports (steel, textiles, pharma hit hardest).
- Goal: Curb Russia's war revenue; force India to diversify.

- Result: India diversified → Middle East (Saudi, UAE, Iraq) regained lead (~55% in Jan 2026); US crude imports up.

Key Elements of US-India Interim Framework (Feb 2026)

- **Tariff Relief**:
  - US: 50% → 18% on Indian goods; removed 25% Russia penalty (EO Feb 6, effective Feb 7).
  - India: Eliminate/reduce tariffs on US industrial goods, agri products (DDGs, sorghum, nuts, fruits, soybean oil, wine).
- **Commitments**:
  - India: Stop Russian oil imports; buy **$500 bn** US goods over 5 years (energy, tech GPUs, aircraft, coking coal).
  - Monitoring: US Commerce to track; snapback possible if resumed.
- **Uncertainties**:
  - SCOTUS struck IEEPA tariff basis → legal footing weakened.
  - India: No official "halt" directive; state refiners (IOC, BPCL) continue; private (Reliance) stopped.
  - Russia: Kremlin denies formal communication; volumes declining but not zero.

Impact on India's Russian Oil Imports

- **Volume Decline**:
  - Jan 2026: ~1.1 mbpd (21.2% share).
  - Feb-Mar projection: 1.0-1.2 mbpd → 0.8-1.0 mbpd.

- Cost rise: **+$2-3/bbl** on overall basket (Kpler) due to loss of discounts.

- **Refinery Challenges**:
  - Russian heavy sour crude suits Indian complex refineries (high sulphur processing).
  - Switch to lighter/sweeter alternatives (US WTI, Middle East) → higher costs, reconfiguration needed.
- **Energy Security**:
  - Diversification positive (reduces Russia dependency).
  - But higher import bill → pressure on forex, inflation.

Broader Implications

- **Strategic Autonomy**: India balances US pressure with Russia ties (defence, fertilisers, nuclear).
- **Trade Leverage**: Interim deal eases export pain but $500 bn target unrealistic (~$50 bn current US imports).
- **Global Energy**: Russia loses revenue; OPEC+ gains; US energy exports rise.
- **Domestic Politics**: Opposition accuses Modi of “appeasement”; BJP highlights tariff relief.

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Prelims

- Key figures: Russian share drop (40% → 21%), volumes (1.1 mbpd Jan 2026), tariff changes (50% → 18%).
- Agreements: US-India Interim Framework (Feb 2026), $500 bn intent.

GS-2 (IR)

- India-US reset under Trump 2.0: Trade-offs (tariffs vs. Russia oil).
- India-Russia ties: Energy vs. strategic hedging.
- Multipolarity: Balancing QUAD/US vs. BRICS/Russia.

GS-3 (Economy & Energy)

- Energy security: Discounted Russian crude → diversification costs.
- Trade policy: Reciprocal tariffs, protectionism impact.
- Forex & inflation: Higher oil costs ($2-3/bbl rise).

Essay / Interview

- "Strategic autonomy vs. economic pragmatism: India's Russia oil dilemma in US-led world order."
- "Trump tariffs & global energy flows: Implications for India's energy transition."

US Supreme Court Strikes Down Trump Tariffs: Implications for Global Trade, Treasuries & India

Why in News?

- On **23 February 2026**, the **US Supreme Court** (in a 6-3 decision) struck down President Donald Trump's use of the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)** to unilaterally impose **25-60% tariffs** on imports from multiple countries (including India, China, EU, Canada, Mexico).
- The ruling invalidated tariffs announced in August 2025 and partially implemented from October 2025 onward → immediate market relief but new uncertainty.
- Key headlines (24 Feb 2026):
    - **The Hindu**: "American trade tariff turmoil leaves Treasury markets in dazed condition"

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- Bloomberg, Reuters: Dollar slides, 10-year Treasury yields fall ~14 basis points intraday → Treasuries rally as safe-haven demand spikes.
- White House response: Trump signals intent to seek new legislative authority or use alternative statutes → "tariff war not over".

- Immediate Indian context: India's planned delegation visit to Washington (23-25 Feb) to finalise interim trade deal details postponed → talks frozen.

US 10-year Treasury yield movement (Feb 23-24, 2026) – sharp dip after SCOTUS ruling (Representational trend)

Background: Trump 2.0 Tariff Blitz (2025–2026)

- **August 2025**: Trump invoked IEEPA (1977 law meant for national emergencies) to declare "trade imbalance emergency" → imposed:
  - **25% base reciprocal tariff** on most trading partners.
  - Additional **25% penalty** on countries buying Russian oil (targeting India, China).
  - Total: Up to **50-60%** on steel, aluminium, textiles, pharma, electronics from India.
- India hit hardest among allies: Exports worth **~$80-90 bn** faced 50% duties → textiles, steel, pharma margins crushed.
- Interim relief (Feb 2026): US-India framework reduced duties to **18%** + removed Russia penalty in exchange for India halting Russian oil imports & committing to **$500 bn** US purchases over 5 years.
- SCOTUS challenge: Consolidated petitions (states, importers, foreign governments) argued IEEPA misuse → no "unusual & extraordinary threat" justification.

Key Elements of the Supreme Court Ruling (23 Feb 2026)

- **Majority (6-3)**: IEEPA cannot be used for broad, permanent trade policy changes → limited to genuine emergencies (sanctions, asset freezes).

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- Tariffs declared **ultra vires** → immediate revocation ordered (phased over 60-90 days to avoid chaos).
- Dissent (conservative justices): Broad executive trade powers needed in national interest.
- No stay on implementation → tariffs to unwind gradually.

Immediate Market & Economic Impact

- **US Treasury Market**:
  - 10-year yield fell ~14 bps intraday (to ~4.12-4.18%).
  - Flight to safety: Investors bought Treasuries amid tariff uncertainty.
  - Dollar weakened vs. major currencies (EUR, JPY, INR).
- **Global Markets**:
  - Asian equities rallied (Nikkei +1.8%, Hang Seng +2.1%).
  - Indian rupee strengthened marginally (~₹83.40-83.60/USD).
- **Inflation & Fed Outlook**:
  - Tariff unwind → lower imported goods prices → reduces near-term inflation pressure.
  - Fed likely to pause or slow rate cuts → bond yields may stabilise higher.

Implications for India

- **Positive**:
  - Immediate relief to exporters (textiles, steel, pharma, electronics) → 50% duties removed.
  - Rupee appreciation support → lower import bill (oil, electronics).
  - Strengthens negotiating position in paused US talks.
- **Uncertainties**:

- Trump may push Congress for new tariff legislation (possible "America First Trade Act").
- Russia oil imports: India's commitment under interim deal now in limbo → volumes may rebound (currently ~21%).
- $500 bn US purchase target: Unrealistic → needs renegotiation.

- **Strategic**:
  - Reinforces India's hedging strategy (US vs. Russia/BRICS).
  - Opportunity to diversify exports further (EU, ASEAN, Africa).

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Prelims

- Key law: **IEEPA 1977** (misused for tariffs).
- SCOTUS ruling date: 23 Feb 2026.
- Tariff levels: 50% (pre-ruling) → 18% interim → revocation underway.

GS-2 (International Relations)

- India-US trade dynamics under Trump 2.0: Coercion vs. strategic partnership.
- Protectionism resurgence: Impact on multilateral trade (WTO relevance declining).
- India's strategic autonomy: Balancing US pressure with Russia ties.

GS-3 (Economy)

- Trade wars & tariffs: Effects on exports, inflation, forex.
- Global bond market linkage: US Treasury yield movements → impact on Indian debt & rupee.
- Energy imports: Russian crude discount loss vs. US LNG/coal push.

Essay / Interview

- "Tariff weaponisation in a multipolar world: Challenges for emerging economies like India."
- "From free trade to managed trade: Implications for India's economic diplomacy."

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