

FINDER

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Where does the India-U.S. trade deal stand?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. U.S. Supreme Court Ruling on Tariffs

- The **U.S. Supreme Court (Feb 20)** struck down tariffs imposed under the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 1977**.
- It ruled that the **President needs Congressional approval** to impose tariffs under this law.
- This led to the removal of several **"reciprocal tariffs"** imposed since mid-2025.
- Earlier, President Trump had:
 - ➔ Removed the **25% penal tariff** on India (for its import of Russian oil).
 - ➔ Reduced India's total tariff burden from **50% to 25%**.
- Under the proposed **interim India-U.S. trade deal**, the remaining **25% tariff** was to be reduced to **18%**.
- However, the **Court ruling disrupted this process**.

2. Trump Administration's Response & Current Tariffs

- President **Donald Trump** criticised the Supreme Court decision publicly.
- He imposed a **flat 10% tariff on all imports** for **150 days** (from January 24), with a possible increase to **15%**.
- Other **tariffs still in place**:
 - ➔ **50% tariff on steel and aluminium**
 - ➔ **Country-specific tariffs** on goods below **\$800**

- On **February 24**, the U.S. imposed a **126% tariff on Indian solar modules**, citing **subsidised exports** harming U.S. firms.
- Overall, the U.S. maintains a **protectionist stance** despite the ruling.

3. Global Reactions (EU, Japan, Australia)

- **The European Union** sought clarity, stating the situation undermines **"fair, balanced, and mutually beneficial" trade**.
- Japanese officials said their trade deal with the U.S., which mainly covers **automobile tariffs**, was **not affected** by the Supreme Court ruling, so they do not want to renegotiate it.
- **Australia** insisted the U.S. must honour their **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** and allow **duty-free imports**.
- Countries want the U.S. to **honour signed agreements** despite the legal uncertainty.

4. India's Position & Status of the Trade Deal

- Commerce Minister **Piyush Goyal** earlier said the interim deal would be signed by **mid-March**, implemented by **April**.
- After the Supreme Court ruling:
 - ➔ India issued a **cautious statement**.
 - ➔ The Indian negotiation team **postponed its Washington visit indefinitely**.
- However, Goyal met:
 - ➔ **U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick**
 - ➔ **U.S. Ambassador to India**
- **No new negotiation date** announced yet.
- Currently:
 - ➔ The deal is **more urgent for the U.S.** than India because **India can reduce its tariffs on U.S. goods only once a deal is signed**.

- ➡ The immediate **tariff threat on the Russian oil issue has eased**.
- The Trump administration maintains that **trade deals must be honoured**, and warns of **higher tariffs** if countries “play games”.

Why is the NEP undergrad course in chaos?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Economic and Social Development-Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector Initiatives, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2
Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

1. What is the Four-Year UG Programme?

- Introduced under **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.
- Expands the traditional **3-year bachelor's degree** into a **4-year structure**.
- Focus areas: **flexibility, interdisciplinary learning, research exposure, and skill development**.
- Offers **multiple entry-exit options**:
 - ➡ **1 year**- Certificate
 - ➡ **2 years**- Diploma
 - ➡ **3 years**- Bachelor's degree
 - ➡ **4 years**- Bachelor's with Honours / Honours with Research / Entrepreneurship focus
- **UGC issued guidelines (Dec 2022)** under the **Curriculum and Credit Framework**.
- Implemented in major universities like **Delhi University (DU), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)**, and several State universities.

2. Current Situation

- The first batch of 4-year students is now in the **final semester**.
- In **Delhi University**:
 - ➡ Over **23,000 students** in 4th year.
 - ➡ Around **13,000** opted for the **dissertation/ research track**.

- Many universities adopted the programme **before detailed guidelines were fully stabilised**, causing confusion.

3. Major Challenges

Academic & Policy Issues

- Frequent **changes in guidelines** created uncertainty.
- Initial requirement for **Scopus-indexed publications** and conference presentations was later diluted.
- Students report **conflicting instructions** from university and departments.

Infrastructure & Access Constraints

- Lack of adequate **laboratories, research facilities, and funding**.
- Limited access to major research institutions like:
 - ➡ **Teen Murti Library**
 - ➡ **National Archives**
 - ➡ **National Museum**
- Faculty are **overburdened**, and research supervision is **not counted in workload**.
- No additional funding from **UGC**.

Equity & Financial Concerns

- Critics argue it adds financial burden on:
 - ➡ **Students**
 - ➡ **Government exchequer**
- Karnataka decided to revert to a 3-year **degree** from 2024-25.
- Concern that a 4-year programme may reduce access for:
 - ➡ **SC/ST students**
 - ➡ **Women**
 - ➡ **Rural and economically weaker students**

4. Suggested Improvements

- **UGC should gather feedback** from faculty and students for realistic reforms.
- Need for:
 - ➡ More **infrastructure**
 - ➡ Better **laboratory facilities**
 - ➡ Additional **faculty recruitment**

- Universities encouraged to:
 - ➔ Seek **HEFA (Higher Education Financing Agency) loans**
 - ➔ Apply for **research funding**

How will rare earth MoU with Brazil help India?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

1.Context

- **India and Brazil signed an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on rare earths and critical minerals** during President Lula da Silva's state visit to India (February 21).
- The agreement covers the entire mineral value chain: exploration, mining, processing, refining, and recycling.
- The **main aim is to strengthen supply chains, reduce dependency, and improve competitiveness** in critical minerals.

2.India's Strategy to Secure Critical Minerals

- **National Critical Mineral Mission (2025):** Approved to develop the full value chain (exploration to recycling) from 2024-31 with major funding.
- **Legal reforms:** The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act 2023 allows the Centre to auction critical mineral blocks.
- **Mineral list:** India identified 30 critical minerals in 2023 for focused policy action.
- **Overseas strategy:** Through Khanij Bidesh India Ltd., India is securing mineral assets abroad.
- **Domestic manufacturing:** Plans to produce rare earth magnets by 2026 to cut imports in EV and defence sectors.

3.What the India–Brazil MoU Means for India?

- Brazil has **substantial critical mineral reserves (only ~30% explored)**, offering India a major new source for exploration and processing.

- **Reduces overdependence on limited suppliers** by adding Brazil as an alternative source.
- India can **negotiate better prices and terms in global markets**.
- A **stable partnership signals fewer risks from export controls** or geopolitical shocks.

4. Does the MoU intersect with Pax Silica?

- Pax Silica is a **U.S.-led initiative** to secure the technology supply chain, and India joined it on February 20.
- The **India–Brazil MoU can support this goal by helping India access and process critical minerals** needed for the tech supply chain.
- However, the MoU does not make Brazil a member of Pax Silica.

5.What the MoU Means for Brazil?

- Brazil can **better use its large mineral reserves for industrial growth**.
- It can **attract Indian investment for mines and processing**. India provides a stable, long-term market.
- The **deal helps Brazil move beyond raw exports** to value-added production.
- A partnership with **India improves Brazil's position in global mineral negotiations**.

KEYWORDS

Sungudi sari

- **Sungudi sari** is a traditional cotton saree from Madurai in Tamil Nadu.
- The word “Sungudi” comes from the Sanskrit word **Sunnam**, meaning “round” or “circle,” referring to its dotted patterns.
- It is known for its **special tie-and-dye technique** that creates thousands of small white dots (puttas).
- The **craft was introduced by Saurashtrian weavers who migrated to South India** centuries ago.
- **Madurai Sungudi received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2006**, recognizing its unique regional origin and traditional craftsmanship.

QT45 RNA

- QT45 RNA is a **short RNA molecule** that can **self-replicate** under laboratory conditions.
- **RNA (Ribonucleic Acid) molecule is a single-stranded genetic material** made of nucleotides that carries and helps use genetic information in living cells, mainly for making proteins.
- Researchers found that this **replication occurs without the involvement of proteins or enzymes**.
- It **provides strong evidence supporting the RNA World Hypothesis**, which suggests that **early life on Earth may have begun with simple RNA molecules capable of storing information** and replicating independently.
- During the process, it first forms a complementary strand and then reconstructs its original sequence from that template.

Scopus-indexed journals

- **Scopus-indexed journals** are research publications that are evaluated and included in **Scopus**, a globally recognized **citation database** managed by **Elsevier**.

- **Scopus indexes high-quality journals**, including leading **open-access publications**.
- These journals undergo rigorous evaluation based on their **editorial standards, peer-review process, citation impact, publishing ethics, and international relevance**.
- Since they are regarded as **quality-assured journals**, publication in a Scopus-indexed journal enhances a researcher’s **credibility, visibility, and global recognition**.

Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA)

- The **Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA)** is a **joint venture** between the **Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of India, and Canara Bank**.
- HEFA is registered as a **Section 8 (not-for-profit) company** under the **Companies Act, 2013**.
- It functions as a **Non-Deposit Taking Systemically Important Non-Banking Financial Company** regulated by the **RBI**.
- Incorporated on **31 May 2017**, HEFA operates with an agreed equity participation of **90.91% by MoE and 9.09% by Canara Bank**.
- It primarily focuses on financing **educational infrastructure** and **R&D infrastructure**, aiming to strengthen institutional capacity and support Indian institutions in achieving **global academic rankings**.