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FINDER

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THE HINDU

India's opportunity to put BRICS back together

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.

Why in Focus?

- The **18th BRICS Summit, to be held in New Delhi on September 12–13, 2026, gives India an opportunity to strengthen BRICS** as a platform for Global South cooperation and reform of global institutions.

Key Highlights

- BRICS was formally established in 2009 with the first BRIC summit held in Yekaterinburg, Russia **to increase the voice of emerging economies** in global governance.
- **India's first BRICS presidency in 2012 contributed to the creation of the New Development Bank (NDB)** and strengthened cooperation on issues such as counter-terrorism.
- BRICS has **expanded to 11 members, with 10 partner countries, making internal coordination more difficult.**
- **India wants BRICS to remain "non-West" rather than "anti-West",** allowing members to engage with different global powers according to their national interests.
- The **principle of consensus is important for maintaining cohesion**, but disagreements among members have increasingly made joint statements difficult.
- **China has sought to use BRICS to increase its global influence**, including through initiatives related to de-dollarisation and alternative financial systems.
- **India seeks to revive "reformed multilateralism" and make BRICS a stronger voice for the Global South** and middle powers.

Implications

- **China's disproportionate influence can push BRICS towards an agenda that does not align** with India's interests.
- **Expansion has increased political and bilateral differences** among members.
- **Growing pressure to make BRICS anti-Western** could undermine India's multi-alignment policy.
- The **weakening of the consensus principle may reduce the group's effectiveness.**
- **Competing visions of the global order by the U.S. and China could turn BRICS** into a platform for **geopolitical rivalry.**
- Proposals such as a **BRICS common currency face resistance because members have different economic interests and concerns about Chinese dominance.**

Way Forward

- **Revive the agenda of reformed multilateralism and reform global institutions** such as the UN and Bretton Woods institutions.
- **Keep BRICS non-Western rather than anti-Western**, allowing members to maintain strategic autonomy.
- **Strengthen consensus-based decision-making to prevent bilateral disputes** from paralysing the grouping.
- **Focus on common areas** such as development, climate change, health, technology, counter-terrorism and digital governance.
- **Promote local-currency trade and interoperable payment systems** rather than rushing towards a common BRICS currency.
- **Use India's leadership to make BRICS a credible platform for Global South** cooperation and multi-alignment.

Mains Question

BRICS has evolved from a platform for economic cooperation among emerging economies into an important geopolitical grouping. Discuss the challenges before BRICS and examine India's role in shaping its future direction. (250 words)

U.S. tariffs are not what is holding back Indian research

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.

Why in Focus?

- The focus is on **whether U.S. tariffs are weakening India's research and innovation, and why India needs to increase R&D (Research and Development) in trade-exposed industries** to move towards higher-value production.

Key Highlights

- The **sectors most affected by U.S. tariffs: chemicals, plastics, metals, machinery, auto components and leather already have low R&D spending**.
- **Indian metals firms spend around 0.4% of sales on R&D,** compared with the global average of about 1.6%.
- Auto and parts manufacturers spend a little over 2%, against around 5% globally.
- **India's R&D is concentrated mainly in pharmaceuticals and automobiles**, while most other manufacturing sectors invest little in research.
- The **automobile sector faces a greater R&D risk as the 25% U.S. duty on auto parts remains,** while pharmaceuticals received an exemption.
- **India's overall R&D spending remains very low compared with major competing economies**, with private-sector contribution also limited.
- The **government's ₹1 lakh crore Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme provides long-term, low-cost funding for areas** such as AI, semiconductors, quantum technology and biotechnology.

Implications

- **Low private-sector investment in core** research and innovation.
- R&D is **concentrated in only a few sectors.**
- **Many industries focus on routine testing and development** rather than creating new products.
- **Existing R&D support is focused heavily on deep-tech sectors**, while traditional industries exposed to trade shocks receive less support.
- **Delayed and incomplete R&D data makes it difficult for policymakers to identify weaknesses** and respond quickly.

Way Forward

- **Increase R&D incentives for trade-exposed sectors** such as auto components, chemicals and metals.
- **Shift support from routine testing towards**

core research and new-product development.

- **Link government support and tariff relief to actual R&D investment** and innovation outcomes.
- **Protect research-intensive sectors** such as pharmaceuticals and automobiles during trade negotiations.
- **Improve firm-level and timely R&D data to track** private-sector research spending.
- **Use trade shocks as an opportunity to help industries move from low-value products to differentiated,** high-value products.

Mains Question

India's weak research and development ecosystem, rather than tariffs alone, remains a major constraint on its transition towards high-value manufacturing. Discuss. (250 words)

India can cut steel emissions before coal plants lock them in

Prelims : General Studies Paper I
Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies 3
Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Why in Focus?

- India is accelerating efforts to **decarbonise its steel sector**, including a **₹5,000-crore scheme** to support the transition.
- However, India's steel industry faces a major challenge: balancing its **rapidly growing steel demand** with the need to reduce carbon emissions.

Key Highlights

- India's steelmaking emissions are around **32% higher than the global average** and account for nearly **12% of India's total greenhouse gas emissions**.
- India produced around **160 million tonnes of steel in FY 2025-26**, making it the **world's second-largest steel producer**.
- Under the **National Mission on Green Steel**, India aims to reduce emissions intensity from around **2.55-2.65 tonnes of carbon dioxide-equivalent (tCO2e) per tonne** of crude steel to **2.2 tCO_2e by 2029-30**.
- The traditional **BF-BOF (Blast Furnace-Basic Oxygen Furnace)** method uses coal and is highly carbon-intensive.
- Green steel production can shift towards **recycling steel scrap through Electric Arc Furnaces (EAFs)** or using **Direct Reduced Iron (DRI)**.
    - **Scrap steel** is discarded or leftover steel that can be **melted and reused to make new steel**.
    - **DRI** is the product of the **direct reduction of iron ore** in the **solid state** by carbon monoxide and hydrogen derived from natural gas or coal.
- **Green hydrogen**, powered by renewable electricity, could further reduce emissions from steel production.
- However, India has limited availability of **steel scrap**, making a rapid shift towards **recycling-based production more difficult.**
- **India uses a diverse mix of steelmaking technologies:** 43% **Blast Furnace-Basic Oxygen Furnace (BF-BOF)**, 22% **Electric Arc Furnace (EAF)** and 35% electric induction furnaces.
    - **Electric induction furnaces** use electromagnetic fields to process small batches of scrap or **Direct Reduced Iron (DRI)** and are relatively energy-efficient.
    - But **coal-based BF-BOF capacity is expected to increase, locking India into high emissions for decades**.
- Researchers argue that India can reduce future emissions by **redirecting planned investments from new coal-based BF-BOF plants towards cleaner DRI-EAF technologies**.
- India has also begun supporting **green hydrogen projects and green steel certification**.

Implications

- **Cleaner** technologies and green hydrogen **remain expensive.**
- India **does not have enough steel scrap** to rely heavily on recycling.
- Infrastructure, construction and manufacturing are **driving rapid growth in steel consumption.**
- New or relined blast furnaces could keep **India dependent on coal-based steel for decades.**
- The success of low-carbon steel **depends heavily on the future availability and affordability of green hydrogen.**
- The European Union's **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)** could increase pressure on Indian steel producers to reduce emissions.

Way Forward

- Redirect future investments from **coal-based BF-BOF plants towards cleaner DRI-EAF technologies**.
- A gradual transition could initially use **natural gas-based DRI-EAF plants**, followed by a shift to **green hydrogen** when it becomes more affordable.
- Expand the availability of **renewable electricity and green hydrogen** for steel production.
- Increase **steel scrap collection and recycling infrastructure**.
- Develop stronger domestic demand for **low-carbon and green steel**.
- Use government policy and public procurement to support the growth of a **competitive green steel market**.

Mains Question

Q. India's rapidly growing steel industry faces the twin challenge of meeting rising industrial demand and reducing carbon emissions. Discuss the challenges of steel sector decarbonisation in India and examine the pathways towards green steel production(250 words).

Are nicotine pouches beyond the law?

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies 2

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Why in Focus?

- A new study by the **ICMR-National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research** found that nicotine pouches are reaching Indian cities through **online platforms, hookah shops and gig delivery services**.
- The issue has gained attention following a **WHO warning in May 2026**, amid uncertainty over which Indian law regulates these products.

Key Highlights

- **Nicotine pouches** are small, tobacco-free pouches containing nicotine, flavourings and plant-based fibres.
- They are placed between the **lip and gum**, allowing nicotine to enter the bloodstream without smoke or vapour.
- The **Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003 (COTPA)** may not cover them because its definition does not include all nicotine-containing products.
- Their status under the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940** is unclear, as they **may not qualify as drugs under the Act**.
- They are not covered by the **Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2019 (PECA)** because they do not contain an electronic device or produce vapour.
- They could arguably **fall within the broad legal definition** of **food**, which includes substances intended for human consumption.
- Under customs classification, certain tobacco-free oral nicotine pouches are classified as **restricted goods**, requiring specific permission for import.
- Despite these restrictions, nicotine pouches are reportedly available through **online platforms and some duty-free stores**.

Implications

- The unclear legal status creates a potential **regulatory gap** for a product containing an addictive substance.
- Easy availability could lead to the **rapid growth of nicotine use**, particularly before clear regulations are introduced.
- Delayed action could allow demand and illegal supply networks to become established, making future regulation more difficult.
- The issue highlights the challenge of regulating **new consumer products that do not fit clearly within existing legal categories**.

Way Forward

- Clearly define the **legal and regulatory status** of nicotine pouches in India.
- The government can use powers under the **Customs Act, 1962** and the **Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992** to regulate or ban their import on health grounds.
- **Introduce clear rules** before these products become widely established in the Indian market.
- Strengthen monitoring of **online sales, retail outlets and informal delivery channels** to prevent unregulated distribution.

Mains Question

Q. The emergence of new nicotine products highlights the challenges posed by regulatory gaps in rapidly evolving consumer markets. Examine the legal and public health challenges associated with regulating nicotine pouches in India (250 Words).

KEYWORDS

MatsyaMetri

- MatsyaMetri is a **smartphone application developed by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI).**
- CMFRI is **headquartered in Kochi, Kerala.**
- The **application enables measurement of the length and width of fish without physically handling them.**
- It **can automatically generate length-frequency distributions from recorded measurements.**
- The **application supports rapid and systematic collection of biological data for fisheries assessment** and management.

EOS-05 (Earth Observation Satellite-05)

- EOS-05 is a **state-of-the-art Earth Observation satellite developed by ISRO.**
- It is **India's first imaging satellite from a geosynchronous orbit.**
- It was **launched on September 4, 2026, aboard GSLV-F17 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.**
- GSLV-F17 placed EOS-05 initially into a Sub-Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (Sub-GTO).
- EOS-05 is **intended for Earth observation applications, making it significant for continuous or frequent monitoring of the Indian region**.
- GSLV-F17 is the 19th flight of India's Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV).
- The successful mission adds a new capability to India's Earth-observation programme by using a geosynchronous orbit for imaging.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

- Established in **1989 by the G7** to develop measures against **money laundering**.
- It is based in **Paris** and leads global efforts against **money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing**.
- FATF sets **international standards** to help countries combat illicit financial flows and related serious crimes.
- More than **200 countries and jurisdictions** have committed to implementing its standards.
- Its decision-making body, the **FATF Plenary**, meets **three times a year**.
- Countries that repeatedly fail to comply may be placed under **Increased Monitoring (Grey List)** or identified as **High-Risk Jurisdictions (Black List)**.

World Customs Organization (WCO)

- Established in **1952** as the **Customs Co-operation Council (CCC)**.
- An **independent intergovernmental body** working to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of customs administrations.
- Represents **187 Customs administrations**, collectively handling about **98% of world trade**.
- Develops **international customs standards** and promotes cooperation among customs administrations.
- Supports **trade facilitation, fair revenue collection and the protection of society**.
- Serves as the **global centre of expertise and voice of the international customs community**.