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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

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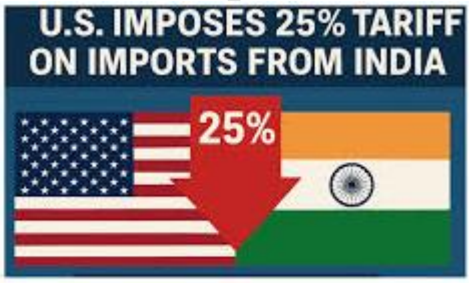
1. India's Policy Reset to Offset US Tariff Impact

- **Background & Trigger**
    - US President Donald Trump imposed an additional 25% penalty tariff on Indian goods (total 50% duty) from 27 August, targeting major export sectors such as garments ($6.2 bn), leather goods ($1.3 bn), chemicals, pharmaceuticals, petroleum, and shrimp.
    - This move disrupts India's competitiveness in key export sectors and reflects the instability in the global trade order, with declining adherence to WTO norms.
- **India's Strategic Response**



    - Instead of retaliatory tariffs, India is focusing on *structural reforms* to boost manufacturing, enhance ease of doing business, and attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
    - Measures include a **single-window clearance system** (passport office-style), streamlined land acquisition and contract enforcement processes, and removal of procedural bottlenecks.
- **Key Reform Measures**
    - **Single Interface System:** Both digital and physical platforms for approvals, reducing reliance on middlemen.
    - **Side-Letter Arrangements:** Long-term procurement agreements with trusted trading partners.
    - **Industrial Land Reform:** Centralised system for land identification, conversion, and registration to attract manufacturers.
    - **Contract Enforcement Improvements:** Speeding up dispute resolution and property registration to reduce investor risk.
- **FDI & Economic Targets**
    - India received **$81.04 billion FDI in FY25** (14% increase from FY24); services sector received 19% of inflows ($9.35 bn).
    - Government aims for **$100 billion FDI target for FY26** to strengthen manufacturing and employment.
    - India's Doing Business ranking improved from 142nd (2014) to 63rd (2020) before the index was discontinued.
- **Global Trade Context**
    - WTO norms are increasingly ignored, with tariffs used as political and economic pressure tools.
    - Analysts warn of a "trustless" trade environment, increasing the need for resilient domestic capabilities and diversified trade partnerships.

Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

India is using the US tariff crisis as an opportunity to implement deep procedural and structural reforms in manufacturing and investment processes. By focusing on ease of doing business, FDI growth, and self-reliance, India aims to shield its economy from external shocks.

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS-2 (Governance & International Relations):** WTO framework, trade diplomacy, bilateral trade negotiations.
- **GS-3 (Economy):** FDI policy, ease of doing business reforms, manufacturing competitiveness.
- **Essay:** "Self-Reliance in an Uncertain Global Economy" or "Reforms as a Response to External Economic Shocks."

2. Extension of PM E-Drive Scheme

- **Background & Scheme Details**
  - The **PM E-Drive** is a ₹10,900 crore central government subsidy scheme launched in October 2024, replacing the *Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme (EMPS)*.
  - Objective: To **promote electric mobility** by reducing upfront costs of electric vehicles (EVs) and expanding EV charging infrastructure.
  - Initial timeline: 2024–25 to 2025–26; now extended by **two financial years till 2027–28** due to underutilisation of funds.
- **Fund Utilisation & Targets**
  - Nearly **50% of the corpus remains unused**.
  - Targets include:
    - 14,000 electric buses
    - 5,600 electric trucks
    - 72,000 public EV charging stations

  - As of April 2025, ₹422 crore incentives disbursed for electric two- and three-wheelers.
- **Key Policy Changes**
  - Incentives for **electric two- and three-wheelers** will **end in 2025–26**.
  - Focus will remain on **electric buses, trucks, and charging infrastructure**.
  - Funds to be utilised until exhaustion rather than ending abruptly with a fixed date.
- **Relation to Earlier Schemes**
  - Third major incentive scheme after two phases of **FAME India** (2014–15 to 2023–24).
  - Distinction: PM E-Drive has significant planned expenditure on **electric buses**, unlike earlier schemes focused mainly on personal and small commercial EVs.
- **Legal & Administrative Context**
  - Extension formalised via **Ministry of Heavy Industries Gazette Notification (7 August 2025)** under executive powers of the Union Government.

- Linked to **National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP)** and commitments to reduce vehicular emissions in line with Paris Agreement targets.

Conclusion & UPSC Relevance
The extension of PM E-Drive reflects both **opportunities** (unused funds, infrastructure gaps) and **challenges** (slow adoption pace, limited disbursement capacity) in India's EV transition. The shift in focus from two/three-wheelers to heavy electric vehicles and public charging stations indicates a policy pivot towards **public transport electrification**.
UPSC Relevance:

- **GS-3 (Environment & Economy):** Sustainable mobility, electric vehicle policy, emission reduction.
- **GS-2 (Governance):** Role of executive notifications in scheme implementation.
- **Essay:** "Transition to Clean Mobility in India – Opportunities and Roadblocks."

3. Surge in State Borrowings via SDLs in FY26

- **Background & Key Data**
    - State governments borrowed **₹96,769 crore** in July 2025 through *State Development Loans (SDLs)*, significantly higher than ₹68,383 crore in July 2024.
    - From April to July FY26, total market borrowings stood at **₹2.97 trillion**, up from ₹2.14 trillion in the same period last year.
    - SDLs are **bonds issued by state governments** to finance infrastructure, welfare schemes, and fiscal gaps, auctioned by the RBI on states' behalf.

- **Shift in Borrowing Pattern**
    - States usually **backload SDL issuances** in the second half (H2) of the fiscal year after exhausting low-cost funds such as central tax devolution, GST compensation, and interest-free central loans.
    - In FY26, there is a **front-loading of borrowings** to accelerate capital expenditure and kickstart infrastructure projects early, aligning with the Centre's infrastructure push.
- **Drivers of Increased Borrowing**
    - Need to **boost economic growth** amid global trade/geopolitical uncertainties and weak private sector capex.
    - Availability of liquidity and favourable RBI monetary stance encouraged states to tap markets earlier.
    - Coordinated fiscal strategy between Centre and states to anchor growth through public investment.
- **Investor Confidence & Market Response**
    - Investor appetite for SDLs remains strong due to:

    - **Sub-sovereign credit quality** (perceived as safe).
    - **Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) eligibility**.
    - Steady demand from banks, insurers, pension funds, and mutual funds.
  - August 5 auction: ₹26,750 crore raised; Maharashtra (₹6,000 crore) led, followed by Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Telangana (₹5,000 crore each).
- **Legal & Constitutional Context**
  - **Article 293 of the Constitution** regulates state borrowing powers, requiring consent of the Centre if states have outstanding loans from the Union government.
  - SDLs form part of states' public debt, monitored under the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act** limits (3% of GSDP, with some flexibility for capex).

Conclusion & UPSC Relevance
The aggressive front-loading of SDL borrowings in FY26 indicates a proactive fiscal approach by states to accelerate infrastructure spending, create jobs, and support growth in a challenging global environment. While this can spur development, it also raises concerns about long-term debt sustainability and adherence to FRBM targets.
UPSC Relevance:

- **GS-3 (Economy):** Public finance, fiscal policy, infrastructure investment.
- **GS-2 (Governance):** Centre–State financial relations under Article 293.
- **Essay:** "Public Borrowing as a Tool for Development – Opportunities and Fiscal Risks."

4. Cabinet Approval for New Income Tax Bill & ₹51,407 Crore Spending Plan

- **Background & Key Decisions**
  - The Union Cabinet approved a **₹51,407 crore package** covering infrastructure, energy subsidies, and a new Income Tax Bill, 2025.
  - The Bill, incorporating recommendations from a parliamentary select committee, will be introduced in the Lok Sabha to replace the **Income-Tax Act, 1961**.
- **Income Tax Bill, 2025**

  - Objective: To **simplify and modernise** India's six-decade-old direct tax framework.
  - Based on feedback from a **Parliamentary Select Committee** chaired by MP Baijayant Panda.
  - Seeks to enhance clarity, reduce litigation, and streamline compliance.
  - The earlier February 2025 draft was withdrawn for revisions before reintroduction.
- **Energy Sector Subsidies & OMC Compensation**

  - ₹30,000 crore allocated to **public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs)** – Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum, and Hindustan Petroleum – to compensate for past LPG losses due to selling at regulated prices despite high global costs.
  - Payments to be made in **12 instalments** to support LPG procurement and maintain capex plans.
- **Ujjwala Scheme Subsidy**
  - ₹12,000 crore targeted subsidy approved for **free LPG connections under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)** for FY26.
  - ₹300 subsidy per 14.2 kg cylinder, up to 9 refills annually per household, to ensure affordable access to clean cooking fuel.
- **Infrastructure & Regional Development**
  - Funds earmarked for a **new highway project**, a **regional development plan for the Northeast**, and a **technical education scheme** to boost skill development.
- **Legal & Constitutional Context**
  - **Article 110 & 265 of the Constitution**: Tax proposals are part of Money Bills requiring Lok Sabha approval; no tax can be levied except by authority of law.
  - Income Tax Bill aims to align direct taxation with global best practices and reduce complexity in line with **Ease of Doing Business** goals.

Conclusion & UPSC Relevance
The Cabinet's dual decision addresses **immediate sectoral needs** (energy subsidies, infrastructure funding) and **long-term tax reforms** (new direct tax law). This reflects a balanced fiscal strategy of supporting growth, protecting vulnerable households, and modernising tax administration.
UPSC Relevance:

- **GS-3 (Economy):** Tax reforms, subsidies, infrastructure investment.
- **GS-2 (Governance):** Role of parliamentary committees in law-making.
- **Essay:** "Balancing Fiscal Priorities – Reforms and Welfare in India's Development Path."

5. Narali Purnima and Koli Community Traditions

- **Background & Cultural Significance**
  - **Narali Purnima** is a traditional festival celebrated by coastal communities, especially the **Koli fishing community** of Maharashtra, marking the start of the fishing season after the monsoon.
  - Observed on the **full moon day (Purnima) of the Shravan month** (July–August), it signifies the safe return to the sea for fishing activities.
- **Rituals & Practices**
  - Devotees offer **coconuts ("naral") to the sea** as a gesture of thanksgiving to **Varuna, the Sea God**, seeking his blessings for safety and abundant catch.

- Processions, folk dances, traditional attire, and decorated boats are common features, especially in fishing hamlets like **Worli Koliwada, Mumbai**.

- **Economic & Social Context**
    - The festival marks the end of the **annual fishing ban period** (monsoon breeding season) enforced for marine sustainability.
    - For the Koli community, it is both a religious occasion and an economic restart, as fishing resumes—critical for their livelihood.
- **Legal & Policy Linkages**
    - Linked to marine conservation policies under the **Indian Fisheries Act, 1897**, and state-level fishing regulations that mandate seasonal bans to protect fish stocks.
    - Supports **SDG Goal 14 (Life Below Water)** by aligning cultural practices with ecological sustainability.
- **Definition**
    - **Koli Community**: Indigenous fisherfolk of Maharashtra's coastal belt, known for their maritime skills, traditional fishing methods, and unique cultural identity.

Conclusion & UPSC Relevance
Narali Purnima blends **religious devotion, ecological awareness, and livelihood concerns**. It demonstrates how traditional festivals can reinforce sustainable resource use while preserving community identity.
UPSC Relevance:

- **GS-1 (Indian Culture):** Festivals and traditions of coastal communities.
- **GS-3 (Environment):** Sustainable fishing practices, marine ecosystem conservation.
- **Essay:** "Traditional Knowledge and Festivals in Promoting Environmental Sustainability."

6. SC-Constituted National Task Force on Student Mental Health

- **Background & Formation**
    - The **National Task Force (NTF)** was constituted by the **Supreme Court of India** in March 2025 to address rising student suicides and mental health concerns in higher education institutions.
    - Triggered by petitions from parents of students who died by suicide, citing **caste discrimination**, lack of institutional support, and inadequate administrative response.

- **Composition & Leadership**
  - A **12-member panel** headed by former Supreme Court judge **Justice Ravindra Bhat**.
  - Members include experts in psychiatry, development studies, civil society, and government officials such as Secretaries from key ministries (Home Affairs, Education, Social Justice, Health, Women & Child Development, and Legal Affairs).
- **Activities & Engagement**
  - Launched a dedicated **website hosting five stakeholder surveys** targeting students, parents, faculty, mental health professionals, and the public.
  - Conducting **institute visits** (e.g., AIIMS, JNU, Jamia Millia Islamia, Ramjas College, IISc, Bangalore Medical College) and holding consultations with experts and stakeholders.
- **Mandate & Objectives**
  - Identify **predominant causes** of student suicides—ragging, discrimination, academic pressure, financial burden, mental health stigma.
  - Review existing institutional and legal regulations, highlight systemic gaps, and recommend reforms for prevention and mental well-being.
  - Submit an **interim report** by September 2025 and a **final report** by end of 2025.
- **Legal & Constitutional Linkages**
  - Linked to **Article 21 (Right to Life with dignity)**, ensuring mental well-being as part of fundamental rights.
  - Supports implementation of **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017** provisions for suicide prevention and mental health promotion.
  - Aligns with **UGC regulations** on curbing ragging and promoting student welfare.
- **Definition**
  - **Ragging**: Any conduct causing physical or psychological harm to a student, prohibited under UGC Regulations, 2009, and punishable under relevant IPC provisions.

Conclusion & UPSC Relevance
The SC-constituted NTF represents a judicially driven, multi-stakeholder approach to addressing **mental health crises in education**. By combining legal oversight, institutional reforms, and stakeholder engagement, it aims to make campuses safer and more supportive.
UPSC Relevance:

- **GS-2 (Polity & Governance):** Role of judiciary in policy-making, mental health legislation, inter-ministerial coordination.
- **GS-1 (Society):** Social justice, caste discrimination, youth issues.
- **GS-4 (Ethics):** Empathy, institutional responsibility, and human dignity in governance.

7. US Tariffs on India – Economic Implications

- **Background**: The United States has imposed a 25% reciprocal tariff on India's exports (effective August 7, 2025) and an additional 25% penal levy (effective August 29, 2025) for India's continued crude oil imports from Russia. This move is aimed at reducing the $41.18 billion merchandise trade surplus India has with the US.
- **Economic Impact**: Reciprocal tariffs could cause India's exports to the US to drop by up to 25%, widening the overall trade deficit by about 0.56% of GDP (to 7.84%) and reducing GDP growth from 6.5% to 5.9% for 2024-25; Current Account Deficit (CAD) could rise from 0.6% to 1.15%. For 2025-26, the GDP decline may be around 0.4%–0.5%.
- **Penal Levy & Non-Tariff Effects**: The penal levy operates as an additional trade barrier and could push India to shift oil imports away from Russia to costlier sources like the US, increasing import bills, CAD, and inflation risks. Together, reciprocal tariffs and penal levy could cut over 0.6 percentage points from India's base growth rate.
- **Global Trade Concerns**: Such unilateral tariff measures are contrary to WTO principles of free and fair trade. They reflect the use of trade tools to influence another nation's foreign policy—here, India's energy imports from Russia. The move is seen as discriminatory, given other nations import more from Russia but face no similar penalties.
- **Possible Mitigation Strategies**: India can use the three-week negotiation window to seek exemptions, avoid penal levy, and highlight inequity at multilateral forums. Long-term measures include diversifying export markets, reducing import tariffs that hinder export competitiveness, and leveraging trade agreements (UK deal, ongoing EU talks) to offset US trade losses.
- **Constitutional & Legal Provisions**: Article 301 of the Indian Constitution ensures freedom of trade and commerce within India, while international trade is regulated under the Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992. WTO agreements, particularly GATT provisions on Most Favoured Nation (MFN) and non-discrimination, are relevant to challenge such tariff actions.

Key Terms:

- **Reciprocal Tariff** – A tariff imposed by one country in response to similar duties imposed by another.
- **Current Account Deficit (CAD)** – A situation where a country's imports of goods, services, and transfers exceed its exports.
- **Non-Tariff Barrier** – Regulatory or policy measures other than tariffs that restrict trade.

Conclusion: The US tariff and penal levy could significantly affect India's exports, trade balance, CAD, and growth, while also influencing its energy import strategy. The episode underscores the need for strategic trade diversification, tariff rationalisation, and robust diplomatic engagement.
UPSC Relevance: Important for topics under GS Paper 3 (Indian Economy – External Sector, Trade Policy),

GS Paper 2 (International Relations, WTO & Bilateral Issues), and Essay Paper (Globalisation & Economic Diplomacy).

8. Cabinet Approval for MERITE Scheme

- **Overview**: The Union Cabinet has approved the *Multidisciplinary Education and Research Improvement in Technical Education (MERITE)* Scheme for 275 technical institutions (175 engineering colleges and 100 polytechnics) across all States/UTs, with an outlay of ₹4,200 crore (2025-26 to 2029-30), including ₹2,100 crore loan assistance from the World Bank. It is a *Central Sector Scheme* aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- **Objectives**: To enhance quality, equity, and governance in technical education through reforms in curriculum, pedagogy, digital infrastructure, faculty development, research, and innovation ecosystems. The scheme also seeks to promote multidisciplinary learning, improve employability, and address gender gaps in technical education.
- **Expected Benefits**: Around 7.5 lakh students will benefit directly. Anticipated outcomes include increased accreditation, better quality assurance, enhanced student employability, improved research capacity, development of market-aligned courses, and training of future academic leaders (especially women faculty). Support will also be extended to State/UT technical education departments.
- **Implementation Strategy**: The scheme will be executed via a Central Nodal Agency with direct fund transfer from the Centre. Key partners include IITs, IIMs, AICTE, and NBA. Participating States/UTs are crucial stakeholders in planning and execution, with interventions tailored to local needs based on consultations.

- **Employment Generation Focus**: Emphasizes internships, industry-aligned curricula, skill and maker labs, incubation centers, language workshops, and innovation hubs to boost employability and placement rates, thereby reducing unemployment among engineering graduates.
- **Constitutional & Legal Provisions**:
  - *Entry 66, Union List, Seventh Schedule* – Coordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education and research.
  - *Entry 25, Concurrent List* – Education, including technical education.
  - NEP 2020 framework as policy basis; aligned with *Right to Education* principles under Article 21A for equitable access.

Key Terms:

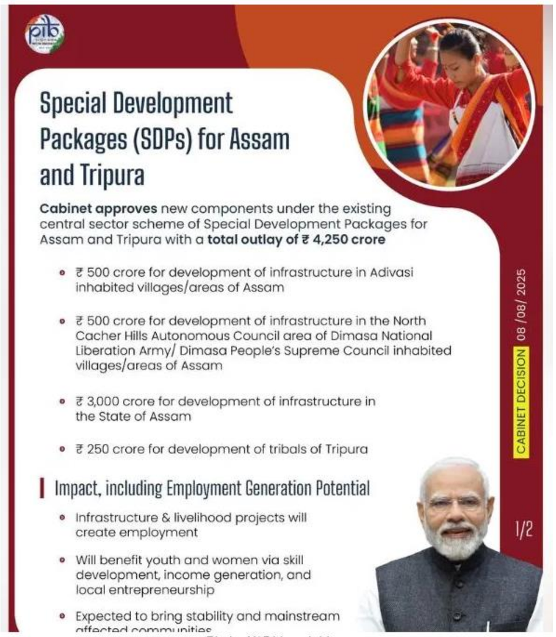
- *Central Sector Scheme*: A scheme fully funded by the Union Government, implemented directly or through agencies.

- *Multidisciplinary Education*: An approach integrating knowledge and skills from multiple disciplines into teaching and research.
- *Accreditation*: Formal recognition that an institution or program meets defined quality standards, e.g., by NBA or NAAC.

Conclusion: MERITE is a strategic reform initiative aimed at modernizing technical education through holistic interventions in governance, pedagogy, research, and employability, thereby aligning India's technical workforce with global industry standards.
UPSC Relevance: Significant for GS Paper 2 (Governance, Government Schemes, Education Policy), GS Paper 3 (Science & Technology, Skill Development, Employment), and Essay (Human Capital & Innovation).

9. Cabinet Approval for Four New Components under Special Development Packages (SDPs) for Assam & Tripura

- **Overview**: The Union Cabinet approved four new components under the *Central Sector Scheme of Special Development Packages* with an outlay of ₹4,250 crore (Assam ₹4,000 crore; Tripura ₹250 crore) for infrastructure and socio-economic development as per Memoranda of Settlement (MoS) signed with various ethnic groups. Assam Government will additionally contribute ₹3,000 crore from its own resources.
- **Breakup of Allocations**: ₹500 crore for Adivasi areas in Assam; ₹500 crore for North Cacher Hills (Dimasa) areas; ₹3,000 crore for ULFA-affected areas in Assam; ₹250 crore for tribal development in Tripura. Timeframe: Assam components (5 years, 2025-26 to 2029-30), Tripura component (4 years, 2025-26 to 2028-29).



- **Objectives & Benefits**: Improve socio-economic conditions of marginalized groups, boost employment through skill development and livelihood projects, enhance health and education services, promote tourism, and integrate communities into the mainstream. Expected to directly benefit lakhs of people from Adivasi, Dimasa, ULFA-affected, and Tripura tribal communities.
- **Impact & Employment Potential**: Focus on infrastructure, local entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, and income generation. Expected to create jobs in construction, tourism, and allied sectors. Designed to support peace-building by fulfilling MoS commitments, thereby ensuring stability in the region.
- **Background & Precedents**: MoSs signed with Adivasi groups (2022), DNLA/DPSC (2023), ULFA (2023), and NLFT/ATTF (2024) aim for inclusive development and rehabilitation. Previous MoS-based packages (e.g., Bodo, Karbi) have demonstrated positive results in conflict resolution and economic upliftment.
- **Constitutional & Legal Provisions**:
    - *Article 275(1)* – Grants for promoting welfare of Scheduled Tribes and administration of Scheduled Areas.

- *Fifth & Sixth Schedule* – Safeguards for administration of Scheduled Areas and Autonomous District Councils in NE states.
- *Article 371B & 371C* – Special provisions for certain NE states including Assam and Manipur.
- *Union List Entry 97* and *Concurrent List Entry 20* – Development of backward areas.

Key Terms:

- *Central Sector Scheme*: 100% funded by the Union Government, implemented by central agencies or through state machinery.
- *Memorandum of Settlement (MoS)*: A negotiated agreement between government and stakeholder groups to resolve conflicts and outline developmental commitments.
- *Autonomous District Council*: Local self-governing body in Sixth Schedule areas with legislative, administrative, and judicial powers.

Conclusion: The approval of these components under the SDPs reflects a peace-through-development strategy, integrating ethnic groups into the socio-economic mainstream while fulfilling negotiated settlement promises. This strengthens stability, boosts livelihoods, and enhances regional connectivity.
UPSC Relevance: Important for GS Paper 2 (Governance, Policies for Vulnerable Sections, Centre-State Relations), GS Paper 3 (Infrastructure, Employment Generation, North-East Development), and GS Paper 1 (Society, Tribal Issues).

10. India–U.S. Tensions over Russian Oil Imports

- **Background & Current Issue**: The U.S., under President Donald Trump, has threatened to impose a 25% penalty in addition to existing 25% tariffs on Indian goods unless India reduces Russian oil imports, which currently make up over 35% of India's total crude imports. This move is linked to U.S. geopolitical pressure amid the Russia–Ukraine war, with the penalty set to take effect on August 27 unless Russia halts the conflict.
- **Difference from Iran/Venezuela Precedent**: In 2018–19, India complied with U.S. demands to stop oil imports from Iran and Venezuela. Experts stress that the same approach cannot be applied to Russia due to its scale, strategic importance, and long-standing defense, political, and technological support to India.

- **Strategic & Diplomatic Significance**: Russia is viewed as a major global power and a vital strategic partner for India. Experts warn that yielding to U.S. demands could embolden Washington to seek more concessions, undermining India's strategic autonomy.
- **Criticism of U.S. Approach**: Analysts like Brahma Chellaney argue that the U.S. is using Russian oil purchases as leverage to push India into accepting an unfavorable trade deal. Notably, the U.S. has not sanctioned Russian oil imports globally nor penalized China, the largest importer of Russian oil.
- **Impact on India–U.S. Relations**: The past 25 years have seen a gradual building of trust, especially post-2008 civil nuclear deal and U.S. support during India–China border tensions. However, current

coercive measures risk reviving older perceptions of the U.S. as unreliable and coercive, potentially damaging bilateral ties.

- **Constitutional & Legal Context**: India's foreign trade and external relations policy operate under the **Union List** (List I, Seventh Schedule, Article 246), giving the Union Government exclusive power over foreign affairs and trade. **Article 51** of the Directive Principles encourages fostering international peace, but it also supports safeguarding national interests and strategic autonomy.

Key Definitions:

- **Strategic Autonomy**: The ability of a state to pursue its national interests and foreign policy independently, without being constrained by other states' pressures.
- **Sanctions**: Penalties imposed by one or more countries against a targeted country, group, or individual, often to influence behavior or policy.

Conclusion: India's refusal to halt Russian oil imports reflects a balancing act between economic needs, energy security, and strategic partnerships. While the U.S. pressure could strain ties, India is likely to prioritize its long-term geopolitical and energy interests over short-term compliance.

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper II**: International Relations (India–U.S. ties, strategic autonomy, sanctions diplomacy)
- **GS Paper III**: Energy Security, External Sector and Trade Policy
- **Prelims**: Key provisions of the Constitution related to foreign affairs, definitions of strategic terms, India's major oil trade partners.

11. Scheme of Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)

- **Introduction & Background**: Launched in October 2019 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) after the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018 and Supreme Court's Suo Motu Writ (Criminal) No. 1/2019, FTSCs—including exclusive POCSO (ePOCSO) Courts—aim to ensure time-bound trial of rape and POCSO Act cases. Triggered by rising sexual crimes and the Nirbhaya case (2012), the scheme addresses judicial pendency in sensitive cases.
- **Scale & Achievements**: Extended till 31 March 2026, targeting 790 courts with ₹1952.23 crore outlay (₹1207.24 crore from Nirbhaya Fund). As of 30 June 2025, 725 courts (392 ePOCSO) across 29 States/UTs have disposed of 3,34,213 cases; disposal rate (9.51 cases/month) is nearly triple that of regular courts (3.26/month).

- **Funding & Implementation**: Funded under Nirbhaya Fund—non-lapsable corpus administered by Ministry of Finance, with Ministry of Women and Child Development as nodal agency. CSS cost-sharing ratio: 60:40 (General States), 90:10 (NE States & special category). Covers salaries for one Judicial Officer, 7 staff, and daily operational expenses via reimbursement based on functional court numbers.
- **Constitutional & Legal Basis**:
    - **Article 246 & Seventh Schedule, List I & List III**: Union & State concurrent powers over criminal law and criminal procedure.

- **POCSO Act, 2012**: Special protection and speedy trial framework for sexual offences against children.
- **Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018**: Strengthened penalties and mandated faster disposal of sexual offence cases.
- **Article 39A (DPSP)**: Mandates equal access to justice and free legal aid.

- **Key Definitions**:
  - **Fast Track Court**: A special court designed to expedite the judicial process and reduce case pendency by dedicated handling of specific categories of cases.
  - **POCSO Act, 2012**: Comprehensive law for protection of children from sexual offences, ensuring child-friendly reporting, investigation, and trial procedures.
- **Challenges & State Participation**: Court allocation based on pendency (65–165 cases per court). Some States/UTs (e.g., Arunachal Pradesh) opted out due to low case numbers; Jharkhand exited in 2025 after disposing 9,114 cases. Some regions yet to operationalize courts despite consent (e.g., A&N Islands).

Conclusion: FTSCs have significantly improved the disposal rate of rape and POCSO cases, strengthening victim justice and public confidence. Their sustained functioning depends on timely funding, judicial staffing, and effective state participation, making them a crucial instrument in combating sexual violence.

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper II**: Polity & Governance (Judiciary reforms, Centre–State relations, constitutional provisions on justice delivery).
- **GS Paper II & III**: Social Justice, Women & Child Development, Internal Security (crime against women & children).
- **Prelims**: POCSO Act, Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018, Nirbhaya Fund, constitutional provisions (Article 39A, 246, Seventh Schedule).