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Headlines:

- India-China Trade Deficit Crosses \$100 Billion Amid Export Growth
- Electric Mobility in India: Opportunities, Challenges and the Way Forward
- Independence of the Election Commission: Appointment Process and Electoral Reforms
- Drug Trafficking in Punjab: Organised Crime and Internal Security Challenges
- Constitutional Morality, Peaceful Protest and Democratic Citizenship



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1. India-China Trade Deficit Crosses \$100 Billion Amid Export Growth

GS Paper II: India-China Relations

Why in News?

- India's exports to China grew by 40.7% to \$19.26 billion during January–September 2026. However, the bilateral trade deficit reached \$105.93 billion, according to China's General Administration of Customs.

Key Trade Trends

- **Bilateral trade:** Increased by 25.4% to \$144.45 billion.
- **Indian imports:** Rose by 23.3% to \$125.19 billion.
- **Trade deficit:** Occurs when merchandise imports exceed merchandise exports over a specified period.

Economic Significance

- **Manufacturing dependence:** Indian industries rely on Chinese intermediate goods, such as electronic components, machinery and industrial inputs.
- **Export opportunities:** Seafood, naphtha and printed circuit boards are among India's exports to China.
- **Supply-chain vulnerability:** Chinese export controls on rare earth elements and fertilisers may disrupt critical industries.
- **Market access:** Limited and unpredictable access to Chinese markets constrains Indian exporters.

Implications for India

- **External sector:** The bilateral trade deficit reflects an imbalance in merchandise trade; it does not, by itself, determine India's overall Balance of Payments.
- **Strategic autonomy:** Excessive dependence on one country for critical inputs can create economic and geopolitical vulnerabilities.
- **Domestic industry:** Import dependence may constrain domestic value addition and expose manufacturers to external supply disruptions.

Challenges

- Gaps in manufacturing competitiveness, technology and economies of scale.
- Concentration of critical imports and limited alternative suppliers.
- Market-access barriers and dependence on imported industrial components.

Way Forward

- Strengthen domestic manufacturing, research and development, and export competitiveness.

- Diversify import sources, particularly for critical minerals and industrial components.
- Improve product quality, technological capabilities and market access through sustained trade negotiations.
- Promote domestic value addition and resilient supply chains while maintaining constructive economic engagement with China.

2. Electric Mobility in India: Opportunities, Challenges and the Way Forward

GS Paper III: Environment, Energy, Infrastructure and Industrial Development; GS Paper II: Government Policies, Urban Governance and Public Transport

Why in News?

- Electric mobility is gaining importance as India seeks to address air pollution, energy security and climate change while promoting sustainable urban development.

Significance of Electric Mobility

- **Energy security:** Reduces dependence on imported petroleum and exposure to global oil-price volatility, but creates new supply-chain dependencies on battery materials and critical minerals.
- **Environmental benefits:** Eliminates tailpipe emissions. Overall climate benefits depend on the electricity mix, battery manufacturing and end-of-life battery management.
- **Economic growth:** Creates opportunities in battery manufacturing, electronics, software, charging infrastructure and specialised services.
- **Urban sustainability:** Electric buses and last-mile connectivity can improve public transport and reduce transport-related emissions.

Government Initiatives

- **FAME-II:** The earlier demand-incentive programme supporting electric and hybrid vehicle adoption, charging infrastructure and related interventions.
- **PM E-DRIVE Scheme:** Launched in 2024 with an outlay of ₹10,900 crore to support electric mobility, including eligible electric two-wheelers, three-wheelers, buses, charging infrastructure and testing facilities, subject to scheme provisions.

Key Challenges

- High upfront costs and unevenly distributed charging infrastructure.
- Dependence on imported battery materials and critical minerals.

- Battery waste management, recycling and electricity-generation emissions.
- Limited integration between EVs and public transport systems.

Way Forward

- Prioritise electric buses, two-wheelers and commercial fleets where electrification can deliver substantial public benefits.
- Expand accessible charging networks powered increasingly by renewable energy.
- Strengthen domestic battery manufacturing, mineral supply chains, recycling and research and development.
- Integrate EVs with public transport, pedestrian infrastructure and last-mile connectivity.
- Promote domestic value addition, public-private partnerships and consistent policies to improve affordability and investment.

India needs a holistic electric mobility strategy combining clean electricity, domestic manufacturing, circular battery management and integrated public transport to achieve sustainable, affordable and energy-secure mobility.

3. Independence of the Election Commission: Appointment Process and Electoral Reforms

GS Paper II: Constitution, Judiciary, Electoral Reforms and Constitutional Bodies

Why in News?

- On September 23, 2026, the Supreme Court delivered a split verdict in *Dr. Jaya Thakur v. Union of India*, challenging the constitutional validity of the 2023 law governing appointments to the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 324(2):** Provides for the appointment of the CEC and other Election Commissioners by the President, subject to parliamentary legislation.
- **Anoop Baranwal judgment (2023):** The Supreme Court prescribed an interim selection committee comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and Chief Justice of India until Parliament enacted a law.
- **2023 Act:** Replaced the Chief Justice of India with a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister on the selection committee, raising concerns about executive predominance.

Key Issues

- **Institutional independence:** Executive dominance in appointments may undermine the perceived neutrality of election authorities.

- **Electoral integrity:** Public confidence in the ECI is essential for free and fair elections and democratic legitimacy.
- **Judicial review:** The split verdict highlights continuing constitutional debate over the appointment mechanism; the law's validity was not finally determined by this verdict.
- **Judicial ethics:** Alleged conflicts of interest underline the importance of disclosure, impartiality and public trust in judicial proceedings.

Challenges

- Balancing executive accountability with institutional autonomy.
- Ensuring transparent, merit-based and impartial appointments.
- Preventing conflicts of interest and maintaining public confidence.

Way Forward

- Establish a balanced, broadly representative selection mechanism that safeguards independence and constitutional accountability.
- Introduce transparent eligibility criteria and clear selection procedures.
- Strengthen the ECI's institutional and operational autonomy.
- Improve disclosure requirements and safeguards against conflicts of interest.
- Pursue electoral reforms through parliamentary deliberation, constitutional processes and informed public participation.

An independent Election Commission is essential to free and fair elections. Transparent appointments, institutional safeguards and accountability can strengthen democratic legitimacy and constitutional governance.

4. Drug Trafficking in Punjab: Organised Crime and Internal Security Challenges

GS Paper III: Internal Security, Organised Crime and Cross-Border Smuggling; GS Paper II: Governance, Public Health and Law Enforcement

Why in News?

- Recent incidents of targeted killings and alleged drug-trafficking networks in Punjab have highlighted the links between narcotics, organised crime, illicit financing and public safety.

Key Concerns

- **Drug dependence:** The AIIMS-led Magnitude of Substance Use in India survey (2019) estimated opioid dependence among 1.28% of Punjab's population aged 10–75 years, compared with 0.26% nationally, based on 2017 data.

- **Overdose deaths:** NCRB figures cited in the source article recorded 106 drug-overdose deaths in Punjab in 2024, compared with 89 in 2023.
- **Organised crime nexus:** Drug trafficking can finance gangster networks, targeted killings and other criminal activities.
- **Cross-border smuggling:** Punjab's geographical location and multiple transport routes create challenges for detecting illicit consignments.
- **Digital platforms:** Online communication may facilitate criminal coordination, necessitating stronger cyber-investigation capabilities.

Government Response

- **Yudh Nashian Virudh:** A Punjab State anti-drug campaign aimed at curbing trafficking and strengthening enforcement.
- **Legal framework:** The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985, provides the principal legal framework for controlling narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- **Enforcement agencies:** State police, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and border-security agencies contribute to combating trafficking.

Key Challenges

- Diversion of pharmaceutical products and precursor chemicals.
- Illicit financial flows, potential corruption and concealed proceeds of crime.
- Underreporting of overdose deaths and inadequate access to rehabilitation.
- Public distrust of formal reporting mechanisms and risks to whistle-blowers.

Way Forward

- **Financial investigations:** Trace illicit proceeds, identify financial facilitators and disrupt the logistics of organised criminal networks.
- **Institutional coordination:** Strengthen intelligence-sharing among State police, NCB, border-security agencies and financial-investigation authorities.
- **Demand reduction:** Expand prevention, evidence-based de-addiction, rehabilitation and community-based reintegration.
- **Accountable policing:** Improve protection for threatened individuals and strengthen public reporting mechanisms.

Punjab needs an integrated strategy combining law enforcement, financial investigations, cross-border cooperation and public-health interventions to dismantle drug networks and improve public safety.

5. Constitutional Morality, Peaceful Protest and Democratic Citizenship

GS Paper II: Constitution, Fundamental Rights, Judiciary and Civil Society

Why in News?

- Recent debates on peaceful protests, state action and judicial responses have renewed attention to constitutional values, civil liberties and democratic citizenship.

Constitutional Significance

- Constitution-as-commons:** The Constitution provides a shared framework of justice, dignity, liberty and collective responsibility.
- Article 14:** Guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws, requiring non-arbitrary state action.
- Article 19:** Article 19(1)(a) protects freedom of speech and expression, while Article 19(1)(b) guarantees peaceful assembly without arms. These rights are subject to constitutionally permitted restrictions under Articles 19(2) and 19(3), respectively.
- Article 21:** Protects life and personal liberty, requiring state action to comply with constitutional safeguards and due process.
- Constitutional morality:** Public institutions must uphold justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and individual dignity.

Role of Peaceful Protest

- Democratic accountability:** Peaceful dissent enables citizens to question policies and demand institutional accountability.
- Satyagraha:** Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance offers a method of challenging injustice.
- Social transformation:** Civic movements can highlight structural inequalities and encourage reforms.
- Judicial remedies:** Article 32 enables approaches to the Supreme Court for Fundamental Rights enforcement; Article 226 empowers High Courts to issue writs for Fundamental Rights and other legal purposes.

Key Challenges

- Balancing public order with freedom of peaceful assembly.
- Preventing disproportionate or discriminatory restrictions.
- Ensuring timely judicial remedies and accountable policing.

Way Forward

- Apply lawful, necessary and proportionate restrictions on protests.

- Strengthen access to legal aid and judicial remedies.
- Encourage dialogue between governments, citizens and civil society.
- Promote constitutional literacy and non-violent democratic participation.

A vibrant constitutional democracy requires peaceful dissent, institutional accountability and respect for Fundamental Rights. Constitutional values must guide both state authority and citizen participation.

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