

# PrepAlpine

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# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 01.02.2026

## GS Paper II: Current Affairs

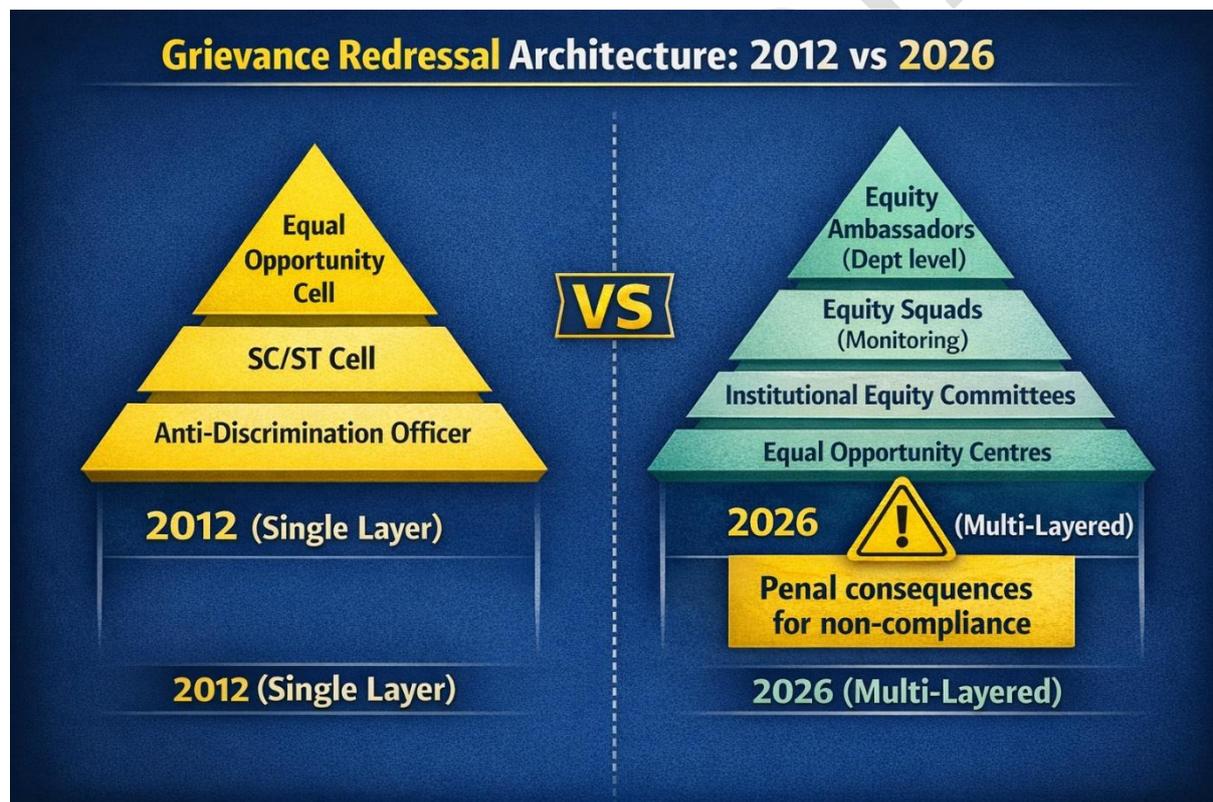
### 1. UGC Equity Regulations on Caste-Based Discrimination (2012 and 2026)

#### a. Why Equity Regulations Became Necessary in Higher Education

Indian institutions of higher education have historically mirrored the structural inequalities of society. For students belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), discrimination has rarely taken the form of overt exclusion. Instead, it has operated through subtle but persistent practices.

These include biased academic evaluation, unequal access to institutional support, social isolation in hostels and classrooms, and differential mentoring or supervision by faculty. Such experiences highlighted that informal grievance mechanisms were inadequate to address systemic and institutionalised discrimination.

Consequently, the need arose for a formal regulatory framework to ensure equality, dignity, and non-discrimination within university campuses. This led to the introduction of UGC regulations aimed at institutionalising equity in higher education.



#### b. The 2012 UGC Anti-Discrimination Regulations: A Preventive Framework

##### i. Core Features

The defining strength of the 2012 UGC Regulations lay in their clarity and specificity. The regulations identified twenty-five illustrative acts of discrimination, spanning key domains such as:

- Admissions and enrolment
- Academic evaluation and grading
- Hostel allocation and campus facilities
- Faculty conduct and supervision

- Participation in academic and social life

By concretely listing discriminatory practices, the framework enabled both institutions and complainants to recognise discrimination in operational terms, rather than as abstract violations.

To operationalise these norms, higher education institutions were required to establish:

- Equal Opportunity Cells
- SC and ST Cells
- The post of an Anti-Discrimination Officer

These bodies functioned as complaint-receiving and redressal forums within institutions.

## **ii. Structural Limitations**

Despite its normative clarity, the 2012 framework remained largely preventive and advisory in nature.

- It lacked penal provisions for institutional non-compliance
- Accountability mechanisms were weak and unenforceable
- OBCs were not clearly brought within the protective ambit
- Many institutions treated compliance as symbolic rather than substantive

These limitations became starkly visible in the aftermath of tragic incidents such as the Rohith Vemula case (2016) and Payal Tadvi case (2019), which exposed the inability of a non-enforceable framework to prevent institutional discrimination.

## **c. Rationale for the 2026 UGC Equity Regulations**

The 2026 Equity Regulations emerged against a backdrop of judicial scrutiny, sustained public debate, and persistent reports of campus discrimination.

Their stated objective went beyond mere prevention. The regulations sought to enforce equity through institutional accountability, rather than relying on voluntary compliance.

Key motivations behind the 2026 framework included:

- Addressing enforcement gaps in the 2012 regulations
- Standardising grievance redressal mechanisms across institutions
- Explicitly including OBCs within the equity framework
- Responding to concerns raised in ongoing Supreme Court proceedings

Notably, the regulations were drafted by an expert committee constituted during Supreme Court hearings on petitions related to caste-based discrimination in higher education.

## **d. Conceptualisation of Discrimination under the 2026 Regulations**

### **i. General Definition**

The 2026 regulations adopted a broad, principle-based definition of discrimination. Discrimination was described as any unfair, biased, or differential treatment—whether explicit or implicit—on grounds such as:

- Caste
- Religion
- Gender
- Disability
- Race
- Place of birth

This marked a departure from the act-based enumeration approach of 2012 toward a normative, values-driven framework.

## **ii. Definition of Caste-Based Discrimination**

Caste-based discrimination was defined as discrimination solely on the basis of caste or tribe against members of SCs, STs, and OBCs.

This formulation soon became contentious:

- Critics argued that it focused on identity rather than conduct
- The absence of illustrative acts created interpretative ambiguity
- Concerns were raised regarding procedural fairness and legal certainty

The shift from specificity to abstraction thus generated debate over the effectiveness and clarity of the new framework.

## **e. Shift in Regulatory Philosophy: From Prevention to Enforcement**

The most significant transformation introduced in 2026 was philosophical rather than textual.

While the 2012 regulations emphasised identification and discouragement of discriminatory behaviour, the 2026 framework placed the burden squarely on institutional responsibility and enforcement.

Key features of this shift included:

- Replacement of advisory bodies with regulatory mechanisms
- Introduction of penal provisions for institutional non-compliance
- Integration of equity monitoring into routine campus administration

Practices explicitly prohibited included:

- Denial of access to education
- Imposition of humiliating or degrading conditions
- Maintenance of segregated academic or social spaces

These prohibitions applied across grounds such as caste, religion, language, gender, and disability.

## **f. Grievance Redressal Mechanisms: A Comparative Perspective**

### **i. Framework under the 2012 Regulations**

The 2012 regulations relied on:

- Equal Opportunity Cells
- SC and ST Cells
- Anti-Discrimination Officers

These bodies primarily functioned as complaint-receiving and conciliatory forums, with limited authority to enforce outcomes.

### **ii. Framework under the 2026 Regulations**

The 2026 regulations introduced a multi-layered grievance redressal structure, comprising:

- Equal Opportunity Centres
- Institutional-level Equity Committees
- Equity Squads for monitoring compliance
- Equity Ambassadors at departmental or unit levels

Importantly, institutional non-compliance could attract penal consequences, marking a decisive break from the earlier approach.

### **g. Reasons for Widespread Opposition to the 2026 Regulations**

Opposition to the 2026 framework emerged from multiple and often opposing constituencies.

#### **i. Concerns of General and Upper Caste Groups**

- Perceived one-sided definition of caste-based discrimination
- Fear of presumption of guilt
- Absence of explicit safeguards against false or malicious complaints
- Unclear powers and accountability of Equity Squads

#### **ii. Criticism from Dalit Scholars and Academics**

- Dilution of concrete protections available in the 2012 regulations
- Removal of enumerated discriminatory acts
- Ambiguity regarding applicability to institutions like IITs and IIMs
- Absence of mandatory representation norms in equity bodies

Thus, paradoxically, the regulations were criticised both for being overbroad and insufficiently protective.

### **h. Supreme Court Intervention and Stay on the 2026 Regulations**

The Supreme Court stayed the implementation of the 2026 regulations citing:

- Vagueness in definitions
- Procedural ambiguities in newly created bodies
- Risk of misuse due to lack of safeguards
- Removal of concrete protections present in the 2012 framework

Given the pendency of sensitive cases, including those linked to Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, the Court directed institutions to continue following the 2012 regulations on an interim basis.

### **i. Way Forward: Reconciling Equity with Procedural Fairness**

A sustainable equity framework must balance social justice with natural justice.

Key elements of a reconciled approach include:

- Retaining the specificity and clarity of the 2012 regulations
- Incorporating enforceable accountability mechanisms from the 2026 framework
- Clearly enumerating discriminatory acts alongside principle-based definitions
- Introducing procedural safeguards against misuse
- Ensuring defined representation norms and transparent grievance procedures

### **Conclusion**

An effective regulatory framework against caste-based discrimination in higher education must combine definitional clarity with enforceable accountability, ensuring equity while upholding procedural fairness, institutional credibility, and constitutional balance.

## 2. India–European Union Trade Agreement (Free Trade Agreement)

### a. Introduction: What is the India–European Union Trade Agreement?

The India–European Union Trade Agreement is a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) aimed at deepening economic integration between India and the European Union. It seeks to progressively reduce or eliminate tariffs, improve market access for goods and services, and establish predictable and transparent rules governing long-term trade and investment.

By linking India with the European Union—a bloc of twenty-seven advanced economies—the agreement connects two of the world’s largest economic spaces. This makes it one of the most economically and strategically significant trade agreements currently under negotiation in the global trading system.

## Why the India–EU Trade Agreement Matters



### b. Significance of the India–European Union Trade Agreement

#### i. Economic Scale and Trade Importance

The European Union is India’s largest trading partner among FTA partners and accounts for nearly twelve per cent of India’s total merchandise and services trade. Together, India and the EU represent an economic market of approximately twenty-four trillion dollars.

This sheer economic size ensures that tariff reductions and regulatory cooperation under the agreement have a direct and substantial impact on trade volumes, investment decisions, and global competitiveness.

#### ii. Export Diversification and Market Stability

Indian exports—especially labour-intensive products—have faced rising uncertainty due to protectionist measures, tariff hikes, and geopolitical disruptions in some traditional markets.

The agreement offers stable, rules-based, and predictable access to a large, high-income European market. This helps India reduce over-dependence on a narrow set of export destinations and strengthens resilience in an increasingly fragmented global trading environment.

#### iii. Support to Employment-Intensive Manufacturing

A major strength of the agreement lies in its alignment with India's employment and manufacturing priorities.

Labour-intensive sectors such as:

- Textiles and apparel
- Leather and footwear
- Marine products
- Gems and jewellery
- Toys, sports goods, and handicrafts

are dominated by micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Improved access to the European market enhances price competitiveness in these sectors, directly supporting employment generation, MSME growth, and export-led industrialisation.

#### **iv. Strategic and Geopolitical Relevance**

Beyond economics, the agreement carries strong strategic value. At a time of global supply chain reconfiguration, deeper economic ties with Europe help India project itself as a reliable, rules-based trading partner.

The agreement also strengthens India-EU cooperation in shaping a multipolar economic order, reinforcing India's strategic autonomy while deepening engagement with like-minded democratic economies.

#### **c. Extent of Tariff Liberalisation Offered by the European Union**

The European Union has offered very high tariff liberalisation for Indian exports.

- Over ninety per cent of India's current export value is expected to receive immediate zero-duty access
- Most remaining exports will see tariffs eliminated or sharply reduced within short transition periods
- In effect, more than ninety-nine per cent of India's exports to the EU will benefit from either zero or reduced tariffs

This extensive liberalisation significantly enhances the price competitiveness of Indian products vis-à-vis global competitors.

#### **d. Key Beneficiary Sectors in India**

##### **i. Merchandise Trade**

The agreement offers substantial gains for a wide range of manufactured and processed goods, including:

- Marine products such as shrimp and prawns
- Processed food items
- Leather and footwear
- Chemicals, plastics, and rubber products
- Sports goods, toys, and gems and jewellery

Earlier, many of these products faced moderate to high European tariffs, limiting export growth. Tariff elimination under the agreement improves India's relative competitiveness in the European market.

##### **ii. Services Trade**

The European Union has made commitments in one hundred and forty-four service sub-sectors, covering:

- Information technology and IT-enabled services

- Professional and consultancy services
- Education and training services
- Business and financial support services

Although services liberalisation is more cautious than goods trade, it expands India's presence in high-value services markets and complements India's strength in skill-based exports.

### **iii. Traditional Medicine and AYUSH**

A distinctive feature of the agreement is the recognition of Indian traditional medicine systems.

In European countries lacking domestic regulatory frameworks, practitioners of AYUSH systems are permitted to offer services using Indian qualifications. This provision:

- Promotes traditional knowledge systems
- Encourages wellness and medical tourism
- Enhances India's cultural and soft-power outreach

### **e. India's Market Access Commitments to the European Union**

India has followed a gradual and calibrated approach to market opening.

- Tariff elimination is front-loaded for non-sensitive items
- Sensitive sectors are liberalised over longer timeframes
- Over ninety-two per cent of tariff lines are covered
- Most reductions are phased over five to ten years

This approach balances trade liberalisation with the need to protect domestic industry and employment.

#### **Sensitive Consumer Imports**

India has adopted carefully structured commitments in sensitive sectors:

- Wine: Import duties reduced gradually with quotas and safeguards
- Automobiles: Tariff reductions limited to high-value vehicles above a price threshold and subject to quotas

These measures shield the mass-market domestic automobile and consumer goods sectors from sudden import surges.

### **f. Sectors Excluded from Liberalisation**

To protect food security and farmer livelihoods, India has excluded several agricultural and allied products, including:

- Cereals and dairy
- Meat and edible oils
- Fruits, vegetables, tea, coffee, and spices
- Tobacco

The European Union has also retained restrictions on certain sensitive items, reflecting a mutual recognition of critical domestic concerns.

### **g. Key Concerns and Implementation Challenges**

A major concern relates to the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), under which carbon-intensive exports may face additional costs.

While India has secured assurances against discriminatory treatment, the agreement does not provide exemptions. Moreover, tariff access alone is insufficient. To fully realise benefits, India must improve:

- Logistics and port efficiency
- Regulatory transparency
- Ease of doing business
- Standards compliance capacity

## **h. Overall Assessment**

The India–European Union Trade Agreement represents a strategic economic partnership rather than a narrow tariff-reduction exercise.

It strengthens export competitiveness, supports employment-intensive manufacturing, expands services trade, deepens strategic engagement with Europe, and preserves policy space in sensitive sectors.

## **Conclusion**

An effective India–European Union Trade Agreement advances India’s integration into global value chains by combining export expansion with strategic autonomy, thereby reinforcing economic growth, employment generation, and India’s role in a multipolar trading order.

## **GS Paper III: Economics**

### **3. India’s Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Manufacturing Scheme**

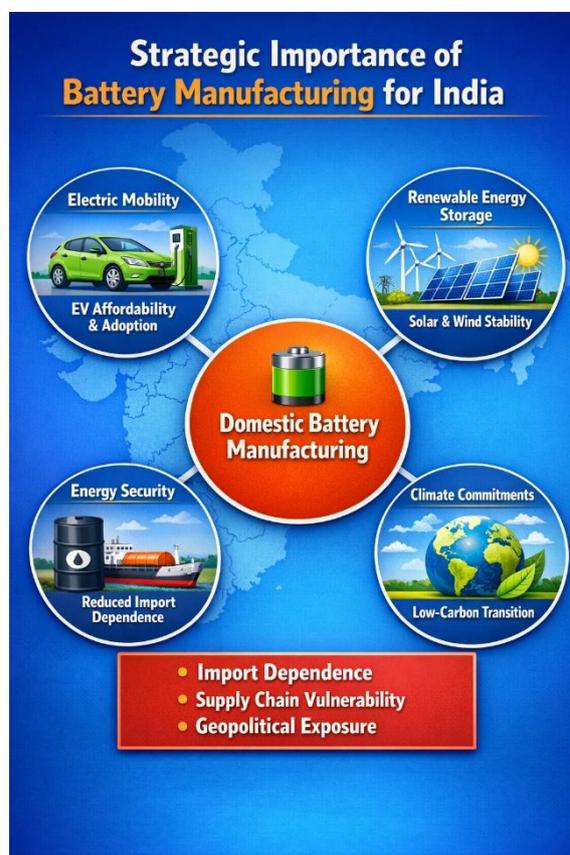
#### **a. Strategic Importance of Battery Manufacturing for India**

Battery manufacturing has emerged as a core pillar of India’s economic, energy, and climate transition. It underpins the shift to electric mobility, enables large-scale integration of renewable energy, strengthens energy security, and supports India’s long-term low-carbon growth pathway.

In electric vehicles, batteries constitute the single most expensive component, directly determining vehicle affordability and adoption rates. Beyond transport, batteries are critical for energy storage systems, which stabilise solar and wind power by storing surplus electricity and supplying it during periods of low generation.

Without domestic battery manufacturing, India’s clean energy transition remains exposed to import dependence, supply disruptions, and geopolitical vulnerabilities.

#### **b. Understanding Advanced Chemistry Cells (ACC)**



Advanced Chemistry Cells refer to modern batteries that store electrical energy in chemical form and convert it back into electricity when required. These batteries are characterised by:

- High energy density
- Longer operational life
- Improved safety standards
- Faster charging capability

Such features make ACCs suitable for electric vehicles as well as grid-scale energy storage.

Major battery chemistries covered under the ACC framework include:

- Lithium-ion batteries
- Lithium iron phosphate (LFP)
- Nickel–manganese–cobalt (NMC) variants
- Emerging technologies such as sodium-ion batteries

Importantly, the ACC policy is technology-agnostic, allowing manufacturers to adopt evolving battery chemistries as innovation advances, rather than locking the industry into a single technological pathway.

### **c. ACC Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme: Objectives and Design**

The ACC Production Linked Incentive scheme was launched in 2021 with a financial outlay of ₹18,100 crore.

#### **Core Objectives**

The scheme aims to:

- Create fifty gigawatt-hours of domestic battery manufacturing capacity
- Reduce dependence on imported batteries
- Build a domestic ecosystem for electric mobility and energy storage
- Support India's renewable energy and net-zero ambitions

The broader goal is to establish a globally competitive battery manufacturing base in India.

### **d. Structural Design of the ACC PLI Scheme**

The scheme follows an auction-based allocation model, under which companies bid for manufacturing capacity.

#### **i. Key Design Features**

- Minimum capacity commitment of five gigawatt-hours
- Eligibility based on high net worth and large-scale investment capability
- Establishment of battery gigafactories within India

Financial incentives are directly linked to actual battery production, with a ceiling of approximately ₹2,000 per kilowatt-hour.

#### **ii. Domestic Value Addition Requirements**

To promote localisation, the scheme mandates progressive domestic value addition:

- Twenty-five per cent within two years
- Sixty per cent within five years

Manufacturing facilities are expected to be commissioned within a two-year timeframe, after which incentives become available only upon meeting production milestones.

### **e. Current Status and On-Ground Performance**

Despite ambitious targets, implementation has been slow and uneven.

- Only a small fraction of the planned capacity has been commissioned
- Several approved projects remain delayed or yet to begin
- Employment generation and investment mobilisation are below expectations
- No incentive payments have been disbursed due to lack of production

This performance gap highlights the disconnect between policy ambition and industrial reality, especially in a capital-intensive and technologically complex sector.

### **f. Beneficiaries and Industry Composition**

The scheme selected a limited number of beneficiaries with large capacity commitments.

However, concerns have emerged because:

- Several established Indian battery manufacturers were excluded
- Newer or relatively inexperienced players received capacity allocations
- Execution capability and technological readiness became uncertain

This raised questions regarding risk assessment, project viability, and long-term sustainability of the selected manufacturing capacities.

### **g. Factors Responsible for Slow Progress**

#### **i. Unrealistic Timelines**

Setting up battery gigafactories requires:

- Advanced manufacturing technology
- Specialised machinery
- Skilled technical manpower
- Long gestation periods

Expecting full-scale commissioning within two years is impractical for a nascent industry.

#### **ii. Weak Upstream Supply Chain**

India lacks domestic capacity in:

- Lithium processing
- Nickel and cobalt refining
- Cathodes, anodes, and electrolytes

This makes domestic value addition targets difficult to achieve and forces continued import dependence.

#### **iii. Selection and Evaluation Issues**

The scheme placed heavy emphasis on:

- Value addition commitments
- Subsidy benchmarks

while giving relatively less weight to:

- Prior manufacturing experience
- Proven technical capability

As a result, firms with established expertise were sidelined.

#### **iv. External Dependencies and Execution Bottlenecks**

India remains heavily dependent on China for:

- Raw materials
- Manufacturing machinery
- Technical know-how

Delays in visas for foreign technical experts further slowed execution. Since incentives are output-based, the absence of production meant that financial support did not flow, weakening investor confidence.

#### **h. Implications for India's Battery and EV Ecosystem**

In the short term:

- Battery costs remain high
- Electric vehicle adoption slows
- Import dependence persists

In the long term, India risks becoming an assembly-oriented market rather than a manufacturing leader, increasing strategic vulnerability in clean energy supply chains and slowing progress toward climate and net-zero commitments.

#### **i. Measures Required to Revive the ACC Scheme**

##### **i. Immediate Corrective Measures**

- Extend implementation timelines
- Temporarily relax penalty provisions
- Expedite visas for skilled technical experts

##### **ii. Structural and Long-Term Reforms**

- Develop a critical minerals ecosystem covering mining, refining, and recycling
- Promote domestic manufacturing of battery components
- Integrate ACC scheme with the Critical Minerals Mission
- Align with skill development initiatives
- Rebalance evaluation criteria to prioritise manufacturing experience and technical capability

#### **Conclusion**

The ACC battery manufacturing scheme reflects strong strategic intent, but incentives alone cannot substitute for robust industrial foundations. Its success depends on ecosystem readiness, supply chain depth, realistic timelines, and skilled manpower availability.

India's transition to domestic battery manufacturing requires realistic timelines, resilient supply chains, and skilled human capital, with production-linked incentives complemented by foundational industrial capacity rather than substituted for it.

## Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

This document is part of the PrepAlpine Current Affairs Series — designed to bring clarity, structure, and precision to your daily UPSC learning.

While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

### 1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

### 2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

### 3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

If you prefer a specific style (lists → paras, paras → tables, etc.), feel free to convert using any free LLM.

### 4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

The complete Monthly Current Affairs Module will be released soon, optimized to a compact 100–150 pages — comprehensive yet concise, exam-ready, and revision-efficient.

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