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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 08.02.2026

GS Paper II: Current Affairs

1. Mental Health in India: Crisis, Institutional Response and the Way Forward

a. Introduction

Mental health refers to a state of emotional, psychological and social well-being that enables individuals to cope with stress, work productively and contribute meaningfully to society. It is not merely the absence of mental illness, but the presence of resilience, balance and the ability to function effectively.

In contemporary India, mental health has emerged as a major public health and developmental challenge. Rising urbanisation, academic pressure, unemployment anxiety, substance abuse, social isolation and digital exposure have increased psychological stress. The issue directly affects productivity, demographic dividend and social stability. Therefore, mental health is not a peripheral social concern; it is central to human capital formation and ethical governance.

Mental Health and National Development



b. The Scale and Nature of the Crisis

i. Youth at risk

- Suicide is among the leading causes of death in the 15–29 age group.
- This is particularly concerning because this age group forms the backbone of India's future workforce.

ii. Contributing factors

- Academic stress and competitive examinations
- Unemployment and career uncertainty
- Relationship pressures and family expectations

- Social isolation and digital comparison culture

India's share in global suicide numbers remains significant, highlighting both the magnitude of distress and inadequate early intervention.

c. The Treatment Gap

i. High untreated proportion

An estimated 70–90% of individuals with mental disorders do not receive proper treatment.

ii. Severe shortage of professionals

- Less than one psychiatrist per one lakh population in many regions.
- Shortage extends to clinical psychologists, psychiatric social workers and counsellors.

iii. Weak integration with primary healthcare

Mental health services are often not fully embedded in primary care, limiting early detection.

d. Economic Consequences

Mental health disorders:

- Reduce productivity and increase absenteeism.
- Impose financial burdens on families.
- Lead to macroeconomic losses estimated in trillions over decades.

Thus, mental health is not only a humanitarian issue but also a growth and labour-market concern.

e. Institutional and Budgetary Response

i. Budgetary Allocation

- Limited financial prioritisation
Mental health receives a small proportion of the overall health budget.
- Broader context
Public health expenditure as a share of GDP remains modest, constraining sectoral expansion.

ii. Strengthening Tertiary Institutions

Institutions such as the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS):

- Provide specialised treatment.
- Conduct research and training.
- Serve as centres of excellence.

However, strengthening tertiary hospitals alone does not ensure last-mile accessibility.

iii. Integration into Primary Healthcare

Under comprehensive primary healthcare reforms:

- Mental health services are incorporated into Health and Wellness Centres.
- Screening and basic counselling are decentralised.
- Early intervention becomes more feasible.

This marks a shift toward community-level access.

iv. Tele-Mental Health Initiatives

- 24×7 toll-free helplines.
- Digital counselling platforms.
- Remote access for underserved regions.

Digital outreach reduces geographical barriers and provides immediate emotional support.

v. Capacity Building

- Expansion of postgraduate seats.
- Establishment of Centres of Excellence.
- Skill enhancement initiatives.

Yet, increasing training capacity must be matched with retention strategies and equitable distribution.

f. Persistent and Structural Challenges

i. Underinvestment

The mismatch between disease burden and funding remains significant, limiting infrastructure and outreach.

ii. Urban-Centric Services

- Concentration of services in metropolitan areas.
- Rural and tribal regions remain underserved.
- Community-based and preventive models are underdeveloped.

iii. Administrative Inefficiencies

- Delays in fund utilisation.
- Weak monitoring and evaluation.
- Procedural bottlenecks reducing programme effectiveness.

iv. Social Stigma and Low Literacy

- Mental illness is often associated with shame.
- Families conceal symptoms.
- Low awareness delays diagnosis and treatment.

v. Emerging Digital Stressors

- Excessive screen exposure.
- Cyberbullying and online harassment.
- Social media comparison pressures.

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable, while policy frameworks addressing digital mental health are still evolving.

g. Way Forward

i. Enhancing Budgetary Priority

- Increase protected allocation for mental health.
- Ensure district-level funding with accountability mechanisms.

ii. Strengthening Community-Based Care

- Train primary healthcare workers in early screening.
- Institutionalise school-based psychological assessment.

- Strengthen the District Mental Health Programme.

iii. Expanding Human Resources

- Increase training seats in psychiatry and psychology.
- Provide rural service incentives.
- Expand tele-consultation networks.

iv. Prioritising Prevention and Youth Well-Being

- Appoint school counsellors.
- Develop peer-support systems.
- Institutionalise suicide prevention strategies.
- Promote digital literacy and stress management programmes.

v. Improving Monitoring and Accountability

- Digital dashboards to track fund utilisation.
- Outcome-based performance indicators.
- Regular independent evaluation of programmes.

h. Ethical and Constitutional Dimensions

i. Right to Life and Dignity

Mental healthcare is intrinsically linked to the right to life and dignity. Untreated mental illness undermines equality of opportunity and social justice.

ii. Ethical Responsibility of the State

- Protection of vulnerable individuals.
- Prevention of avoidable deaths.
- Ensuring equitable access to care.

Mental health policy therefore embodies compassion, distributive justice and human dignity.

Conclusion

India's mental health crisis reflects a profound mismatch between psychological distress and institutional response. While tertiary expansion and tele-mental health initiatives mark progress, funding remains inadequate and community-level integration insufficient.

A sustainable solution requires shifting from a hospital-centric, curative model to a preventive, community-based and stigma-free approach. Mental health must be recognised as fundamental to human capital, productivity and social cohesion.

Only when mental well-being becomes a core public health priority can India fully harness its demographic and developmental potential.

GS Paper II: International Relations

2. India-United States Interim Trade Agreement Framework, 2026

a. Introduction

The proposed interim trade agreement framework between India and the United States marks an important phase in bilateral economic relations. Instead of immediately concluding a comprehensive

Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), both countries have opted for a phased and confidence-building approach.

This strategy reduces trade friction, expands market access and prepares the ground for deeper integration. It reflects India's shift from a largely defensive trade posture to calibrated liberalisation, while safeguarding politically sensitive sectors such as agriculture and small-scale industries.

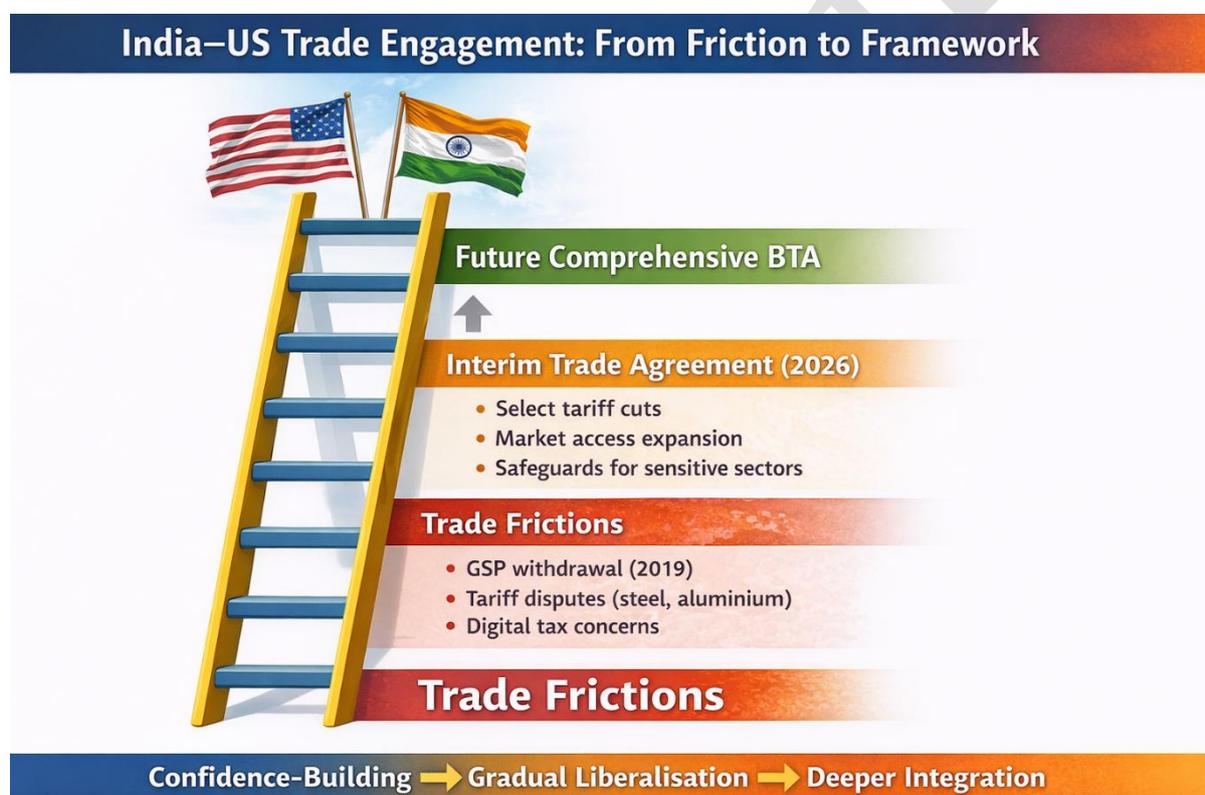
b. Background: Trajectory of India-US Trade Relations

i. Scale of engagement

- Bilateral trade has crossed approximately 190 billion dollars in recent years.
- The United States is among India's largest export destinations.

ii. Key Indian exports

- Pharmaceuticals
- Textiles and apparel
- Engineering goods
- IT and business services



c. Sources of Friction

Despite strong trade volumes, tensions have emerged:

i. Withdrawal of GSP (2019)

The US withdrew Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) benefits, affecting Indian exporters.

ii. Tariff disputes

- US tariffs on steel and aluminium.
- India's retaliatory duties.

iii. Digital taxation concerns

US criticism of India's equalisation levy on digital services.

iv. Agricultural tariff concerns

US objections to India's relatively high agricultural tariffs.

Thus, the interim agreement emerges from a period of negotiation and recalibration rather than seamless cooperation.

d. Understanding the Interim Trade Framework

i. Core Objectives

The interim agreement serves as a transitional mechanism with four broad goals:

- Lower selected tariffs
- Expand market access
- Integrate supply chains
- Build trust toward a future comprehensive BTA

ii. India's Commitments

Tariff reductions

India will reduce or eliminate tariffs on selected industrial goods and certain agricultural imports from the United States, including:

- Tree nuts and fruits
- Soybean oil
- Dried distillers' grains (animal feed)
- Selected beverages

Purchase commitments (5-year horizon)

India has indicated intent to scale up imports of:

- Energy resources (LNG, crude oil)
- Aircraft and aviation components
- Precious metals
- Technology products
- Coking coal

Protection of sensitive sectors

Highly sensitive sectors such as dairy, poultry, soybean, maize and cotton remain protected.

This reflects controlled liberalisation rather than full-scale opening.

iii. United States Commitments

Tariff reductions on Indian exports

Expected beneficiary sectors include:

- Generic pharmaceuticals
- Gems and jewellery
- Textiles and apparel
- Leather goods
- Organic chemicals
- Select machinery products

Removal of penalty tariffs

Additional duties imposed earlier are expected to be eased.

This enhances India's access to a high-value consumer market.

iv. Rules of Origin

Both countries will implement rules of origin to ensure:

- Only goods genuinely produced in either country qualify for tariff benefits.
- Third-country trade diversion is prevented.

e. Sensitive Sector Safeguards

i. Agricultural Protection

- **Dairy sector insulation**
India's dairy sector is dominated by cooperatives and small farmers. Opening it could disrupt rural livelihoods.
- **Exclusion of certain imports**
Large-scale imports of poultry and genetically modified soybean or maize are excluded.

ii. MSME Considerations

- Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) remain politically sensitive. Controlled liberalisation reduces sudden competitive shocks.

The approach demonstrates gradual integration rather than abrupt exposure.

f. Economic Implications

i. Industrial and Export Gains

- Pharmaceutical firms gain wider access.
- Textile and jewellery exporters benefit from tariff reductions.
- Supports domestic manufacturing initiatives.

ii. Agricultural Impact

Selective import liberalisation combined with protection of core crops reduces political resistance while signalling reform intent.

iii. Energy Security Dimension

- Increased energy imports from the US diversify India's energy basket.
- Reduces vulnerability to geopolitical disruptions.
- Strengthens strategic alignment in the Indo-Pacific context.

iv. Supply Chain Integration

Enhanced trade supports integration into global value chains, especially in:

- Aerospace
- Advanced manufacturing
- Critical minerals

g. Concerns and Critiques

i. Trade Deficit Risk

Increased imports from the US may widen India's trade deficit and pressure the current account balance.

ii. Domestic Political Sensitivity

Farmer groups and small producers remain wary of future liberalisation beyond current safeguards.

iii. Strategic Dependency Concerns

Trade alignment may intersect with geopolitical positioning, particularly in energy and technology sectors. Economic engagement must align with strategic autonomy.

h. Broader Policy Context

India is gradually shifting from broad protectionism toward pragmatic engagement.

The framework reflects:

- Confidence in selective liberalisation
- Preservation of policy space in critical sectors
- A cautious, phased approach to global integration

Its success will influence the feasibility of a future comprehensive BTA.

i. Way Forward

i. Strengthening Domestic Competitiveness

- Improve agricultural productivity.
- Enhance MSME resilience.
- Upgrade manufacturing capabilities.

ii. Infrastructure and Standards

- Strengthen logistics and port infrastructure.
- Improve compliance with international quality standards.

iii. Safeguard Mechanisms

- Include safeguard clauses for sudden import surges.
- Establish review mechanisms to monitor impact.

iv. Diversified Trade Strategy

- Avoid excessive dependence on a single partner by continuing engagement with multiple trade blocs.

Conclusion

The India–United States Interim Trade Framework represents a calibrated and pragmatic step toward deeper economic partnership. It blends reciprocal tariff reductions with protection of sensitive sectors, signalling openness without abandoning caution.

Its long-term success will depend on India's ability to enhance competitiveness, manage trade imbalances and preserve strategic autonomy. If carefully implemented, the framework can serve as a bridge toward a comprehensive and mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement.

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.

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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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