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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 18.03.2026

GS Paper II: Current Affairs

1. Transgender Rights in India: 2026 Amendment

a. Introduction

The discourse on transgender rights in India has evolved from social invisibility to constitutional recognition. At the centre of the present debate lies a crucial question: is gender identity an inherent personal reality or something that requires state validation?

The proposed Transgender Amendment Bill, 2026 has reignited this debate by altering the framework of legal recognition. This raises deeper concerns about dignity, autonomy, and the nature of rights in a constitutional democracy.

b. Conceptual Foundation: Understanding Gender Identity

Gender identity refers to an individual's deeply felt internal sense of being male, female, both, neither, or along a spectrum.

Nature of Gender Identity

- It may not align with biological sex assigned at birth.
- It is shaped by psychological, social, and cultural factors.
- It represents a lived and experienced reality.

Illustrative Understanding

- A person assigned male at birth may identify as female or non-binary.
- Identity is not merely biological classification.

Core Principle

- Gender identity is intrinsic and self-determined.
- It should not be externally imposed.

c. Judicial Recognition: NALSA Judgment, 2014

The Supreme Court's NALSA judgment marked a turning point in recognising transgender rights.

Recognition of Identity

- Transgender persons recognised as a distinct gender category.
- Right to self-identification affirmed.

Constitutional Basis

- Linked to dignity and personal autonomy.
- Protected under fundamental rights.

Key Principle

- No requirement of medical or state approval for identity recognition.

d. Legislative Framework: The 2019 Act

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 attempted to institutionalise these principles.

Key Features

- Recognition of identity without mandatory medical intervention.
- Provisions for welfare and protection from discrimination.

Significance

- Marked a step towards institutional inclusion.
- Provided a legal framework for rights protection.

e. The 2026 Amendment: A Shift in Approach

The amendment introduces a state-mediated process for identity recognition.

Certification Requirement

- Medical board certification made necessary.
- Approval from district authorities required.

Change in Principle

- Moves from self-identification to state validation.
- Identity becomes subject to verification.

Narrowing of Recognition

- Greater focus on traditional categories like hijra and kinnar.
- Reduced recognition of diverse identities.

f. Core Issues and Critiques

Erosion of Self-Identification

- Undermines personal autonomy.
- Contradicts spirit of NALSA judgment.
- Makes identity conditional on approval.

Medicalisation of Identity

- Treats identity as a clinical condition.
- Ignores social and psychological aspects.

Bias and Harassment Risks

- Institutional bias may affect decisions.
- Possibility of intrusive scrutiny and humiliation.

Exclusion of Diverse Identities

- Marginalises non-binary and gender-fluid individuals.
- Creates hierarchy within the community.

Expansion of State Control

- Increases bureaucratic regulation of personal identity.
- Shifts governance from empowerment to control.

Constitutional Concerns

- Potential violation of Article 14 (equality).
- Impacts Article 19 (expression).
- Affects Article 21 (life and dignity).
- Contradicts constitutional morality.

g. Ethical Dimensions of the Debate

The debate reflects tension between dignity, autonomy, and state responsibility.

Dignity

- Individuals must be recognised as they perceive themselves.

Autonomy

- Identity should be free from external validation.

State Responsibility

- Duty to protect vulnerable groups.
- Must avoid intrusive control while providing safeguards.

h. A Broader Conceptual Insight

The issue highlights the contrast between two approaches.

Rights-Based Approach

- Focus on freedom, dignity, and inclusion.
- Emphasises self-identification.

Regulatory Approach

- Focus on verification and control.
- Relies on administrative mechanisms.

Core Debate

- The amendment signals a shift from rights-based to regulatory framework.

i. Way Forward

Restore Self-Identification

- Recognition based on self-declaration.
- Align with constitutional principles.

Simplify Procedures

- Reduce bureaucratic barriers.
- Ensure accessibility of processes.

Ensure Inclusivity

- Recognise full spectrum of gender identities.

- Avoid exclusionary categories.

Institutional Sensitisation

- Train officials and healthcare providers.
- Promote respectful engagement.

Focus on Substantive Equality

- Improve access to education, employment, and healthcare.
- Strengthen social security measures.

Conclusion

The debate over the Transgender Amendment Bill, 2026 ultimately concerns the meaning of dignity in a constitutional democracy. Recognition of identity is not merely legal—it is a validation of personhood.

A progressive framework must ensure that individuals are not required to prove who they are. Instead, it should trust self-expression and safeguard rights.

True empowerment lies in enabling individuals to define themselves, rather than allowing institutions to define them.

GS Paper II: International Relations

2. E-Transmission Duty in WTO

a. Introduction

The rapid expansion of the digital economy has fundamentally changed global trade. Goods and services that earlier moved physically across borders are now increasingly transmitted electronically. This raises a key policy question: should countries be allowed to impose customs duties on digital transmissions?

The debate within the World Trade Organization (WTO) reflects a deeper tension between free digital trade and national fiscal sovereignty, especially for developing countries like India.

b. Understanding E-Transmission in Trade

Electronic transmission refers to the cross-border delivery of digital products and services through the internet.

Types of Digital Products

- Software downloads and updates
- Streaming of films and music
- E-books and online publications
- Cloud-based services and AI outputs

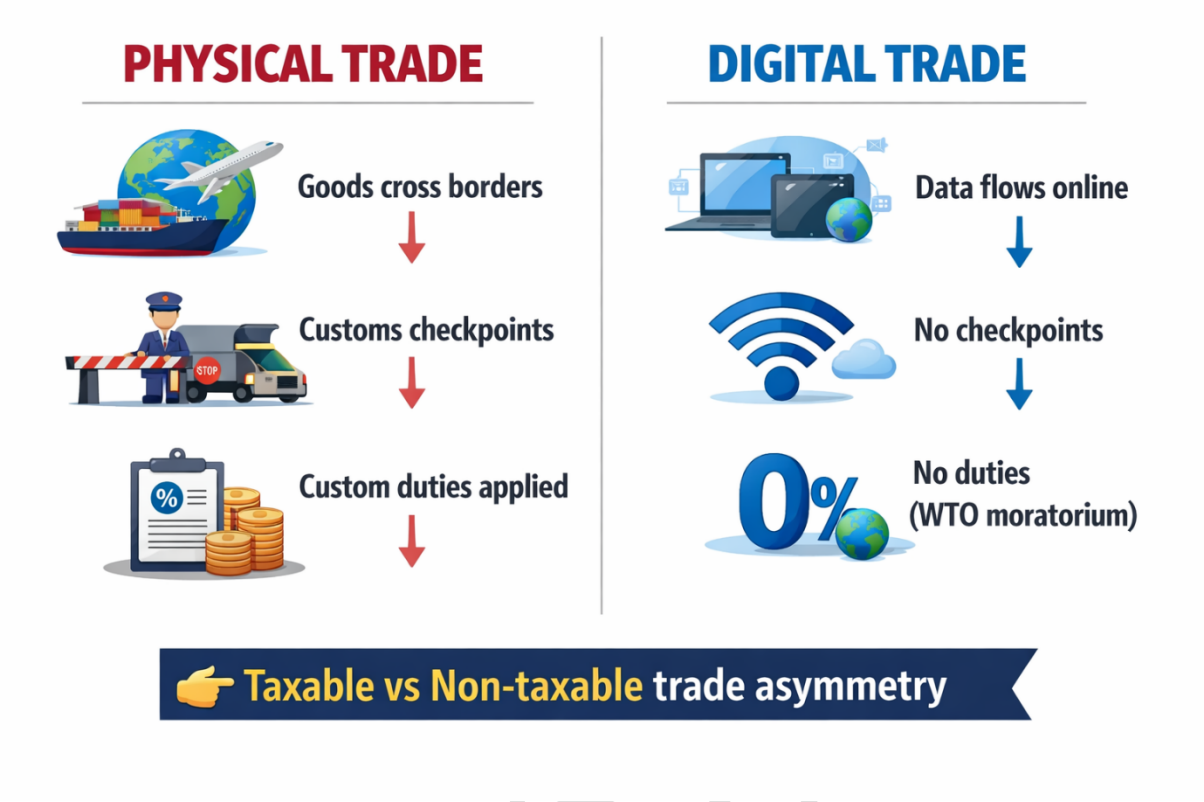
Key Characteristics

- No physical movement of goods
- No customs checkpoints involved
- Seamless and instant delivery

Structural Issue

- Physical goods are taxed at borders

- Digital goods currently remain duty-free under WTO rules
- This creates asymmetry between traditional and digital trade



c. The WTO Moratorium: Origin and Evolution

The debate dates back to 1998 when WTO members agreed to a temporary moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions.

Original Objective

- Promote growth of the digital economy
- Encourage innovation and connectivity

Nature of the Moratorium

- Temporary in nature
- Renewed periodically (usually every two years)
- Not made permanent so far

Changing Context

- Digital trade has expanded massively
- Now a multi-trillion-dollar sector
- Raises questions about continued relevance of the moratorium

d. Position of Developed Countries

Developed countries, particularly the United States, support making the moratorium permanent.

Promotion of Free Trade

- Eliminates barriers to digital flows
- Reduces transaction costs

Business and Innovation Benefits

- Predictable regulatory environment
- Encourages investment and expansion

Advantage to Digital Economy

- Supports sectors like AI, software, and streaming
- Prevents fragmentation of digital markets

Support for SMEs

- Lower entry barriers for small firms
- Easier access to global markets

e. India's Perspective and Concerns

India and other developing countries oppose making the moratorium permanent due to multiple concerns.

Revenue Loss

- Increasing digital imports reduce potential tax revenue
- Significant fiscal implications for developing economies

Inequitable Distribution of Gains

- Developed countries dominate digital exports
- Developing countries mainly act as consumers
- Benefits accrue disproportionately to advanced economies

Loss of Policy Space

- Limits ability to design domestic taxation policies
- Restricts support for local digital industries

Future Revenue Risks

- Growth of AI and data-driven services
- High-value digital trade may remain untaxed

f. Structural Shifts in Global Trade

Global trade is moving from tangible goods to intangible digital flows.

Traditional Trade System

- Based on physical goods
- Easy valuation and taxation

Digital Trade System

- Based on data and services
- Difficult to measure and regulate

Core Challenge

- Existing WTO rules are not fully suited to digital trade

g. The Issue of Digital Inequality

Digital trade has amplified disparities between countries.

Advantages of Developed Countries

- Strong technological infrastructure
- Dominant global digital firms
- Advanced innovation ecosystems

Challenges for Developing Countries

- Limited digital infrastructure
- Dependence on imports of digital products
- Lower value capture in digital economy

Long-Term Risk

- Emergence of digital dependency
- Concentration of value creation in few economies

h. Power Dynamics within the WTO

The debate highlights asymmetries in global trade governance.

Influence of Developed Countries

- Greater economic and technological power
- Ability to shape global rules

Assertion by Developing Countries

- Demand for fairness and inclusivity
- Emphasis on developmental concerns

Broader Implication

- Impacts legitimacy of the multilateral trading system

i. Towards a Balanced Approach

Continue Temporary Moratorium

- Allow periodic review of impact
- Adapt policies to evolving realities

Special and Differential Treatment

- Provide flexibility to developing countries
- Align with WTO equity principles

Strengthening Domestic Capacity

- Invest in digital infrastructure
- Promote innovation and skill development

Diversifying Digital Economy

- Reduce dependence on imports
- Build indigenous capabilities

Global Cooperation on Taxation

- Develop fair frameworks for digital taxation

- Address data flows and AI-related challenges

Conclusion

The debate over e-transmission duties marks a critical phase in the evolution of global trade. It reflects the transition from a goods-based economy to a digital economy driven by data and services.

For India, the issue goes beyond taxation—it concerns fairness, policy space, and long-term economic sovereignty. A balanced framework must promote openness while ensuring that the benefits of digital trade are distributed equitably.

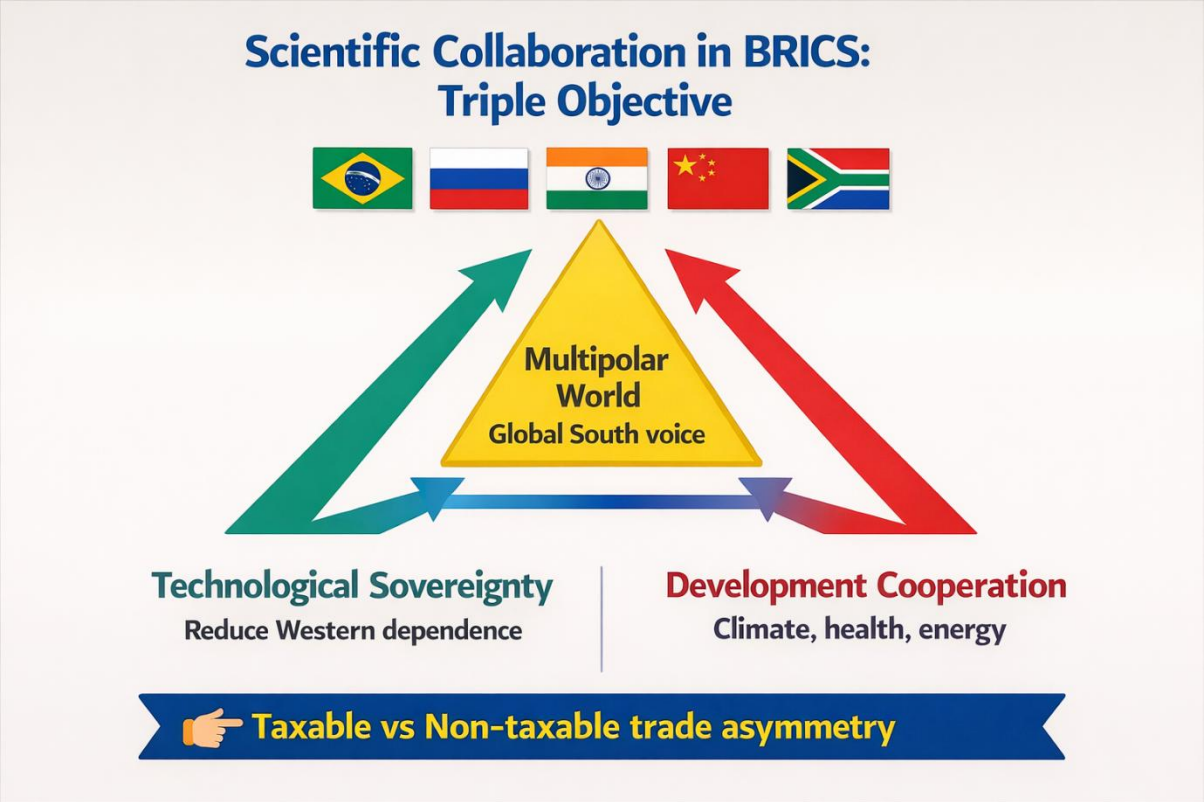
GS Paper II: International Relations

3. Scientific Collaboration in BRICS: Concept, Evolution and Challenges

a. Introduction

In today's global order, science and technology are not just tools of development but also instruments of geopolitical influence. For groupings like BRICS, scientific collaboration serves both as a means to solve shared problems and as a way to enhance global standing.

Thus, BRICS cooperation in science, technology, and innovation can be seen as both a developmental necessity and a strategic tool for shaping a multipolar world.



b. Conceptual Basis of BRICS Scientific Collaboration

BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and now BRICS+) brings together emerging economies with common developmental challenges and growing scientific capacity.

Addressing Common Challenges

- Climate change, health crises, energy, and water issues
- Problems that cross national borders
- Require collective knowledge and solutions

Reducing Technological Dependence

- Dependence on Western technologies
- Need for indigenous innovation
- Strengthening technological sovereignty

Promoting Multipolarity

- Enhancing Global South voice
- Increasing bargaining power in global governance
- Science as a tool of strategic influence

c. Institutional Architecture and Mechanisms

BRICS scientific cooperation operates through decentralised institutional arrangements.

Policy-Level Coordination

- Meetings of BRICS Science and Technology Ministers
- Provide strategic direction

National-Level Agencies

- India: CSIR, Department of Biotechnology
- Coordinate domestic participation

Operational Platforms

- STI Entrepreneurship Partnership Working Group
- Technology Transfer Centre
- Joint research calls and funding mechanisms
- Academic and research networks

Key Limitation

- Lack of centralised authority
- Coordination challenges and continuity issues

d. Evolution of Cooperation

Initial Phase: Knowledge Sharing

- Focus on basic research
- Academic exchanges and networking

Intermediate Phase: Applied Research

- Focus on healthcare, biotech, energy
- Response to global challenges like pandemics

Current Phase: Advanced Technologies

- Artificial intelligence and data science
- High-performance computing
- Digital technologies

Key Shift

- From knowledge exchange to innovation-led growth

e. Achievements and Contributions

Growth in Collaboration

- Increase in joint research projects
- Greater academic mobility

COVID-19 Response

- Cooperation in vaccines and health tech
- Digital health initiatives

Technology Transfer Efforts

- Linking research to industry
- Promoting innovation ecosystems

Focus on Emerging Technologies

- AI and digital innovation
- Emphasis on inclusive and ethical use

f. Persistent Challenges

Uneven Sectoral Progress

- Strong in IT and digital sectors
- Weak in capital-intensive areas like ocean research

Institutional Weakness

- No permanent secretariat
- Rotational leadership affects continuity

Funding Constraints

- Limited financial commitments
- Lower scale compared to EU models

Weak Industry Linkages

- Poor research-to-market conversion
- Limited commercialisation of innovation

Diversity Among Members

- Differences in economic and technological capacity
- Coordination challenges in BRICS+

g. Science Diplomacy as a Core Idea

Meaning

- Use of scientific collaboration to strengthen international relations

Key Benefits

- Builds trust among nations
- Encourages knowledge exchange
- Enables cooperation despite political differences

Strategic Role

- Provides stable channels of engagement
- Supports long-term partnerships

h. Way Forward

Institutional Strengthening

- Establish permanent science secretariat
- Improve coordination and continuity

Enhanced Funding

- Create joint innovation funds
- Support large-scale projects

Mega-Science Projects

- Space, climate modelling, ocean research
- Require pooled resources and expertise

Industry Linkages

- Strengthen research-industry interface
- Promote commercialisation

Inclusive Expansion (BRICS+)

- Build capacity of new members
- Ensure equitable participation

Global South Focus

- Digital divide
- Health equity
- Climate resilience

i. India's Role

Leadership Opportunity

- BRICS Presidency 2026
- Shape future direction of cooperation

Strategic Contributions

- Promote inclusive innovation
- Strengthen institutional frameworks
- Align agenda with Global South priorities

Conclusion

Scientific collaboration in BRICS is a key pillar of an emerging multipolar world. It enables developing countries to pool knowledge, reduce dependence, and promote inclusive growth.

However, real success will depend on stronger institutions, higher investment, and better coordination. Moving from vision to implementation is essential for achieving meaningful outcomes.

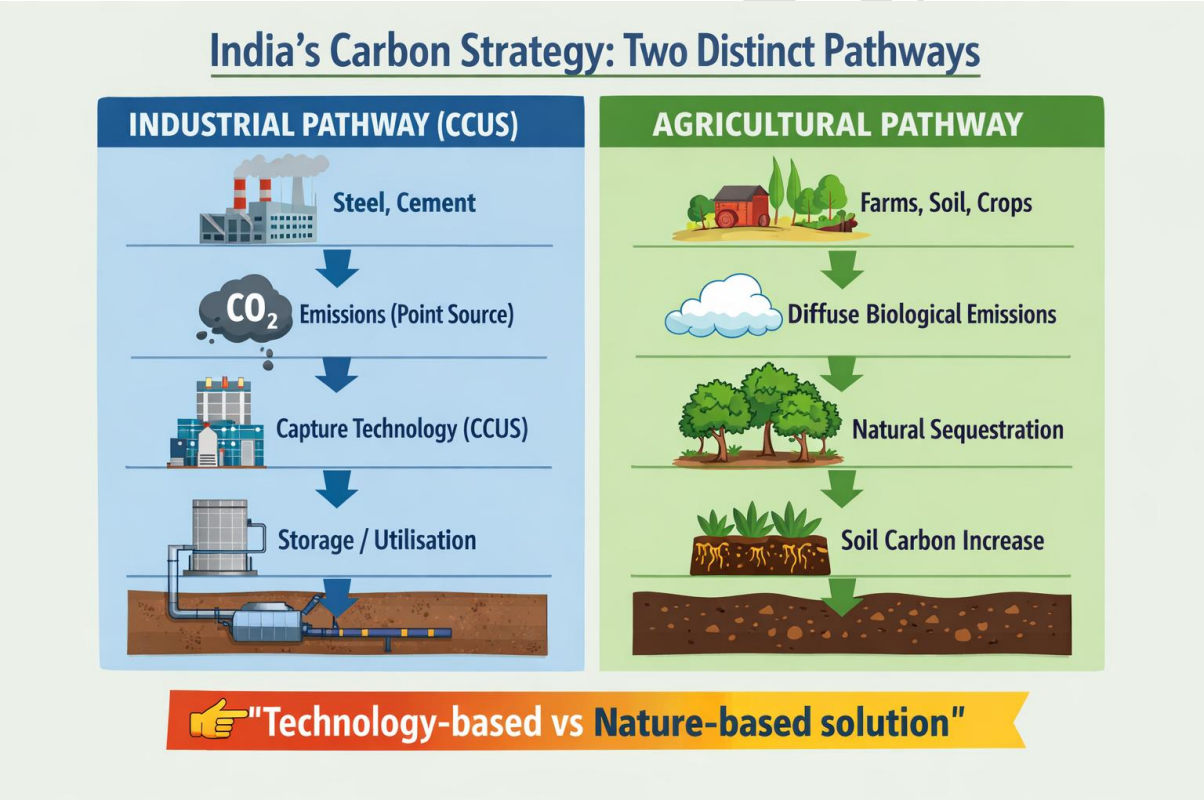
GS Paper III: Environment

4. India's Carbon Credit Policy: Industrial CCUS versus Agricultural Carbon Credits

a. Introduction

India's carbon credit debate today appears confusing because two different climate strategies are being discussed together. One focuses on industrial decarbonisation through CCUS (Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage), while the other relates to agriculture-based carbon credits, where farmers may earn income by improving soil carbon and sustainability.

However, the official policy position is clearer than public perception. The ₹20,000 crore Budget 2026–27 allocation is linked specifically to CCUS, aimed at sectors like power, steel, cement, and refineries. Thus, the current initiative is an industrial decarbonisation programme, not a farmer-focused carbon credit scheme.



b. Why the Confusion Has Arisen

The confusion mainly arises due to the broad use of the term "carbon credit programme."

Multiple meanings of carbon credits

- The term can include any activity that reduces emissions or stores carbon.
- This includes both industrial emission reduction and agricultural carbon sequestration.

Global discourse linking agriculture with carbon markets

- Concepts like regenerative farming and soil carbon are widely discussed globally.

- This creates an assumption that all carbon-credit initiatives must include farmers.

Mismatch between perception and policy

- While agriculture is relevant to carbon markets,
- The current Budget allocation is focused specifically on CCUS.

Thus, the confusion arises from mixing two distinct policy tracks—industrial carbon capture and agricultural carbon sequestration.

c. First Concept: What Is a Carbon Credit

A carbon credit is a tradable certificate representing reduction, avoidance, or removal of greenhouse gas emissions.

Basic idea

- If an activity reduces emissions or stores carbon, it can generate credits.
- These credits can be traded in carbon markets.

India's institutional framework

- India has introduced the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, 2023.
- The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) plays a key role in implementation.

Key implication

- Carbon markets are a broad system,
- But different sectors require different mechanisms within that system.

This leads us to understand the specific industrial mechanism under discussion—CCUS.

d. Second Concept: What Is CCUS

CCUS stands for Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage.

What it involves

- Capturing CO_2 emissions from industrial sources.
- Either using it in industrial processes or storing it underground.

Target sectors

- Power plants
- Steel and cement industries
- Oil refineries

Nature of emissions addressed

- These sectors produce concentrated, point-source emissions,
- Which can be physically captured and managed.

Thus, CCUS is a technology-driven solution for industrial emissions, not for dispersed emissions like those in agriculture.

e. Third Concept: What Are Agricultural Carbon Credits

Agricultural carbon credits are generated through land-based and biological processes.

Sources of carbon credits in agriculture

- Increasing soil organic carbon
- Agroforestry
- Sustainable land management

Policy direction in India

- Government has explored a Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM) for agriculture.
- Aim is to benefit small and marginal farmers.

Nature of emissions and sequestration

- Diffuse and biological — soil, crops, livestock
- Not suitable for capture through industrial technology

This shows that agricultural carbon credits belong to a separate policy pathway, distinct from CCUS.

f. What the Current Budget Measure Is Actually About

The Budget allocation must be interpreted correctly.

Core objective

- Promote CCUS adoption and deployment
- Strengthen long-term energy security

Target sectors

- Hard-to-abate industries — steel, cement, power, refineries

Policy nature

- Technology-focused intervention
- Not an income-support scheme for farmers

Thus, the current measure is clearly an industrial decarbonisation initiative, not an agricultural carbon-credit programme.

g. Why Agriculture Does Not Fit into the CCUS Framework

This is the most important conceptual distinction.

Industrial emissions

- Concentrated and measurable
- Come from identifiable sources like factories

Agricultural emissions

- Diffuse and spread across fields
- Linked to biological processes — methane, soil carbon, livestock

Implication

- Industrial emissions can be captured physically
- Agricultural emissions cannot be addressed through CCUS

Therefore, agriculture contributes to climate mitigation, but not through CCUS technology.

h. Why Industrial CCUS Matters for India

India faces a structural challenge in decarbonisation.

Nature of industrial emissions

- Emissions arise not only from energy use
- But also from industrial processes e.g., cement production

Limits of renewable energy alone

- Renewables cannot fully eliminate industrial emissions
- Hence, CCUS becomes essential

Strategic importance

- Supports infrastructure and manufacturing growth
- Aligns with India's net-zero pathway

Thus, CCUS addresses a critical gap in India's climate strategy.

i. Why Agricultural Carbon Credits Also Matter

While separate from CCUS, agriculture remains crucial.

Environmental benefits

- Improves soil health
- Enhances ecological sustainability

Economic potential for farmers

- New income streams through carbon markets
- Especially beneficial for small farmers

Future potential

- Requires robust systems for measurement and verification
- Needs aggregation and institutional support

Thus, agricultural carbon credits represent a long-term opportunity, though still evolving.

j. The Real Analytical Lesson

India's climate policy is unfolding on two parallel fronts.

Industrial front

- Focus: Reducing emissions from heavy industries
- Tool: CCUS and technological interventions

Land and soil front

- Focus: Enhancing carbon sequestration
- Tool: Sustainable agriculture and carbon markets

Key takeaway

- Both are necessary
- But require different institutions, financing, and monitoring systems

This distinction is essential for correct policy understanding.

k. Way Forward

Clear policy communication

- Distinguish between CCUS and agricultural carbon credits
- Avoid unrealistic public expectations

Develop agricultural carbon market framework

- Build systems for measurement, verification, and aggregation
- Protect interests of small farmers

Strengthen Indian Carbon Market

- Improve certification and standards
- Ensure credibility and transparency

Continue industrial decarbonisation

- Support hard-to-abate sectors
- Scale up CCUS deployment

These steps will ensure a balanced and effective climate strategy.

Conclusion

The confusion in India's carbon credit debate arises from combining two distinct strategies. The ₹20,000 crore Budget allocation is clearly focused on industrial decarbonisation through CCUS, targeting heavy industries. It is not a direct carbon-credit scheme for farmers.

At the same time, agriculture is being considered under a separate voluntary carbon market framework, which may evolve in the future.

Thus, India has already activated the industrial CCUS pathway, while the agricultural carbon-credit pathway remains a parallel but still-developing policy direction.

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.