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# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 28.01.2026

## GS Paper II: Current Affairs

### 1. UGC Regulations on Promotion of Equity in Higher Education, 2026

#### a. Why Equity in Higher Education Matters

Higher education institutions occupy a unique position in a constitutional democracy. They are not merely centres of knowledge creation, but social institutions entrusted with upholding equality, dignity and non-discrimination. In principle, access to universities symbolises social mobility and merit-based opportunity. In practice, however, students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds often face subtle and overt forms of exclusion within academic spaces.

Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, Economically Weaker Sections and persons with disabilities frequently encounter barriers that extend beyond admission processes. These include:

- Social prejudice and stereotyping
- Differential academic and social treatment
- Institutional insensitivity
- Weak or inaccessible grievance redressal mechanisms

Such experiences erode not only individual dignity but also the constitutional promise of substantive equality. Ensuring equity in higher education is therefore not an act of welfare, but a question of social justice, constitutional morality and inclusive national development.

#### UGC Promotion of Equity Regulations, 2026: What Changed?

Aspect	2012 Regulations	2026 Regulations
Nature	Advisory	Mandatory & Binding
Enforcement	Weak	Strong penalties
Accountability	Symbolic	Procedural & time-bound
Equity Approach	Intent-based	Institutionalised

#### b. UGC Promotion of Equity Regulations, 2026: An Overview

The University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026 are mandatory and binding on all higher education institutions governed by the UGC framework.

The central objective of these regulations is to prevent, prohibit and redress discrimination, while simultaneously promoting equity and inclusion as everyday institutional practices. In doing so, they replace the earlier 2012 regulations, which were largely advisory and suffered from weak enforcement.

The 2026 regulations mark a decisive shift from symbolic intent to procedural, enforceable and accountable institutional responsibility.

#### c. Scope of Discrimination Addressed

The regulations prohibit discrimination on multiple grounds, including caste, religion, race, gender, place of birth and disability. A critical improvement is the explicit inclusion of Other Backward Classes within caste-based discrimination.

This clarification is significant because discrimination in higher education often operates through informal hierarchies, social practices and peer interactions that were inadequately addressed under

earlier frameworks. By widening the scope, the regulations acknowledge the social reality of exclusion, not merely its formal manifestations.

#### **d. Institutional Architecture for Equity**

The regulations require every higher education institution to establish three interlinked bodies, ensuring that equity is embedded at multiple levels of campus governance.

##### **i. Equal Opportunity Centre**

The Equal Opportunity Centre (EOC) functions as the primary institutional mechanism for promoting equity-oriented policies and welfare measures.

- Implements support programmes for disadvantaged groups
- Coordinates with external authorities such as district administrations or law enforcement agencies when necessary
- Facilitates access to legal assistance for aggrieved individuals

The Centre is to be staffed by five faculty members of the institution. In colleges with limited faculty strength, the parent university's EOC assumes these responsibilities. While no mandatory reservation is prescribed in its composition, the Centre's role is primarily facilitative and coordinative.

##### **ii. Equity Committee**

The Equity Committee is the core grievance redressal authority under the regulations.

- Inquires into complaints of discrimination
- Recommends corrective and disciplinary action

The Committee comprises ten members and is chaired by the Head of the Institution. It mandates representation from:

- Scheduled Castes
- Scheduled Tribes
- Other Backward Classes
- Women
- Persons with disabilities

This composition reflects the principle that credible justice requires representation of the vulnerable.

A key innovation is the time-bound grievance redressal mechanism:

- Complaint to be acknowledged within 24 hours
- Inquiry report to be submitted within 15 days
- Action to be initiated by the Head of Institution within 7 days

This addresses chronic delays that previously diluted accountability.

#### **e. Equity Squads**

Equity Squads function as a preventive vigilance mechanism.

- Regularly monitor campus spaces such as hostels and common areas
- Identify early signs of discriminatory behaviour
- Act as a deterrent against normalisation of exclusion

To strengthen this preventive framework, the regulations also provide for:

- A 24-hour equity helpline

- Appointment of Equity Ambassadors to promote awareness and sensitivity

#### **f. Monitoring and Enforcement Mechanism**

One of the most transformative aspects of the 2026 regulations is their robust enforcement framework.

Unlike the advisory nature of the 2012 regulations, the new framework empowers the UGC to impose tangible penalties for non-compliance, including:

- Withholding or withdrawal of grants
- Exclusion from UGC schemes
- Restriction on approval of new degree or online programmes

Through these measures, equity is no longer treated merely as a moral expectation, but as a binding institutional obligation.

#### **g. Changes from Draft to Final Regulations**

Two modifications are particularly noteworthy.

##### **Explicit inclusion of OBCs**

- Addresses concerns that their omission in the draft weakened caste-based equity safeguards

##### **Removal of provision on action against “false complaints”**

- Acknowledges that fear of counter-action can deter genuine victims
- Prioritises access to justice over procedural deterrence

These changes reflect a more empathetic and rights-oriented regulatory approach.

#### **h. Constitutional and Ethical Foundations**

The regulations are firmly anchored in constitutional values:

- **Article 14** – Equality before law
- **Article 15** – Prohibition of discrimination
- **Article 17** – Abolition of untouchability
- **Article 21** – Right to life with dignity

Ethically, the framework recognises that fairness does not mean identical treatment. It acknowledges structural power asymmetries within educational institutions and seeks to correct them through representation, procedural safeguards and accountability. In this sense, the regulations promote institutional empathy alongside legal compliance.

#### **i. Significance of the 2026 Regulations**

The regulations mark a transition from symbolic inclusion to procedural justice in higher education.

They:

- Strengthen campus-level grievance redressal
- Embed equity within governance structures
- Align education policy with constitutional morality and SDG 4 (inclusive and equitable education)

In doing so, they reframe equity as a core governance concern, not an auxiliary welfare issue.

## j. Way Forward

Effective implementation will require:

- Continuous capacity building and sensitisation of faculty and administrators
- Clear communication of grievance procedures to build trust and accessibility
- Balancing encouragement of reporting with procedural fairness for all stakeholders

Ongoing monitoring and institutional learning will be essential to prevent misuse while safeguarding the core objective of equity. If implemented in both letter and spirit, the 2026 regulations can reshape higher education campuses into genuinely inclusive, dignified and constitutionally aligned spaces of learning.

## Conclusion

The UGC Promotion of Equity Regulations, 2026 mark a decisive shift from symbolic inclusion to enforceable institutional accountability in higher education. By embedding equity within governance structures and grievance redressal mechanisms, they operationalise constitutional morality in everyday academic life. Their real impact, however, will depend on sincere implementation, sustained sensitisation and a campus culture that treats dignity and equality as foundational, not optional.

## GS Paper II: International Relations

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

#### a. Understanding the India–EU Free Trade Agreement

A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is a structured arrangement between two or more trading partners aimed at reducing or eliminating customs duties, simplifying regulatory procedures and facilitating the smoother movement of goods, services, investment and professionals. The core objective is to expand trade by lowering artificial barriers while ensuring predictability and stability for businesses.

The India–European Union Free Trade Agreement represents a comprehensive economic partnership between India and the European Union, a bloc of twenty-seven countries. Together, the two partners account for nearly two billion people and a substantial share of global trade, investment flows and consumer demand.

In terms of scale, depth and economic reach, this agreement is India’s largest and most ambitious trade arrangement to date, marking a decisive evolution in India’s external economic engagement.

#### b. Background: Why an FTA Became Necessary

Economic relations between India and the European Union have historically been



strong. The EU has consistently ranked among India's largest trading partners, while India represents an expanding and strategically important market for European firms.

### **Existing Trade Profile**

- India's exports to the EU include textiles and apparel, gems and jewellery, pharmaceuticals and engineering goods
- EU exports to India focus on high-value manufactured products such as machinery, automobiles, chemicals and advanced equipment

Formal negotiations for an FTA began in 2007, but progress remained slow for over a decade.

### **Reasons for Prolonged Stalemate**

- India's high tariffs on automobiles and wines
- EU's stringent regulatory, labour and environmental standards
- Differences over sustainability and market access commitments

Over time, global conditions changed significantly. Supply chain disruptions, rising protectionism and strategic uncertainty created incentives for deeper and more reliable economic partnerships, leading to renewed momentum in India-EU negotiations.

## **c. Scope and Nature of the Agreement**

The India-EU FTA goes beyond tariff reductions to encompass a comprehensive economic partnership.

- Trade in goods and services
- Investment facilitation and protection
- Mobility of professionals
- Cooperation in technology, security and defence

This reflects the understanding that modern trade agreements shape long-term economic and strategic alignment. The FTA is therefore best viewed not merely as a commercial instrument, but as a strategic economic framework linking markets with geopolitical cooperation.

## **d. Key Trade Provisions and On-Ground Changes**

### **i. Market Access for Indian Exports**

A major outcome of the agreement is significantly improved access for Indian exports to European markets.

- Nearly all Indian exports to the EU become duty-free
- Enhanced price competitiveness in high-income markets

Sectors expected to benefit the most include:

- Textiles and apparel
- Leather and footwear
- Gems and jewellery
- Pharmaceuticals
- Engineering goods

For labour-intensive industries, this creates opportunities for scale expansion, employment generation and deeper integration into European supply chains.

### **ii. Market Access for European Exports**

India's market opening under the agreement is phased and sector-specific, aimed at protecting domestic industry from sudden shocks.

- Automobiles: tariff reductions within fixed quotas
- Wines and spirits: gradual tariff cuts
- Machinery, electrical equipment, aircraft and railway components: movement towards zero-duty access

Importantly, most agricultural products remain outside the agreement, safeguarding Indian farmers and rural livelihoods.

### **e. Economic Significance for India**

The agreement has the potential to provide a strong boost to manufacturing, exports and investment.

- Improved access to a large, high-income market encourages Indian firms to scale up production
- Exposure to European standards promotes quality upgrading and higher value addition
- Increased European investment can bring advanced technology, innovation and managerial practices

Overall, the FTA supports India's integration into global value chains and aligns with the objective of building a competitive manufacturing base.

### **f. Strategic and Geopolitical Importance**

The India-EU FTA signals a shift in India's trade strategy towards selective integration with trusted, rule-based economies.

- Diversifies trade partnerships amid global supply chain fragmentation
- Reduces vulnerability to geopolitical and economic shocks
- Reinforces commitment to an open, predictable and rules-based trading order

In a period of uncertainty in multilateral trade institutions, deeper engagement with the EU enhances India's economic resilience and strategic autonomy.

### **g. Regulatory and Climate Dimension**

A sensitive aspect of the negotiations concerned the EU's environmental and regulatory framework, particularly the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

India's primary concern was that climate measures should not function as disguised trade barriers for developing economies. Under the agreement:

- India has secured flexibility comparable to other major partners
- Developmental priorities are balanced with climate responsibility
- The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is implicitly respected

This ensures that climate action does not undermine trade competitiveness.

### **h. Challenges and Concerns**

The agreement also presents notable implementation challenges.

- Compliance with European regulatory and quality standards may raise costs for MSMEs
- Domestic automobile manufacturers may face increased competition
- Effective execution requires strong institutional coordination

Additionally, the EU's complex internal ratification process may delay full operationalisation, highlighting that outcomes depend not only on negotiation but on sustained follow-through.

### **i. Way Forward**

To fully realise the benefits of the FTA, India must:

- Strengthen domestic quality and standards infrastructure
- Support MSMEs through technology upgradation and skill development
- Use the agreement to move manufacturing towards higher value-added segments

Aligning trade expansion with goals of innovation, decent work and sustainable growth will ensure durable economic transformation.

### **Conclusion**

The India-European Union Free Trade Agreement symbolises India's transition from tariff-based protection to strategic integration within the global economy, combining economic growth objectives with long-term geopolitical alignment and resilience.

## **GS Paper II: International Relations**

### **3. India-European Union Relations: From Strategic Vision to Effective Delivery**

#### **a. Introduction**

India and the European Union represent two of the most significant political and economic groupings in the contemporary world. Together, they account for a substantial share of the global population, economic output, and international trade. More importantly, both are rooted in democratic values, rule of law, and a commitment to a rules-based international order.

In an era characterised by geopolitical uncertainty, supply-chain disruptions, technological rivalry, and economic fragmentation, India and the EU face overlapping challenges related to economic resilience, strategic autonomy, and long-term stability. As a result, their relationship has gradually evolved beyond symbolism and declaratory statements.

The central challenge today is no longer about defining shared objectives, but about ensuring effective delivery of agreed outcomes.

#### **b. Evolution of India-EU Relations**

##### **i. Early Phase: Limited Strategic Engagement**

For much of the post-Independence period, Europe did not occupy a central position in India's foreign policy priorities. India's engagement with Europe was shaped largely by Cold War dynamics, particularly the broader East-West divide, while Europe viewed India as an economically inward-looking and protectionist economy.

Despite the presence of political goodwill, the absence of strategic urgency and limited economic complementarity meant that the relationship remained shallow, fragmented, and under-institutionalised.

##### **ii. Phase of Stagnation: Mid-2000s to Early-2010s**

The declaration of a Strategic Partnership in 2004 raised expectations of deeper cooperation. However, it failed to translate into tangible outcomes. Negotiations on the proposed India-EU Free Trade

Agreement (FTA) stalled due to regulatory concerns, differences over standards, and domestic sensitivities on both sides.

Political engagement weakened, summits became irregular, and existing coordination mechanisms remained under-utilised. This phase highlighted a critical lesson: formal labels and agreements, in the absence of sustained political commitment and institutional follow-through, do not produce strong partnerships.

### c. Strategic Reorientation: A Renewed Approach

#### i. India's Changing Outlook

Over time, India reassessed its engagement with advanced economies. Policymakers increasingly recognised that sustained economic growth and technological upgrading require deeper integration with global value chains.

Trade agreements began to be viewed not merely as commercial arrangements, but as strategic instruments capable of supporting domestic reform, manufacturing expansion, and global positioning. India's approach thus shifted from broad trade scepticism to selective liberalisation, prioritising partnerships that complement domestic capabilities rather than undermine them.

#### ii. Europe's Reassessment of India

Simultaneously, the European Union recalibrated its perception of India. India came to be seen as

- a stable democratic partner in a volatile global environment,
- a significant Indo-Pacific actor, and
- a credible option for diversifying economic and strategic dependencies.

This mutual reassessment laid the foundation for renewed engagement and deeper cooperation.



#### d. Areas of Convergence Between India and the European Union

Today, India and the European Union converge across several critical domains.

In the economic sphere, both emphasise institutional reform, competitiveness, and sustainable growth. In trade, there is a shared focus on supply-chain diversification and the creation of resilient, trusted networks that reduce vulnerability to external shocks.

In defence and security, cooperation has expanded to include capacity building, maritime security, and regional stability, particularly in the Indian Ocean region.

In technology, collaboration has gained momentum in semiconductors, clean energy, green hydrogen, digital public infrastructure, and other advanced technologies.

### **e. Trade as a Strategic Instrument**

India increasingly views trade as a cornerstone of national development and long-term economic transformation. Trade agreements are now understood as tools that can

- support manufacturing growth,
- facilitate technology transfer, and
- integrate India more deeply into global markets.

Within this framework, the India–European Union Free Trade Agreement assumes particular importance. If successfully concluded and implemented, it would become India’s most comprehensive trade arrangement, deepen engagement with a major economic bloc, and support India’s ambition of becoming a developed nation by 2047.

### **f. The Core Challenge: From Agreements to Outcomes**

Despite growing convergence in vision, the principal challenge in India–EU relations remains execution.

In trade, regulatory differences and domestic political sensitivities complicate negotiations. In defence cooperation, long project timelines and high coordination requirements slow progress. Technology partnerships tend to be capital-intensive and institution-heavy, demanding sustained political and financial commitment.

Additionally, the European Union’s multi-country decision-making structure often lengthens consensus-building, affecting speed and responsiveness.

Addressing these constraints requires continuous political attention and robust institutional mechanisms on both sides.

### **g. Strategic Context: Diversification, Not Alignment**

India–EU cooperation should not be interpreted through the lens of alliance politics. Instead, it reflects an effort to diversify partnerships and manage strategic risks in a changing global order.

Both sides seek to respond to challenges arising from China’s assertiveness, supply-chain vulnerabilities, and global trade uncertainty, while retaining engagement with other major powers. This approach strengthens strategic autonomy rather than constraining it.

### **h. Way Forward: Translating Potential into Results**

For the partnership to realise its full potential, the focus must shift decisively from declarations to delivery.

Key priorities include

- strengthening institutional mechanisms for implementation,
- expanding India’s engagement beyond a few major European capitals to the wider continent,
- sustaining political momentum beyond summit-level interactions, and
- integrating cooperation across trade, security, and technology rather than treating them in isolation.

### **Conclusion**

India–European Union relations have reached a stage where strategic vision is clearly articulated. The decisive factor now is effective execution.

If managed with consistency and commitment, the partnership can significantly contribute to India’s economic transformation, reinforce strategic autonomy, and support a stable and balanced global

order. Failure to deliver, however, would risk repeating earlier cycles of ambition followed by stagnation.

## **GS Paper II: International Relations**

### **4. European Union Regulatory Regime and Its Impact on India–EU Trade**

#### **a. Introduction**

In contemporary international trade, market access is no longer determined primarily by customs duties. Increasingly, it is shaped by rules, standards, and regulatory requirements. While earlier forms of protectionism relied on tariffs and quotas, advanced economies today use regulatory frameworks to influence who can trade, what can be traded, and under what conditions.

The European Union represents the most prominent example of this shift. Its expanding regulatory regime—especially in areas related to climate change, sustainability, environmental protection, and corporate responsibility—has emerged as the single most significant constraint on India’s trade engagement with Europe.

#### **b. How the European Union Shapes Global Trade Through Regulation**

The European Union sets some of the world’s highest regulatory standards in environmental protection, climate mitigation, human rights, corporate accountability, and product safety. These standards apply not only to European producers but to all firms seeking access to the EU market.

As a result, regulatory compliance has become a de facto gatekeeper to trade with Europe. In practice, this means that market access is increasingly determined by a country’s regulatory capacity and institutional preparedness, rather than by tariff concessions alone.

#### **c. Why Regulations Matter More Than Tariffs for India**

A defining feature of India–EU trade is that most Indian exports already enter the European market at relatively low tariff rates. Consequently, further tariff reductions through a Free Trade Agreement offer only marginal additional gains.

In contrast, regulatory compliance imposes continuous and often high costs. Exporters must invest in

- documentation and reporting systems,
- certification and verification mechanisms, and
- ongoing monitoring of supply chains.

These costs fall disproportionately on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which form the backbone of India’s export sector.

Therefore, for India, regulatory barriers are far more consequential than tariff barriers in determining real and sustained market access to the European Union.

#### **d. Key European Union Regulations Affecting India**

##### **i. Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**

The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism imposes a charge on imports based on the carbon emissions generated during production. It primarily targets energy-intensive sectors such as steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, and related industrial goods.

For India, CBAM raises the cost of exporting steel and aluminium to Europe. Indian producers may be forced to absorb part of this cost by lowering prices, leading to reduced profit margins. In effect, CBAM functions as a carbon-linked trade barrier, posing difficulties for a developing economy that is still transitioning towards low-carbon manufacturing.

### ii. European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)

The EU Deforestation Regulation aims to prevent products linked to deforestation from entering the European market. Exporters must provide detailed traceability data, linking products to the exact land on which they were produced.

This poses particular challenges for India, where agriculture is dominated by small and fragmented landholdings. Establishing precise farm-level traceability across millions of small farmers significantly increases compliance costs and administrative complexity for Indian agricultural exports.

### iii. Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)

Under the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, companies must assess their entire supply chains for risks related to human rights violations, environmental harm, and unethical practices.

For Indian exporters, this creates multiple difficulties:

- collecting reliable data across long and fragmented supply chains,
- protecting commercially sensitive information, and
- bearing high compliance costs without adequate institutional support.

Small and medium enterprises face the heaviest burden, as they lack the financial and organisational capacity to meet such extensive requirements.

### e. Structural Asymmetry in Regulatory Capacity

A core problem in India–EU trade is the asymmetry in regulatory capacity. The European Union possesses advanced institutions, strong enforcement mechanisms, and the financial ability to absorb compliance costs. India’s regulatory systems, by contrast, are still evolving.

European agriculture is characterised by larger and more consolidated farms, while Indian agriculture is dominated by smallholders. European MSMEs are relatively resilient, whereas Indian MSMEs are far more vulnerable to regulatory shocks.

This structural imbalance creates an unequal trading environment, even under conditions of formal trade liberalisation.

### f. Impact on India’s Trade and Industrial Sector

The cumulative impact of EU regulations is a decline in the competitiveness of Indian exports. Manufacturing costs rise, compliance burdens increase, and profit margins shrink—especially for MSMEs.



In several sectors, regulatory barriers have the potential to neutralise the benefits of tariff reductions, effectively shifting trade advantages towards developed economies with stronger regulatory infrastructure. As a result, expected gains from trade liberalisation may not fully materialise.

### **g. Role of the India–European Union Trade Agreement**

The India–EU trade agreement provides an important institutional platform to address regulatory challenges. It enables

- structured dialogue on standards,
- scope for mutual recognition of conformity assessments,
- phased or flexible implementation of regulations, and
- provision of technical assistance and capacity-building.

However, unless regulatory concerns are addressed meaningfully, the agreement risks delivering asymmetric outcomes. Tariff concessions alone cannot offset deep regulatory disadvantages.

### **h. Way Forward: India’s Strategic Response**

Domestically, India must invest in

- improving environmental and quality standards,
  - developing robust traceability and data systems, and
  - supporting MSMEs through finance, technology, and institutional capacity-building.
- Accelerating the transition to low-carbon manufacturing is also essential.

Externally, India should seek flexibility and transitional arrangements within EU regulations, push for harmonisation of standards, and consistently highlight developmental differences. Continuous engagement through trade and regulatory dialogue is crucial to prevent regulations from becoming disguised trade barriers.

### **Conclusion**

The European Union’s regulatory regime reflects a fundamental shift from tariff-based protection to rule-based control of global trade. For India, the central challenge lies in adapting to these rules without undermining growth, exports, and livelihoods.

How effectively India manages regulatory barriers will determine whether India–EU trade evolves into a genuinely balanced and mutually beneficial partnership, or remains structurally unequal despite formal trade liberalisation.

## 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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