



NAMAN SHARMA
IAS ACADEMY

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1. Menstrual Health in Schools is Integral to Right to Life: Supreme Court

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court of India has ruled that menstrual health and access to Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in schools form an integral part of the Right to Life and Dignity under **Article 21** of the Constitution.

- The Court held that the absence of menstrual hygiene facilities subjects girls to stigma, humiliation, unsafe practices, and absenteeism.
- It directed all States and Union Territories to ensure:
 - Free access to sanitary napkins in all schools
 - Functional gender-segregated toilets
 - MHM support systems, such as vending machines and MHM corners.
- The judgment came in response to a writ petition highlighting gaps in menstrual hygiene facilities in schools across India.

<h3>Access for all</h3> <p>Supreme Court rules that all schools must provide menstrual hygiene access to students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Inaccessibility of menstrual hygiene management undermines the dignity of a girl child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Denial of menstrual hygiene measures denies girls equal participation in school
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ A child's right to privacy and bodily autonomy is inseparably linked to dignity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Under Article 21A, the fundamental right to free education includes covering expenses that hinder a child
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The right to life under Article 21 encompasses the right to menstrual health	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">from completing elementary education, which should extend to providing free sanitary napkins

Background

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) refers to access to:

- Clean menstrual products
- Private sanitation facilities
- Safe disposal systems
- Information and awareness

In India, menstrual health remains linked with:

- Social stigma
- Gender taboos
- Inadequate sanitation infrastructure

Surveys and reports over the years have shown:

- Many schools lack functional girls' toilets
- Lack of disposal systems leads to embarrassment and absenteeism

- Poor access to sanitary products results in unsafe alternatives

The issue is closely tied to:

- Right to Education
- Gender equality
- Adolescent health
- School retention of girls

Features

- Menstrual Health = Fundamental Right

The Court held that menstrual health is part of:

- Right to life
- Right to dignity
- Right to privacy
- Bodily autonomy
- It stated that dignity must be reflected in real living conditions, not remain an abstract idea.

Mandatory School Infrastructure

The Court directed that all schools (government + private, rural + urban) must ensure:

- Functional gender-segregated toilets
- Continuous water supply
- Hygienic disposal mechanisms
- Privacy safeguards

Non-compliance may lead to:

- Accountability for government schools
- De-recognition risks for private schools under RTE norms.

Free Sanitary Napkins Access

- Schools must provide:
- Oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkins
- Free of cost
- Preferably via vending machines inside the toilet premises

Creation of “MHM Corners”

Each school should establish MHM corners containing:

- Spare innerwear
- Spare uniforms
- Disposable bags
- Emergency menstrual supplies

This supports girls during unexpected menstrual situations.

Link with Education Rights

The Court noted:

- Menstrual poverty creates a gender-specific barrier to education
- Forcing girls to choose between dignity and schooling is unconstitutional

- Absenteeism due to menstruation harms long-term educational outcomes

Role of Men in Menstruation

A notable feature:

- The Court stressed the need to sensitise male teachers and boys
- Aim:
- Reduce stigma
- Prevent harassment
- Avoid invasive questioning
- Normalise menstruation as a biological process

Challenges

Infrastructure Gaps

- Many schools still lack:
- Functional toilets
- Running water
- Disposal facilities
- Rural and remote schools are especially vulnerable.

Funding Constraints

Regular supply of sanitary napkins and machines requires:

- Budget allocation
- Maintenance contracts
- Supply chains

Maintenance & Monitoring Issues

- Vending machines and incinerators often fail due to:
- Poor upkeep
- Lack of trained staff
- No monitoring mechanism

Social Taboos

- Menstruation remains stigmatised in many communities
- Girls may hesitate to use facilities even if available.

Private School Compliance

- Enforcement in private schools may be uneven
- Risk of formal compliance but poor ground reality.

Way Forward

Strengthen WASH + MHM Integration

- Integrate MHM into School WASH programmes
- Converge efforts of:
- Education departments
- Health ministries

- Women & Child Development bodies

Dedicated Budget Lines

- Earmark funds for:
- Sanitary products
- Disposal systems
- Maintenance of facilities

Behavioural Change Campaigns

Run structured awareness programs for:

- Students (girls + boys)
- Teachers
- Parents
- Include menstrual education in the curriculum.

Monitoring & Social Audits

- Periodic third-party audits of school sanitation
- Use school report cards & district dashboards.

Public-Private & CSR Partnerships

CSR support for:

- Vending machines
- Incinerators
- Menstrual kits
- Awareness drives

Link with Adolescent Health Programs

- Converge with:
- School Health Programme
- Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK)
- Local health workers.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's ruling marks a rights-based shift in how menstrual health is viewed - from a welfare concern to a constitutional entitlement linked with dignity, privacy, and equality. By recognising menstrual hygiene as essential to Article 21, the judgment strengthens gender justice and educational access. The real test now lies in ground-level implementation, sustained funding, and social sensitisation to ensure that no girl is forced to compromise her dignity or education due to menstruation.

2. 'Labour intensive sectors to benefit from EU-India FTA'

Why in the News?

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has stated that the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union will significantly benefit India's labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, gems and jewellery.

Key highlights:

- EU-India FTA likely to be implemented in calendar year 2026.
- Around \$35 billion export potential, with \$33.5 billion getting zero-duty access from Day 1.
- The government reiterated that India is negotiating FTAs mainly with developed economies.
- India has ruled out revisiting its exit from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).



Background

- India and the EU began FTA negotiations in 2007, but talks stalled in 2013 due to differences over:
 - Tariffs on automobiles, wines, and dairy
 - Services mobility
 - Data security status
 - Intellectual property rules

Negotiations were relaunched in 2021-22 amid:

- Global supply chain diversification
- Europe's "China+1" strategy
- India's push for export-led manufacturing growth.
- The EU is one of India's largest trading partners in goods and services.

- India has recently signed FTAs with developed or high-income partners such as the UAE, Australia, and EFTA countries under the leadership of Narendra Modi.

Features

Major Tariff Elimination

- Zero-duty access for most Indian exports in labour-intensive sectors.
- Immediate tariff removal on large product lines.

Labour-Intensive Sector Gains

- Textiles & garments
- Gems & jewellery
- Footwear
- Leather products
- Processed agricultural goods (select categories)

Competitive Parity

- India will match the advantages currently enjoyed by:
- Bangladesh (duty-free as LDC)
- Vietnam (FTA with EU)

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) Provision

- Framework discussions included climate-linked trade rules.
- Built on “trust and accommodation” language in negotiations.

Pragmatic Negotiation Model

- Focus on:
- Low-hanging fruit first
- Red-line clarity
- Exclusion of ultra-sensitive items (e.g., certain farm products).

Faster Operationalisation

- Political push on both sides for quick ratification across the EU's 27 members.
- Cabinet-level approvals are already progressing on the Indian side.

Sectoral Impact - Why Labour-Intensive Sectors Matter

Employment Multiplier

- These sectors create high jobs per unit of capital invested.
- Critical for absorbing a semi-skilled workforce.

Export Diversification

- Moves India beyond petroleum & gold exports.

- Strengthens MSME-linked value chains.

Market Size Advantage

- EU is a high-value consumption market.
- Premium pricing possible for apparel, handicrafts, and jewellery.

Supply Chain Shift

- Buyers seeking alternatives to China-centric sourcing.
- India positioned as scale + compliance supplier.

Challenges

EU Regulatory Barriers

- Stringent:
- Sustainability norms
- Labour standards
- Environmental compliance
- Product traceability rules.

CBAM Risk

- Carbon taxes may hurt:
- Steel
- Aluminium
- Cement exports unless India decarbonises faster.

Standards & Certification Costs

- MSMEs may struggle with:
- Technical standards
- Testing & certification
- ESG reporting.

Agricultural Sensitivities

- Several farm products remain excluded or tightly quota-bound.
- Political resistance within the EU (as seen in the Mercosur case earlier).

Rules of Origin Complexity

- Strict origin rules may limit third-country value addition.

Domestic Preparedness Gap

- Logistics costs
- Compliance infrastructure
- The quality control ecosystem is still uneven.

Way Forward

Strengthen Labour-Intensive Export Ecosystems

- Textile & jewellery clusters modernisation
- Design + branding support
- Skill upgrading programs

MSME Compliance Support

- Subsidised certification & testing
- ESG compliance toolkits
- EU standards facilitation centres

Green Transition Strategy

- Faster industrial decarbonisation
- Carbon accounting systems
- Clean energy adoption in export sectors

Trade Facilitation

- Faster customs processing
- Digital trade documentation
- Port logistics reforms

Market Intelligence for Exporters

- EU demand mapping
- Product-specific opportunity dashboards
- Buyer–seller matchmaking

FTA Utilisation Monitoring

- Track actual tariff usage rates
- Sector-wise export response audits
- Corrective policy support.

Conclusion

The EU–India FTA represents a strategic shift toward high-quality trade partnerships with developed economies. Its biggest promise lies in boosting labour-intensive sectors, enhancing employment, and correcting India's historical underperformance in the EU market relative to competitors such as Vietnam and Bangladesh.

3. Stem cell therapy cannot be offered as a clinical service for autism: Supreme Court

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court of India has ruled that stem cell therapy cannot be offered as a clinical treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) outside approved and monitored clinical trials. The Court held that there is insufficient scientific evidence on the safety and efficacy of such therapy for autism and questioned the Union government for failing to regulate clinics promoting it as a “miraculous cure.” A Bench led by Justice J.B. Pardiwala and Justice R. Mahadevan also directed the Centre to establish a dedicated regulatory authority for stem cell research and applications.

Background

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting communication, social interaction, and behaviour.
- It is a spectrum condition - severity and symptoms vary widely.
- There is no known medical cure; treatment focuses on:
- Behavioural therapy
- Speech and occupational therapy
- Educational and social support interventions.



There is a dearth of established scientific evidence on the efficacy and safety of therapeutic use of stem cells in Autism Spectrum Disorder. As a result, the doctors do not have 'adequate information' to provide their patients in the first place

SUPREME COURT



Stem Cell Therapy — What It Means

- Stem cells are undifferentiated cells that can differentiate into different cell types.

- They are used in certain approved medical treatments (e.g., bone marrow transplant for blood disorders).
- However, their use in neurological disorders like autism remains experimental.

Regulatory Context in India

- Stem cell use is governed by:
- ICMR Guidelines for Stem Cell Research
- New Drugs and Clinical Trial Rules, 2019
- Using outside approved trials is considered unethical and unregulated.
- Despite this, many private clinics marketed stem cell therapy as a cure for ASD.

Features

No Clinical Use Without Scientific Validation

- The Court held that stem cell therapy for ASD:
- Lacks established scientific proof of efficacy and safety
- Cannot meet the “reasonable standard of care” required in medical practice.

Informed Consent Not Possible

Valid consent requires:

- Adequate disclosure of risks, benefits, alternatives, and consequences.

Since scientific evidence is lacking:

- Doctors cannot provide adequate information.
- Therefore, informed consent becomes legally invalid.

Patient Autonomy Not Absolute

The Court clarified:

- Patient autonomy does not extend to demanding scientifically unproven and ethically impermissible procedures.
- Consent cannot legalise unsafe or unvalidated treatments.

Criticism of Government Inaction

- The Bench criticised the Union government for:
- Not acting against clinics offering unproven stem cell cures.
- Allowing misleading medical claims targeting vulnerable families.

Direction for Regulatory Authority

- The Court directed the Centre to:
- Establish a dedicated authority for oversight and regulation of stem cell research and therapy across India.

Challenges

Exploitation of Vulnerable Families

- Parents of children with ASD often seek alternative therapies due to:
- Lack of cure
- Social stigma
- Emotional distress.
- This creates a market for high-cost, unproven treatments.

Weak Enforcement of Guidelines

- Existing stem cell guidelines are often:
- Advisory in nature
- Poorly enforced at the clinic level.

Misleading Medical Advertising

- Clinics promote “miracle cures” through:
- Aggressive marketing
- Testimonials without scientific backing.

Regulatory Fragmentation

- Multiple bodies (ICMR, CDSCO, Health Ministry) share oversight - leading to:
- Gaps in accountability
- Slow enforcement action.

Ethical Risks

- Use of experimental therapies outside trials:
- Violates medical ethics
- Undermines evidence-based medicine
- Risks patient harm.

Way Forward

Create a Dedicated Stem Cell Regulatory Authority

- As directed by the Court:
- Single-window regulator
- Licensing, inspection, and enforcement powers
- National registry of approved trials and centres.

Strict Enforcement & Penal Action

- Crack down on:
- Unapproved stem cell clinics
- Misleading cure claims
- Violations of clinical trial rules.

Strengthen Clinical Trial Framework

- Faster approvals for genuine research.
- Transparent public database of:
- Ongoing stem cell trials
- Approved indications.

Ethical Medical Advertising Rules

- Mandatory disclaimers for experimental therapies.
- Ban on “miracle cure” terminology.
- Strong penalties for false medical claims.

Parent & Caregiver Awareness

- Government and medical bodies should:
- Run awareness campaigns on ASD treatment realities.
- Promote evidence-based therapies.
- Provide verified information portals.

Promote Responsible Research

- Encourage stem cell research under:
- Ethical review
- Trial monitoring
- Long-term safety tracking.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court’s ruling reinforces the principle that medical practice must be grounded in scientific evidence, ethics, and patient safety. By prohibiting stem cell therapy for autism as a routine clinical service, the Court has protected vulnerable families from exploitation and reaffirmed the limits of patient consent in unproven treatments.

4. Green steel can shape India’s climate goals trajectory

Why in the News?

- India has signalled that it will submit a more ambitious revised NDC (Nationally Determined Contribution) ahead of COP30.
- The steel sector — responsible for roughly 12% of India’s carbon emissions- is now at the centre of decarbonisation discussions.
- Industry leaders such as former Tata Steel executive Sanjiv Paul have argued that green steel is essential to align India’s industrial growth with climate commitments.
- India has also released a Green Steel Taxonomy (2024) and a Greening Steel Roadmap, signalling policy intent.

Background

Steel and India's Development Model

- Steel is a core sector supporting:
- Infrastructure
- Construction
- Automobiles
- Defence
- Railways and energy systems.
- Current production: ~125 million tonnes/year.
- Projected need: 400+ million tonnes/year by mid-century to support growth.

Emissions Profile

- Steelmaking in India is largely coal-based (blast furnace–basic oxygen furnace route).
- Heavy dependence on:
 - Coking coal
 - Iron ore reduction using carbon.
- Makes steel one of the hard-to-abate sectors.

What is Green Steel?

Green steel refers to steel produced using low-carbon or near-zero carbon technologies, such as:

- Hydrogen-based direct reduced iron (DRI)
- Electric arc furnaces (EAF) using scrap
- Renewable-powered production
- Carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS)



Features

Strategic Importance of Steel Decarbonisation

- Steel growth is inevitable for India's development.
- Without a green transition:
- Emissions will sharply rise.
- Carbon-intensive assets will get locked in for decades.
- Early green transition avoids carbon lock-in of capital stock.

Global Market Signals Are Clear European Union Pressure

- The European Union has introduced the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM):
- Imposes carbon-linked border charges.
- Penalises high-carbon steel imports.

Exporters without low-carbon credentials risk:

- Market loss
- Higher tariffs
- Competitiveness decline.

China's Transition

- Expanding:
- Scrap-based steel
- Hydrogen pilots
- Electric furnace capacity.

Indian Industry's Early Moves

- Major Indian firms have begun pilots:
- Tata Steel - hydrogen injection in blast furnaces, renewables PPAs, CCUS pilots.
- JSW Steel - green hydrogen integration plans.
- Jindal Steel and Power Limited - low-carbon production exploration.
- Steel Authority of India Limited - furnace modernisation and efficiency upgrades.

However:

- Most efforts remain at the pilot stage, not a full-scale transformation.

Policy Progress by the Government

India has taken several initial steps:

- Greening Steel Roadmap (2024)
- Green Steel Taxonomy - world's first formal classification
- National Green Hydrogen Mission
- Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)
- Emission intensity targets for steel plants
- Renewable energy expansion push

These provide direction, but not yet strong investment signals.

Challenges

High Cost of Green Technologies

- Green hydrogen is currently expensive.
- Low-carbon steel plants have:
 - 30–50% higher capital cost.
 - Financing remains difficult.

Energy Constraints

- Limited dedicated renewable power for industry.
- Grid reliability issues.
- Need for continuous high-load clean power.

Hydrogen & Gas Infrastructure Gap

- **Lack of:**
 - Hydrogen production scale
 - Storage systems
 - Pipeline networks.
- Natural gas (transition fuel) availability is uncertain and price-volatile.

Way Forward

Clear Carbon Price Roadmap

- Time-bound carbon pricing rollout.
- Provide long-term visibility for investors.
- Learn from the EU carbon price experience (\$90–100/ton viability zone).

Mandate Low-Carbon New Capacity

- Discourage new coal-heavy blast furnaces.
- Require all new steel capacity to be low/near-zero carbon-ready.

Green Steel Public Procurement Policy

- Government to:
 - Prefer green steel in infrastructure projects.
 - Create assured domestic demand.
 - Use certification and labelling systems.

Finance & Fiscal Support

- Green steel transition funds.
- Concessional long-term debt.
- Risk guarantees.
- Viability gap funding - especially for MSMEs.

Scrap Market Formalisation

- National scrap registry.
- Incentives for organised recycling.

- Urban mining ecosystem.

Conclusion

Green steel is not merely an environmental reform - it is a strategic economic necessity. With steel demand set to triple, India's climate trajectory will depend heavily on how this sector evolves. Early adoption of low-carbon steel technologies will protect export competitiveness, prevent carbon lock-in, and reinforce India's climate leadership.

5. FPI outflows at a five-month high of ₹35,962 crore

Why in the News?

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) recorded net outflows of ₹35,962 crore from Indian equities in January, marking the highest monthly outflow in five months, according to data from the National Securities Depository Limited.

The sell-off has been attributed mainly to:

- Weak corporate earnings outlook
- Depreciation of the Indian rupee
- Global portfolio rebalancing toward other emerging markets

This trend is significant for India's capital markets, currency stability, and external sector indicators - all important for UPSC Economy and Current Affairs.

Background: What are FPIs?

Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) refers to investments made by foreign entities in a country's financial assets, such as:

- Shares
- Bonds
- Mutual funds
- Exchange-traded funds (ETFs)

Features:

- Portfolio investors do not seek management control
- Investments are highly liquid and volatile

Sensitive to:

- Interest rates
- Currency movements
- Global risk sentiment
- Earnings outlook

FPI vs

- FPI → Short-term, market-linked, volatile
- FDI → Long-term, control-oriented, stable

Features

Scale of Selling

- January outflows: ₹35,962 crore — highest since August
- CY2025 total FPI equity selling so far: ₹1.66 lakh crore

Mixed Pattern of Flows

- Direct equity selling continues
- However, FPIs are net buyers through mutual fund routes

Shows:

- Tactical caution
- Preference for diversified exposure instead of direct stock picking

Fund-Level Behaviour

Research notes from Elara Capital indicate:

- India-focused long-term funds continue to see withdrawals

Major selling concentrated in:

- Japan-domiciled funds
- Luxembourg-domiciled funds

Earnings Signal

According to Kotak Securities:

- Q3 earnings were only marginally above expectations
- Beats exceeded misses, but not strongly enough to reverse risk sentiment
- FPI flows likely to remain volatile

Challenges Arising from FPI Outflows

Market Volatility

- Sharp FPI exits increase:
- Equity market swings
- Sectoral corrections
- Short-term investor panic

Currency Pressure

- Outflows increase dollar demand
- Leads to rupee depreciation

Raises:

- Import bill
- Inflation risk (especially energy imports)

Way Forward

Strengthen Macroeconomic Stability

- Maintain fiscal discipline
- Control inflation

- Ensure a predictable policy regime

Improve Corporate Earnings Quality

- Boost manufacturing competitiveness
- Support MSME productivity
- Encourage export-led sectors

Deepen Domestic Institutional Base

- Promote:
- Pension funds
- Insurance funds
- Retail SIP participation
- Reduces dependence on foreign flows

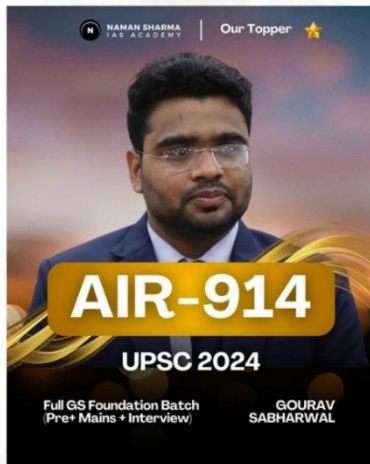
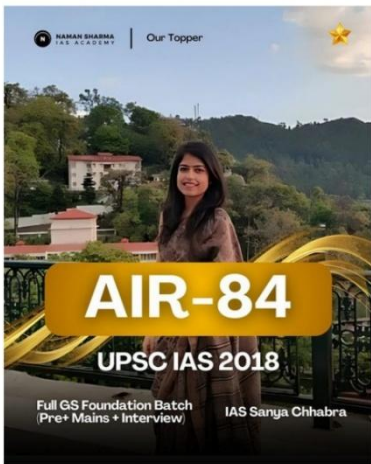
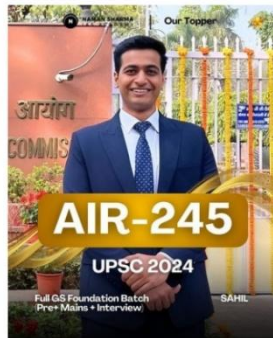
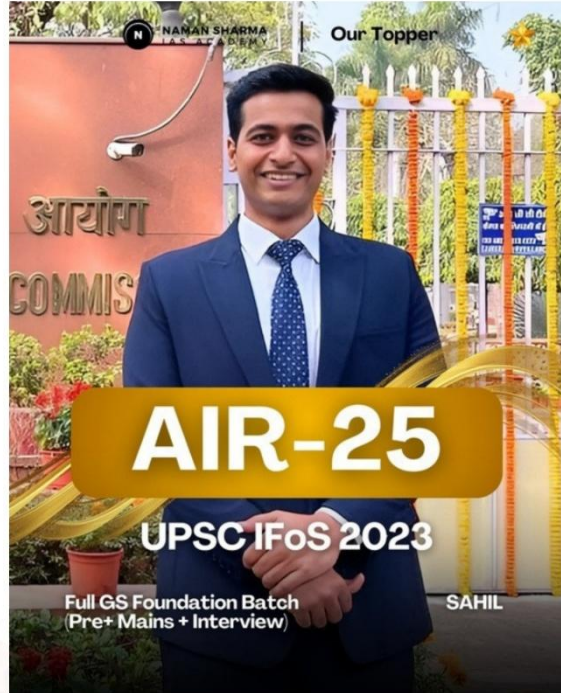
Conclusion

The recent spike in FPI outflows reflects global risk rebalancing, rupee weakness, and moderate earnings momentum, rather than a structural loss of confidence in India. While such flows are inherently volatile, their macroeconomic impact can be managed through strong domestic institutions, stable policy signals, deeper capital markets, and improved earnings growth.

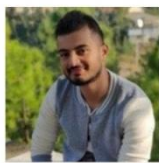


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