



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 13-01-2026

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- 1. Popocatépetl Volcano**

Prelims Perspective

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- 3. Orobanche aegyptiaca**

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Popocatépetl Volcano

Syllabus: GS-1; Physical Geography -Geomorphology

Context

Scientists obtained the first-ever **3D images from inside Mexico's Popocatépetl volcano**, offering insights into its internal structure and eruptive behaviour.

About Popocatépetl

- Meaning: **"Smoking Mountain"** in Nahuatl (Aztec language).
- Location:
 - Situated in **central Mexico**
 - Approximately **72 km southeast of Mexico City**
 - Lies on the **border of the states of Puebla and México**
- It forms part of the **Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt (TMVB)**.
- Formed due to **subduction of the Cocos Plate beneath the North American Plate**.
- One of **Mexico's most active and dangerous volcanoes**, with recorded eruptions since **1519**.
- Elevation: **5,452 metres**.
- Part of the **Pacific Ring of Fire**.

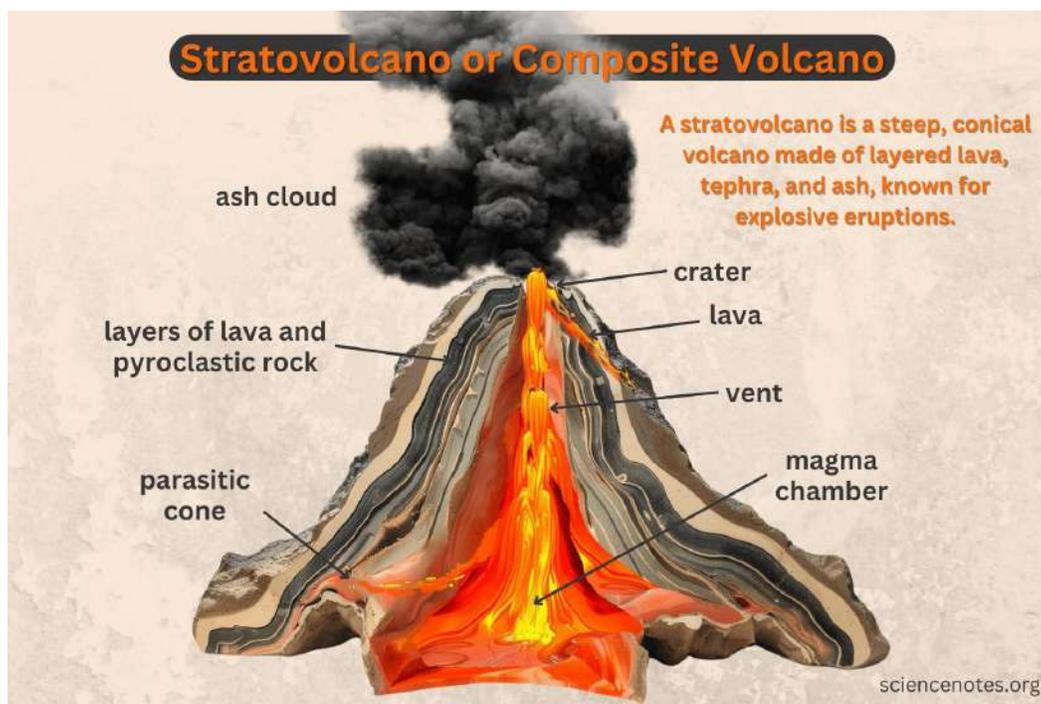
Mapping & Location



- Located near **Mexico City–Puebla volcanic axis**.
- Neighbouring major volcanic peaks:
 - **Iztaccíhuatl Volcano** (dormant) – immediately north of Popocatepetl
 - **Pico de Orizaba (Citlaltépetl)** – Mexico’s highest peak, to the east
- Drainage impact:
 - Volcanic ash influences river basins draining towards the **Gulf of Mexico**.
- Tectonic setting:
 - Lies along the **Middle America Trench** subduction system (off Mexico’s Pacific coast).
- Part of a broader volcanic arc extending across **Central America**.

Stratovolcano (Composite Volcano)

- Tall, steep-sided, cone-shaped volcano.
- Typically formed at **convergent plate boundaries**.
- Built from alternating layers of:
 - Lava flows
 - Pyroclastic material (ash, tephra, pumice)
- Magma is **viscous**, allowing gas pressure buildup.
- Results in **highly explosive eruptions**.
- Account for **~60% of Earth’s volcanoes**.



Kathputli Puppetry

Syllabus: GS-1; Art & Culture

Context

Jaipur's **Kathputli Nagar**, home to around **250 families of traditional puppeteers**, has come into focus for preserving **Kathputli**, one of Rajasthan's oldest living folk art traditions.

About Kathputli Puppetry

What is Kathputli?

Kathputli is a **traditional string puppetry** art form of Rajasthan. It uses **wooden puppets (putlis)** controlled by strings to narrate stories drawn from history, folklore, and moral traditions.

Region of Practice:

- Originated in **Rajasthan**
- Prominent centres: **Jaipur, Nagaur, Churu and Sikar**
- **Kathputli Nagar (Jaipur)** is the largest surviving settlement of Kathputli artists

Historical Background

- Believed to be **over 1,000 years old**
- Traditionally performed by **Bhat and Nat communities**
- Performed in **royal courts, village fairs, festivals and public gatherings**
- Served both **entertainment and educational purposes**, spreading moral and social messages

Key Features

- **Puppets:**
 - Made of wood
 - Large painted eyes and exaggerated facial features
- **Costumes:**
 - Bright, colourful Rajasthani attire
 - Influenced by **royal and desert aesthetics**
- **Performance Style:**
 - Fast-paced narration

- Accompanied by folk instruments like **dholak and harmonium**
- **Themes:**
 - Rajput warriors and kings
 - Folk heroes
 - Social satire
 - Moral and ethical stories



Traditional Puppetry of India

State / Region	Major Traditional Puppetry Forms
Tamil Nadu	Tolu Bommalatam (shadow), Bommalatam (string-cum-rod), Pava Koothu (glove)
Kerala	Tolpava Koothu (shadow), Pavakathakali (glove), Nool Pavakoothu (string)
Andhra Pradesh	Tolu Bommalata (shadow), Koyya Bommalata (string), Keelu Bommalata (string), Sutram Bommalata (string)
Karnataka	Togalu Gombeyata (shadow/leather), Sutrada Gombeyata (string), Yakshagana Gombeyata (string), Salaki Gombeyata (rod/string), Chinni Patti (glove)
Maharashtra	Chamdyacha Bahulya (shadow), Kalasutri Bahulya (string), Chitrakathi (picture narration)
Rajasthan	Kathputli ka Khel (string)
Uttar Pradesh	Gulabo-Sitabo (glove)
Odisha	Ravanachhaya (shadow), Gopalila Kundhei (string), Sakhi Kundhei (glove), Kathi Kundhei Nacha (rod)
West Bengal	Tarer/Sutor Putul Nach (string), Danger Putul Nach (rod), Benir Putul (glove)
Tripura	Putul Nach (string)
Assam	Putala Nach / Putul Nach (string)

State / Region	Major Traditional Puppetry Forms
Manipur	Laithibi Jagoi (string)

Orobanche aegyptiaca

Syllabus: GS-3; Environment, Agriculture and Food Security

Context

India's largest oilseed crop, **mustard**, is under threat due to the rapid spread of the **parasitic weed Orobanche aegyptiaca** in **Rajasthan and Haryana**.



About Orobanche aegyptiaca

What is it?

Orobanche aegyptiaca (locally known as **Margoja**) is a **root-parasitic flowering weed** that attaches to the roots of crops such as mustard, extracting **water, carbon and nutrients**, leading to severe yield losses.

Origin:

- Native to the **Mediterranean–West Asian region**
- Now spread across **South Asia, North Africa and parts of Europe**

Spread and Habitat

- Predominantly found in **north-western India**, especially mustard-growing regions of **Rajasthan and Haryana**
- **Seeds remain viable for up to 20 years** in the soil
- Spread through:
 - Wind
 - Irrigation water
 - Farm machinery and tools
 - Contaminated soil

Key Characteristics

- **Obligate parasite:** Cannot complete its life cycle without a host plant
- **Underground parasitism:** Attaches to crop roots before emerging above ground, making early detection difficult
- **High reproductive capacity:**
 - One plant produces **40–45 flowers**
 - Each flower releases **4,000–5,000 microscopic seeds**
- **Irrigation-triggered germination:** Moist soil after first irrigation promotes seed germination and attachment

Implications

- Causes **wilting, yellowing, stunted growth** and severe yield losses in mustard
- Discourages farmers from mustard cultivation
- Undermines India's goal of **reducing edible oil imports**, as mustard contributes **over 4 million tonnes** to domestic oil production

Should the age of consent be lowered?

Syllabus: GS-2: Governance – Laws and Policies.

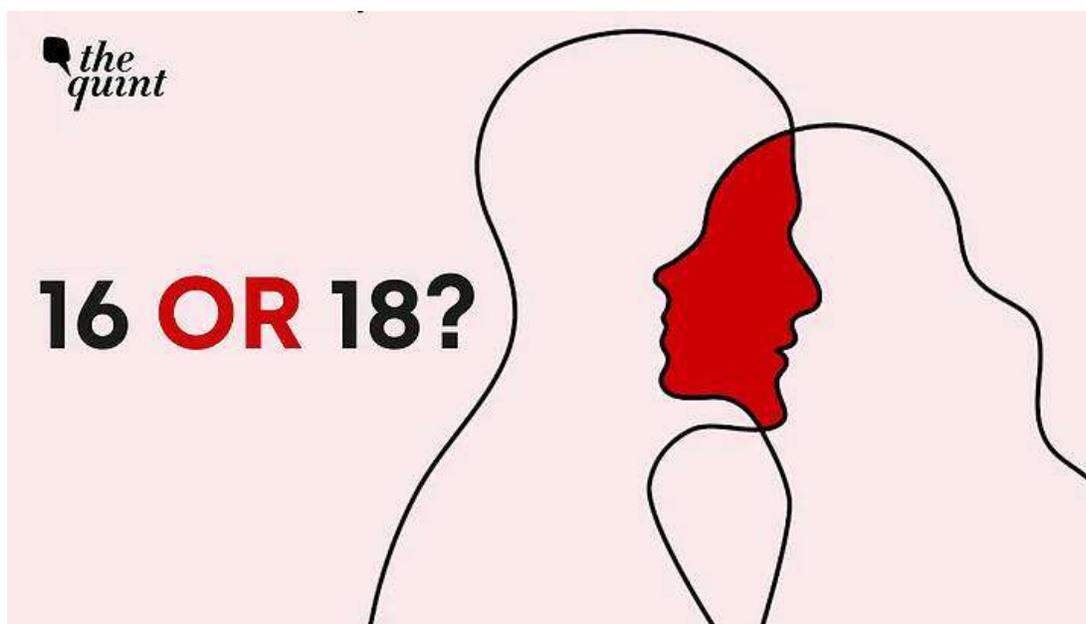
Context:

- In **January 2026**, the **Supreme Court**, in *State of UP vs Anurudh & Anr.*, flagged the **misuse of the POCSO Act** in cases of **consensual adolescent relationships** and urged the Union government to examine possible reforms.

- The issue lies at the intersection of **child protection, adolescent autonomy, gender justice, and criminal law.**

What is the Age of Consent?

- The **age of consent** is the legally prescribed minimum age at which an individual can **validly consent to sexual activity.**
- In India, it is **18 years** under:
 - **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012**
 - **IPC Section 375 (now BNS Section 63, 2023)**
- Any sexual activity involving a person below 18 is **statutory rape**, irrespective of consent.



Key Trends and Data

- **NFHS-4:**
 - ~39% of Indian girls reported first sexual experience **before 18.**
- **Enfold & Project 39A studies (2016–20):**
 - ~25% of POCSO cases involved **consensual adolescent relationships**, not sexual abuse.
- **Emerging trend:**
 - Increasing use of POCSO by parents to oppose **inter-caste, inter-religious, or socially disapproved relationships.**

Supreme Court Judgment & Present Legal Position

- **Current law:**
 - Consent of a minor is **legally irrelevant** under POCSO and BNS.
- **Supreme Court (Jan 10, 2026):**
 - Acknowledged that POCSO is being used against **romantic adolescent relationships**.
 - Called upon the **Union government** to consider **legislative reform or exemptions**.
- **Judicial tension:**
 - High Courts (Delhi, Bombay) have recognised adolescent autonomy in select cases.
 - Supreme Court has occasionally used **Article 142** to mitigate harsh outcomes but has upheld the statutory age of 18.

Arguments for Lowering or Relaxing the Age of Consent

1. Criminalisation of Adolescent Love

- **Enfold (2020):** In ~24% of POCSO cases, the girl **refused to testify**, indicating voluntary relationships.
- Converts consensual teenage behaviour into **serious criminal offences**.

2. Parental Misuse of POCSO

- Justice B.V. Nagarathna (2025) observed that parents often invoke POCSO to:
 - Punish elopement
 - Enforce caste and social control
- Undermines adolescent choice and bodily autonomy.

3. Mismatch with Social Reality

- Empirical data (NFHS-4) shows adolescent relationships are **socially prevalent**.
- Law treats a widespread social phenomenon as **criminal deviance**.

4. International Best Practices

- **UK, Canada, Australia:**
 - Age of consent at **16 years**, with safeguards against exploitation.
- India's rigid 18-year rule is **out of sync with global norms**.

5. Judicial Overload and Misplaced Priorities

- Courts burdened with romantic relationship cases.

- Diverts attention from **serious child sexual abuse**, worsening POCSO pendency.

Arguments Against Lowering the Age of Consent

1. Risk of Grooming and Coercion

- **MWCD Study (2007):**
 - Over **50% of abusers are known to the child.**
- Apparent consent may mask **manipulation, dependency, or fear.**

2. Trafficking and Child Marriage Concerns

- **Law Commission Report 283 (2023):**
 - Lowering age may weaken safeguards against **child marriage and trafficking.**

3. Need for a Bright-Line Rule

- A uniform age of 18 provides:
 - Legal clarity
 - Strong protective presumption
- Avoids subjective judicial assessment of “maturity”.

4. Parliamentary Intent

- Parliamentary Committees (2011–12) explicitly rejected recognising minor consent.
- Emphasised **child protection over autonomy.**

5. Potential Legitimisation of Abuse

- Predators (teachers, relatives, caregivers) could cloak abuse as “consensual”.
- Particularly dangerous in contexts of **power imbalance.**

Way Forward: A Balanced Reform Approach

1. Close-in-Age Exemptions (16–18 Years)

- Decriminalise consensual relationships between adolescents with a **small age gap.**
- Retain strict punishment for **older, exploitative partners.**

2. Judicial Scrutiny of Power Imbalance

- Courts should assess:
 - Grooming
 - Threats or inducement
 - Economic or emotional dependency

3. Strengthen Sex Education & Counselling

- Comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education in schools.
- Focus on:
 - Consent
 - Boundaries
 - Healthy relationships

4. Improve Victim Support Mechanisms

- Trained support persons and legal aid to:
 - Reduce trauma
 - Prevent hostile or collapsing testimonies

5. Uniform Supreme Court Guidelines

- Clear national standards to:
 - Avoid conflicting High Court rulings
 - Ensure consistent POCSO application across states

Conclusion

- **Lowering the age of consent outright** risks weakening child protection.
- However, the **blanket criminalisation** of adolescent relationships under POCSO causes injustice and social harm.
- India needs a **nuanced, evidence-based framework** that:
 - Protects children from exploitation
 - Respects adolescent autonomy
- A **close-in-age exemption model**, coupled with judicial safeguards, offers the most balanced and constitutionally sound solution.

EU-Mercosur Trade Deal Explained

Syllabus: GS-2: International Relations – Trade agreements.

Context:

- The **European Union** and **Mercosur** are set to **sign a long-pending Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** on **17 January 2026 in Asuncion, Paraguay.**

- Negotiations began in **1999**; agreement was **formally concluded in December 2024** under **Ursula von der Leyen**.
- Recently approved by **EU member state ambassadors**, despite internal opposition—especially from **France**.
- The deal remains **politically sensitive**, particularly on agriculture and environmental standards.

Mercosur: An Overview

Mercosur (Southern Common Market) is a major South American economic bloc aimed at regional integration.



Founding & Membership

- Established in **1991** by the **Treaty of Asunción**.
- **Founding members:** Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay.
- **Bolivia:** Joined later.
- **Venezuela:** Full member, **currently suspended**.
- Several South American countries are **associate members**.
- **Official languages:** Spanish and Portuguese.

Core Objectives

- Creation of a **common market**
- **Elimination of internal trade barriers**
- **Harmonisation of macroeconomic policies**
- **Free movement** of goods, services, capital, and people
- Promotion of **regional trade and cooperation**

What the EU–Mercosur Trade Deal Includes

According to the **European Commission**, this is the **EU’s largest FTA by tariff cuts**.

Tariff Liberalisation

- Eliminates over **€4 billion** in duties on EU exports.
- **Mercosur tariffs currently high** on cars, dairy, wine.

Current Trade Profile

- Annual EU–Mercosur goods trade: **~€111 billion**
 - **EU exports:** Machinery, chemicals, transport equipment
 - **EU imports:** Agricultural products, paper, minerals

Market Access Commitments

- **Mercosur:** Remove duties on **91% of EU exports** over **15 years** (from ~35%).
- **EU:** Remove duties on **92% of Mercosur exports** within **10 years**.

Sensitive Products & Quotas

EU Side

- Quotas retained on **poultry, pork, sugar, ethanol, rice, honey, maize, sweet corn**.
- **Expanded quota:**
 - **Beef imports** up to **99,000 tonnes**.

Mercosur Side

- Quotas on **milk powders and infant formula**.
- **Duty-free quota** of **30,000 tonnes of cheese** for EU exports.

Geographical Indications (GIs)

- Protection for **~350 EU food and drink products**.
- Prevents imitation and misuse of EU GIs in Mercosur markets.
- Strengthens **IPR protection** for European agri-products.

Safeguards & Enforcement

- EU can **suspend preferential access** if:
 - Import surges harm sensitive sectors.
 - **Pesticide residue limits** or standards are breached.
- Tighter **sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) controls**.

Support Measures by the EU

To address domestic opposition:

- Creation of a **crisis fund** for farmers.
- **Duty cuts on fertiliser imports.**
- Fast-tracking **€45 billion** in farmer support.
- Strengthened **import checks** on agri-products.

Opposition Within the EU

Countries Opposing

- **France, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Ireland** voted against.
- **Belgium** abstained.
- **Italy** withdrew its veto, enabling progress.

Key Concerns

- **Agricultural Competition:** Cheaper Mercosur imports undercut EU farmers.
 - Irish farmers particularly concerned about **beef quota expansion.**
- **Environmental & Climate Standards:**
 - Fear that imports may not meet EU's stringent norms.
- **Deforestation Risks:**
 - Weak enforcement against deforestation, especially in the **Amazon basin.**
- **Fair Competition:**
 - Unequal production standards may disadvantage EU farmers.

Why the EU–Mercosur Deal Matters Now

Strategic & Economic Significance

- **Trade Diversification:** Reduces over-dependence on traditional partners amid global protectionism.
- **Countering China:** Enhances EU engagement with Latin America as a counterweight to Chinese influence.
- **Boost to Mercosur:** Enhances bloc's global credibility despite internal divisions.
- **Economic Impact (Bloomberg Economics):**
 - Mercosur GDP: **+0.7%**
 - EU GDP: **+0.1%**

Geopolitical & Supply Chain Dimension

- Acts as a **shield against trade disruptions**, especially amid renewed US protectionism.
- Helps EU **reduce dependence on China** for critical minerals:
 - **Brazil**: Graphite, nickel, manganese, rare earths, niobium
 - **Argentina**: Major global **lithium** producer
- Supports **clean energy transition** and advanced manufacturing.

Conclusion

- The EU–Mercosur Trade Deal represents a **landmark inter-regional agreement** with significant economic and strategic implications.
- While it promises **market access, diversification, and geopolitical leverage**, unresolved concerns over **agriculture, environment, and enforcement** remain critical.
- Its success will depend on **effective safeguards, robust environmental enforcement**, and **political consensus** within the EU.