



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 07-02-2026

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Gulf Cooperation Council

Syllabus: GS-2: International Organisations.

Context:

India, Gulf Cooperation Council agree on terms to start free trade pact talks.

Historical Context:

- Framework agreement signed in 2004.
- Two rounds of talks held in 2006 and 2008.
- Negotiations were paused by the GCC in 2011; formal efforts to resume began in late 2022.

Bilateral Trade & Economic Profile (FY 2024-25)

- **Total Bilateral Trade:** ~\$179 billion (accounts for ~15.4% of India's global trade).
- **Exports from India (~\$57 billion):** Pearls, precious stones, metals, imitation jewelry, electrical machinery, iron & steel, chemicals, and food products (cereals, meat).
- **Imports to India (~\$121.7 billion):** Crude oil, Natural Gas (LNG), petrochemicals, and gold.
- **Trade Deficit:** India runs a significant trade deficit with the GCC (\$64.8 billion in FY25), primarily due to energy imports.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Introduction

- **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** is a regional intergovernmental organization of Arab Gulf states.
- Established to promote **economic, political, security and cultural cooperation**.
- Often compared to a **sub-regional bloc** within West Asia, though with limited supranational authority.

Formation and Background

- **Established:** 25 May 1981
- **Place:** Abu Dhabi
- **Context of formation:**
 - Iranian Revolution (1979)
 - Iran–Iraq War (1980–88)
 - Cold War geopolitics in the Gulf

- Aim: **Collective security and policy coordination** among monarchies of the Gulf.

Member Countries (6)

Country	Capital
Saudi Arabia	Riyadh
United Arab Emirates	Abu Dhabi
Kuwait	Kuwait City
Qatar	Doha
Oman	Muscat
Bahrain	Manama

Note:

- All members are **Arab monarchies** and **major hydrocarbon producers**.



Headquarters

- **Location:** Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Objectives of GCC

- **Political & Security**

- Ensure **regional stability**
- Coordinate foreign and defense policies
- **Economic**
 - Economic integration
 - Common market and customs union
- **Social & Cultural**
 - Promote shared Arab-Islamic identity
- **Legal & Administrative**
 - Harmonisation of laws in selected sectors

Institutional Structure

- **Supreme Council**
 - Highest authority
 - Composed of Heads of State
 - Presidency rotates annually
- **Ministerial Council**
 - Foreign Ministers of member states
 - Meets quarterly
- **Secretariat General**
 - Administrative body
 - Headed by Secretary-General
- **Specialised Bodies**
 - GCC Standardization Organization (GSO)
 - GCC Patent Office
 - Monetary Council

Economic Integration

- **Customs Union (2003)**
 - Common external tariff (5%)
- **GCC Common Market (2008)**
 - Free movement of:

- Goods
- Capital
- Labour (nationals)
- Services

➤ **Proposed Monetary Union**

- Common currency proposed but stalled
- UAE and Oman opted out initially

Security and Defence Cooperation

➤ **Peninsula Shield Force**

- Joint military force
- Created in 1984

GCC and India

➤ GCC is India's **key strategic and economic partner**

➤ **Importance for India:**

- Major source of crude oil and LNG
- Large Indian diaspora (over 8 million)
- Remittances critical for Indian economy

➤ **India–GCC engagement:**

- India–GCC Framework Agreement on Economic Cooperation (2004)
- Growing defense and counter-terrorism cooperation

Challenges

- Internal political differences
- Rivalry between Saudi Arabia and smaller states
- Delay in monetary union
- Over-reliance on hydrocarbons
- Limited institutional supranational authority

Way Forward

- Greater economic diversification cooperation
- Strengthening conflict-resolution mechanisms

- Institutional reforms for deeper integration
- Enhanced engagement with emerging economies (India, ASEAN)

NHRC

Syllabus: GS-2: Statutory Bodies.

Context:

The **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** has taken suo motu cognisance of reports alleging a racket operating under the guise of gyms and fitness centers. The allegations involve:

- **Sexual exploitation** of women by trainers.
- **Forced religious conversions** (targeted recruitment/grooming).
- **Health risks** arising from substandard supplements and unregulated physical activities.

Key Actions Taken by NHRC

- **Notices Issued:** To Chief Secretaries of all States/UTs, the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS), and the Sports Authority of India (SAI).
- **Legal Basis:** Cognisance taken under **Section 12 of the Protection of Human Rights (PHR) Act, 1993**, which empowers the Commission to inquire into violations of human rights or negligence in the prevention of such violations.
- **Directives:** States and UTs have been asked to formulate guidelines, registration norms, and standards for the operation of gyms/fitness centers.

Major Concerns Identified

- **Institutional Lacunae:** Lack of specific registration norms and oversight for private fitness centers leads to "unethical activities."
- **Abuse of Authority:** Allegations of police complicity or failure in law enforcement, which the NHRC termed a "violation of human rights and religious freedom."
- **Public Health:** The sale of unregulated/substandard dietary supplements poses a threat to human life.
- **National Security:** Referenced Supreme Court observations that forced conversions may ultimately affect national security and freedom of religion.

Human Rights & Constitutional Dimensions

- **Article 15:** Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.

- **Article 21:** Right to Life and Personal Liberty (includes the right to health and safety).
- **Article 25:** Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice, and propagation of religion (notably, the SC has held that this does not include a fundamental right to convert another person).
- **Women's Safety:** Violation of the "Right to Dignity" and protection against exploitation.

About NHRC

- **Establishment:** Established in 1993 under the Protection of Human Rights Act (amended in 2006 and 2019).
- **Status:** A **Statutory Body** (not constitutional).
- **Composition:** Chairperson (former CJI or SC Judge) and other members.
- **Powers:** It has the powers of a **Civil Court**.
 - It can recommend compensation or prosecution but its recommendations are **not binding** on the government (though the government must inform the NHRC of actions taken within a month).



Cyberchondria

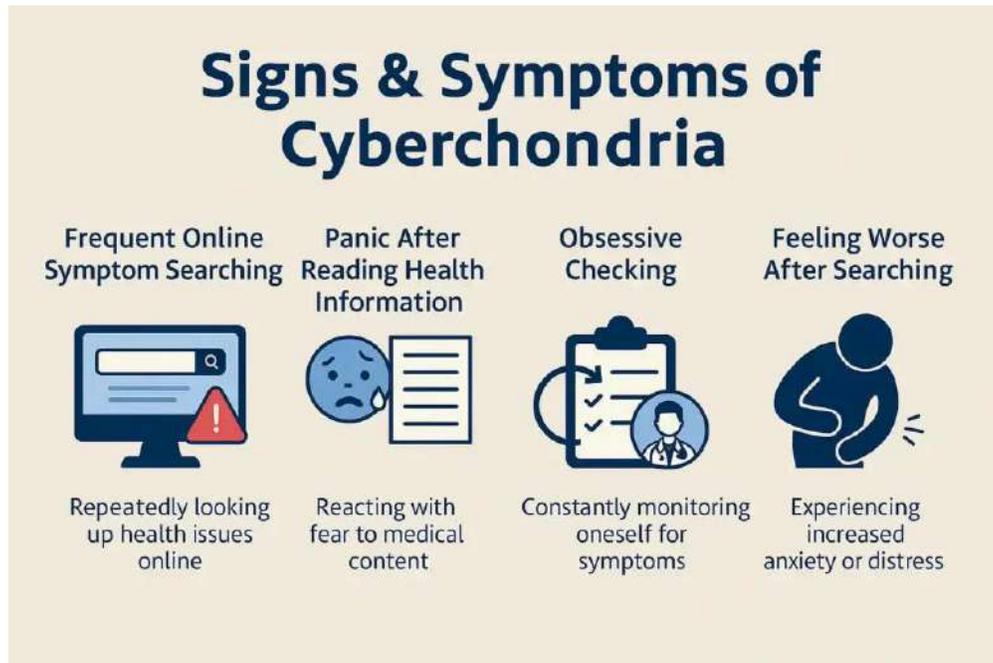
Syllabus: GS-3: Cybersecurity and impact of cyber on health.

Context:

The rapid democratization of medical information through the internet has led to a psychological phenomenon called **Cyberchondria**, which has significant implications for public health, the doctor-patient relationship, and the healthcare economy.

Definition

- **Cyberchondria:** A portmanteau of "Cyber" and "Hypochondria." It refers to the **unfounded escalation of anxiety** about one's health resulting from excessive or repeated online searches for medical information.
- Unlike healthy health-seeking behavior, it is **compulsive** and leads to distress rather than reassurance.



The Vicious Cycle (Mechanisms)

- **Ranking Bias:** Search engine algorithms often prioritize results based on clicks and relevance rather than medical probability. Rare, life-threatening conditions (e.g., a brain tumor) often rank higher than common causes (e.g., tension headache).
- **Base-Rate Neglect:** Users tend to ignore the statistical rarity of serious diseases, assuming their common symptoms match the "worst-case" scenario found online.
- **Confirmation Bias:** Individuals with health anxiety selectively search for and focus on information that confirms their fears while dismissing benign explanations.

- **Safety Behavior:** Searching is used as a "safety behavior" to reduce uncertainty, but it provides only temporary relief, ultimately reinforcing the anxiety loop.

Impacts of Cyberchondria

On Individual Health (Mental & Physical)

- **Psychological Distress:** Leads to chronic anxiety, sleep disturbances, and depression.
- **Nocebo Effect:** Intense anxiety can cause real physical symptoms (racing heart, dizziness), which the individual then misinterprets as further proof of illness.
- **Self-Medication:** Users may adjust dosages or buy unprescribed drugs based on internet "cures," leading to drug resistance or toxicity.

On the Healthcare System

- **Strain on Resources:** Unnecessary medical consultations, diagnostic tests, and "doctor shopping" increase the burden on both public and private health infrastructure.
- **Erosion of Trust:** Cyberchondriacs often challenge a doctor's diagnosis if it contradicts their online "research," leading to a breakdown in the doctor-patient relationship.
- **Increased Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE):** Financial drain on families due to unnecessary diagnostic procedures.

Factors Contributing to Rise in India

- **Digital Penetration:** Cheap data and high smartphone ownership have made health "info" accessible but unregulated.
- **Information Overload:** A lack of curated, verified vernacular medical content.
- **Low Health Literacy:** Inability to distinguish between peer-reviewed medical journals and anecdotal "health blogs."

Way Forward / Solutions

- **Digital Health Literacy:** Government initiatives (like National Digital Health Mission) should include modules on how to evaluate online health information.
- **Algorithmic Responsibility:** Search engines and social media platforms should be encouraged to prioritize verified medical sources (e.g., WHO, MoHFW, Mayo Clinic) over commercial or click-bait sites.
- **Role of Physicians:** Doctors must adopt "empathetic communication" to address patient fears rather than dismissing their internet-sourced concerns.
- **Public Awareness:** Campaigns like "Talk to a Doctor, not a Search Engine" to sensitize the public about the risks of self-diagnosis.

The fading of India's environmental jurisprudence

Syllabus: GS-2: Judiciary and Environment.

Context:

- India is at a crossroads where environmental safeguards are increasingly treated as **procedural formalities** (mere paperwork) rather than **substantive safeguards** (actual protection).



Key Regulatory & Judicial Reversals

Specific recent events that signal a "fading" of environmental protection:

- **Dilution of EIA (Dec 2025):** New regulations allowed **non-coal mining projects** to conduct Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) without specifying the exact land location or area. This violates the **Principle of Prior Scrutiny**, as impact cannot be assessed without knowing the specific site.
- **The Vanashakti Recall (2025):** The Supreme Court recalled its earlier judgment in *Vanashakti vs Union of India*, which had strictly prohibited **ex post facto (retrospective)** environmental clearances.
 - *Concern:* Allowing projects to get clearance *after* they are built makes the EIA process a "fait accompli" (a done deal), where the damage is already irreversible.
- **Reductionism in the Aravallis:** In a 2025 ruling (*Definition of Aravalli Hills and Ranges*), the Court accepted a **100-metre elevation criterion** to define what constitutes a "hill."
 - *Criticism:* This ignores hydrology, geomorphology, and ecological continuity. It effectively removes legal protection from vast, ecologically significant low-lying areas of the Aravallis.

Erosion of Landmark Principles

India's environmental law was built on several bedrock principles, which are now being undermined:

- **Precautionary Principle:** Established in *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum (1996)*. It mandates that when there are threats of serious damage, lack of scientific certainty should not be used to postpone measures to prevent degradation.
- **Public Trust Doctrine:** Established in *M.C. Mehta vs Kamal Nath (1996)*. It states that natural resources (air, water, forests) are held by the State as a "trustee" for the public and cannot be converted into private ownership or degraded.
- **Doctrine of Prior Scrutiny:** The idea that environmental costs must be calculated *before* a project begins.

Critical Consequences

- **Ecological Backbone at Risk:** The Aravallis act as a barrier against the Thar desert and as a groundwater recharge zone for NCR. Narrowing their definition threatens the water security of millions.
- **Judicial Leniency:** The judiciary, once the "Green Sentinel" of India, is seen as becoming increasingly lenient, prioritizing "sunk costs" (money already spent on illegal projects) over ecological integrity.
- **Regulatory Capture:** Policy changes (like the 2025 mining EIA rules) suggest a move toward "ease of doing business" at the direct cost of "right to a healthy environment" (Article 21).

Way Forward / Suggested Reforms

- **Restoring the Green Bench:** regular sittings of the **Supreme Court's Green Bench** and similar specialized benches in High Courts to ensure consistent environmental focus.
- **Scientific Definition of Ecology:** Moving away from "reductionist" definitions (like the 100m rule) toward an ecosystem-based approach that considers biodiversity and hydrology.
- **Strict Adherence to Prior Clearance:** Ending the culture of "post-facto" clearances to ensure that the EIA remains a meaningful tool of governance.

Sodium-Ion Technology

Syllabus: GS-3: Science and Technology – Battery Technology.

Context:

While **Lithium-ion batteries (LIBs)** currently dominate the market, India's heavy reliance on imports (primarily from China) and the scarcity of lithium reserves pose significant risks to energy security and the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* vision.

Sodium-ion batteries (SIBs) are emerging as a strategic, indigenous alternative.



Comparison: Sodium-ion vs. Lithium-ion

Feature	Sodium-Ion (Na-ion)	Lithium-Ion (Li-ion)
Abundance	Sodium is the 7th most abundant element (found in seawater, soda ash).	Lithium is scarce (0.01% of Earth's crust) and geographically concentrated.
Cost	20-40% cheaper; uses aluminum current collectors instead of copper.	Expensive; relies on copper and critical minerals like Cobalt/Nickel.
Safety	Non-flammable; can be discharged to zero volts for safe transport.	Higher fire risk; requires a minimum charge during transport to prevent damage.
Performance	Better performance in extreme temperatures (-30°C to 60°C).	Efficiency drops significantly in very cold or very hot climates.
Energy Density	Lower (100-160 Wh/kg).	Higher (100-300 Wh/kg) — better for long-range EVs.
Charging	Potential for ultra-fast charging (80% in 6 mins in recent breakthroughs).	Generally slower charging cycles compared to next-gen SIBs.

Strategic Importance for India

- **Energy Security:** Reduces dependence on the "Lithium Triangle" (Chile, Argentina, Bolivia) and Chinese supply chains.

- **Economic Viability:** India has vast salt reserves, making raw material sourcing domestic and cost-effective.
- **Grid Storage:** Ideal for stationary storage of renewable energy (Solar/Wind) where weight/size (energy density) is less critical than cost.
- **Rural Electrification:** Low cost makes it suitable for off-grid power solutions in remote areas.

Challenges to Adoption

- **Technological Maturity:** Still in early commercialization stages compared to the highly mature LIB industry.
- **Energy Density Gap:** Not yet ideal for high-performance, long-range electric vehicles (EVs).
- **Supply Chain Ecosystem:** Lack of established manufacturing facilities at scale in India (though companies like Reliance/Faradion are investing).
- **Cycle Life:** Currently trails behind Lithium Iron Phosphate (LFP) batteries in terms of total charge-discharge cycles.

Recent Breakthroughs (India Focus)

- **JNCASR (Bengaluru):** Developed a NASICON-type sodium-ion battery that charges to 80% in 6 minutes and lasts for 3,000+ cycles.
- **Anode Innovation:** Use of "hard carbon" (often derived from agricultural waste like coconut shells) as an alternative to graphite.

Way Forward

- **Policy Support:** Including Sodium-ion under the **Production Linked Incentive (PLI)** scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cells (ACC).
- **R&D Investment:** Collaborative research between institutions like IITs and private players to bridge the energy density gap.
- **Niche Applications:** Initially targeting 2-wheelers, 3-wheelers, and stationary grid storage before moving to the broader EV market.