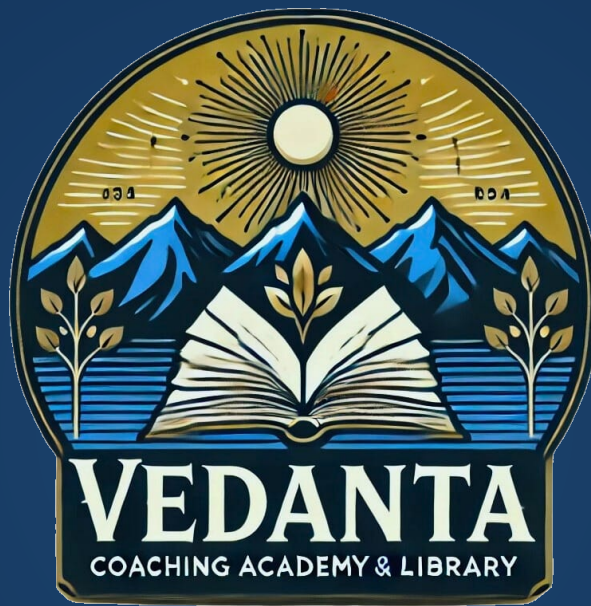


DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS



The Hindu Analysis

UPSC Civil Services · Prelims & Mains

THURSDAY · 11 SEPTEMBER 2026

GS PAPER II · GS PAPER III · 6 THEMES

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EDITOR'S FOCUS

Today's edition threads a single question through governance and geopolitics: **how the design of a rule shapes its outcome**. The Supreme Court's push on FSSAI labels and the framing of PMLA charges test institutional rigour at home; three West Asia and trade pieces — read together on the 25th anniversary of 9/11 — show how well-meant strategy can invert its own goals. Pair the FSSAI and PMLA stories for GS-2 institutions, and the 9/11-Iran-Canada cluster for GS-2 IR and GS-3 economy.

Why in News — the trigger that put the topic on the front page.

Analysis dots — the facts, actors and cause-effect you must retain.

★ **Value Addition** — static linkage: the body, law or concept behind the news.

Prelims Pointer & Syllabus — the exam-ready fact and the paper it maps to.

1 SC seeks clarity on FSSAI's warning-label norms

GS 2 The Hindu · Page 14 · Aaratrika Bhaumik, New Delhi

WHY IN NEWS

On Thursday the Supreme Court asked the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** how it would decide whether a packaged food is “high” in sugar, salt or fat under its proposed **front-of-pack warning labels**, underlining that food safety is a matter of “national interest”.

- Last month the FSSAI proposed **prominent red warning labels** on packaged foods high in added fat, added sugar or salt — a regulatory pivot after the court questioned its earlier reluctance.
- In its affidavit, the regulator said the label would be a **red hexagonal warning** on the front of a pack found high in **two or more** nutrients of concern — fat, sugar or salt.
- Thresholds would follow the **Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024**, issued by the **ICMR–National Institute of Nutrition (NIN)**.
- A Bench of Justices **J.B. Pardiwala and K. Vinod Chandran** pressed on how “high” would be measured: “If you ask them to put a label — high in salt, high in sugar, high in sodium, high in potassium — how will you determine it?”
- The Bench was hearing a **PIL by non-profits** seeking warning labels indicating high salt, sugar and saturated fat; it asked the regulator to take its directions “seriously”, citing the health of “growing children”.

Page No.14 , GS 2

SC seeks clarity on FSSAI's warning label norms

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday questioned the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on how it proposed to determine whether packaged foods were “high” in sugar, salt or fat as part of its proposed front-of-pack warning labels, as it underlined that food safety was a cause of “national interest”.

The FSSAI had last month proposed prominent red warning labels on packaged foods high in added fat, added sugar or salt, marking a regulatory pivot after the top court questioned its reluctance

to introduce such warnings.

In an affidavit filed before the court, the food regulator said the labels would take the form of a red hexagonal warning on the front of packages where a product was found to be high in two or more specified nutrients of concern — fat, sugar or salt. The thresholds would be based on those prescribed under the Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024, issued by the ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition (NIN).

FSSAI's affidavit

A Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and K. Vinod Chandran, while examining the FSSAI's affidavit, however,



questioned how the regulator would determine the threshold beyond which a packaged food would be classified as “high” in sugar, salt or fat. “If you ask them to put a label, say high in salt, high in sugar, high in sodium, high in potassium, how will you de-

termine it? Have you laid down any guidelines?” the Bench asked. Additional Solicitor-General Brijender Chahar, appearing for the Centre and the FSSAI, said the regulator was adhering to the guidelines issued by the ICMR-NIN.

The Bench was hearing a public interest litigation petition filed by non-profit organisations seeking warning labels on packaged foods to indicate high levels of salt, sugar and saturated fats. On Thursday, it indicated that it would soon pass a detailed order seeking further information from the stakeholders.

“We have done some homework and undertaken some study. We pro-

pose to pass an order calling for some further information from you. Study the order and come back with an appropriate further report,” Justice Pardiwala told Mr. Chahar.

‘Take orders seriously’

The top court also asked the regulator to take its directions “seriously”, stressing its concern over the impact of food safety standards on public health. “We are concerned with the health of people, more particularly growing children... We have taken it up very seriously... We expect one and all to extend cooperation in a cause which is in national interest,” Justice Pardiwala said.

The Hindu, Page 14 — SC seeks clarity on FSSAI's warning label norms

★ FSSAI — AT A GLANCE

- **Parent Ministry:** Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

- **Nature:** Statutory body under the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**.
- **Mandate:** Lays down science-based standards and regulates manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import of food to ensure safety.
- **Flagship initiative:** **Eat Right India** movement.
- **Structure:** A Food Authority with a Chairperson and **22 members** — one-third of them women.

PRELIMS POINTER The **hexagonal red mark** triggers only when a product is high in **≥2** nutrients of concern; thresholds derive from **ICMR-NIN Dietary Guidelines 2024**, not a separate FSSAI standard.

Syllabus link: GS-2 — statutory & regulatory bodies; government policies for the health sector; issues relating to nutrition and public health.

2 Court frames PMLA charges in the IRCTC hotels case

GS 2 The Hindu · Page 15 · Ishita Mishra, New Delhi

WHY IN NEWS

A Delhi court ordered the framing of charges under the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)** against RJD chief **Lalu Prasad**, former Bihar CM **Rabri Devi**, RJD MLA **Tejashwi Yadav** and others over alleged irregularities in leasing two IRCTC hotels.

- The Special Judge observed there was a “**strong suspicion of abuse of office**” by the former Railway Minister; Lalu's son-in-law Rahul Yadav was discharged.
- Per the **CBI**, Lalu allegedly received **high-value land and shares** as illegal consideration for facilitating contracts to private parties during his tenure as Union Railway Minister.
- The case stems from a **2017 CBI FIR**; the agency alleges a criminal conspiracy between **2004 and 2009** with owners of certain hotels in **Patna and Puri**.
- It is alleged the **tendering process** for leasing two IRCTC hotels was manipulated and contracts awarded in exchange for bribes in the form of land and shares.
- The order follows an earlier decision (Oct 13, 2025) framing corruption, conspiracy and cheating charges in the related IRCTC case; the family denies the allegations, calling the case politically motivated.

Court frames PMLA charges against Lalu in IRCTC case

Rabri Devi, Tejashwi, and others were also included; former Railway Minister is accused of taking bribes, in the form of land and shares, to facilitate IRCTC leases for hotel owners in Patna and Puri

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court ordered the framing of charges under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) against Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad, his wife and former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi, their son and RJD MLA Tejashwi Yadav, and others, in connection with alleged irregularities in the leasing of two Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation hotels.

It observed that there was a "strong suspicion of abuse of office by former Railway Minister Lalu Prasad".

Special Judge (PC Act) Vishal Gagne of the Rouse Avenue Courts passed the order after hearing arguments from both sides over several months.

The Lalu family has denied the allegations and



Graft allegations: RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi at a public meeting in Patna. FILE PHOTO

questioned the investigation, maintaining that there is no substantive evidence linking them to the alleged wrongdoing. They have also alleged that the case is politically motivated.

The court also framed money laundering charges against Sarla Gupta, Prem Chand Gupta, Sujata Hotels, Vinay Kochhar, and Vijay Kochhar.

However, the court discharged Mr. Lalu's son-in-law Rahul Yadav from the proceedings.

The latest order follows an earlier decision dated October 13, 2025, when the court framed charges against Mr. Lalu for alleged corruption, criminal conspiracy, and cheating in the related IRCTC case. Ms. Devi and Mr. Tejashwi Yadav were also charged with

offences including conspiracy and cheating.

According to the CBI, Mr. Lalu allegedly received high-value land and shares as illegal consideration for facilitating contracts in favour of private parties during his tenure as Union Railway Minister.

The case stems from an FIR registered by the CBI in 2017 against Mr. Lalu, members of his family, IRCTC officials, and others. The agency alleged that, between 2004 and 2009, when Mr. Lalu was the Union Railway Minister, he entered into a criminal conspiracy with the owners of certain hotels in Patna and Puri.

The CBI has alleged that the tendering process for the leasing of two IRCTC hotels was manipulated and contracts were awarded to the accused in exchange for alleged bribes in the form of high-value land and shares.

The Hindu, Page 15 — Court frames PMLA charges against Lalu in IRCTC case

★ PMLA, 2002 & THE ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE

- **PMLA:** in force since **2005**; prevents money-laundering and enables confiscation of property derived from crime.
- **Enforcement agency:** the **Directorate of Enforcement (ED)** investigates, attaches, confiscates and prosecutes.
- **Proceeds of crime:** any property derived from a **scheduled offence**, including equivalent property held abroad.
- **Reporting:** banks must report suspicious transactions to **FIU-IND**; an Adjudicating Authority and Appellate Tribunal provide oversight.
- **ED (est. 1956):** enforces PMLA, **FEMA 1999** and **FEOA 2018**; works under the Department of Revenue.

PRELIMS POINTER PMLA came into **force in 2005** though enacted in 2002; the ED handles PMLA & FEOA (Dept. of Revenue) and FEMA (policy under Dept. of Economic Affairs).

Syllabus link: GS-2 — statutory bodies & their mandates; separation of powers; role of investigative agencies. GS-3 — money-laundering and its prevention.

3

A unilateral America in a post-unipolar world

GS 2

The Hindu · Page 10 · Editorial-Analysis, Stanly Johny

WHY IN NEWS

Twenty-five years after 9/11, this piece argues that the U.S. — at the **pinnacle of power** in 2001 — saw its attempts to consolidate primacy through military interventions gradually **erode the very strategic freedom** unipolarity had given it.

- In 2001 the U.S. was the sole superpower: the USSR had collapsed, Russia was in post-Soviet chaos, China was a close economic partner, and NATO had completed its first eastward expansion.
- The “**global war on terror**” — conceived against al-Qaeda — evolved into a series of **regime-change wars** reshaping Afghanistan, West Asia and North Africa.
- The **2003 Iraq invasion** had three lasting effects: it diverted attention from Afghanistan (letting the Taliban regroup), created a haven for al-Qaeda, and removed the Iraqi buffer between Iran and the Gulf monarchies.
- The paradox: primacy pursued through force **eroded unipolarity** itself; the August 2021 Afghan withdrawal signalled the limits of that strategy.
- Result — a **widening transatlantic chasm**, a China risen as a **second pole**, and a Russia violently challenging the U.S.-led security architecture in Europe.

Page No.10 , GS 2

A unilateral America in a post-unipolar world

When the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks took place, the United States was at the pinnacle of its power. A decade earlier, the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union had disintegrated, Russia was still struggling to emerge from the post-Soviet chaos while China remained a close economic partner of the U.S. in eastern Europe. Washington had successfully undertaken military interventions, while the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had completed its first round of expansion into Russia's neighbourhood. The U.S. also maintained a formidable military presence in West Asia. Then came 9/11.

The U.S., then the world's sole superpower, was understandably angry and anguished. It launched “a global war on terrorism”, with Taliban-run Afghanistan, which had hosted al-Qaeda, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, as its first target. But the war that then U.S. President George W. Bush launched went far beyond the remit of a fight against terrorism. Twenty-five years later, the U.S. remains bogged down in West Asia, its rivals are more assertive elsewhere, while the threat of terrorism has become more dispersed across West and South Asia and Africa.

Even though it was conceived as a transborder fight against terrorist organisations, primarily al-Qaeda, the war eventually evolved into a series of regime-change wars, driven by the goal of reshaping Afghanistan, West Asia and North Africa in accordance with American interests and worldview. Mr. Bush and his successors allies believed that a “deficit of democracy” bred terrorism, and hence, the spread of democracy became a theoretical imperative of the war on terror. In Afghanistan, U.S. forces helped the Taliban regime and established a new state — the Islamic Republic. The war forced al-Qaeda to disperse into autonomous cells and retreat, but it did not defeat the organisation.

Three consequences
In less than two years, the U.S. invaded Iraq. Besides the disruptive humanitarian cost of the war, the invasion had three lasting consequences. First, it diverted U.S. attention from Afghanistan and al-Qaeda, giving the Taliban space to regroup and lay the foundations for an insurgency that would eventually defeat the U.S. — 20 years after the 9/11 attack.
Second, the destruction of the state of Iraq and the chaos that followed offered a new haven for al-Qaeda, which was also seeking to regroup. Before 9/11, Afghanistan had hosted Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda. After the Iraq war, Abu Mubashir al-Zarqawi built the deadliest branch of the jihadist organisation in Iraq. The al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) would ouster Zarqawi, who was killed in a U.S. airstrike in 2006, and transform itself into the deadly Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the early 2000s, after Syria, too, plunged into civil war.



Stanley John

Third, the collapse of the Saddam regime in Iraq removed a historical buffer between Iran and the U.S.-backed Persian Gulf monarchies. Saddam had fought Iran for eight years in the 1980s. Then he had later become an outpost in the U.S.-Saudi axis, but he remained a staunch enemy of Tehran. After Saddam fell, Iran's Shia insurgency, which had deep historical ties with Tehran but had been suppressed under Saddam, emerged as the new centre of power in Baghdad. Iran steadily expanded its influence in Iraq, strengthening its regional position while also trapping the U.S. in the morass of Iraq.

The regime-change wars did not end with Iraq. In 2011, amid the Arab Spring protests, NATO launched an extensive bombing campaign in Libya aimed at “protecting the Libyan people” from Muammar Gaddafi's forces. The war, which then U.S. President Barack Obama later said he had “let from behind”, brought down the Gaddafi regime but effectively destabilised Libya, one of the most stable states in Africa. The collapse of the Libyan state opened the floodgates to terrorism across Africa, as weapons were smuggled across borders and fell into the hands of various militia and terrorist groups. Over the past 15 years, jihadist groups have spread their influence across the Sahel, while western influence has continued to diminish on the continent.

Cutting the losses, geopolitical chain effects
In the time Mr. Obama had left the White House, war weariness had set in across Washington. Iraq remained unstable, with growing Iranian influence. In Afghanistan, the Taliban were gaining strength with each passing day, putting American troops under excessive pressure. Libya was divided between rival governments and armed militia. In Syria, a Russian military intervention seemed to have turned the tide, though briefly, in favour of the Assad regime. While the U.S. was struggling to manage its wars in Afghanistan, West Asia and North Africa, China, America's key economic rival, continued to rise economically and militarily. Having become bogged down in a strategic state, the U.S. started cutting its losses and repositioning itself across the wider region.
The first move was to accept the fact that the U.S. had lost the war in Afghanistan. The first of its post-9/11 regime-change wars, Donald Trump's first administration began direct talks with the Taliban, and in February 2020, the U.S. signed an agreement with the Islamist insurgency, committing to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan. On August 15, 2021, two weeks ahead of the deadline, the Taliban entered Kabul. The paradox of the post-9/11 era is that

America emerged from the Cold War as the world's unrivalled power, but its attempts to consolidate that primacy through military interventions gradually eroded the very strategic freedom that unipolarity had given it. Take the case of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. The U.S. saw the withdrawal as the realisation of an inevitable bitter pill. Washington needed to trim its strategic overreach and prepare for the looming contest with China. But two developments since the withdrawal have erected obstacles to America's strategic repositioning. First, the U.S. pullback from Afghanistan was interpreted as a sign of weakness by its rivals, particularly Russia, which had long sought to alter the post-Soviet security architecture in its homeland. Call it a geopolitical butterfly effect: in February 2022, less than a year after America's withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia invaded Ukraine, testing the U.S. commitment to Europe.

Second, the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel shook the whole of West Asia. A far-right Israeli announced its own “war on terror”, launching a full-scale attack on Palestinians in Gaza and extending it into a mini-regional war in West Asia, setting off a chain of developments that led to the February 2025 U.S. Israeli bombing of Iran. America's failure to learn the lessons of its failed regime-change wars, its inability to strategically decouple itself from Israel, and its failure, coupled with a refusal to accept the reality that the world has changed, have all contributed to this fiasco. The American Israel axis sought to topple the Islamic Republic and reshape the region, but the war has trapped the U.S. in another quagmire in West Asia.

The changing global order
So, 25 years after the 9/11 attack, terrorist groups have not only survived the war on terror but have also evolved into localised tentacles of a transnational jihadist project spanning multiple geographies. Despite America's commitment to Europe through NATO, there is a widening chasm in the transatlantic alliance. As traditional U.S. allies grow increasingly frosty with Washington's new-found transactionalism, Israel, America's closest ally in West Asia, is dragging Washington deeper into a regional vortex. While the U.S. remains bogged down in West Asia, China has risen as the second pole of an increasingly fluid multipolar order, while Russia is violently challenging the U.S.-led security architecture in Europe. The U.S., as its ill-conceived Iran war would suggest, continues to act like a unilateral hegemon. But its unilaterality is increasingly at odds with the emerging realities of the post-unipolar world.

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The Hindu, Page 10 — A unilateral America in a post-unipolar world

★ 9/11 TO A MULTIPOLAR ORDER — KEY MARKERS

- **Unipolar moment:** post-1991 U.S. primacy after the Soviet collapse.
- **Regime-change wars:** Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), Libya (2011).
- **Afghan withdrawal:** completed **15 August 2021**; Taliban returned to Kabul.
- **Multipolarity:** diffusion of power — U.S., China and Russia as competing poles.
- **Transatlantic strain:** NATO allies wary of Washington's “transactionalism”.

PRELIMS POINTER Iraq 2003 removed a **historical buffer** between Iran and the U.S.-backed Gulf monarchies — a structural gain for Tehran (links to Topic 6).

4

Growth spurt: alternative powertrains go mainstream

GS 3

The Hindu · Page 10 · Editorial, GS-3 Economy

WHY IN NEWS

Per **FADA**, total vehicle registrations in August rose **17.5% year-on-year** — an all-time high for the month — with **CNG, electric and hybrid** powertrains leading passenger-vehicle sales **for the first time**.

- **Rural demand led:** registrations grew **19.7%** in rural areas vs **15.1%** urban; passenger-vehicle sales rose 24.9% rural vs 10.9% urban.
- A **base effect** is at work: the 2025 GST cut on small cars, two-wheelers (up to 350 cc), three-wheelers, buses and goods vehicles pushed buyers to wait for new rates, depressing August 2025.
- Between **August 2024 and August 2026**, CNG and electric powertrains contributed most of the surge — Indians are switching to **cheaper-to-run alternatives** amid the West Asia conflict and worries over ethanol blending.
- The move away from petrol is **uneven**: three-wheelers are predominantly electric, two-wheelers are catching up, and passenger-car powertrains keep diversifying.
- A caution flag: dealers hold **38–40 days of inventory** against a recommended 21 — the “historic moment” holds only if Sept–Nov preserves the gains after the base effect fades.

Page No.10 , GS 3

Growth spurt

Alternative powertrains are now mainstream in automobiles

According to data released by the Federation of Automobile Dealers' Associations (FADA), total vehicle registrations in August have increased 17.5% year on year, recording the all-time highest volume for the month, and with alternative powertrains, i.e., CNG, electric, and hybrids, leading passenger vehicle sales for the first time. But upon a closer look, some confounding factors emerge that also warrant caution about the figures. First, July 2026 itself was a strong month, with the August numbers 6.4% lower, possibly due to the monsoon. Second, the number of vehicles retailed in rural areas grew 19.7% year on year over 15.1% in urban areas; passenger vehicles sales likewise increased 24.9% in rural areas versus 10.9% in urban areas. This could be due to rising disposable incomes and consistent state capital expenditure on semi-urban infrastructure. However, tractor sales have in the past indicated monsoon-related rural stress, and while their sales are virtually unchanged year on year, they declined 25% month on month. Together with two-wheelers and passenger vehicles selling well, the trend suggests that non-farm rural incomes and mobility could be strengthening more than capital spending linked to agriculture. Third, last year, the GST Council reduced taxes on small cars, motorcycles (up to 350 cc), three-wheelers, buses, and goods vehicles, so August 2025 sales growth dropped as buyers waited for the new rates from September.

reduced taxes on small cars, motorcycles (up to 350 cc), three-wheelers, buses, and goods vehicles, so August 2025 sales growth dropped as buyers waited for the new rates from September. Fourth, while CNG, hybrid, and electric powertrains beat petrol/ethanol vehicle sales by 1.1 percentage points, most hybrid vehicles still burn petrol while CNG itself is a fossil fuel. So the lead taken by alternative powertrains is not synonymous with a lead of non-fossil-fuel vehicles.

That said, petrol vehicles falling behind is still notable; the data also show that between August 2024 and August 2026, CNG and electric powertrains contributed most of the surge, implying that Indians are switching to alternatives that are cheaper to run, in light of the West Asia conflict and, to a lesser degree, concerns over ethanol blending. Next, the move away from petrol is uneven: three-wheelers are predominantly electric while two-wheelers catch up, and passenger cars' powertrains continue to diversify. And electrification continues to reflect rising consumer demand as much as industrial policy. Finally, FADA also reported that, despite record sales, dealers are holding 38-40 days of inventory against the recommended 21. So while the petrol era is far from over, the Indian automotive industry has commenced the mass-market integration of alternative powertrains. But that said, only if September–November preserves the gains in alternative powertrains after the base effect disappears, and dealer inventories return to normal levels, can August 2026 be considered a historic moment.

The Hindu, Page 10 — Growth spurt: alternative powertrains are now mainstream

★ STATIC & POLICY LINKAGE

- **FADA:** Federation of Automobile Dealers' Associations — the apex retail-auto body whose registration data proxies real demand.
- **Powertrain:** the system delivering power to the wheels — here CNG, battery-electric (BEV) and hybrid vs petrol/diesel/ethanol.
- **Why the shift:** lower running cost, GST rationalisation, fuel-security concerns (West Asia), and EV push (FAME, PM E-DRIVE, PLI).
- **Read the caveat:** record retail with rising inventory can signal a supply glut, not durable demand.

PRELIMS POINTER Alternative powertrains leading PV sales is a **first**; but a CNG/hybrid lead is **not** the same as a non-fossil-fuel lead — CNG is a fossil fuel and most hybrids still burn petrol.

Syllabus link: GS-3 — Indian economy; growth & development; infrastructure; energy transition and the effect of fuel prices & taxation on demand.

5

Rude lessons: India and the wariness of U.S. deals

GS 2,3

The Hindu · Page 10 · Editorial, GS-2 & GS-3

WHY IN NEWS

The **U.S.-Canada trade dispute** — between two economies integrated since 1965 — carries sharp lessons for India as it weighs its own trade arrangements with Washington.

Page No.10 , GS 2,3

Rude lessons

India should learn from Canada and be wary of deals with the U.S.

The U.S.-Canada trade dispute has a few sharp lessons for India. The two economies have been deeply economically integrated since at least 1965, when they established free trade in automobiles and their parts. This then widened into a full-fledged free trade agreement in 1989, which was expanded into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) about five years later. The economic integration between the U.S. and Canada has steadily continued and, by all accounts, has worked well for both economies. The target for the much smaller Canadian economy was to achieve economies of scale by producing vast amounts of a few products. According to Nobel laureate Paul Krugman, Canada accounts for 70% of the oil refined in the American Midwest, and supplies 60% of the nation's aluminium. It also supplies nearly all the types of lumber used in U.S. residential construction. Yet, despite this long and fruitful trade partnership, their economic relationship has fallen to a new low. Canada pulled out of negotiations over a new tariff deal citing last-minute insertions by the U.S. side. The U.S. has made a similar allegation against Canada. Canada recently levied reciprocal tariffs on the U.S. of up to 50% as a reaction to the 50% tariffs that the U.S. has imposed on imports from Canada. From September 29, the U.S. will

some dairy goods, and motorcycles. Statements by U.S. President Donald Trump are hardly conciliatory in nature.

The first lesson for India lies here: if this is how the U.S. treats a next-door neighbour, alliance member, and long-standing trade partner, India should not take for granted any favourable treatment that it might receive from the U.S. The second lesson is that barrelling ahead with trade deals might not always be the best plan. Before Canada, Malaysia also backed out of a deal it had signed with the U.S. It argued that once the U.S.'s reciprocal tariff system was deemed illegal, the benefit from a trade deal no longer outweighed the costs of opening up to the U.S. Despite the success of its recent trade pacts, India should weigh the same pros and cons when it comes to the U.S., especially since a deal might not be the end of the tariff pressure. India has faced this before. Despite the February 2026 agreement of 18% tariffs on imports from India, the U.S. has forged ahead with its forced labour and excess capacity investigations that could see tariff levels exceed that limit. India has done well to insist that a deal will not be struck until its advantage over its competitors is clear. The third lesson is that this advantage can vanish even after a deal is struck.

The Hindu, Page 10 — Rude lessons: India should be wary of deals with the U.S.

- U.S. and Canada built **auto free trade in 1965**, a full FTA in **1989**, and **NAFTA** about five years later — integration that worked well for both.

- Yet Canada **pulled out** of a new tariff deal citing last-minute U.S. insertions, and has levied **reciprocal tariffs of up to 50%** against 50% U.S. tariffs on Canadian imports.
- **Lesson 1:** if the U.S. treats a neighbour, ally and long-standing partner this way, India cannot take favourable treatment for granted.
- **Lesson 2:** barrelling ahead with deals may not pay — **Malaysia** also backed out once the U.S.'s reciprocal-tariff system was deemed illegal and the benefit no longer outweighed the cost of opening up.
- **Lesson 3:** the advantage can vanish even after a deal — despite a **Feb 2026 pact of 18% tariffs** on Indian imports, the U.S. pressed forced-labour and excess-capacity probes that could push levels higher.

★ NAFTA / USMCA — STATIC LINKAGE

- **NAFTA:** in effect **1994**; successor to the Canada–U.S. FTA; a **trilateral** pact including Mexico.
- Lowered tariffs on most goods/services and reorganised supply chains across North America, boosting auto competitiveness.
- Regional trade expanded more than **threefold**; it added rules on food safety, IPR and dispute settlement.
- Renegotiated as the **USMCA** (2020), reflecting the same politics of “fair” rather than “free” trade now facing India.

PRELIMS POINTER India–U.S. talks proceed under tariff pressure; the **Feb 2026 18% tariff** arrangement did not end further U.S. investigations — a deal is not necessarily the end of leverage.

Syllabus link: GS-2 — bilateral agreements involving India; effect of developed-country policies on India. GS-3 — external sector, trade & tariffs, WTO-related issues.

6

The global war on terror and an empowered Iran

GS 2

The Hindu · Page 10 · Shashank Ranjan (Col., retd.)

WHY IN NEWS

As West Asia stays mired in conflict, this analysis shows how the U.S.-led **global war on terror inadvertently emboldened Iran**, elevating it into a regional power now capable of confronting the U.S.

- Before 2001, Iran was **contained** by two hostile neighbours — the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam's Iraq; U.S. invasions removed both and installed friendlier governments.
- Analysts hold Iran **surpassed the U.S.** as the most influential power in Iraq, sharply improving its strategic position.

- The invasions fuelled the **Shia–Sunni** divide, seeding groups like al-Qaeda in Iraq (later **ISIS**); Iran backed Shia militias while Saudi Arabia backed Sunni groups – proxy warfare that entrenched Tehran.
- Iran built the “**Axis of Resistance**” – a network linking Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine – a “**ring of fire**” around Israel and forward defence via Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis and Shia militias.
- The **2011 Arab Spring** and U.S. withdrawal created vacuums Iran filled; the **IRGC / Quds Force** projected power, cementing the “**Shia Crescent**” from Iraq through Syria to Lebanon.

Page No.10 , GS 2

The global war on terror, an empowered Iran

As West Asia remains mired in conflict, it is worth examining how the United States-led global war on terror inadvertently emboldened Iran, elevating it to a regional power that is now capable of confronting the U.S. in the ongoing conflict.

Prior to 2001, Iran faced strategic containment from two hostile regimes: the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's Iraq. U.S. invasions toppled both governments, eliminating Iran's most dangerous neighbours. The new governments in both countries proved friendlier to Tehran. In Iraq, the fall of the Sunni regime led to a Shia-led government with deep ties to Iran, transforming an enemy into a strategic partner. According to analysts, Iran had surpassed the U.S. as the most influential power in Iraq, significantly improving its strategic position.

Sectarianism was the fuel

The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq created a chaotic environment in the region that fuelled sectarian conflicts centred on the Shia-Sunni divide. These developments provided fertile ground for the emergence of terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, which later evolved into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Regional powers took sides – Iran bolstered Shia militias in Iraq, while Saudi Arabia supported Sunni extremists. This sub-conventional proxy warfare entrenched Iran as a regional power broker, contrary to the overarching U.S. objective of isolating Iran.

ISIS, being ideologically anti-Shia, posed an unprecedented threat to Iran. This pushed Iran to become a central actor in the anti-ISIS coalition, deploying military advisers and mobilising allies across the region.

Iran consolidated its influence by becoming a key counter-terrorism player, exploiting power vacuums and using the crisis to strengthen its



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diplomatic position. Though the emergence of a shared enemy opened a narrow window for dialogue with the U.S., no synchronisation materialised, as President George W. Bush had famously labelled Iran part of the 'Axis of Evil' in his 2002 State of the Union address, alongside Iraq and North Korea, citing their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and support for terrorism.

The role of the 'Axis of Resistance'

However, from Iran's point of view, what mattered was the "Axis of Resistance" (the Axis) – a political, military, and social network linking Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. It was designed as a "ring of fire" around Israel, serving as a form of forward defence for Iran. In addition, Iran gained several buffer zones in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen through key Axis members such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, and Shia militias in Iraq. The Axis contributed to the emergence of the "Shia Crescent", an arc of Iranian influence extending through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

Iran gained international legitimacy for its military activities in Iraq and Syria. Groups such as Hezbollah became battle-hardened and politically entrenched. The Houthis in Yemen graduated from a local insurgent movement into a political insurgent group. In terms of military capabilities, Iran's primary focus was on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which controls the country's strategic assets and specialises in sub-conventional warfare, including the control of proxies. By comparison, Iran's conventional military received far less attention.

The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and the Arab Spring in 2011 created vacuums that Iran was uniquely positioned to fill. Iran invested

significantly in the Axis to gain an asymmetric advantage over the U.S. and Israel, as matching them on conventional military metrics was a difficult proposition for Tehran.

The "Forever Wars" in West Asia drained American resources and attention, allowing Iran to expand its influence unimpeded while reinforcing its hardline posture. The rise of ISIS paradoxically benefited Iran, which became one of the first and most critical military supporters of the Iraqi government in its fight against the group. Iran deployed its elite Quds Force to coordinate Baghdad's defence, cementing its influence over Iraq's security apparatus. In Syria, defending the Assad regime protected Iran's only major state ally and helped consolidate its supply routes to Hezbollah in Lebanon.



The transformation of Iran

The global war on terror fundamentally transformed Iran from a contained state into a dominant regional power. By removing hostile regimes, creating power vacuums, and unintentionally strengthening Iran's alliance network, U.S. actions produced outcomes diametrically opposed to their stated objectives.

The global war on terror enabled Tehran to project power in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. As a result, Iran's role as a pivotal broker was cemented, with lasting consequences for West Asian geopolitics.

Having benefited from these developments, Iran increasingly invested in the Axis while rallying domestic support around nationalism rather than religion. Iran's current resilience against the U.S.-Israeli offensive in West Asia could be viewed as a manifestation of the strategic advantages flowing from the global war on terror.

★ AXIS OF RESISTANCE & THE SHIA CRESCENT

- **Axis of Resistance:** Iran-led political-military network of states and non-state actors opposed to U.S.–Israel influence.
- **Members/proxies:** Hezbollah (Lebanon), Hamas (Palestine), the Houthis (Yemen), Shia militias (Iraq), and the erstwhile Assad government (Syria).
- **Shia Crescent:** arc of Iranian influence running Iraq–Syria–Lebanon.
- **IRGC / Quds Force:** elite arm controlling Iran's strategic assets and sub-conventional (proxy) warfare.
- **Net effect:** by removing hostile regimes and creating power vacuums, U.S. actions produced outcomes opposite to their stated aims.

PRELIMS POINTER The rise of **ISIS** paradoxically **benefited Iran**, which became a critical military backer of Baghdad and deepened its grip on Iraq's security apparatus.

Syllabus link: GS-2 — India and West Asia; effect of policies of other countries; regional groupings and the changing balance of power.

Test Yourself

Two Mains questions with model approach · Ten Prelims MCQs with answer key & rationale · Quick revision & trap-setters

MAINS — ANSWER-WRITING PRACTICE

Q1 · GS-2 · Governance & Health · 250 words / 15 marks

Front-of-pack warning labels are as much a problem of regulatory design as of public health. In light of the Supreme Court's recent observations on the FSSAI's proposed labelling regime, examine the challenges in operationalising nutrient-threshold-based warnings in India.

पैकेज्ड खाद्य पर सामने की ओर लगे चेतावनी लेबल जितना जन-स्वास्थ्य का प्रश्न हैं उतना ही नियामक अभिकल्पना का। FSSAI की प्रस्तावित लेबलिंग प्रणाली पर उच्चतम न्यायालय की हालिया टिप्पणियों के आलोक में, भारत में पोषक-सीमा आधारित चेतावनियों को लागू करने में आने वाली चुनौतियों का परीक्षण कीजिए।

APPROACH: Open with the FSSAI red-hexagon proposal and the SC's "how will you determine high?" question. Body — map the design challenges: setting scientific thresholds (ICMR-NIN 2024), the "≥2 nutrients" trigger, industry pushback, reformulation vs labelling, comparison with warning models (Chile's black octagons) vs traffic-light systems, and enforcement capacity. Add the public-health stake (children, NCDs, Eat Right India). Conclude: labels are necessary but must be legally defensible, science-anchored and simple.

Q2 · GS-2 · International Relations · 250 words / 15 marks

The global war on terror, conceived to dismantle transnational terrorism, instead reordered the balance of power in West Asia. Critically analyse, with reference to the strategic rise of Iran.

आतंकवाद के विरुद्ध वैश्विक युद्ध, जो सीमा-पार आतंकवाद को समाप्त करने हेतु आरंभ किया गया था, ने पश्चिम एशिया में शक्ति-संतुलन को ही पुनर्व्यवस्थित कर दिया। ईरान के रणनीतिक उत्थान के संदर्भ में आलोचनात्मक विश्लेषण कीजिए।

APPROACH: Set the 9/11 context and the U.S. aim to isolate Iran. Body — show the inversion: toppling the Taliban and Saddam removed Iran's containment; the Shia-Sunni churn and ISIS made Iran indispensable to Baghdad; the Axis of Resistance and Shia Crescent gave forward defence via Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis; 2011 vacuums and the IRGC/Quds Force projected power. Critically note the current strain under the U.S.-Israel offensive. Conclude on the paradox of primacy producing multipolarity and lessons for Indian strategy.

Q1

Consider the following statements about the FSSAI:

1. It is a statutory body under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
2. It functions under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution.
3. Its proposed front-of-pack thresholds are based on the ICMR-NIN Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

1. 1 and 2 only
2. 1 and 3 only
3. 2 and 3 only
4. 1, 2 and 3

Q2

With respect to the FSSAI's proposed warning label, which is correct?

1. It is a green traffic-light mark shown when high in any one nutrient
2. It is a red hexagonal warning shown when high in two or more nutrients of concern
3. It applies only to imported packaged foods
4. It is issued by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs

Q3

Consider the following about the PMLA, 2002:

1. It came into force in 2005.
2. The Directorate of Enforcement is the agency empowered to investigate offences under it.
3. Suspicious transactions are reported to the Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

1. 1 and 2 only
2. 2 and 3 only
3. 1 and 3 only
4. 1, 2 and 3

Q4

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) is responsible for enforcing which of the following?

1. Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002
2. Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999
3. Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

1. 1 and 2 only
2. 1 and 3 only
3. 2 and 3 only
4. 1, 2 and 3

Q5

The “Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024” referenced in the FSSAI label debate were issued by:

1. World Health Organization
2. ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition
3. Food Corporation of India
4. NITI Aayog

Q6

Regarding the U.S. after 9/11, consider the following:

1. The 2003 invasion of Iraq removed a buffer between Iran and the Gulf monarchies.
2. The U.S. completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021.
3. The war on terror strengthened, rather than isolated, Iran's regional position.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

1. 1 and 2 only
2. 2 and 3 only
3. 1 and 3 only
4. 1, 2 and 3

Q7

The “Axis of Resistance”, in the West Asian context, is best described as:

1. A NATO-led counter-terror coalition
2. An Iran-led network of state and non-state actors opposed to U.S.-Israel influence
3. A UN peacekeeping arrangement for Syria
4. A Gulf Cooperation Council security pact

Q8

Consider the following about NAFTA:

1. It came into effect in 1994.
2. It was a trilateral pact including the U.S., Canada and Mexico.
3. It was later renegotiated into the USMCA.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

1. 1 and 2 only
2. 2 and 3 only
3. 1 and 3 only
4. 1, 2 and 3

Q9

With reference to the recent FADA vehicle-registration data, which is correct?

1. Petrol vehicles recorded their highest-ever share
2. Alternative powertrains (CNG, electric, hybrid) led passenger-vehicle sales for the first time
3. Urban sales grew faster than rural sales
4. Dealers reported inventory below the recommended level

Q10

The term “Shia Crescent” refers to an arc of influence running through:

1. Egypt–Libya–Tunisia
2. Iraq–Syria–Lebanon
3. Turkey–Greece–Cyprus
4. Saudi Arabia–Yemen–Oman

ANSWER KEY & RATIONALE

Q1 · (b)

Q2 · (b)

Q3 · (d)

Q4 · (d)

Q5 · (b)

Q6 · (d)

Q7 · (b)

Q8 · (d)

Q9 · (b)

Q10 · (b)

Q1 (b) — FSSAI is statutory under the FSS Act, 2006 and works under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (not Consumer Affairs); thresholds follow ICMR-NIN's 2024 guidelines.

Q2 (b) — The proposal is a red hexagonal front-of-pack warning triggered when a product is high in two or more nutrients of concern — fat, sugar or salt.

Q3 (d) — All three are correct: PMLA in force from 2005, enforced by the ED, with suspicious transactions reported to FIU-IND.

Q4 (d) — The ED enforces PMLA (2002), FEMA (1999) and the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act (2018).

Q5 (b) — The Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024 were issued by the ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition.

Q6 (d) — All three hold: Iraq 2003 removed the Iran-Gulf buffer, the Afghan withdrawal ended in Aug 2021, and the war on terror strengthened Iran.

Q7 (b) — The Axis of Resistance is an Iran-led political-military network of states and proxies opposed to U.S.-Israel influence.

Q8 (d) — NAFTA (1994) was a trilateral U.S.-Canada-Mexico pact, later renegotiated as the USMCA (2020).

Q9 (b) — Alternative powertrains led PV sales for the first time; rural outpaced urban and dealer inventory (38-40 days) exceeded the recommended 21.

Q10 (b) — The Shia Crescent denotes the arc of Iranian influence through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

QUICK REVISION RECAP

FSSAI: statutory (FSS Act 2006), Min. of Health; red hexagon when high in ≥ 2 nutrients; thresholds from ICMR-NIN 2024; flagship Eat Right India; Chairperson + 22 members (1/3 women).

PMLA/ED: PMLA in force 2005; ED (est. 1956) enforces PMLA, FEMA, FEOA; proceeds of crime; FIU-IND; Adjudicating Authority & Appellate Tribunal.

9/11 at 25: regime-change wars (Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, Libya 2011); Afghan exit Aug 2021; primacy-through-force eroded unipolarity → multipolar order.

Auto/FADA: August registrations +17.5% YoY; alternative powertrains led PV sales for the first time; rural > urban; watch the base effect & 38-40-day inventory.

Trade: U.S.-Canada tariff war (up to 50%); NAFTA 1994 → USMCA 2020; India's Feb-2026 18% tariff pact did not end U.S. probes.

Iran: Axis of Resistance ("ring of fire"), Shia Crescent (Iraq-Syria-Lebanon), IRGC/Quds Force; U.S. wars removed its containment.

PRELIMS TRAP-SETTERS

Trap: FSSAI is **not** under Consumer Affairs — it is under the Ministry of **Health & Family Welfare**.

Trap: PMLA was **enacted in 2002** but came into **force in 2005** — both dates are examinable.

Trap: A CNG/hybrid lead is **not** a non-fossil-fuel lead — CNG is a fossil fuel and most hybrids still use petrol.

Trap: NAFTA (1994) preceded the **USMCA** (2020); do not treat them as unrelated agreements.

Trap: The Afghan withdrawal was completed in **August 2021**, not 2020 (the Feb-2020 Doha deal only committed to withdrawal).

MAINS — MODEL ANSWER SKELETONS

Q1 · FSSAI labels. Intro: FSSAI's red-hexagon front-of-pack proposal & the SC's "how do you define high?" query. **Body (design challenges):** (i) setting scientific thresholds via ICMR-NIN 2024 & the "≥2 nutrients" trigger; (ii) industry pushback and the reformulation-vs-labelling debate; (iii) choice of model — warning octagons (Chile) vs traffic-light (UK) vs star ratings; (iv) enforcement, small-manufacturer capacity, litigation risk. **Public-health stake:** NCDs, childhood obesity, Eat Right India. **Conclusion:** labels must be simple, science-anchored and legally defensible.

Q2 · GWOT & Iran. Intro: 9/11, the U.S. aim to isolate Iran, and the paradox that followed. **Body (the inversion):** (i) removal of the Taliban & Saddam ended Iran's containment; (ii) Shia-Sunni churn & ISIS made Iran indispensable to Baghdad; (iii) the Axis of Resistance / Shia Crescent as forward defence via Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis; (iv) 2011 vacuums & the IRGC-Quds Force projecting power. **Critical note:** current strain under the U.S.-Israel offensive; primacy-through-force bred multipolarity. **Conclusion:** lessons for India's autonomous, interest-led West Asia policy.

TODAY IN ONE LINE — REVISE ALL SIX

1 · FSSAI: red-hexagon front-of-pack warning proposed; SC asks how "high" is defined — thresholds from ICMR-NIN 2024.

2 · PMLA/IRCTC: Delhi court frames PMLA charges against Lalu, Rabri & Tejashwi over hotel-lease irregularities.

3 · Post-unipolar world: 9/11 at 25 — U.S. primacy-by-force eroded the unipolar moment and hastened multipolarity.

4 · Auto/FADA: August registrations up ~17.5% YoY; alternative powertrains led PV sales for the first time.

5 · Trade: the India-Canada-U.S. episode — NAFTA→USMCA lesson that tariff wars and re-negotiation are now routine.

6 · Iran & GWOT: the war on terror removed Iran's buffers (Taliban, Saddam) and strengthened its regional position.

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Compiled by Sapna Chauhan · Revise the recap tonight, attempt the MCQs closed-book tomorrow.