

Editorial of the Day – 02.01.2026

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1. The Water Divide- on Water Contamination, Piped Water Supply in India

General Studies 2- Social Justice

Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

The Water Divide- Governance and Public Health Crisis

1. Introduction

Public health serves as a barometer for the State's commitment to its citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable. While India has made strides in expanding access to water, recent tragedies highlight a critical gap between access and quality. The provision of piped water is meaningless if rigorous testing at the point of delivery is absent, turning an essential service into a potential public health hazard.

2. The Mandate of Public Health and Basic Needs

Defining Development- The true measure of public health is not aggregate data but the well-being of the most vulnerable sections of society.

Rights vs. Privileges- Essential services such as safe drinking water, healthcare, education, clean air, and infrastructure are basic human necessities, not privileges reserved for the few.

State Responsibility- Institutions are duty-bound to work proactively—not just reactively—to protect citizens' lives.

Current Status- Despite economic growth, India is falling short on these critical human development indicators, necessitating urgent institutional introspection.

3. Case Study- The Indore Tragedy (Administrative Failure)

The Incident- In Indore, Madhya Pradesh, the consumption of municipality-supplied contaminated water led to a severe health crisis.

1. **Casualties-** At least four deaths, including an infant.

2. **Morbidity-** Over 2,000 people fell ill, with 200+ hospitalized and 32 admitted to the ICU.

The Irony of Governance- The tragedy is particularly stark because Indore has been repeatedly ranked as India's cleanest city under the Swachh Survekshan surveys. This exposes a disconnect between surface-level cleanliness and deep-rooted infrastructural hygiene.

Accountability Deficit- The response has been characterized by post-crisis blame-shifting and the formation of committees, which are insufficient excuses for the failure to prevent a predictable disaster.

4. Systemic Lapses- Recurring Crisis in Madhya Pradesh

Pattern of Negligence- The Indore incident is not an isolated accident but the second major water related crisis in the state within two months, indicating systemic rot.

Previous Precedent- In November, a jaundice outbreak occurred at a Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) campus near Bhopal due to contaminated water, leading to student protests.

Failure of Warning Systems- These repeated incidents highlight a lack of early detection mechanisms and public warning systems that could have prevented the loss of life.

5. Policy Gaps and Infrastructural Challenges

Mission vs. Reality- While flagship schemes like the Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission have improved coverage, water safety failures persist. Coverage targets are being met, but quality assurance is lagging.

Infrastructure Decay- The root causes of contamination are structural

1. Aging pipelines that have outlived their utility.
2. Sewage leaks infiltrating drinking water lines (cross-contamination).
3. Chemical contamination in groundwater sources.

Demographic Risk- With India's population nearing 147 crores, the supply of unsafe water is not just a local issue but a grave national health risk that can overburden the healthcare system.

6. The Way Forward

Quality over Quantity- Access to water must be legally coupled with assured quality. Testing must be rigorous at the **point of delivery**, not just at the treatment plant.

Infrastructure Overhaul- Immediate identification and replacement of old pipelines and sealing of sewage leaks are required.

Strict Enforcement- States must enforce strict water-quality norms with zero tolerance for negligence.

Proactive Governance- Implementation of early warning systems and regular public awareness campaigns regarding water safety.

7. Conclusion

The recurring water contamination crises in Madhya Pradesh serve as a grim reminder that public health goals cannot be met through accolades alone. Systemic reform, rather than post-disaster blame games, is the need of the hour. Ensuring safe drinking water through upgraded infrastructure and strict monitoring is non-negotiable to restore citizen trust and prevent further preventable deaths.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-water-divide-on-water-contamination-m-piped-water-supply/article70460544.ece>

2. Between India and EU, A Carbon Gap and an FTA Bridge

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Carbon Trade Challenge- CBAM and India's Competitiveness

1. Introduction

The global trade landscape is undergoing a structural shift where carbon footprints are becoming a decisive factor in economic competitiveness. Effective from January 1, 2026, the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) has begun imposing taxes on imports based on their embedded carbon emissions. This move directly impacts Indian steel and aluminium exports, necessitating a dual strategy of domestic industrial adaptation and robust international diplomatic negotiation.

2. Understanding the Impact on Indian Exports

Economic Exposure- The EU is a critical market, absorbing approximately 22% of India's total steel and aluminium exports.

Immediate Trade Compression- Even prior to the full implementation of the tax, the transition phase (involving data reporting) led to a 24% decline in exports in FY2025. This indicates that compliance costs and administrative hurdles are already acting as non-tariff barriers.

Price and Margin Erosion

1. Coal-based steel production in India faces the highest financial burden.
2. Realised export prices could potentially drop by 16–22%.
3. Although the legal liability to pay CBAM lies with the EU importer, the cost is effectively passed back to Indian exporters through demands for lower supply prices to offset the tax.

3. Structural Challenges for Indian Industry

Absence of Carbon Credit Offset- India currently lacks a comprehensive national carbon tax or a mature emissions trading system. Consequently, Indian exporters cannot claim "credits" against taxes paid domestically, forcing them to pay the full levy to the EU.

Verification Hurdles- CBAM requires rigorous verification of both Scope 1 (direct emissions) and Scope 2 (indirect emissions from electricity used). Verification must be conducted by ISO 14065-accredited auditors, creating a bottleneck for Indian firms.

The "Default Value" Trap- If Indian exporters fail to provide verified, actual emission data, the EU applies default emission values. These defaults are often 30–80% higher than actual emissions, artificially inflating the tax burden and severely damaging competitiveness.

Technology Disadvantage- The mechanism inherently penalizes coal-intensive production. Competitiveness will now shift toward manufacturers using cleaner methods like Gas-based Direct Reduced Iron (DRI) or Electric Arc Furnaces.

4. The Geo-Economic Debate- Climate Action or Green Protectionism?

Equity Concerns (CBDR)- Applying the high carbon prices of rich nations to developing economies violates the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). It forces developing nations to pay for carbon constraints without having the financial or technological legacy of the West.

Protectionist Trends- Steel and aluminium are rapidly becoming the most "protected" sectors globally. Combined with high US tariffs (50%), CBAM acts as a tool for industrial protection under the guise of climate action. Revenue vs. Emissions Critics argue that CBAM generates revenue for the EU and slows industrial growth in the Global South, while having a minimal impact on reducing actual global emissions.

5. Strategic Role of India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

Negotiation Lever- The ongoing FTA talks offer a critical window for India to negotiate transitional relief or specific exemptions for MSMEs and developing sectors.

Mutual Recognition- A key goal for India is to secure mutual recognition of carbon accounting frameworks. If the EU accepts India's reporting standards, compliance costs would drop significantly.

Finance and Tech Transfer- Negotiations must extend beyond trade facilitation to include climate finance and the transfer of low-carbon technologies, balancing industrial needs with environmental goals.

6. The Way Forward

Accelerate Domestic Carbon Markets- India must fast-track the operationalization of the Indian Carbon Market (ICM) under the *Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022*. A domestic price on carbon allows funds to remain in India rather than being paid as tax to the EU.

Technological Upgrade- Incentivize the steel and aluminium sectors to shift toward cleaner production technologies (Green Hydrogen, renewable energy integration) to naturally lower the CBAM burden.

Strengthen MRV Systems- Robust Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems must be established to ensure Indian data is accepted globally, avoiding the punitive "default values."

Diplomatic Push- Use FTA forums to ensure fair treatment, arguing against the imposition of non-tariff barriers that disproportionately hurt developing economies.

7. Conclusion

The implementation of CBAM is a wake-up call that emission efficiency is now as vital as cost competitiveness. India cannot afford passivity; it must aggressively pursue domestic policy reforms to establish its own carbon market while engaging in proactive diplomacy to protect its export interests. Survival in high-value markets like the EU now depends on green transitions as much as economic efficiency.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/between-india-and-eu-a-carbon-gap-and-an-fta-bridge-10450577/>