

Daily Editorial Analysis 2 January 2026

January 2, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com

Mandating Student Presence, Erasing Learning

Context

- The Delhi High Court's decision allowing law students to appear for examinations without fulfilling rigid attendance requirements has revived a critical debate in Indian higher education.
- While administrators fear a decline in discipline, the ruling exposes a deeper misunderstanding of how learning occurs.
- **Compulsory attendance equates obedience with learning**, reflecting a bureaucratic and paternalistic model of education.
- Rather than weakening academic standards, the judgment challenges universities to reconsider whether education should rely on surveillance or on curiosity, autonomy, and intellectual engagement.

The Fallacy of Attendance as a Measure of Learning

- Attendance is often treated as evidence of seriousness and commitment, yet physical presence guarantees neither attention nor understanding.
- **Attendance measures compliance, not intellectual engagement.** This fixation thrives where classrooms have been reduced to routine delivery of notes and predictable content.
- When teaching lacks vitality, institutions substitute inspiration with enforcement.
- Instead of examining why students disengage, responsibility is displaced onto attendance policies that conceal pedagogical inadequacies.

Pedagogy, Autonomy, and the Role of the Teacher

- Coercive education produces neither depth nor seriousness. Meaningful pedagogy demands confidence in the teacher's ability to create intellectual value.
- Absence should provoke reflection, not punishment. This view aligns with Paulo Freire's rejection of the banking model of education, which treats students as passive recipients.

- For Freire, learning emerges through dialogue, questioning, and shared inquiry. **Education thrives on autonomy and dialogue**, not compulsion.
- Compulsory attendance undermines this vision by privileging discipline over thought.

Exemplary Teaching and the Power of Voluntary Engagement

- The history of education demonstrates that great teachers never relied on enforcement.
- Figures such as Isaiah Berlin, Terry Eagleton, Germaine Greer, Christopher Bayly, and Frank Kermode drew students through intellectual craftsmanship, originality, and passion.
- Their lectures were meticulously prepared, emotionally resonant, and intellectually provocative. Students attended not out of obligation but anticipation.
- Such teaching rendered absence unnecessary by making learning compelling.

Learning Beyond the Classroom

- Transformative learning often occurs when institutional rigidity dissolves.
- Reading Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey within natural landscapes or engaging with Thoreau's Walden outdoors allows texts to emerge as living provocations rather than static artefacts.
- Students interpret, debate, and reflect independently.
- These experiences reveal learning in its most fundamental form, rooted in curiosity, dialogue, and personal engagement rather than prescribed metrics.

Contemporary Knowledge and the Obsolescence of Coercion

- In an age of digital archives, open-access scholarship, and artificial intelligence tools, compulsory physical presence appears increasingly outdated.
- Leading global universities trust students' intellectual maturity and rely on pedagogical quality rather than surveillance.
- Their authority stems from confidence in teaching, not monitoring. In contrast, Indian universities have become burdened by bureaucratic overreach and administrative control.
- Mandatory attendance functions within this framework as a tool of pacification, restricting autonomy and critical inquiry.

The Philosophical Stakes of the Attendance Debate

- The attendance debate is fundamentally philosophical. It asks whether universities regard students as autonomous thinkers or as wards requiring constant supervision.

- Institutions that prioritise attendance over engagement betray their purpose of cultivating critical minds capable of questioning society.
- Coercion emerges where pedagogy lacks confidence. The High Court's ruling challenges this erosion by restoring trust in students' intellectual agency.

Conclusion

- By separating attendance from examination eligibility, the Delhi High Court affirms a foundational educational principle: **Intellectual engagement cannot be legislated.**
- Learning flourishes only where freedom, curiosity, and dialogue are central. The ruling compels educators to rethink teaching itself and encourages institutions to replace coercion with creativity.
- If embraced earnestly, it offers Indian higher education **an opportunity to reclaim the university as a space of inquiry**, discovery, and intellectual vitality rather than bureaucratic discipline.

Mandating Student Presence, Erasing Learning FAQs

Q1. Why does compulsory attendance fail as a measure of learning?

Ans. Compulsory attendance measures physical presence and compliance but does not guarantee intellectual engagement or understanding.

Q2. What educational model does the essay criticise through the attendance debate?

Ans. The essay criticises a bureaucratic and paternalistic model that prioritises control over curiosity and autonomy.

Q3. How does Paulo Freire's philosophy relate to the argument against compulsory attendance?

Ans. Paulo Freire's philosophy emphasises dialogue and critical inquiry, which are undermined by coercive attendance policies.

Q4. Why did renowned teachers not need to enforce attendance?

Ans. Renowned teachers attracted students through intellectually compelling and well-crafted teaching rather than administrative compulsion.

Q5. What broader opportunity does the High Court ruling create for universities?

Ans. The ruling creates an opportunity for universities to rethink pedagogy and prioritise meaningful engagement over surveillance.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) - Implications for India's Steel and Aluminium Exports

Context:

- From 1 January 2026, the European Union (EU) will effectively impose a **carbon-linked import tax** under the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) on select carbon-intensive products, including steel and aluminium.
- Though certificate payments begin in 2027, the price impact starts immediately in 2026, significantly affecting Indian exporters.
- This marks a **structural shift** in global trade, where carbon intensity becomes a determinant of competitiveness.

What is CBAM:

- CBAM is the EU's instrument to extend its carbon pricing regime (EU Emissions Trading System – ETS) to imports, preventing carbon leakage (shifting production to countries with weaker climate norms).
- **Covered sectors (Phase I):** Steel, Aluminium, Cement, Fertilisers, Electricity, Hydrogen (and more sectors likely to be added).
- **Key objective:** It will ensure a level playing field between EU producers and foreign exporters by pricing carbon emissions embedded in imports.

How CBAM Works:

- **Basis of taxation:** CBAM liability depends on –
 - Plant-level carbon emissions during production.
 - EU carbon price (equivalent to €80 per tonne of CO₂):
 - Only Scope 1 (direct fuel) and Scope 2 (electricity) emissions are counted.
 - No company-wide averages; only the exact supplying plant matters.
 - Emissions from mining, transport, or product use are excluded.
 - **Who pays:**
 - EU importers officially buy CBAM certificates.
 - Actual burden is passed to Indian exporters through lower prices and tougher contracts.

Impact on Indian Steel and Aluminium Exports:

- **Shrinking margins:**

- 16–22% reduction in realised prices.
- **Example:**
 - Blast Furnace–Basic Oxygen Furnace (BF-BOF) steel emits almost 2.4 tonnes CO₂/tonne
 - CBAM cost equivalent to €192 per tonne
 - Exporter bears €95–€133 per tonne after cost pass-through
 - €600 sale price falls to €467–505
- **Export decline:**
 - In FY2025, India exported \$5.8 billion worth of steel and aluminium to the EU — 24% lower than the previous year — despite no carbon tax.
 - The decline began after new EU rules took effect in October 2023, requiring exporters to report plant-level carbon emissions under CBAM’s transition phase.
 - Compliance costs, data gaps, and verification hurdles forced many Indian firms to scale back exports well before CBAM formally became a tax.

Compliance and Verification Challenges:

- Mandatory plant-level emissions reporting.
- Risk of default CBAM values (30–80% higher than actual emissions) if data is missing.
- From 2026, data must be verified by ISO 14065 / EU-approved auditors.
- Limited availability of eligible Indian auditors.

Impacts:

- **On contracts and trade practices:**

- Renegotiation of long-term contracts.
- Introduction of CBAM adjustment clauses, dual pricing (base price + CBAM-linked price), and price revisions linked to changes in EU carbon prices.
- Reduced bargaining power of Indian exporters.

- **Production routes and differential impact:**

- CBAM rewards cleaner production –
 - Highest burden: Coal-based BF-BOF steel
 - Moderate burden: Gas-based DRI
 - Lowest burden: Scrap-based / Electric Arc Furnace (EAF) steel

- **Equity and protectionism concerns:**

- EU carbon price (almost €80) applied uniformly, even to developing countries.
- **Comparison:** China's carbon price is equivalent to 10% of EU level. India has no nationwide carbon tax.
- Raises concerns of climate inequity, disguised protectionism, and revenue generation under the garb of climate action.
- **Irony:** Steel and aluminium (equivalent to 10% of global emissions) are now among the most protected sectors in developed economies (EU CBAM + US 50% tariff).

Challenges for India:

- Absence of a national carbon pricing mechanism.
- High dependence on coal-based steel.
- Weak carbon accounting and verification ecosystem.
- Risk of losing EU market share (22% of India's steel and aluminium exports).
- Slower industrial growth with minimal global emission reduction impact.

Way Forward:

- **At the international level:** Seek CBAM resolution or exemptions in India-EU FTA negotiations. Push for differentiated responsibilities reflecting development levels.
- **At the domestic level:**
 - Strengthen carbon accounting frameworks.
 - Build capacity of emissions auditors.
 - Support transition to gas-based DRI, scrap-based or electric arc furnace (EAF) steel
 - Encourage green steel through incentives, technology upgrades, and financing.
 - Prepare exporters for data discipline and contract restructuring.

Conclusion:

- CBAM is not a temporary compliance hurdle, but a fundamental reordering of global trade rules where carbon becomes a trade currency.
- For Indian steel and aluminium exporters, continued access to the EU market will depend on accurate emissions measurement, verified data, cleaner production routes, and strategic trade negotiations.
- In the emerging low-carbon trade regime, competitiveness will be defined not only by cost efficiency, but by carbon efficiency — a critical insight for India's industrial and trade policy going forward.

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) FAQs

Q1. What is the CBAM and why has the EU introduced it?

Ans. CBAM is an EU mechanism that taxes imports based on embedded carbon emissions to prevent carbon leakage.

Q2. How will CBAM impact India's steel and aluminium exports to the EU?

Ans. CBAM is likely to reduce Indian exporters' realised prices by 16–22%, weaken bargaining power, etc.

Q3. Why does the absence of a nationwide carbon pricing mechanism in India increase CBAM's burden on Indian exporters?

Ans. Since India does not price carbon domestically, EU importers cannot claim deductions, forcing Indian exporters to bear the full CBAM charge.

Q4. Why is plant-level emissions data critical for Indian exporters under CBAM?

Ans. CBAM is based on verified plant-specific Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions, and lack of data leads to inflated default values.

Q5. In what way does CBAM influence production choices and industrial strategy in India?

Ans. CBAM incentivises a shift from coal-based BF-BOF steel to cleaner routes such as gas-based DRI to remain globally competitive.

Source: IE

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/daily-editorial-analysis-2-january-2026/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.