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SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT EDITORIALS

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(GS Paper II - International Relations)
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(GS Paper II - Polity)

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1. GULF'S GEOPOLITICAL PREDICAMENT CANNOT BE SOLVED. IT CAN ONLY BE MANAGED

(GS Paper II - International Relations)

This editorial 'Gulf's geopolitical predicament cannot be solved. It can only be managed' was published in **The Indian Express** on 25th Mar 2026, highlights the enduring **power asymmetry** between **Iran** and the Arab Gulf, which makes regional stability manageable but not permanently solvable.

Structural Roots of the Gulf Predicament

- The core fault line is the **power asymmetry** between **Iran** and the Arab Gulf, with Iran too large and Gulf neighbours too small to create a stable equilibrium on their own.
- Gulf Arabs therefore rely on **external balancers**, chiefly the **United States**, making Gulf security vulnerable to political shifts in Washington.
- The numbers reflect this imbalance: Iran's **90 million** people far exceed the **27 million** citizens of GCC states.
- Persia is a **unified state**, while the Arab Gulf is divided among several **kingdoms**, sustaining Iran's ambition to dominate the region under both monarchy and theocracy.

Historical Continuity of Iranian Assertiveness

- Iran's regional ambition predates **1979** and was not created by the **Islamic Republic**; the Shah had already intensified hegemonic instincts before the revolution.
- Before 1971, Iran seized **Abu Musa** and the **Tunbs**, claimed Bahrain as its 14th province, and sent troops to Oman's Dhofar to entrench itself as the Gulf's security arbiter.
- The Shah built the region's strongest **military force** in the developing world and positioned Tehran as a regional **gendarme** with American support.
- The **Islamic Revolution** changed ideology, not geopolitical ambition; Khomeini fused Persian nationalism with **Shia doctrine** while preserving Tehran's regional drive.

Regional Responses and Strategic Blowback

- The Gulf Arabs created the **GCC** in **1981** to resist post-revolutionary Iran, but internal divisions kept it weak and ineffective.
- Backing **Iraq** in the Iran-Iraq War contained Iran temporarily, but Saddam's **1990 invasion** of Kuwait exposed the double-edged nature of that strategy.
- The US-led expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait in **1991** did not resolve the imbalance; it merely replaced Iraqi protection with direct **American presence** in the peninsula.
- Gulf support to **radical Sunni** forces against Iranian influence backfired after **September 11, 2001**, prompting the US destruction of the Iraqi state and handing Tehran major geopolitical advantage.
- Iran then spent years consolidating a **Shia corridor** from **Tehran** to Beirut, while its proxies expanded influence and the Gulf Arabs confronted an Iranian sphere stretching from the Zagros to the Mediterranean.
- The rise of Iranian power also drove quiet **Israel-Gulf** rapprochement, adding a new **strategic wrinkle** to the regional balance.

Why the Crisis Can Only Be Managed

- The US, Israel, and Gulf Arabs want credible **deterrence** against Iran's **missile** and nuclear capabilities and seek limits on Iranian proxies and interference.
- Iran, however, demands recognition of its right to develop **nuclear** and **missile** technologies, guarantees against American attack, an end to US bases in Arab states, war compensation, and a veto over Hormuz governance.
- Iran is too strong to **ignore** but not strong enough to impose unilateral **dominance**, while Gulf Arabs cannot balance it independently and remain dependent on US security.
- No other power, including **Russia**, **China**, late Europe, or India, can replace Washington as the Gulf's ultimate security guarantor.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

India's strategic stakes in the Gulf

- **Energy security remains vital: Saudi Arabia** and the **UAE** continue among India's major suppliers of crude oil and other hydrocarbons, making Gulf stability central to India's energy security.

- **Diaspora interests are substantial:** The **UAE** and **Saudi Arabia** host some of the largest Indian expatriate communities, giving the region direct importance for India's social and consular priorities.
- **Remittance dependence remains significant:** States like **Kerala** and **Telangana** remain closely linked to incomes earned by Indian workers in Gulf economies, making regional instability a domestic concern too.
- **Maritime vulnerability is high:** The **Strait of Hormuz** carries a significant share of India's energy imports and commercial shipping, so disruptions there can quickly affect trade and prices.
- **Balancing diplomacy is necessary:** India engages **Iran** through **Chabahar** while also deepening ties with Israel, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, requiring a carefully calibrated regional approach.
- **Strategic autonomy is regularly tested:** During crises, as seen in **Operation Sankalp**, India must protect its interests without being drawn into the rivalries of competing regional blocs.
- **Connectivity interests are expanding:** Projects like **Chabahar Port** and the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor** show that the Gulf matters not only for security, but also for trade and connectivity.

2. Deepening global corruption as a pointer for India

(GS Paper II - Governance)

This editorial '**Deepening global corruption as a pointer for India**' was published in **The Hindu** on 25th Mar 2026, highlights how rising **corruption** is becoming a serious **governance** and economic challenge for India.

What the index reveals

- The **CPI 2025** signals global deterioration, with the average score falling to **42/100** and 122 of 182 countries scoring below 50.
- Only five countries now score above **80**, down from 12 a decade ago, showing weakening **oversight** and narrowing civic freedoms.
- India scored **39** and ranked **91**, keeping it in the lower half despite its growing economic weight.
- Over the past decade, India's score has stayed between **38 and 41**, indicating broad **stagnation** in governance perception.

- China scored **42**, Sri Lanka is close to India, while Bangladesh and Pakistan scored lower, placing India in a mixed **regional** position.
- India still trails several **upper-middle-income** democracies and many East Asian and European countries that improved through sustained institutional reform.

Why India's score remains weak

- The index measures perceived **public sector** integrity, not recorded incidents, using 13 sources covering procurement, regulation, judiciary, and safeguards.
- Weak **transparency** and limited **accountability** directly worsen governance credibility and corruption perceptions.
- Governance credibility now affects **investment decisions**, sovereign risk assessments, and long-term capital allocation.
- Corruption is therefore not just a legal issue but also a major **economic variable** shaping **development** prospects.

Economic costs of corruption

- Corruption raises **transaction uncertainty**, increases **compliance costs**, and diverts entrepreneurial energy toward rent-seeking.
- These distortions reduce **productivity** and discourage fresh **investment** across the economy.
- A widely cited global estimate places corruption costs at at least **5% of GDP**, or more than **\$2.6 trillion** in lost output annually.
- For India, research suggests direct losses of about **0.5% of GDP**, with total losses rising to **1-1.5%** when indirect effects are included.
- These losses absorb resources that could otherwise finance **infrastructure**, health, education, and industrial upgrading.

Compliance burdens and rent-seeking

- India's **compliance architecture** remains highly complex, with entrepreneurs operating under **26,134 imprisonment** provisions across business regulations.
- Even with the **SHAKTI** initiative in **Budget 2026-27**, a single pharmaceutical unit must navigate 998 compliance obligations before starting operations.
- Nearly **49%** of these obligations carry imprisonment clauses, showing the scale of regulatory burden.
- Excessive **criminalisation** raises business costs and expands **discretionary power**, creating fertile ground for rent-seeking.

Encouraging counter-trends

- India's **digital public infrastructure** has reduced welfare leakages through direct benefit transfers linked to bank accounts and digital identity.
- The **RBI-DPI** reached 516.76 in September 2025, up from **493.22** in March 2025, reflecting deeper payment digitisation.
- The **GST network** has increased **formalisation** and traceability in indirect taxation.
- **E-procurement** systems and digital payments have reduced opportunities for some forms of rent-seeking.
- These examples show that **technology** and institutional design can reduce discretion and improve administrative integrity.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Building an integrity-based governance architecture

- **Regulatory simplification must deepen:** Reducing excessive **compliance** burdens and imprisonment clauses, as flagged under the **SHAKTI** initiative, can curb discretionary power and limit routine rent-seeking.
- **Public procurement needs full transparency:** Wider use of **GeM** and its tools such as **e-bidding** and reverse e-auction can reduce opacity in government purchasing.
- **Institutional accountability must strengthen:** Bodies such as the **Lokpal** and vigilance systems need greater capacity and follow-through, especially when annual reporting itself is a statutory obligation.
- **Citizen grievance systems must become outcome-based:** Platforms like **CPGRAMS**, which has operated since **2007**, should move from complaint receipt to time-bound resolution and feedback-based accountability.
- **Whistleblower protection must become credible:** Stronger safeguards under the **Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014** are essential so corruption can be reported without fear of retaliation.

- **Civil service ethics must be reinforced:** Administrative reform led by **DARPG** should combine ethics training, conflict-of-interest rules, and service-conduct enforcement to improve integrity in decision-making.
- **Digital governance must remain humanly accountable:** Expanding **digital platforms** helps reduce discretion, but systems must also ensure auditability, grievance redress, and institutional oversight.

3. LONG DELAYS, BURDENED COURTS: WE NEED A NATIONAL MISSION FOR NEGOTIATED JUSTICE

(GS Paper II - Polity)

This editorial ‘**Long delays, burdened courts: We need a national mission for negotiated justice**’ was published in **The Indian Express** on 25th Mar 2026, highlights the need to expand **plea bargaining** and negotiated settlements to reduce **judicial pendency** and improve justice delivery.

Scale of the judicial burden

- India’s courts face enormous **pendency**, with about **4.76 crore** cases in district and subordinate courts, over 63 lakh in high courts, and over 92,000 in the Supreme Court.
- More than **80%** of the backlog lies in **district courts**, where ordinary citizens interact most directly with the justice system.
- Backlogs rose during the **pandemic** and continued despite reforms such as the **e-Courts project**, fast-track courts, and Lok Adalats.
- For victims, prolonged litigation becomes a second **trauma**; for undertrials, delay can mean years of **imprisonment** before conviction or acquittal.
- Slow justice weakens **contract enforcement**, raises business costs, and erodes **investment confidence**.
- A sluggish judicial process also makes the legal system appear weaker to citizens, creating a wider crisis of **legitimacy** and trust.

Why negotiated justice remains underused

- Drawing from **Cesare Beccaria**, the editorial stresses that certainty and speed of punishment matter more than sheer **severity**.

- **Plea bargaining**, introduced through the **2005 amendment** to the Code of Criminal Procedure, allows the accused to accept responsibility in return for lower charges or lighter sentencing.
- When used fairly, it can serve both the **state** and the **accused** by enabling quicker and more efficient resolution.
- Yet after two decades, plea bargaining has been adopted in less than **1%** of cases, showing serious **underutilisation**.
- Its weak use reflects procedural hesitation, poor **institutional incentives**, and low awareness among prosecutors, defence lawyers, and litigants.

Global experience and practical value

- Countries such as the **United States**, **United Kingdom**, Canada, and Australia show that negotiated resolution is often the most effective way to handle large case volumes.
- In the US, more than **90%** of criminal cases are reportedly settled through **plea deals** rather than full trials.
- Given India's huge caseload, neither a larger **judiciary** nor better **infrastructure** alone can solve the problem.
- Trials are often uncertain, expensive, and time-consuming, whereas plea bargaining offers a more **predictable** and mutually agreed path.
- Negotiated settlements allow the **police**, prosecutors, and courts to devote more time to serious and complicated crimes.
- Victims may also prefer quicker **closure** instead of a prolonged and emotionally draining **legal battle**.

Need for a national mission

- The editorial proposes a **national mission** for negotiated justice, called the **Samathi Samadhan Nyaya Mission**, to normalise plea bargaining and pre-trial settlements.
- A national **protocol** is needed to guide prosecutors, counsel, victims, and judges in a transparent and objective way.
- **Prosecutors** must be trained and institutions readied so fair deals can be negotiated within reasonable timelines.
- The fee structure for **lawyers** should be reformed so that settlement through negotiation becomes professionally viable.

- **Judges** should encourage early settlement methods and identify suitable cases before trials begin.
- Strong **protections** and oversight are essential to prevent coercion, extortion, and exploitation in the process.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Towards a citizen-centric and efficient justice delivery system

- **Judge strength must rise:** India still has only about **22 judges per million** people against the long-cited **50 per million** benchmark, which shows why vacancies and low capacity keep delays entrenched.
- **Court infrastructure needs modernisation:** The approved **e-Courts Phase III** seeks digital, online and paperless courts, showing that better records, e-filing, and e-Sewa Kendras are now central to faster justice.
- **Procedural delays must reduce:** Persistent adjournments and slow case progression continue to weaken timely justice, which is why faster case management and simpler procedures remain essential.
- **Legal aid must become meaningful:** **NALSA**, created under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**, exists to provide free legal services to weaker sections, but access must become earlier and more effective.
- **Police investigation must improve:** Delays in investigation and weak trial preparation often slow criminal justice, which is why specialised courts such as recent **NIA courts** are being pushed to accelerate sensitive cases.
- **Technology must support inclusion:** Digital reform is necessary, but even under **e-Courts Phase III**, technology must remain accessible to ordinary litigants through universalised e-filing, e-payments, and assisted service centres.
- **Alternative dispute resolution must expand:** **Lok Adalats**, given statutory status under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**, remain a practical way to settle pending and pre-litigation disputes outside full court trials.