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SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT EDITORIALS

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TOPICS:-

1. Holding up half the sky on India's farms

(GS Paper I - Society)

2. A seismic decision

(GS Paper III - Disaster Management)

3. Era of gentle trade is over. Global village is being replaced by law of jungle

(GS Paper II - International Relations, GS Paper III - Economy)

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1. HOLDING UP HALF THE SKY ON INDIA'S FARMS

(GS Paper I - Society)

This editorial 'Holding up half the sky on India's farms' was published in **The Hindu** on 12th Mar 2026, highlights how women sustain **India's agricultural economy** yet remain **undercounted, underpaid** and **insufficiently recognised** in data, wages and worker rights.

Women's work remains statistically invisible

- Official statistics do not fully capture women's participation across **agriculture**, livestock rearing, fisheries and allied activities.
- Large labour force surveys often miss women's work because it is **home-based**, seasonal, intermittent and mixed with care work.
- A woman handling child care alongside animal rearing or farm tasks may not even identify herself as a **worker**.
- This makes the scale, form and economic contribution of women's labour appear smaller than it actually is.

Rising participation, but weaker-quality employment

- Rural women's work participation has risen sharply, with **46.5%** of rural girls and women aged 15 and above in the workforce in **2023-24**, up from **35%** in 2011-12.
- Yet much of this increase reflects growth in **self-employment**, not expansion of secure or better-paid work.
- The share of rural women workers classified as self-employed rose from **60%** in 2011-12 to **73%** in 2023-24.
- Over the same period, regular and casual wage work declined, showing weaker access to formal **employment opportunities**.
- In agriculture, women formed nearly half of all **self-employed workers**, reaching **47.2%** in 2023-24.

Women now form nearly half the farm workforce

- In **2023-24**, at least **117.6 million** women worked in agriculture, including **21.7 million** hired workers, **95.1 million** self-employed and **0.8 million** regular workers.
- The estimated male agricultural workforce stood at **127.5 million**, placing women at roughly **half** the total farm workforce.

- The real share is likely even higher because of persistent **undercounting**.
- Yet only **10%** of rural women owned land, even though land remains the main productive asset in cultivation.

Village evidence shows women as core producers

- Village-level **PARI** surveys across four villages in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh show that crop cultivation depends heavily on women's labour.
- In family labour, women accounted for around one-third or more across villages, and when family and hired labour were combined, their share became the **major share** in parts of Tamil Nadu and eastern Uttar Pradesh.
- In **livestock rearing**, especially milk cattle and poultry, most routine tasks were performed by women.
- Where households owned cattle, a woman typically spent about **2 hours per animal**, showing the time intensity of this labour.
- With **40 million** rural households owning milch animals, around **40 million women** may have been engaged in animal rearing.

Low wages and weak returns define women's earnings

- A woman agricultural worker earned less than **Rs 300 a day** in all four surveyed villages.
- In the Tamil Nadu villages, women's wages at about **Rs 290** were less than half of male wages, revealing a sharp **gender wage gap**.
- In the Uttar Pradesh villages, women's wages at around **Rs 242-276** were also lower, though the gap was narrower because male wages were lower too.
- Official data reflect a similar pattern, with the **Labour Bureau** reporting an average all-India daily wage of **Rs 384** for women in agricultural work in November 2025.
- Wages corrected for **inflation** have barely risen over the last decade.

Livestock and crop income also remain poor

- There are no official data on women's earnings from **livestock**, but estimated implicit daily earnings in the surveyed Uttar Pradesh villages were only around **Rs 100**.
- That was barely two-fifths of the prevailing agricultural wage, showing that women's labour in cattle rearing remains deeply **undervalued**.
- Returns from crop production were also low, averaging less than **Rs 16,000 a year** in one eastern Uttar Pradesh village and less than **Rs 24,000** in Palakurichi in Tamil Nadu.

- Even if half the crop income were apportioned to women, their actual earnings would still remain modest.

The broader picture

- Women now exceed men among **agricultural workers**, with **21.7 million** women workers compared to **19.7 million** men, a first-time shift in post-Independence India.
- Even so, women's wages remain low in absolute terms and marked by a wide **gender gap**.
- The larger failure lies in not correctly recording women workers and not ensuring them decent **wages** and full worker rights.

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Need for gender-responsive agrarian reforms

- **Recognise women as farmers and workers:** Policy must formally record **women's labour**, as over **53%** of e-Shram registrants are women in the unorganised workforce.
- **Expand women's land rights:** Stronger **land ownership** and joint titles are essential, as women operated only **11.72%** of total operated area in Agriculture Census 2015-16.
- **Ensure fair and equal wages:** Agricultural labour markets need **wage justice**, as the **Code on Wages, 2019** carries the principle of equal wages for all genders.
- **Improve access to productive resources:** Women need better **credit, inputs and extension**, as **DAY-NRLM** has supported over **4.6 crore** Mahila Kisans with improved farming methods.
- **Reduce drudgery through technology:** Gender-sensitive **farm mechanisation** can ease time poverty, as schemes like **NaMo Drone Didi** aim to support women-led agri-services.
- **Extend social security and worker rights:** Women in farm and allied sectors need stronger **worker protections**, as e-Shram now links informal workers with welfare, skilling and jobs.
- **Strengthen gender-disaggregated data systems:** Better **rural labour data** is vital, because undercounting still distorts women's actual contribution across agriculture and allied work.

2. A SEISMIC DECISION (GS PAPER III - DISASTER MANAGEMENT)

This editorial ‘A seismic decision’ was published in **The Hindu** on 12th Mar 2026, highlights how India needs a scientifically sound but practically implementable **earthquake zoning framework** that balances disaster resilience with affordability and execution realities.

Why the rollback matters

- The Centre’s rollback of the **Bureau of Indian Standards** revision follows strong objections to the proposed earthquake zoning methodology.
- The issue goes beyond technical mapping, because zoning shapes **urban planning**, disaster preparedness, infrastructure design and climate resilience.
- With India expanding cities, highways, dams, power systems, homes and offices, getting the zoning framework right has become increasingly critical.

Shift in methodology and the core dispute

- The debate centres on estimating likely earthquakes, their **intensities** and the readiness of the built environment to withstand them.
- Globally, many advanced and seismically active regions now use **Probabilistic Seismic Hazard Assessment** as a dynamic, probability-based framework.
- India has so far relied mainly on a simpler **fixed zoning model**, so the move toward a globally accepted framework is directionally sound.
- The conflict arises because the notified revisions were seen by some engineers and policymakers as too stringent in design and implementation terms.

Why the proposed revision triggered pushback

- The proposal introduced a new high-risk **Zone VI**, covering most of Kashmir, parts of the Himalayan belt, Kutch in Gujarat and the north-east.
- Urban planners fear such zoning could slow development and infrastructure activity in already fragile regions and push more housing into the **informal sector**.
- Since informal housing already accounts for nearly **80%** of India’s homes, cost escalation carries major social consequences.
- Estimates cited suggest a one-zone increase could raise costs by around **20%**, while a two-zone jump could raise them by nearly one-third.
- For projects such as metro rail, dams and power stations, the cost impact could be even higher.

Need for a wider and workable consensus

- Resistance came not only from the private sector but also from within government, including the Ministries of **Housing and Urban Affairs** and **Home Affairs**.
- Objections also involved institutions such as the **Central Water Commission** and the **National Dam Safety Authority**.
- The construction sector is already one of India's largest dispersed sources of **carbon emissions**, so zoning choices also intersect with climate considerations.
- A revised framework is necessary, but it must emerge through wider consultation across ministries, regulators and industry stakeholders.

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Balancing seismic safety with development realities

- **Scientific accuracy must guide policy:** Earthquake zoning should reflect **actual hazard levels**, as India's official framework still classifies the country into **Zones II-V** by seismic risk.
- **Affordability cannot be ignored:** Stricter **building standards** may raise construction costs, especially for low-income housing and small builders already facing thin margins.
- **Informal housing poses a major challenge:** Higher compliance burdens can push households toward **informal construction**, as India's housing market still contains a large informal segment.
- **Critical infrastructure needs higher resilience:** Assets like **dams, metros and power systems** need stronger seismic standards, as NDMA stresses audits and retrofitting of lifeline structures.
- **Regional development must remain viable:** Fragile regions such as the **Himalayan belt** and north-east cannot be denied development through impractical compliance burdens, even though these areas face high seismic risk.
- **Implementation capacity matters:** Stronger codes need matching **engineering capacity** and enforcement, as NDMA notes compliance by local bodies remains central to earthquake safety.
- **Consensus is essential for durability:** A workable framework needs **consultation across ministries, regulators and industry**, as NDMA's own earthquake guidelines were framed through stakeholder consultations.

3. ERA OF GENTLE TRADE IS OVER. GLOBAL VILLAGE IS BEING REPLACED BY LAW OF JUNGLE

(GS Paper II - International Relations, GS Paper III - Economy)

This editorial ‘Era of gentle trade is over. Global village is being replaced by law of jungle’ was published in **The Indian Express** on 12th Mar 2026, highlights how globalisation’s promise of **peace through interdependence** is giving way to weaponised trade, distrust and fragmented economic blocs.

From doux commerce to hard-edged protectionism

- The old belief in **doux commerce** held that trade softens conflict by creating mutual dependence and civilised exchange.
- That logic has weakened under **tariffs**, export controls and “Buy National” policies, which show the end of gentle trade.
- Economic ties now generate not just integration but also **strategic vulnerability**, as dependence on foreign partners is seen as a liability.
- The result is a world that is simultaneously integrated and fragmented, with the global marketplace turning into a front line of **geo-economic conflict**.

Why interdependence no longer guarantees peace

- The expectation that economic interest would swallow **geopolitical ambition** shaped the era of globalisation, but that promise proved fragile.
- Integration of rivals into supply chains did not reliably turn them into peaceful **stakeholders** in a shared global order.
- Interdependence created value, but also exposed states to **vulnerability**, especially when political decisions overrode commercial rationality.
- Countries that mistook mutual dependence for friendship discovered they had handed potential rivals the keys to their own **front doors**.

Supply chains, trust and the new trade logic

- The globalisation era chased lowest-cost efficiency on the assumption that sea lanes would stay open and rules would hold.
- That model has been replaced by the “**Armour-Plated Rule**”, where a single geopolitical shock can push supply chains into defensive retreat.
- The shift from “**offshoring**” to “friend-shoring” and “near-shoring” shows that firms and states now prioritise trusted partners over cheapest ones.
- **WTO** multilateralism is giving way to bilateral deals and a fragmented order whose costs are ultimately borne by consumers.

Trade as coercion, not exchange

- Commerce no longer operates as a neutral space between autonomous economic actors.
- **Semiconductors** can become diplomatic leverage, while critical minerals and tariffs are used to settle political scores.
- Trade has shifted from being an engine of growth to a tool of **attrition**, even when it imposes self-harm.
- The world has moved from trading to become richer together to trading so that rivals do not gain **strategic advantage**.

Civilisational and political consequences

- Protectionism may offer temporary security, but it abandons the civilising hope embedded in **18th century** liberal trade thought.
- When countries stop trading with “neighbours” and begin trading against **enemies**, incentives for mutual understanding shrink.
- The decline of gentle peace through commerce makes conflict more likely, reviving the warning that when goods stop crossing borders, **armies** may.
- The closing image is stark: the global village is being dismantled and replaced by a harsher world ruled by **fear**, suspicion and rivalry.

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Implications for India’s trade and strategic autonomy

- **Diversify trade partnerships:** India must widen **export markets** and sourcing networks, as recent FTAs like **UAE CEPA** reduce overdependence on single corridors.
- **Build resilient supply chains:** Economic strategy should prioritise **trusted value chains**, as the **India Semiconductor Mission** backs domestic capacity in a strategic vulnerability sector.
- **Strengthen domestic manufacturing:** India needs deeper **industrial capacity**, as **PLI** has approved applications across 14 sectors and boosted investment, production and exports.
- **Use trade policy strategically:** India must balance **openness and protection**, as selective industrial support now works alongside external trade engagement.

- **Protect critical sectors:** Areas such as **semiconductors** and critical minerals require special policy attention, as the **NCMM** was launched to secure strategic supply chains.
- **Preserve strategic autonomy:** India should engage multiple blocs without overdependence, as current policy mixes domestic capacity-building with diversified external partnerships.
- **Support rule-based but realistic engagement:** India must back **multilateralism** where possible, while adapting through bilateral and sectoral arrangements in an increasingly fragmented trade order.