



Sanskriti IAS



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SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT EDITORIALS

18th Mar 2026

TOPICS:-

1. Prison outbreak

(GS Paper II - Governance, GS Paper I - Society)

2. Why the affiliation system is outdated

(GS Paper I - Society)

3. India's GDP debate: Right questions, wrong numbers

(GS Paper III - Economy)

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1. PRISON OUTBREAK

(GS Paper II - Governance, GS Paper I - Society)

This editorial 'Prison outbreak' was published in **The Hindu** on 18th Mar 2026, highlights how **overcrowded prisons** and **weak prison healthcare** are creating a serious public health risk for inmates.

Prison health crisis and overcrowding

- **Prisoners' right to health** remains intact, yet prison ailments are treated only when they become inconvenient.
- Between **August 20, 2025** and **March 9, 2026**, around **92 inmates** at Jalpaiguri Central Correctional Home were infected with **HSV**, and **7 died**.
- Though **HSV** is common in the general population, overcrowded and poorly cared environments can trigger encephalitis, which is often fatal.
- Jalpaiguri Home's **171% occupancy** made hygiene and isolation difficult.
- **2023 Prison Statistics of India** showed district prisons in West Bengal with occupancy above **160%**, while Kandi Sub-Jail had historically crossed **400%**.
- Overcrowding is a persistent structural feature of India's correctional system, not merely a result of foreign national inmates in one State.

Disease burden inside prisons

- In **2023**, **30% of inmates** in 10 Kerala prisons had skin diseases caused by humidity and lack of personal space.
- A **2023 Lancet Public Health** study found prisoners in India **five times** more likely to develop **tuberculosis** than the general population.
- In **2025**, the **Home Ministry** ordered prison screening camps as unventilated settings enable rapid **TB** spread.
- Nagpur and Indore central jails had major **COVID-19** outbreaks.
- **India Justice Report 2025** noted **HIV prevalence** among inmates is significantly above the national average due to shared equipment and weak entry screening.

Institutional and staffing deficits

- **Mandatory, comprehensive medical screening** could detect infections before they become dangerous.
- The **India Justice Report 2025** flagged a **43% vacancy** in medical officers, leaving inmates per doctor at **2.6 times** the **Model Prison Manual** norm.

- India has only **25 psychologists** for **5.7 lakh inmates**, indicating severe mental health capacity deficits.
- Effective outbreak control requires prison integration with the **National Health Mission** and adequate health-worker deployment.
- The **Manual's standards** need uniform enforcement across States.

Decongestion and justice-linked remedies

- West Bengal's **2020** temporary release of thousands of undertrials in South 24 Parganas District Correctional Home and Baruipur Central Jail showed overcrowding can be reduced through administrative action.
- Cases involving **undertrials**, who form the majority of inmates, need fast-tracking.
- Wider **bail** and **non-custodial alternatives** are needed for minor offences.
- Faster repatriation of **foreign nationals** can also reduce prison crowding.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Way Forward for Humane and Health-Centric Prison Reform

- **Recognise health as a right:** Prison health must be treated as a rights issue, as the **Supreme Court** linked prison reform to dignity in *Inhuman Conditions in 1382 Prisons*.
- **Reduce overcrowding urgently:** Decongestion is essential because overcrowding worsens hygiene and care, with all-India occupancy previously noted at about **130%** by **NCRB/PRS** references.
- **Strengthen medical staffing:** Prison healthcare needs adequate doctors and trained staff, a gap repeatedly flagged in prison-reform discourse and in the **Model Prison Manual, 2016**.
- **Expand mental-health services:** Humane custody requires psychological care too, yet prison reform frameworks still show weak emphasis on mental-health capacity and specialised support.
- **Institutionalise disease screening:** Early screening is vital in closed settings, as **COVID-19** outbreaks in Indian prisons exposed how fast infections can spread in confinement.
- **Use decongestion measures:** Faster bail review and release mechanisms should be used more actively, as **Under Trial Review Committees** were set up in every district for this purpose.
- **Integrate prisons with public health:** Prison care should align with wider health systems and standards, as the **Model Prison Manual** and **NHM-style** health system strengthening both stress institutional coordination.

2. WHY THE AFFILIATION SYSTEM IS OUTDATED

(GS Paper I - Society)

This editorial ‘**Why the affiliation system is outdated**’ was published in **The Hindu** on 18th Mar 2026, highlights how **India’s university affiliation system** has become **inefficient, rigid and incompatible** with college autonomy and quality improvement.

NEP vision and phased transition

- **NEP 2020** envisages a new regulatory system that will gradually phase out **college affiliation** over **15 years** through graded autonomy.
- Universities are expected to mentor affiliated colleges so they build capacity in **curriculum, teaching, assessment, governance, finance**, and administration.
- Colleges must achieve minimum standards, secure **accreditation** benchmarks, and become autonomous degree-granting institutions.
- The reform requires nationwide effort and sustained **government support**.

Why the affiliation model has become outdated

- The affiliation system long provided centralised control and administrative stability, but now hinders **growth, autonomy, and quality** in colleges.
- Universities grant affiliation under **UGC** guidelines to maintain standards in curriculum, examinations, infrastructure, and faculty quality.
- Affiliation is not one-time; it is initially granted for **one year** and renewed annually or periodically.
- The system is now marked by **systemic inefficiency, academic rigidity**, and administrative barriers that slow college progress.

Administrative overload on universities

- Universities, especially **State universities**, are affiliated with hundreds of colleges and must manage exams, evaluation, curriculum design, compliance, and academic oversight.
- Heavy administrative workloads divert attention from core functions such as **research, innovation, faculty development**, and collaboration.
- Universities increasingly function as bureaucratic bodies rather than institutions expanding knowledge for students and faculty.

Loss of autonomy and academic flexibility

- Affiliated colleges must follow university rules on **syllabi, examination patterns**, and administrative instructions.

- This dependency prevents colleges from designing courses suited to local needs, industrial demand, and emerging market trends.
- Uniformity comes at the cost of **creativity**, specialised courses, modern pedagogy, and interdisciplinary initiatives.
- The result is a stifling of institutional differentiation and innovation.

Slow curriculum reform and weak standardisation

- Under the affiliation model, curriculum revision requires prolonged consultations, committee meetings, and approvals from academic bodies.
- This delay makes course content outdated by the time reforms are implemented, especially in fast-changing fields like **engineering** and **technology**.
- Though the model seeks standardisation, actual delivery varies sharply because infrastructure gaps remain large across colleges.
- Many colleges face weak laboratories, poor library facilities, outdated equipment, and shortage of qualified teachers.
- Students graduating from colleges under the same university may still emerge with very different levels of **skill** and **competence**.

Suggested alternative

- Instead of affiliations, colleges may be encouraged to participate in the **National Institutional Ranking Framework** and **National Board of Accreditation** processes.
- The future of higher education lies in empowering institutions with **autonomy**, **flexibility**, and capacity to innovate freely.
- The editorial holds that the affiliation system can no longer provide the conditions required for progressive educational aspirations.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Way Forward for Autonomy-Driven Higher Education Reform

- **Implement graded autonomy:** Colleges should move steadily from **affiliation** to autonomy, as NEP 2020 proposed phasing out affiliation over **15 years**.
- **Build college capacity:** Universities must mentor colleges in curriculum, governance and administration before autonomy, as envisaged for future **degree-granting colleges** under NEP 2020.

- **Reduce university overload:** State universities should be freed from excessive exam and compliance work so they can refocus on research, innovation and collaboration, the core NEP direction.
- **Enable curriculum flexibility:** Colleges need space to design locally relevant and interdisciplinary courses instead of rigid uniform syllabi, a shift aligned with the NHEQF reform vision.
- **Link autonomy with accreditation:** Institutional freedom should rest on quality benchmarks through NAAC or NBA, as UGC rules require accredited institutions for autonomous status.
- **Encourage differentiated growth:** Higher education should let colleges develop specialised strengths and innovative models, as NIRF and accreditation frameworks already assess institutional performance differently.
- **Shift to outcome-based regulation:** The system should rely less on routine affiliation controls and more on NIRF, NBA and accreditation-led quality assurance

3. INDIA'S GDP DEBATE: RIGHT QUESTIONS, WRONG NUMBERS

(GS Paper III - Economy)

This editorial 'India's GDP debate: Right questions, wrong numbers' was published in **The Indian Express** on 18th Mar 2026, highlights that **concerns** over **India's GDP measurement** are valid, but the paper under critique relies on flawed methods and exaggerated estimates.

Context and core dispute

- The debate centres on whether **India's GDP** accurately captures economic activity, especially after the **February 2026** national accounts methodology revision.
- The authors under critique claim systematic **GDP misestimation**, focusing on **deflator choice**, **informal sector** treatment, and use of **administrative data**.
- The response accepts measurement concerns as legitimate, but rejects the paper's empirical estimates as methodologically weak.

Deflator and proxy objections challenged

- Criticism of **WPI-based deflators** is not new; such choices arose from structural data constraints, especially weak annual informal-sector data and limited producer price information.
- Using **WPI** was presented as a pragmatic choice, not an arbitrary one, given the absence of a comprehensive **Producer Price Index**.
- The claim that **CPI** was the proper alternative is rejected because **CPI** mainly tracks retail prices relevant to private consumption, not production.
- The paper's objection to formal-sector corporate data as a proxy for informal activity is also questioned, since such proxy use had long reflected data limitations.

Informal sector estimation flaws

- The paper uses **unincorporated enterprise survey** data for only half the informal economy, excluding **construction**, then extends that performance to the whole sector to create a "**lower bound**".
- It also excludes **housing services**, though they form a substantial share of informal-sector **GVA** in national accounts.
- Using raw survey figures without these omissions understates informal performance and overstates formal-informal divergence.
- Claims of divergence from **official GVA growth** based on inter-survey comparisons overlook that national accounts rely only on **GVA per worker** from the unincorporated sector survey.

Use of corporate sales and MCA data

- The paper uses **corporate sales** as its benchmark to show GDP mismeasurement, creating circularity because the benchmark itself is under dispute.
- Corporate sales measure **turnover**, not **value added**, so wedges between sales growth and **GVA growth** can arise from input costs and productivity changes, not measurement error.
- Use of **MCA** data is defended because the database provides comprehensive actual coverage, unlike survey-derived estimates such as **ASI**.
- Relying solely on **ASI** data for organised manufacturing corrections is therefore rejected.

Structural changes after 2015 ignored

- The paper does not adequately confront evidence that India's economy changed substantially after **2015**.
- Rapid growth of the **digital economy**, strong expansion in **financial services** and **insurance**, rise of **Global Capability Centres**, and policy-driven **formalisation** altered output patterns.
- These activities may not show up strongly in indicators like energy use, commodity trade volumes, or bank credit, yet still raise aggregate output.
- Correlation weakness with selected variables is therefore unsurprising when sectoral composition changes over time.
- Direct tax growth ignores major **tax policy** changes, notably the **2019 corporate tax rate reduction**.
- The **Index of Industrial Production** does not adequately capture structural shifts in manufacturing since **2011-12**.
- Bank credit data also miss the growing role of alternative financing in investment and consumption.

Overstatement of formalisation claims

- **Arvind Subramanian's** earlier work using yearly **GST** data found informal firms outside both **GST** and social security accounted for only about **7%** of turnover, though **87%** by number.
- Firms within the **GST** net accounted for nearly **80%** of total turnover, suggesting documented formalisation as small firms register to access input tax credits from larger buyers.
- The paper's claim that the informal sector accounted for roughly **44% of GVA** and that formal-informal divergence sharply widened after **2015** is said to be weakened by the **2017-18 Survey**.
- If **80% of turnover** was already formal by late **2017**, and formalisation later accelerated, the informal share should have shrunk further.
- The paper does not reconcile its baseline assumption with this evidence.

Magnitude of alleged overestimation questioned

- The paper's estimate of annual GDP overstatement by **0.4 to 0.8 percentage points** is presented as quantitatively weak.

- Its most dramatic claim, that GDP was overestimated by **22%**, fails the empirical test of the official **February 2026** revision.
- That revision, produced by statisticians with full administrative access and without the paper's shortcuts, made only a modest adjustment.
- If the true overestimation were really **22% of GDP**, the official revision would have revealed a much larger gap.
- The gap between the paper's claims and the revision outcome is presented as too large to be explained away as minor detail.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Way Forward for Robust and Credible Economic Data Systems

- **Strengthen informal data:** GDP disputes will persist unless the **informal sector** is tracked through richer and more frequent surveys, as stressed in the **2026 GDP revision**.
- **Use right deflators:** **CPI** and **WPI** serve different purposes, so deflator choice must match the sector being measured, as recognised in the revised framework.
- **Avoid narrow proxies:** Raw **corporate sales** cannot substitute for value added, since national accounts measure **GVA**, not turnover.
- **Capture structural shifts:** GDP methods must reflect post-**2015** changes like digital expansion and new service activity, which the **new series** sought to incorporate.
- **Use MCA21 carefully:** **MCA21** remains important for private corporate estimates, but it must be interpreted with methodological caution.
- **Test big claims properly:** Large overstatement claims should be checked against the **February 27, 2026** benchmark revision, which used fuller administrative data.
- **Protect data credibility:** GDP debate is healthy, but trust depends on transparent methods and continual statistical improvement, as noted by the **2026 sub-committee**.