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SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT EDITORIALS

19th May 2026

TOPICS:-

1. Unlearnt lessons

(GS Paper III Economy)

2. Gender, caregiving, the law in Indian research funding

(GS Paper I Society)

3. For WTO to matter, it needs to recognise politics behind trade

(GS Paper III Economy)

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1. UNLEARNT LESSONS

(GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial ‘Unlearnt lessons’ was published in **The Hindu** on 19th May 2026, highlights India’s **inadequate strategic petroleum and gas reserves** amid global energy volatility.

India’s Energy Vulnerability

- Retail fuel hikes followed four years of price freeze, reflecting costly **crude oil** and heavy OMC **under-recoveries**.
- The Prime Minister’s appeal on fuel taxes overlooked deeper risks from **rupee depreciation** and rising **inflation**.
- India’s SPR holds 36.7–39 million barrels, covering only seven days of **consumption demand** at 5.5 mbpd.
- Combined OMC inventories and import cover raise stocks beyond 70 days, but remain inadequate for India’s **energy security** needs.
- India’s rise as the third-largest **automobile market** has intensified oil demand and external **supply vulnerability**.

Global Reserve Gap

- The U.S. built **strategic reserves** after the 1973 shock, with 714 million barrels, 18 times India’s stock.
- China’s nearly 900 million-barrel SPR shows stronger **reserve capacity** despite comparable **import dependence**.
- U.S. shale output of about 13 mbpd and commercial stocks keep cover above the **IEA norm** of 90 days.
- India’s gap with the U.S. and China exposes weak **buffer capacity** against price shocks and **supply disruptions**.

Gas Storage Deficit

- India’s 1.4 lakh tonnes of LPG storage covers barely half a day against daily **LPG consumption** of 80,000 tonnes.
- LNG security depends mainly on Petronet LNG and BPCL regasification stocks, without **underground storage** capacity.
- LNG disruption can affect fertiliser production, linking **energy vulnerability** with agricultural **input security**.

- U.S. and Chinese investment in underground LNG storage highlights India's weak **gas reserves** and poor **crisis preparedness**.

Strategic Autonomy and Crisis Learning

- The EU adapted after the Ukraine war by reducing **Russian gas** dependence through reserves, contracts and diversification.
- China's stockpiling helped cushion sanctions-related oil risks, strengthening **energy resilience** under American pressure.
- India would have gained greater **strategic autonomy** through larger reserves and lower exposure to external shocks.

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Demand-Side Energy Transition as a Long-Term Buffer

- **Transport diversification:** Faster electric mobility can reduce oil imports, as seen in Delhi's e-buses and India's FAME-supported two-wheeler push.
- **Ethanol blending:** Higher ethanol blending lowers petrol dependence and supports farmers, as seen in India's 20% ethanol-blending roadmap.
- **Public transport:** Metro, BRT and suburban rail can cut private fuel demand, as seen in Delhi Metro and Mumbai locals.
- **Freight efficiency:** Rail and waterways can reduce diesel intensity, as seen in Dedicated Freight Corridors and PM Gati Shakti logistics planning.
- **Renewable substitution:** Solar, wind and green hydrogen can reduce fossil dependence, as seen in Rewa Solar Park and National Green Hydrogen Mission.
- **Urban planning:** Compact cities, cycling tracks and transit-oriented development can curb commuting fuel, as seen in Pune's street-design and metro planning.
- **Strategic gain:** Lower demand complements SPR expansion by reducing import bills, inflation pressure and shocks like the 2022 crude price surge.

2. GENDER, CAREGIVING, THE LAW IN INDIAN RESEARCH FUNDING

(GS Paper I Society)

This editorial 'Gender, caregiving, the law in Indian research funding' was published in **The Hindu** on 19th May 2026, highlights the need for **gender-sensitive research funding** policies that address caregiving-related structural disadvantages.

Constitutional Basis for Gender-Sensitive Funding

- India's scientific ambitions are visible globally, yet **institutional culture** marginalises women researchers facing unequal domestic **caregiving burdens**.
- Age relaxation in research grants is constitutionally valid because **Article 15(3)** enables special provisions for women and children.
- **Article 16** supports equality of opportunity by allowing corrective measures against structural barriers in public **employment access**.
- **Article 51A(e)** strengthens the case for policy environments that reject practices undermining women's **dignity** and equal participation.

Legislative Gaps and Caregiving Burdens

- The **Maternity Benefit Act, 2017** gives 26 weeks' paid leave, but many researchers remain outside its formal coverage.
- Central government employees get 15 days' paternity leave under **CCS Rules, 1972**, but this excludes many externally funded researchers.
- Current legal frameworks focus on maternity, while weak **paternity provisions** keep caregiving policy centred on women rather than shared care.
- Post-childbirth return to research faces disrupted lab work, changed collaborations and missed **grant timelines**, making quick productivity unrealistic.

Evidence of Structural Disadvantage

- **AISHE 2021-22** shows higher education staff at nearly 61 lakh, with 57% male and 43% female representation.
- Women remain under-represented in faculty posts, especially in **science institutions**, while SERB data show lower application and success rates.
- Women entering postdoctoral careers often coincide with peak **domestic responsibilities**, creating measurable delays in publications and grants.
- Studies on dual-career faculty, including **Tata Institute** research, show women bear greater unpaid work despite professional status.

Judicial and Policy Rationale

- In **Vijay Lakshmi v Punjab University**, the Supreme Court accepted preferential provisions when they address substantive inequality.
- The Court distinguished formal equality from **substantive equality**, allowing women-specific measures that correct real disadvantage.

- Age relaxation in grants is not preferential treatment, but a **corrective tool** for accumulated research-caregiving disadvantage.
- SERB-type age relaxations help only at application stage, not during **childcare support**, maternity leave or re-entry funding.

Need for Layered Research-Funding Reform

- Excluding single fathers or men caring for ailing parents ignores documented **caregiving disruption**, requiring additional support layers.
- Strengthening women-specific provisions remains justified because Indian academia shows unequal **care burdens** and persistent gender gaps.
- Funding agencies should consider no-cost extensions, returning grants and flexible **milestone reporting** for documented caregiving periods.
- The **National Education Policy 2020** encourages flexibility and faculty wellbeing, but this has not become binding funding policy.
- European research councils show gender-neutral caregiving support and gender-specific provisions can improve **equity** without arbitrariness.

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Institutional Childcare and Research Infrastructure Reform

- **Campus childcare:** Universities need reliable crèches, as UGC rules and IIT Delhi facilities show childcare supports research continuity.
- **Re-entry support:** Returning researchers need bridge grants, as DST's Women Scientist Scheme supports women after career breaks.
- **Flexible milestones:** Funders should revise timelines when caregiving disrupts fieldwork, as SERB projects already allow justified no-cost extensions.
- **Research assistance:** Caregiving-linked project assistants can prevent delays, as maternity-related lab gaps affect PI-led experimental research.
- **Workplace design:** Hybrid meetings and predictable schedules reduce career penalties, as CSIR labs increasingly use flexible academic reviews.
- **Institutional accountability:** Grant agencies should assess childcare and re-integration support, as NAAC already evaluates institutional inclusiveness.
- **Equity outcome:** Age relaxation aids entry, but crèches, re-entry grants and flexible timelines sustain women's research careers.

3. FOR WTO TO MATTER, IT NEEDS TO RECOGNISE POLITICS BEHIND TRADE

(GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'For WTO to matter, it needs to recognise politics behind trade' was published in **The Indian Express** on 19th May 2026, highlights why **WTO reform** must address political, security and ecological realities behind trade disputes.

Development Agenda and China Shock

- The WTO's development mandate weakened as the **Doha Development Agenda** lost centrality after its launch in 2001.
- China's WTO entry created a **manufacturing surge**, with state-led policy and overcapacity hitting developing countries hard.
- Lower Chinese prices created a **double blow** by undercutting developing-country producers while aiding Northern consumers.
- Western backlash against China's **trade practices** may further harm developing economies caught in the spillover.

Security, Ecology and Wider Development Concerns

- Economic interdependence can be weaponised through **food-energy access**, chokepoints, cyber threats and surveillance misuse.
- National security must enter **trade equations** systematically because developing countries face fewer protective choices.
- Development cannot remain human-only, as **environmental damage** and animal-related harms expose flawed trade models.
- Growth models must honour **coexistence concerns**, since trade in wild animals and live exports has caused severe harm.

Why MC14 Failed to Deliver

- MC14 could not address old **DDA concerns**, especially because many issues exceed the scope of trade measures.
- Planetary rights remain absent from **WTO debates**, though ecological concerns increasingly shape development outcomes.
- Global publicity moved away from **trade matters**, making Geneva-based technical solutions less visible and politically weaker.
- Without political backing, technically sound **development solutions** become harder to implement through the WTO.

Reform Direction for a Relevant WTO

- WTO members must acknowledge **politics directly**, allowing differentiated and innovative solutions such as tiered MFN approaches.
- Reform must move beyond legalism, as narrow **economic expertise** cannot address power, ethics and interdisciplinary realities.
- A more inclusive WTO secretariat should draw from **historians**, political scientists, philosophers and natural scientists.
- Intellectual inclusion can enable a **paradigm shift** from compliance-led trade governance to politically aware development reform.

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India's Role in Rebuilding a Development-Centric WTO

- **Global South leadership:** India can mobilise developing countries on food security and policy space, as seen in **G-33** and **G-90** coalitions.
- **Food security:** India's public stockholding stance shows why WTO rules must protect MSP procurement and nutrition schemes like **NFSA**.
- **Industrial policy:** Developing countries need policy space for manufacturing and green jobs, as seen in India's PLI schemes.
- **Digital trade:** India can push balanced e-commerce rules on data and technology, as seen in its caution on the WTO e-commerce moratorium.
- **Dispute reform:** A credible WTO needs dispute settlement revival, as Appellate Body paralysis has weakened smaller economies' legal protection.
- **Climate equity:** India can oppose disguised green protectionism, as seen in concerns over the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.
- **Development balance:** A relevant WTO must combine openness with equity, as seen in India's demand for special and differential treatment.