



**Sanskriti IAS**



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# **SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT EDITORIALS**

**20th Mar 2026**

## **TOPICS:-**

- 1. Motions against Speaker, CEC point to a wider trust deficit. That is the real worry**  
(GS Paper II - Polity)
- 2. AI-powered tax governance in India and its challenges**  
(GS Paper II - Governance, GS Paper III - Economy)
- 3. Losing the way**  
(GS Paper III - Science and Technology)

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# 1. MOTIONS AGAINST SPEAKER, CEC POINT TO A WIDER TRUST DEFICIT. THAT IS THE REAL WORRY

*(GS Paper II - Polity)*

This editorial 'Motions against Speaker, CEC point to a wider trust deficit. That is the real worry' was published in The Indian Express on 20th Mar 2026, highlights how controversies around the Speaker and CEC reflect a deeper crisis of democratic trust.

## Trust deficit, not just Opposition protest

- Moves against the **Lok Sabha Speaker** and talk of impeaching the **Chief Election Commissioner** reflect a wider **trust deficit**, not merely Opposition anger.
- The issue is larger than present **incumbents**, because institutions are failing to rise above **partisan identities**.
- Office-holders are also failing to protect **institutional boundaries** from immediate political considerations.
- The ruling side's unwillingness to build a working relationship with the **Opposition** has made distrust a long-term condition.

## Why trust is central to democracy

- **Democracy** rests on a balance between **trust** and suspicion, where citizens and watchdog institutions keep power under scrutiny.
- This structure works only if citizens still presume that **institutions** retain meaning despite pressure and criticism.
- Trust requires that **power-holders** act with **restraint**, not arbitrarily or in bad faith.
- When trust in institutions declines, the basis of **democratic contestation** weakens.
- Neutrality of the **umpire institutions** is essential because political competition is natural in democracy.

## Institutional crisis beyond individuals

- The present issue concerns **institutions generally**, not only specific office-holders.
- **Investigating agencies** have already drawn disrepute for the mishandling of **constitutional autonomy**.
- **Constitutional watchdogs** are underperforming, and many institutions appear hollowed out or captured.

- Allegations of **judicial abdication** and the judiciary's sensitive response to criticism are symptoms of the same **crisis of trust**.
- Trust is central to the judiciary's **constitutional prestige**, yet distrust now appears to permeate all institutions.

### Misreading the real problem

- A **State of Democracy in South Asia** study had suggested that low trust is often associated with institutions having high **citizen interface**.
- In the absence of reliable **current data**, commentary ignores the deeper implications of trust erosion.
- Instead, blame is placed on the **Opposition** for allegedly maligning institutions by questioning autonomy and performance.
- Criticism of institutions through **media**, public trust, or institutional decline does not by itself destroy institutions.
- Such criticism often presupposes that the Opposition still believes **institutions** should function properly.
- The deeper danger begins when every dissenting voice is dismissed and only pro-regime **information dissemination** is treated as legitimate.

### Political project behind institutional decline

- Across three electoral victories, the **BJP's approach** to power is described as one of **supreme arrogance**.
- The first victory seemed electoral, but the idea of **Congress-mukt Bharat** later became an ideological belief.
- Electoral outcomes then came to be read as a **carte blanche** for building a new political culture.
- This approach encouraged the view that pre-existing **institutions** are obstacles to regime politics.
- Trust in institutions is therefore reshaped as an impediment rather than a democratic necessity.

### Conflation of party, state and society

- The ruling party has tried to turn the **state apparatus** into a weapon of **complete control**.
- It seeks to conflate the **party** with **society at large**, expecting to occupy the entire social sphere.

- In such a scheme, there is no autonomous **public opinion**, no independent scholarship, and no space outside the ruling establishment.
- These characteristics produce distrust between **government** and **Opposition**.
- They also actively welcome the **trust deficit** instead of correcting it.

### **Suspension of disbelief and democratic erosion**

- The puzzle deepens because citizens continue under a long **suspension of disbelief** despite visible hollowing of institutions.
- **Headline management** and sustained **narrative-building** have helped insulate this decline from scrutiny.
- The current crisis can be understood through delegitimising the **Opposition**, misreading electoral outcomes as regime-change mandates, and occupying the entire social sphere.
- It also requires making pre-existing **institutions** appear irrelevant and imposing the idea of **truncated democracy**.
- When citizens and institutions are pushed to accept this framework, **institutional trust** becomes a casualty.

## **BEYOND EDITORIAL**

### **Institutional reforms to rebuild democratic credibility**

- **Transparent appointments:** Selection of **Election Commissioners** needs wider credibility, as *Anoop Baranwal* led the Court to devise an interim appointment mechanism in **2023**.
- **Time-bound decisions:** Institutional trust falls when constitutional rulings are delayed, which is why *Keisham Meghachandra Singh* asked Speakers to decide disqualification pleas within **three months**.
- **Codified neutrality norms:** Presiding officers need clearer impartiality conventions, much like the **U.K. Speaker** resigns party affiliation on election.
- **Independent institutional culture:** Constitutional offices need safeguards beyond formal status, since credibility depends on conduct, not merely constitutional text.
- **Strengthened parliamentary conventions:** Democracies run on restraint as much as law, and Westminster practice gives the **Speaker** a convention-bound non-partisan role.

- **Protected dissent space:** Trust improves when criticism is treated as democratic feedback, not sabotage, a concern repeatedly raised in governance reform debates including the **Second ARC**.
- **Reasoned public accountability:** Constitutional authorities should explain key decisions more clearly, because opaque functioning accelerates distrust even when legality is formally intact.

## 2. AI-POWERED TAX GOVERNANCE IN INDIA AND ITS CHALLENGES

*(GS Paper II - Governance, GS Paper III - Economy)*

This editorial ‘**AI-powered tax governance in India and its challenges**’ was published in **The Hindu** on 20th Mar 2026, highlights how **AI-led tax governance** can improve compliance and revenue mobilisation but raises major **ethical**, legal, and institutional challenges.

### Context and rationale

- India’s **tax-GDP ratio** averaged **16.36%** during 2001-22, the lowest among emerging and developing economies.
- India loses about **4.3% of tax revenues** annually to tax evasion, making stronger tax administration critical.
- In this context, the Income Tax Department’s **Project Insight (PI)** uses **AI** and data analytics to improve tax governance and revenue mobilisation.

### Project Insight and its intended gains

- Launched in **2017** and fully operational in **2019**, PI seeks voluntary compliance, lower high-risk evasion, fairer enforcement, and reduced prejudice.
- Its **INTRAC** component analyses multi-source financial data such as banking, property, securities, credit-card, **GST** payments, and high-value purchases.
- This creates a **360-degree taxpayer profile** and detects mismatches between declared income and actual financial activity.
- The Compliance Management Centralized Processing Centre uses this information to improve behavioural compliance.
- Through **NUDGE**, taxpayers receive SMS or email prompts to correct returns where tax paid does not match economic activity.

- AI helps assess **risk profiles**, prioritise complex evasion cases, automate routine administration, and improve taxpayer services.
- It can also assist filing, answer queries through smart chatbots, and help prevent **tax scams**.

### Outcomes and revenue effects

- The PI initiative is beginning to show results after nudges and the updated-return feature encouraged voluntary corrections.
- Since **2020-21**, over **one crore revised returns** have been filed, yielding an additional **₹11,000 crore** in taxes.
- Of **19,501 taxpayers** contacted under a Foreign Income and Assets **NUDGE** campaign, **62%** corrected information in their returns.
- **30,161 tax filers** declared overseas assets worth **₹29,208 crore** and foreign income of **₹1,089 crore** from cryptocurrencies or virtual digital assets.
- A NUDGE campaign covering **6.25 lakh taxpayers** corrected false deduction claims of **₹963 crore** for political donations and led to **₹410 crore** in extra taxes.
- Average **tax refund** processing time fell from **93 to 17 days**.
- Using big data and AI, the ITD found restaurants had suppressed sales worth **₹70,000 crore** since **2019-20** through invoice deletion, bill-splitting, data wiping, and bill-value manipulation.
- Advanced countries such as **Australia, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States** have implemented similar AI-enabled tax platforms and generated additional revenue.

### Governance, legal and ethical concerns

- **Data provenance** is critical because AI outputs are only as reliable as the training data used.
- Complex but legitimate financial behaviour by variable-income professionals or joint-family structures can trigger **false positives**.
- Without accessible human review, taxpayers may be forced to prove the legitimacy of flagged patterns.
- Models trained on past enforcement data can reproduce **algorithmic bias**, concentrating fraud detection in particular taxpayer or regional groups.
- The Dutch **childcare benefits scandal** shows how algorithmic systems can amplify bias in welfare or tax enforcement.

- **Explainability** and due process are essential because taxpayers must know why they were flagged, how data was used, and how decisions were reached.
- Serious compliance decisions require a **human-in-the-loop** and a clear path to challenge outcomes.
- AI-led tax systems also expand risks to **data privacy** and security by concentrating sensitive financial and personal information.

### Institutional accountability gap

- India lacks an **AI ombudsman** to review contested decisions in tax administration.
- There is no stated requirement for **algorithmic impact assessments** or public reporting of false-positive and appeal-success rates.
- The absence of external audits of risk-scoring models weakens **accountability** and taxpayer trust.
- Without such guardrails, PI could become a hidden surveillance system that compromises fairness and legitimacy.

## BEYOND EDITORIAL

### Balancing tax efficiency with taxpayer rights

- **Preserve due process:** AI-led scrutiny must not reverse the burden of proof, especially when India already promises taxpayer fairness through the **Taxpayer's Charter** and **faceless appeal** reforms.
- **Ensure human oversight:** Serious compliance action should not rest only on algorithms, as even the editorial notes complex cases like variable income and joint-family finances.
- **Make systems explainable:** Taxpayers should know why they were flagged, in line with the **OECD AI Principles** on transparency and explainability.
- **Prevent algorithmic bias:** Risk models can unfairly target groups, as seen in the **Dutch childcare benefits** scandal that wrongly flagged thousands of families.
- **Protect data privacy:** AI-tax systems aggregate sensitive personal data, making safeguards essential under India's **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** and its **2025 Rules** rollout.

- **Create accountability mechanisms:** Independent audits and grievance redress matter because the editorial itself notes India still lacks an **AI ombudsman** for tax administration.
- **Build trust with efficiency:** Revenue gains will last only if digital tax administration stays fair, since the **OECD** now reports widespread AI adoption by tax administrations globally.

### 3. LOSING THE WAY

*(GS Paper III - Science and Technology)*

This editorial ‘**Losing the way**’ was published in **The Hindu** on 20th Mar 2026, highlights how **NavIC’s decline** reflects structural weaknesses in **ISRO’s satellite replenishment**, procurement, and governance ecosystem.

#### **NavIC’s operational deterioration**

- **NavIC** has launched 11 satellites since 2013, but only **three satellites** now remain capable of providing **PNT** services.
- A functional **PNT constellation** requires at least **four PNT-capable satellites**, leaving NavIC below operational threshold.
- India had four usable satellites until **IRNSS-1F** lost its atomic clock on **March 13**.
- NavIC’s first-generation satellites used Swiss-made **rubidium atomic clocks** from **SpectraTime**, which suffered repeated failures.
- **IRNSS-1F**, launched in **March 2016**, completed its 10-year design life just three days before its clock failed.
- Eight other satellites have been **decommissioned**, failed to reach orbit, or carry defective clocks.
- **NVS-02**, ISRO’s latest second-generation launch attempt, was aborted after the satellite was placed in the wrong orbit.

#### **Technical transition and replacement constraints**

- In **2018**, ISRO shifted to **indigenous rubidium atomic clocks** developed by the **ISRO-Space Applications Centre**.
- **NVS-01**, launched in **May 2023**, was the first satellite to carry the indigenous clock.
- All second-generation **NVS series** satellites are planned to use these indigenous clocks.

- Procurement remains difficult because the new-generation clocks face **supply and acquisition challenges**.
- ISRO has proposed fitting each satellite with **five atomic clocks** instead of three.

### **Institutional and governance weaknesses**

- NavIC emerged partly from the U.S. refusal to share **GPS** data during the **Kargil war, 1999**, and still functions largely as a defence programme under ISRO.
- Despite **2020 space sector reforms**, the absence of a **national space law** leaves ISRO acting as both designer and operator of NavIC.
- India lacks a civilian counterpart to the **GPS Directorate** or **EUSPA**, which separately manage GPS and Galileo constellations.
- This institutional gap has overstretched **ISRO's mandate** across design, operations, commercialisation, and strategic use.

### **Why replenishment is lagging**

- The constellation is degrading faster than it is being replenished because of **ISRO's poor launch rate**.
- The slowdown reflects pressures from **PSLV** issues, limited funding, and competing mission demands.
- The same budget must sustain **PNT satellites**, a human spaceflight programme, multiple earth-observation satellites, and **R&D** for new rockets.
- ISRO is also supporting start-ups that are still learning to launch rockets to **low-Earth orbit**.
- These pressures have reduced confidence in the plan to launch three more **second-generation satellites** in 2026.

### **Strategic and interoperability implications**

- The Union government has pushed electronics manufacturers to support the **L1 band** of the NVS series for better interoperability with **GPS**.
- At the same time, NavIC is expected to serve the requirements of the **armed forces**.
- Operational distress in the constellation weakens both civilian utility and strategic autonomy goals.

## **BEYOND EDITORIAL**

### **Need for a resilient and mission-ready space navigation architecture**

- **Thin redundancy:** NavIC's fall below the minimum **PNT threshold** shows weak backup, unlike **GPS**, which has over **30 operational satellites**.

- **Slow replenishment:** Replacement launches have lagged behind failures, while the **U.S. Space Force** continues inducting newer **GPS III** satellites.
- **Missing civilian oversight:** India still lacks a civilian institution like **EUSPA**, which manages Europe's user-facing services and programme security.
- **Operational overload:** **ISRO** remains stretched across multiple roles, unlike **GPS**, which uses specialised control and ground structures.
- **Weak external validation:** Unlike **Galileo**, India has no independent service-quality monitor like the **Galileo Reference Centre**.
- **Limited resilience features:** Navigation capability remains vulnerable when anti-jam and mission-assurance features are thin, unlike **GPS III** with stronger anti-jamming.
- **Shallow ecosystem depth:** Long-term autonomy needs stronger industrial and launch depth, as Europe is already planning **Galileo Second Generation**.