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SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT EDITORIALS

3rd Mar 2026

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- 1. Navigating volatile Af-Pak belt requires Delhi to be nimble**
(GS Paper II - International Relations)
- 2. New reality**
(GS Paper III - Economy)
- 3. Rethinking tax searches for the digital age**
(GS Paper III - Economy, GS Paper II - Governance)

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1. NAVIGATING VOLATILE AF-PAK BELT REQUIRES DELHI TO BE NIMBLE

(GS Paper II - International Relations)

This editorial 'Navigating volatile Af-Pak belt requires Delhi to be nimble' was published in **The Indian Express** on 3rd Mar 2026, highlights India's need for a **pragmatic and agile response** to escalating **Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions** in a volatile Af-Pak region.

Pakistan-Taliban rupture

- Pakistan's crisis stems from its long-standing effort to turn **Afghanistan** into a **vassal state**, a strategy now producing blowback.
- The **Taliban's victory**, once seen in Pakistan as policy vindication, has become a nightmare as Kabul now follows an independent line.
- The Taliban does not recognise the **Durand Line**, deepening friction over sovereignty, border control and militant movement.
- Pakistan accuses Kabul of backing the **TTP**, while the Taliban calls it Pakistan's internal problem and counters with charges over **ISKP**.
- Afghan hostility has sharpened Pakistan's already difficult challenge in its volatile **tribal belt**.

Escalation and its limits

- Pakistan has used **trade restrictions**, Afghan expulsions and periodic airstrikes to pressure Kabul, but these measures have not altered Taliban behaviour.
- Islamabad's hope of exploiting internal **Taliban fissures** has failed, despite persistent attempts.
- Hostilities intensified after Pakistan's airstrikes in **October**, then eased through outside mediation and a ceasefire effort.
- The latest flare-up followed fresh Pakistani strikes near the **Durand Line**, allegedly on militant hideouts, which the Taliban said killed civilians.
- The Taliban retaliated through attacks on Pakistani border posts, after which Pakistan escalated with **Operation Ghazab-il-Haq** and wider airstrikes.
- An all-out conflict is against both sides' interests because Pakistan may inflict damage from air but cannot secure decisive success.
- The Taliban is not a conventional military match, but would likely shift to **covert operations** and **guerrilla tactics** if war deepens.

International setting

- The international community has called for **restraint**, reflecting wider concern over regional destabilisation.
- China, worried about threats to **CPEC**, has earlier attempted mediation between the two sides.
- The **United States** signalled sympathy for Pakistan's losses while also backing its claimed right to defend itself.

India's strategic calculus

- India strongly condemned Pakistan's recent **airstrikes** and reaffirmed support for **Afghanistan's sovereignty**.
- The region's radicalisation and instability are linked to internal dynamics and the short-sighted policies of major powers.
- India cannot ignore the fallout because it has deep **civilisational links** with Afghans and a record as a **development partner**.
- India also remembers the 1990s, when Pakistan used Afghan territory to engineer terror against it.
- Delhi therefore cannot cede **strategic space** in Afghanistan to hostile forces.
- This explains India's pragmatic decision to upgrade engagement with the **Taliban government** despite past complexities.

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Implications for India's Security and Connectivity Interests

- **Terror spillover risk:** Escalating **Af-Pak instability** can revive cross-border militant networks, as seen in recent **TTP** violence near Waziristan and the Afghan border.
- **Prevent strategic vacuum:** India cannot cede **strategic space** in Afghanistan, as shown by the **IC-814** Kandahar hijack and the 2008 Kabul embassy attack.
- **Connectivity stakes:** Prolonged conflict can hurt **regional connectivity**, including India's western access plans built around the **Zaranj-Delaram highway** and Chabahar-linked routes.

- **China factor:** Beijing's concern for CPEC shows wider strategic stakes, with **Gwadar** and the corridor's western alignment tied to Afghan stability.
- **Protect development role:** India must preserve its image as a trusted **development partner**, as seen in the **Afghan Parliament** project and the **Salma**, now **India-Afghanistan Friendship, Dam**.
- **Calibrated Taliban outreach:** India's engagement with the **Taliban** reflects realism, as seen in the **Jaishankar-Muttaqi** contact alongside discussion on development cooperation.
- **Need agile regional strategy:** Delhi must pair **security vigilance** with diplomatic flexibility, much like its long-standing support for a sovereign, stable, Afghan-led order.

2. NEW REALITY

(GS Paper III - Economy)

This editorial 'New reality' was published in **The Hindu** on 3rd Mar 2026, highlights how **revised national accounts data improve** economic measurement but make India's fiscal targets harder to achieve.

Why the new series matters

- The new **national accounts series** updates the base year for **GDP** and **GVA** to **2022-23** from **2011-12**, replacing an outdated benchmark.
- It introduces methodological upgrades and wider data sources, improving the robustness of economic measurement.
- The **double-deflator approach** better captures real value added by separating inflation in intermediate goods and final output.
- Multi-sector company output is now allocated proportionately, improving **sectoral accuracy**.
- Household data will now be drawn annually from **ASUSE** and **PLFS**, instead of depending on extrapolations used in the old series.
- **Goods and Services Tax** data is incorporated, strengthening consumer-side estimation.
- New sources and methods improve measurement in historically hard-to-quantify sectors such as **agriculture** and the **informal sector**.

Growth picture under the revised data

- The new series projects **2025-26 GDP growth** at **7.6%**, higher than the **7.4%** estimate under the old series.
- Even with faster growth, the revised absolute size of the economy is lower than previously estimated.
- India's economy is now pegged at **₹345.47 lakh crore** in **2025-26**, about **3.3%** below the earlier estimate.
- The economy in **2023-24** and **2024-25** was also revised downward by **3.8%** each.

Fiscal implications of lower nominal GDP

- A smaller economy, along with **rupee depreciation**, places India currently at about a **\$3.8 trillion** economy, pushing the **\$5 trillion** target further away.
- Lower nominal **GDP** makes fiscal deficit and debt targets harder because these ratios are linked to nominal output.
- The Centre's commitments on reducing **fiscal deficit** and **debt ratios** thus become more difficult under the revised series.
- The editorial's core argument is that target-setting should be realigned to more accurate data rather than continued on outdated metrics.

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Policy Implications for Fiscal Planning and Credible Macroeconomic Management

- **Recalibrate fiscal targets:** Lower **nominal GDP** raises ratios mechanically, making the **4.3% fiscal deficit** and **55.6% debt-GDP** path harder to sustain.
- **More realistic Budget assumptions:** The government will need sharper **Budget projections**, because **2026-27 BE** still rests on a **₹53.47 lakh crore** expenditure plan.
- **Tax buoyancy reassessment:** Revised output estimates can alter readings of **tax buoyancy**, especially when **GST collections** are officially tracked against nominal GDP growth.
- **Expenditure prioritisation:** Tighter arithmetic may force harder choices on **capital expenditure** and subsidies, even with **₹12.22 lakh crore capex** and large food-fertiliser outlays.

- **Better sectoral policy design:** Improved measurement of **agriculture** and the informal sector can sharpen policy, with **ASUSE, PLFS** and **GST data** now feeding the series.
- **Strengthen policy credibility:** Accepting statistically robust revisions improves **macroeconomic credibility**, much like India's **2025 rating upgrades** rewarded fiscal discipline.
- **Align medium-term strategy:** India's growth and fiscal roadmap must now rest on revised **national accounts**, not older **2011-12 base-year** assumptions.

3. RETHINKING TAX SEARCHES FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

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

This editorial '**Rethinking tax searches for the digital age**' was published in **The Hindu** on 3rd Mar 2026, highlights the need to **constitutionally recalibrate tax search powers** for the realities of digital privacy.

Digital shift in tax search powers

- In **Vishwaprasad Alva vs Union of India (2026)**, the **Supreme Court** is examining how far tax search power can lawfully extend into citizens' digital lives.
- **Section 132** of the **Income Tax Act**, once aimed at premises and physical assets, now reaches **computer systems** and **virtual digital space** such as phones, cloud accounts and communication archives.
- A search design meant for cupboards and ledgers now seeks access to devices holding information far beyond tax liability.
- The case raises a constitutional issue larger than taxation, namely the reach of sovereign power into the citizen's informational sphere.

Privacy challenge to the old doctrine

- The petitioner relies on **Puttaswamy**, which recognised **informational privacy** as intrinsic to dignity.
- Digital devices differ qualitatively from ledgers because they hold years of intimate medical, professional and personal material unrelated to tax inquiry.

- Unrestricted digital access converts a specific fiscal search into a general exploratory intrusion, making it disproportionate to its aim.
- Executive-controlled authorisation and secrecy of recorded reasons weaken meaningful review under **Articles 14 and 21**.
- Doctrines that survived scrutiny in **Pooran Mal (1974)** require reconsideration in the post-**Puttaswamy** constitutional order.

State justification and enforcement logic

- The Union defends **Section 132** as a structured anti-evasion power grounded in information and a recorded **reason to believe** by senior officers.
- Courts, it argues, review only jurisdictional conditions to ensure relevant material exists, as reaffirmed in **Laljibhai Mandalia (2022)**.
- Technological change does not erase statutory discipline, but digital evidence can be erased, encrypted or transferred before summons operate.
- This fragility is used to justify anticipatory search under clause **(b)** as necessary for fiscal enforcement.
- The state position therefore treats **Pooran Mal** as continuing authority for intrusive search in the anti-evasion context.

Need for proportional digital safeguards

- The Bench's preliminary observations suggest the dispute concerns not the existence of search power but its **constitutional calibration** in the digital domain.
- The Court accepts both risks: digital evidence may be destroyed without notice, yet anticipatory searches under clauses **(b)** and **(c)** require higher scrutiny.
- A single device contains vast historical data, third-party networks, behavioural records and can be copied in full, magnifying constitutional concerns.
- Since investigative capacity has expanded into the digital sphere, safeguards must expand in equal measure.
- A constitutionally valid framework should require **particularised scope**, limiting authorisation to specified accounts, devices or data categories linked to the inquiry.
- It should impose a **necessity threshold**, allowing digital search only where less intrusive statutory measures are inadequate or likely to fail.
- It should enforce **temporal and subject limits**, segregation of privileged or unrelated third-party communications, and recorded, reviewable search processes.

Constitutional balance at stake

- Such safeguards do not disable enforcement; they align it with **constitutional proportionality**.
- The Court may either uphold the statutory scheme by reading in digital safeguards or require greater transparency in authorisation.
- What cannot be ignored is that digital searches intrude more deeply than physical predecessors.
- The case marks a constitutional transition from spatial searches to digital searches in India's fiscal jurisprudence.
- The future legitimacy of fiscal authority will depend not only on detecting evasion but on the restraint with which the state enters the citizen's **digital personhood**.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Need for a Rights-Based Digital Search Framework

- **Particularised warrants:** Digital searches should target specific **devices** or accounts, because unlike a locker, a smartphone stores years of personal data, a concern central to **Puttaswamy**.
- **Necessity threshold:** Search of **virtual digital space** should arise only where softer tools may fail, since **Section 132** is justified on anticipated non-disclosure and evidence risk.
- **Proportional access rules:** Authorities should copy only inquiry-linked **data**, not full digital histories, because **Puttaswamy** treats informational privacy as part of dignity and autonomy.
- **Protection of third-party rights:** A single device may hold others' **communications** and business records, so safeguards must reflect the **DPDP Act, 2023** concern for digital personal data.
- **Recorded and reviewable reasons:** Search approval must rest on clear **reason to believe** standards, as reaffirmed in **Laljibhai Mandalia (2022)** despite limits on reviewing sufficiency.
- **Temporal and subject limits:** Access should be confined to relevant **time periods** and transaction domains, because **Section 132** was framed for tax inquiry, not unlimited digital trawling.
- **Accountable digital governance:** Stronger safeguards would not weaken **revenue enforcement** but modernise it, just as **Pooran Mal** is now being revisited in a post-privacy constitutional era.