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SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT EDITORIALS

5th Mar 2026

TOPICS:-

- 1. On fertiliser prices, strategy, not firefighting**
(GS Paper II - Governance, GS Paper III - Economy)
- 2. Mind the expertise gap in NGT**
(GS Paper II - Governance)
- 3. Doubts over HPV vaccines are misplaced**
(GS Paper II - Governance, GS Paper I - Society)

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1. ON FERTILISER PRICES, STRATEGY, NOT FIREFIGHTING

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

This editorial 'On fertiliser prices, strategy, not firefighting' was published in **The Indian Express** on 5th Mar 2026, highlights the need for a **strategic response** to India's **fertiliser vulnerability** amid global geopolitical shocks.

Geopolitical vulnerability in fertiliser supply

- India imports about **four-fifths** of urea consumption, with nearly **40%** sourced from **West Asia**.
- Domestic urea is exposed because up to **85%** of feedstock comes from **Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait**.
- Import dependence is higher for **phosphatic** and **potassic** fertilisers and inputs like **rock phosphate, sulphur, ammonia, phosphoric acid**.
- Ukraine drone attacks on Russian oil refineries tightened supply, lifting world prices and the **Iran war** can disrupt gas shipments further.
- China was a major supplier earlier and until **2023-24** was India's largest supplier of **DAP**, adding another external risk layer.

Price freeze and distorted consumption

- Retail prices are frozen for **urea** at **Rs 5,922/tonne** since **Nov 2012** and **DAP** at **Rs 27,000/tonne** since **Covid**.
- Underpricing has encouraged unrestrained use, with urea sales rising from under **30 mt** in **2017-18** to a projected **40 mt** this fiscal.
- Import exposure and subsidy stress deepen when consumption expands without efficiency gains.

Shift from firefighting to targeted management

- Farmers should be discouraged from **over-application** and informed that India imports about half its **natural gas** requirement.
- India has limited domestic reserves of **rock phosphate, potash, elemental sulphur**, so efficiency is central.
- Suggested measures include **capping** urea and DAP consumption and promoting nutrient-use-efficient fertilisers via **drip** or **foliar** delivery.
- Subsidy design should move to **per-acre** support instead of product-specific support.

- **AgriStack** with farmer digital IDs linked to land records and cropping data is flagged as the enabling platform.

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Structural Reforms for Long-Term Fertiliser Security

- **Rationalise subsidy design:** India should shift from **product-based subsidy** to per-acre support, as **DBT** already tracks sales at PoS level.
- **Promote balanced nutrient use:** Policy must curb **urea overuse** and push balanced NPK, as **PM-PRANAM** rewards States for cutting chemical fertiliser use.
- **Cap inefficient consumption:** Highly subsidised **urea** and **DAP** may need calibrated limits, since retail urea prices remain frozen while demand keeps rising.
- **Expand efficient delivery modes:** Greater **drip irrigation** and foliar delivery should be scaled, as micro-irrigation raises nutrient-use efficiency and cuts wastage.
- **Leverage digital targeting:** **AgriStack** linked to land records and crops can enable targeted support, since Farmer IDs are designed to connect schemes to verified beneficiaries.
- **Reduce import vulnerability:** India must diversify **feedstock and inputs**, as domestic urea policy reforms still aim to lower import dependence over time.
- **Treat fertiliser as strategic policy:** Fertiliser security needs a **strategic lens**, as neem-coating and nano fertilisers show shifts from price control to efficiency tools.

2. MIND THE EXPERTISE GAP IN NGT

(GS Paper II - Governance)

This editorial '**Mind the expertise gap in NGT**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 5th Mar 2026, highlights how the National Green Tribunal's **weakening expert capacity** is undermining independent and effective environmental adjudication.

Mandate versus mixed record

- The **NGT Act, 2010** envisaged a watchdog combining **legal and ecological expertise** for stronger environmental governance.
- NGT interventions in **sand-mining** and **river pollution** stressed science-based standards and swift enforcement.
- Air-pollution directions relied on technical material, but impact was blunted by weak **implementation**.

Pattern flagged in project-clearance disputes

- Critics argue some rulings on infrastructure projects miss ecological realities and technical engagement.
- The newspaper's investigation says NGT ruled for developers in **14 of 15 cases (2020–2025)**, raising scrutiny needs.
- The government calls decisions case-merit based, but the pattern signals need for sharper review of **institutional design**.

Conflict-of-interest and staffing gaps

- Since **2016, 9 of 13 expert members** appointed reportedly held senior posts in the **environment ministry**.
- This raises **conflict of interest** concerns because NGT's appellate reach often covers government decisions.
- The Act requires **10–20 judicial members** and an equal number of **expert members**, but expert posts often stay vacant, weakening benches.

Why multidisciplinary expertise is non-negotiable

- Development-linked harms like displacement, pollution, groundwater depletion, biodiversity loss and waste mismanagement need **specialised knowledge**, not only legal interpretation.
- Expert pool drawn largely from the **Indian Forest Service** narrows capacity for today's complex scientific and economic assessments.
- Contemporary challenges need inputs from **scientists**, engineers, economists, urban planners and legal scholars to test competing technical claims.
- With **climate change**, environmental governance needs stronger risk assessment and adaptation planning capacity inside the tribunal.

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Reforms to Restore NGT's Institutional Credibility and Independence

- **Broaden expert recruitment:** The **NGT Act, 2010** allows experts from science, engineering and technology, so appointments should not rely on a narrow official pool.
- **Fill vacancies on priority:** The **NGT** must maintain parity because the Act requires equal **expert** and judicial members in hearings, with 10 to 20 of each overall.

- **Strengthen conflict safeguards:** Appointment norms should reduce dependence on recently retired ministry officials, since the Tribunal often hears appeals involving **MoEFCC** clearances and decisions.
- **Ensure bench diversity:** Cases on **sand mining**, glacial lakes or urban pollution need hydrology and ecology inputs, as recent NGT matters themselves show.
- **Institutionalise technical support:** The Tribunal should use independent scientific assessment for complex cases, as **cumulative impact assessment** questions increasingly arise before it.
- **Build climate-risk capacity:** Future adjudication must integrate **climate change** and adaptation concerns, since expert qualifications under the Act already include climate-change management.
- **Protect adjudicatory autonomy:** A stronger appointments framework is essential because the **NGT** was created as a specialised environmental forum, not a routine extension of executive departments.

3. DOUBTS OVER HPV VACCINES ARE MISPLACED

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

This editorial ‘**Doubts over HPV vaccines are misplaced**’ was published in **The Indian Express** on 5th Mar 2026, highlights that **HPV vaccination policy** should be driven by robust **evidence** and **surveillance**, not misinformation or anecdotal fears.

Why HPV vaccination matters

- Major scientific bodies including **ICMR** and **CDC** and about **160 countries**, recommend **HPV vaccination**.
- **HPV** accounts for most **cervical cancers** and also contributes to anal, oropharyngeal, vulvar, vaginal and penile cancers.
- While some countries recommend vaccination for men, there is near-universal consensus on vaccinating women due to higher risk.
- India has one of the highest burdens of **cervical cancer** globally, making prevention a high-stakes priority.
- Vaccines including **Gardasil** have shown effectiveness in large trials and real-world programmes involving tens of millions.

- Evidence shows sharp reductions in **HPV infection** and precancerous lesions and declines in cervical cancer where sufficient time has passed.

How to judge adverse events

- The editorial distinguishes evidence-led policy from cherry-picked fragments used to amplify fear.
- Adverse events occurring after an intervention do not prove it was the cause, including rare deaths in large populations.
- Scientific testing compares event rates between vaccinated and **control** groups, looking for statistically significant excess harm.
- The **2009** Indian study of seven deaths after vaccination raised concern, but investigations found no causal link.
- The report noted trial deficiencies, yet deaths were attributed to poisoning, drowning and **cerebral malaria**, not vaccination.

What safety monitoring shows

- Even though the **2009** study lacked a control arm, later large trials and post-licensure surveillance tracked safety outcomes.
- Large trials such as **Future I**, **Future II** and **Patricia** and surveillance for HPV vaccines including Gardasil, found no confirmed excess serious adverse events beyond expected patterns.
- **Syncope** is noted as more common among adolescents after vaccines generally, not unique to HPV shots.
- Rare adverse-event reports should be taken seriously, but isolated reports cannot outweigh broad evidence.
- Japan temporarily paused HPV vaccination after reports of pain or numbness, later found unrelated to the vaccine and resumed in **2021**.
- It is rational to demand an effective **adverse-effect monitoring** system, but irrational to treat anecdote as proof.

Choice, ethics and timing

- Concerns about vaccinating young girls against a sexually transmitted infection are framed as legitimate social questions.
- The programme is offered, not imposed and parents retain the right to refuse.
- The vaccine is ideally given at **9–14 years** to maximise benefit before high exposure risk.

- India has an opportunity to prevent thousands of future cancers and delaying uptake increases avoidable harm.

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Public Health Communication and Trust-Building Imperatives

- Counter misinformation fast: Public messaging must separate **temporal association** from causation, as the **2009 PATH** controversy found no causal link between the reported deaths and vaccination.
- Explain evidence standards: Communication should foreground **controlled trials** and surveillance, because the **CDC** reports no confirmed excess serious adverse events after HPV vaccination, apart from syncope patterns seen with many adolescent vaccines.
- Transparent adverse-event reporting: A credible **AEFI** system should publish findings regularly, since the **WHO** links HPV vaccination with continuous safety monitoring and programme review.
- Address social stigma: Outreach should frame HPV vaccination as **cervical cancer prevention**, not morality, because the **WHO** recommends it mainly for girls aged 9 to 14.
- Strengthen informed choice: The programme should stress **voluntary consent** and parental awareness, especially since Indian expert discussions supported adolescent-girl vaccination, not coercive rollout.
- Use trusted local channels: School and community health platforms can raise **awareness** better, as **Japan** resumed active recommendation in 2021 after renewed official communication on vaccine safety.