

EDITORIALS – 13TH JUL 2026

1. Five crore Indians wait when the courts take a break (GS Paper II Polity)

This editorial 'Five crore Indians wait when the courts take a break' was published in The Hindu on 13th Jul 2026, highlights how collective court vacations aggravate judicial delays and weaken access to timely justice.

Backlog and institutional shutdown

- Nearly three-fourths of prisoners are undertrials, sometimes detained longer than the sentence possible after conviction, undermining the presumption of innocence.
- By end-2025, over 5.39 crore cases were pending, including 4.76 crore in district courts, 63.6 lakh in High Courts and 92,000 in the Supreme Court.
- At the current disposal rate, a government study estimated nearly three centuries to clear the backlog, with some pending cases already exceeding 30 years.
- During its six-week summer recess, the Supreme Court operates only three or four vacation Benches weekly, largely restricting hearings to urgent matters.
- Judges require rest and time for reserved judgments, but collective vacations silence the institution for weeks instead of ensuring court continuity through staggered leave.
- The vacation calendar reflects a colonial legacy designed for British judges, while its 2024 renaming as "partial court working days" left roughly 190 sitting days unchanged.

Staggered leave and judicial capacity

- A Parliamentary Standing Committee in 2023 recommended rotating judicial leave and maintaining full Benches, echoing earlier proposals of the Law Commission and Justice Malimath Committee.

- Courts should function like hospitals, where employee leave follows a roster system without suspending essential public services or sharply reducing institutional capacity.
- Judicial vacancies remain serious, with about half of High Court seats reportedly unfilled, but further reducing already limited Bench strength during vacations worsens case delays.
- Appointments require cooperation between the government and collegium, whereas redesigning the vacation calendar lies largely within the judiciary's control.

Reducing litigation and using judicial expertise

- Lok Adalats settled over 2.59 crore cases in one national sitting and more than 23.5 crore within three years, demonstrating effective alternative dispute resolution.
- The Mediation Act, 2023 encourages pre-litigation settlement, while arbitration can remove commercial disputes from courts, but both mechanisms remain underutilised.
- A dedicated corps of retired judges could target major case clusters, set transparent disposal goals and ensure public accountability for progress.
- Staggering vacations addresses operational disruption, while mediation, arbitration and Lok Adalats tackle the deeper problem of excessive court dependence and mounting judicial pendency.

Beyond Editorial

Pendency as a Systemic Governance Failure

- Government litigation: The LIMBS portal recorded nearly 6.99 lakh Central government cases in July 2024, highlighting the need for stricter appeal screening.
- Judicial vacancies: Around 4,855 district-court posts were vacant in February 2026, showing that calendar reform alone cannot reduce pendency.

- Legacy cases: Bombay High Court had 3,847 cases pending beyond 30 years, requiring special age-based disposal plans.
- Digital management: CIS 4.0 and the National Judicial Data Grid can identify delay patterns and support court-wise pendency monitoring.
- Infrastructure deficit: The ₹9,000-crore infrastructure scheme supports courtrooms, lawyers' halls and digital facilities needed for faster disposal.
- Legal aid: NALSA's defence-counsel system and prison clinics can reduce prolonged detention caused by inadequate legal representation.
- Specialised capacity: Fast Track Special Courts recorded a 46.2% disposal rate in 2025, demonstrating the utility of dedicated judicial forums.

2. Insular incentive (GS Paper II Governance)

This editorial 'Insular incentive' was published in The Hindu on 13th Jul 2026, highlights how India's ethanol policy must balance import substitution with consumer fairness, resource efficiency and food security.

Economic and environmental concerns

- Producing E20 petrol can cost more than pure petrol when crude falls below \$70 per barrel, making claims of adequate consumer compensation misleading.
- Ethanol remains largely sugarcane-based, despite the crop's high water demand and fertiliser use in water-stressed Maharashtra and Karnataka.
- The policy's net benefit depends on whether lower crude imports, environmental gains and rural incomes outweigh higher production and consumer costs.

- Consumers bear higher pump prices, while administered procurement transfers benefits through oil companies and distilleries before reaching farmers.
- Higher feedstock prices cannot resolve structural causes of low farm incomes, including post-harvest losses and restricted market access.

Distortions in feedstock incentives

- Uniform ethanol rewards favour sugarcane, which has the largest installed processing base, rather than feedstocks supporting resource efficiency and food security.
- Irrigation, logistics and revenue-sharing agreements with ethanol producers and cooperatives could improve benefits without relying solely on higher feedstock prices.
- India has expanded maize and grain distillation, permitted surplus or damaged FCI rice, and supported plants processing agricultural residues such as rice straw.
- Maize and millets use less water than sugarcane, but maize requires substantial fertiliser, while millets contain less fermentable starch.
- Sweet sorghum offers lower water demand and a shorter growing season, providing a potentially more resource-efficient alternative to sugarcane.

Second-generation ethanol and policy integration

- Lignocellulosic biomass, including rice straw, wheat straw, maize stover and groundnut shells, can support second-generation ethanol production.
- 2G ethanol reduces competition with food crops, avoids dedicated cropland and can address stubble burning, though it remains technologically demanding and expensive.
- Government support could include residue-based premiums, collection and storage infrastructure, aggregator-distillery contracts, viability-gap funding and assured offtake.

- Ethanol policy must remain integrated with agricultural policy, rather than pursuing import substitution without considering crop choice, resources and rural incentives.
- Import substitution cannot justify forcing consumers to pay more for lower-mileage fuel than pure petrol.

Beyond Editorial

Lifecycle Sustainability of Ethanol

- Lifecycle assessment: NITI Aayog is comparing sugarcane, rice and maize ethanol across energy efficiency, emissions and resource consumption.
- Water footprint: Producing one litre of ethanol may require about 2,860 litres of water from sugarcane and over 4,600 litres from maize.
- Consumer cost: Ethanol's average procurement cost reached ₹71.32 per litre in July 2025, including transportation and Goods and Services Tax.
- Residue utilisation: Indian Oil's Panipat plant can convert two lakh tonnes of rice straw into three crore litres of ethanol annually.
- Emission savings: The Panipat project may avoid nearly three lakh tonnes of carbon-dioxide-equivalent emissions while reducing stubble burning.
- Technology support: The PM JI-VAN scheme supports second-generation ethanol plants, including residue-based projects at Panipat and Bathinda.
- Performance incentives: Government support should reflect verified carbon savings, water use and food-security effects rather than ethanol volume alone.

3. The making of Israel's retreat into isolation (GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial 'The making of Israel's retreat into isolation' was published in The Hindu on 13th Jul 2026, highlights how Israel's military-first policies are reversing regional normalisation, straining alliances and creating self-inflicted international isolation.

From regional integration to renewed isolation

- Israel historically sought regional acceptance through peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, Gulf understandings and the Abraham Accords.
- Military operations in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Iran, alongside West Bank settlements, are reversing this diplomatic integration despite growing military strength.
- Israel's leadership increasingly treats military superiority as a substitute for political strategy, privileging tactical victories over strategic consequences.
- Gaza's destruction, mass displacement and civilian casualties transformed the post-October 7 response into a symbol of collective punishment, damaging Israel's global legitimacy.
- Repeated cross-border attacks have deepened regional instability and imposed political and economic costs on neighbouring states, generating wider resentment.

Regional normalisation and American support under strain

- The Abraham Accords rested on economic cooperation, technological exchange and shared concerns over Iran, alongside an expectation of Israeli strategic restraint.
- Gaza's devastation and attacks on Iran have exposed Gulf states to unwanted collateral risks, widening differences between Israeli priorities and Gulf calculations.

- Arab governments may oppose Iranian influence but cannot politically sustain cooperation while public anger over Gaza intensifies across Arab societies.
- Washington increasingly bears Israel's diplomatic and economic costs while exercising limited influence over its decision-making, weakening the traditional bilateral alliance.
- The Washington-Jerusalem dispute over the U.S.-Iran memorandum, followed by J.D. Vance's criticism, suggests unconditional American backing is no longer assured.

West Bank policy and self-inflicted isolation

- Accelerating settlement expansion has eroded the territorial basis of a Palestinian state, while settler attacks further weaken Israel's international legitimacy.
- Alleged protection or acquiescence by Israeli security forces converts local violence into a broader question of state responsibility and permanent Palestinian domination.
- By making the two-state solution increasingly impossible, Israel replaces a negotiable political dispute with an enduring system rejected by much of the world.

Beyond Editorial

India's Strategic Stakes in West Asia

- Strategic autonomy: India supports a negotiated two-state solution while maintaining defence cooperation with Israel, including the 2025 bilateral defence agreement.
- Energy exposure: West Asia supplied 46.9% of India's crude imports during April-January 2025-26, increasing vulnerability to regional conflict.
- Diaspora security: Over 83 lakh Indians lived in Gulf countries in 2025, while Operation Ajay evacuated 1,343 people from Israel.

- **Connectivity interests:** The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor depends on stable ports and transport routes across the Gulf and Mediterranean.
- **Humanitarian credibility:** India supplied 70 tonnes of assistance to Palestine, including 16.5 tonnes of medicines and medical supplies.
- **Security cooperation:** The 2026 India-Israel counter-terrorism dialogue reflects enduring security ties that must coexist with broader Arab partnerships.
- **Minilateral cooperation:** The I2U2 food-corridor proposal combines UAE investment, Israeli technology and Indian agricultural capacity for regional food security.