

EDITORIALS – 29TH JUN 2026

1. Buyer beware

(GS Paper II Governance, GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'Buyer beware' was published in The Hindu on 29th Jun 2026, highlights the need for risk-based drug regulation, QR-code traceability, and credible implementation to track defective and counterfeit medicines.

Regulatory Shift and Traceability

- Schedule H2 expansion shifts drug regulation from curated brand lists to therapeutic classes, moving from revenue-based oversight to risk-based control.
- The 2022-23 framework mandated barcode or QR code verification on specific drug packs; new symbols will encode product identifier, licence, batch and manufacturing details.
- The expanded tracking system aims to locate defective batches faster, especially where counterfeit networks target vaccines, cancer medicines and antimicrobials.

Public Health and Compliance Risks

- Fake antimicrobials flagged by WHO in low- and middle-income countries worsen India's high AMR burden through sub-therapeutic dosing and resistant strains.
- The Narcotics Control Bureau has warned that medicinal opioids and psychotropic substances may leak into illicit markets without stronger tracking safeguards.
- The move responds to FDA and European Medicines Agency concerns over Indian quality control after contaminated cough syrups and fake medicines linked to U.S. seizures.

- The Jan Vishwas Act, 2026 framework separates procedural lapses from substantive non-compliance, making enforcement more proportionate and meaningful.

Implementation Gaps

- QR-code traceability will work only with a real-time state-managed database, interoperable software and scanning infrastructure across States.
- Pharmacists and consumers must routinely verify medicines before sale, otherwise digital traceability will remain a compliance formality with weak deterrence.
- New packaging and IT integration may burden MSME manufacturers, making phased support necessary for effective compliance.
- Prescription data on controlled substances needs a digital governance layer, since it contains sensitive information and lacks a mature handling framework.

Beyond Editorial

From Traceability to Patient Protection

- Recall accountability: CDSCO monthly NSQ and spurious-drug alerts should translate into faster batch recalls, not passive website disclosures.
- Patient grievance: PvPI helpline 1800-180-3024 can link adverse-event complaints with QR scans for quicker regulator follow-up.
- Last-mile verification: Pharmacists in PMBJP and private chemist networks should scan high-risk antimicrobials, opioids and cancer medicines before sale.
- Regulatory coordination: CDSCO sets drug standards and coordinates State Drug Controllers, making Centre-State recall protocols essential.
- Recall transparency: NSQ alerts should become searchable batch dashboards, helping citizens identify unsafe medicines without reading circulars.

- Generic confidence: PMBJP credibility will rise when low-cost generics are backed by recall data and quality grievance systems.
- Citizen protection: Pharmacovigilance becomes patient-centric when detection, reporting, recall and compensation operate through one accountable chain.

2. The new digital slavery needs constitutional guardrails

(GS Paper II Polity, GS Paper III Science and Technology)

This editorial 'The new digital slavery needs constitutional guardrails' was published in The Hindu on 29th Jun 2026, highlights the need for constitutional, rights-based guardrails against AI-driven manipulation, surveillance, and democratic vulnerability.

Human Dignity and Regulatory Lag

- Pope Leo XIV's Magnifica Humanitas frames unchecked AI as digital slavery, where personal data can become human bondage.
- AI governance cannot rely on good intentions or engineer conscience; automated decisions on loans, jobs, health and education need accountable human oversight.
- The Pope rejects surrendering the electronic Curia to private monopolies and even urges slowing AI development.
- AI outpaces law because innovation moves through start-up speed and mathematical discovery, while parliaments regulate harms only after they emerge.
- By the time the EU AI Act or Online Safety Act is passed, technical harms mutate into fresh digital vulnerabilities.

Epistemic and Algorithmic Threats

- Democracy needs shared epistemic facts; high-fidelity deepfakes now blur reality and fabrication beyond reliable human detection.
- Synthetic media can duplicate political leaders during elections, depress turnout, fabricate scandals and weaken trust in institutions.
- Big Tech's engagement model rewards outrage, fear and sensationalism, making algorithms amplify hyper-partisan content and radicalisation.
- Platform algorithms create echo chambers, giving private firms unaccountable power over the public square and social cohesion.

Foreign Interference and India's Exposure

- Polarised societies without shared reality become soft targets for foreign interference and AI-driven psychological operations.
- Adversarial states and non-state actors exploit platform vulnerabilities to amplify divisive narratives across religious, ethnic and socioeconomic fault lines.
- Coordinated campaigns threaten democratic sovereignty by turning citizens against citizens and converting domestic cleavages into strategic leverage.
- India faces acute risk because rapid digital adoption outpaces structural literacy, while synthetic media and algorithmic polarisation strain pluralism.

Constitutional Guardrails

- India needs rights-based AI governance protecting digital autonomy, personal data, consent and freedom from algorithmic discrimination in credit, jobs and health care.
- Platform accountability must move beyond safe harbour, requiring independent audits of recommender engines and liability for algorithmic amplification causing violence.
- Free speech must remain intact: anti-disinformation powers should target bot networks and deepfake originators, not dissent or ideology.

- Civic resilience requires nationwide media literacy and digital citizenship education across schools, universities and rural centres to detect manipulation.
- National security requires real-time early-warning systems linking state agencies, independent fact-checkers and ethical hackers against information warfare.

Beyond Editorial

State Capacity in Algorithmic Governance

- Institutional capability: FREE-AI guidelines show governance intent, but regulators need auditors for welfare, finance, policing and elections.
- Compute sovereignty: IndiaAI Mission approved over ₹10,300 crore, including public compute access, reducing Big Tech dependence.
- Deepfake response: CERT-In issued a high-severity deepfake advisory, which should feed election, police and platform protocols.
- Election safeguards: ECI advisories can require disclosure of synthetic images, audio and video during political campaigns.
- Use-case review: NITI Aayog work on facial recognition shows why high-risk public AI needs impact assessment.
- Agency coordination: MeitY, CERT-In, ECI, CCI and cyber police need shared escalation channels against platform manipulation.
- Democratic resilience: Public capacity must match rights protection, otherwise constitutional AI norms remain dependent on private systems.

3. How schools can tackle adolescent malnutrition (GS Paper I Society)

This editorial 'How schools can tackle adolescent malnutrition' was published in The Hindu on 29th Jun 2026, highlights schools' role in addressing

adolescent malnutrition through better diets, UPF control, physical activity, and nutrition literacy.

Adolescent Malnutrition and Lifestyle Risk

- NFHS-6 shows rising obesity among adults, with women increasing from 24% to 30.7% and men from 22.9% to 27.3%.
- High blood sugar among adults also rose sharply, linking adolescent lifestyle patterns with future NCD risks.
- India faces a double burden where child undernutrition coexists with obesity-driven diabetes, heart disease and stroke.
- Malnutrition is no longer only thinness; the thin-fat phenotype hides metabolic risk among apparently lean children.
- CNNS 2019 found 27.4% of adolescents stunted, while rising urban youth obesity shows widening metabolic vulnerability.

School-Based Dietary Correction

- Delhi studies found low intake of milk, dairy, green leafy vegetables and fruits, while cereal-heavy diets leave proteins inadequate.
- Schools can improve diets through better midday meals, healthier canteens and food demonstrations that teach balanced plates.
- Dietary Guidelines 2024 recommend half the plate by volume as fruits and vegetables, reinforcing everyday protective foods.
- School gardens, fruit breaks and seasonal produce can normalise healthier eating habits against sedentary and screen-heavy lifestyles.

Sugar, UPFs and Physical Inactivity

- Sugary drinks, HFSS foods and UPFs are replacing traditional diets and increasing adolescent free-sugar exposure.
- A WHO study noted India's UPF consumption rising over 13.7% yearly, making school-level prevention urgent.
- Schools should discourage sugary beverages, display sugar boards and use repeated reinforcement to convert knowledge into practice.

- Structured physical activity and sports must become core schooling components, not optional extras, as inactivity becomes nationwide.

Schools as Public Health Institutions

- The LFOF initiative led by ICMR-NIN promotes healthier food environments through policy, nutrition literacy and youth empowerment.
- Its outputs include regulating HFSS advertising, taxing unhealthy beverages, a model school curriculum and label-reading kits.
- A Lancet 2025 study projects 21.8 crore men and 23.1 crore women in India will be overweight by 2050.
- Schools must teach food labels, portion sizes, marketing tactics and basic cooking to move beyond textbook nutrition education.
- Indian school-based interventions have improved dietary behaviour and reduced sugary beverage consumption, showing schools' public health potential.

Beyond Editorial

Nutrition Governance Outside the Classroom

- Household behaviour: Eat Right School treats children as change agents, but family diets must reinforce low-sugar, balanced meals.
- Community convergence: POSHAN Abhiyaan uses convergent action plans, making ICDS, schools and local bodies natural nutrition partners.
- Meal platform: PM POSHAN provides hot cooked meals in government and aided schools, enabling dietary diversification.
- Market environment: FSSAI bars HFSS sale or advertising in school premises and within 50 metres.
- Parental literacy: Eat Right School spreads food-safety and nutrition awareness through students to the wider community.

- Gender lens: Anaemia Mukt Bharat gives weekly IFA tablets to adolescents aged 10–19, supporting targeted nutrition.
- Activity ecosystem: Fit India aims to take fitness to schools, colleges and villages, complementing nutrition with physical activity.