

EDITORIALS – 2nd JUL 2026

1. Yes and no

(GS Paper II Governance)

This editorial 'Yes and no' was published in The Hindu on 2nd Jul 2026, highlights how state-led centralisation, weak fiscal autonomy and manufactured consent have eroded gram sabha self-governance.

Institutional Dilution of Gram Sabha Autonomy

- The 73rd Amendment empowered gram sabhas, but governments have reduced them to clearinghouses for central and State schemes.
- The report frames weak participation as vibrancy, yet prescribes more meetings and oversight that further alienate rural workers.
- Around 18%–28% respondents cited lack of outcomes, but the report favours the NIRNAY app and real-time minutes over substantive deliberation.

Participation Fatigue and Social Exclusion

- Panchayat secretaries spend less time enabling discussion, while weak oversight lets officials dismiss MGNREGA demands as data-entry errors.
- Livelihood-linked barriers show systemic exclusion, as precarious rural labour reduces participation and leaves gram sabhas to leisured elites.
- Failure to treat attendance as paid social protection allows landlords and contractors to dominate local decision-making spaces.

Fiscal Centralisation and Manufactured Consent

- Gram sabhas spend only 13% time identifying local issues and 4% on revenue, while gram panchayats remain grant-dependent.
- 14th and 15th Finance Commission grants tied spending to centrally preferred sectors like water and sanitation, weakening local agenda-setting.
- Flagship schemes such as Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat leave little reason for citizens to attend meetings with pre-decided priorities.
- Under PESA Act, 1996 and forest rights laws, gram sabhas must give prior consent for land acquisition and mining.
- State bypassing or manufacturing consent, as seen in Hasdeo Arand, empties gram sabha rights if only approval is politically acceptable.

Beyond Editorial

Making Gram Sabhas Decision-Making Forums Again

- Capacity gap: Kerala's People's Plan shows trained facilitation can turn village assemblies into planning forums, not routine approval meetings.
- Social audit strength: Andhra Pradesh's MGNREGA social audits show repeated audits can improve beneficiary awareness and make local expenditure more contestable.
- Information access: eGramSwaraj can support transparent planning, geo-tagged monitoring and PFMS-linked payments, if records remain publicly understandable.
- Inclusion design: Mahila Sabhas and Bal-Balika Sabhas can prevent elite capture by making women's and children's concerns visible before gram sabhas.
- Local planning: Gram Panchayat Development Plans should use the Eleventh Schedule's 29 subjects, not become scheme-wise paperwork for higher departments.
- Civic awareness: PESA training is crucial because tribal gram sabhas are meant to protect land, water, forests and customary self-governance.
- Resource autonomy: Vadagudem's tribal sand mining cooperative shows gram sabhas can manage local resources and generate community revenue when legally empowered.

2. On curbing young adults on social media

(GS Paper II Governance, GS Paper I Society)

This editorial 'On curbing young adults on social media' was published in The Hindu on 2nd Jul 2026, highlights why age-based social media bans are weak substitutes for platform accountability and privacy-sensitive governance.

Limits of Age-Based Social Media Bans

- Keir Starmer's proposed under-16 ban, alongside similar global moves, has revived India's State-level debates on children's online access.
- Social media as a source of learning remains contested, since children's actual educational use and platform suitability are both empirically uncertain.
- Evidence does not show a uniform link between social media use and harm; India's social, economic and digital diversity requires identifying specific vulnerabilities.

- Under-16 bans assume reliable age verification, but such systems enable platforms to collect sensitive identity data from minors.
- Bans are easily bypassed through family credentials, older peers or technological circumvention, creating a wider culture of legal work-arounds.
- The Australian experience shows age-gating may push under-16s to less established services, without proving these spaces are safer.

Platform Design and Accountability

- The stronger alternative is platform governance, which shifts attention from at-risk children to platforms creating the conditions of risk.
- Design defects deliberately encourage dependence, as attention-economy platforms rely on cravings and addiction to sustain competition.
- Screen-time caps, like the Chinese response, target platform behaviour better than bans but still require age verification and extra data harvesting.

Regulatory and Privacy Trade-offs

- Limiting access and regulating platforms require different enforcement systems, with bans pushing monitoring toward individuals, households or platforms.
- Household-level bans risk intrusive platform monitoring, while platform-level caps require strict age verification and privacy safeguards.
- Governments reliant on social media for publicity may avoid demanding transparency, while design regulation exposes them to selective enforcement allegations.
- Curtailing access is legislatively easier than creating fair accountability protocols, but it remains a narrow response to online safety.
- Ban advocates must prove harm, accept that screen-time caps are not comprehensive, and anticipate regulatory burdens and privacy risks.

Beyond Editorial

Digital Resilience for Children in a Platform Society

- Digital literacy: CBSE's cyber safety handbook covers cyberbullying, emotional harassment, online abuse, radicalisation and fraud, making safety education preventive.
- Parental guidance: UNICEF India stresses dialogue with children, because families need informed support rather than only device bans or surveillance.
- School support: Online safety should be embedded in education plans and budgets, with EdTech tools evaluated for safety and well-being.

- Age-appropriate design: The EU Digital Services Act pushes platforms to minimise risks for children and young people, shifting responsibility to platform systems.
- Data protection: India's DPDP Act bars tracking, behavioural monitoring and targeted advertising directed at children, making privacy central to child safety.
- Digital citizenship: The MHA cyber safety handbook helps adolescents understand threats and safeguards, linking online rights with responsible conduct.
- Evidence-based policy: Australia's eSafety consultation involved industry, civil society, researchers, educators, children and parents before implementing age restrictions.

3. PPP 2.0 should focus on matching capital to risk (GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'PPP 2.0 should focus on matching capital to risk' was published in The Indian Express on 2nd Jul 2026, highlights the need to redesign PPP financing by matching capital type with project-stage risk.

PPP 1.0: Gains, Retreat and Financing Failure

- PPP framework transformed airports, highways and ports, but post-crisis stressed assets pushed India back toward public capex.
- By March 2025, India's infrastructure pipeline crossed 13,000 projects worth nearly Rs 185 lakh crore, still below 2047 needs.
- The green transition requires renewable energy, transmission, green hydrogen and resilient cities, with net-zero investment exceeding \$20 trillion by 2070.
- India needs private capital, but corporate balance sheets cannot fund this scale; the deeper failure was financing architecture, not partnership itself.
- Infrastructure assets generate value for 30-50 years, yet many PPPs used 7-10 year bank loans, creating repayment stress before revenues stabilised.
- After 2008, weak revenues against fixed debt obligations raised NPAs and damaged confidence in the PPP model.

Capital-Risk Mismatch and Circular Finance

- The core flaw was funding long-lived assets with short-lived capital; PPP 2.0 must ensure capital circulation and risk-stage matching.
- Government is better placed to finance high-risk phases such as land acquisition and construction, before shifting mature assets to long-term investors.
- Once projects stabilise, scarce public capital should move to newer risks, while institutional capital finances operational infrastructure assets.

- Global pension funds, insurers and sovereign funds control over \$110 trillion, seeking stable, inflation-linked long-term returns.
- India has credible vehicles like InvITs and the NIIF, but lacks a continuous mechanism for replacing capital as project risks decline.
- Under circular finance, developers and government fund construction, InvITs acquire operational assets, and recycled capital finances new projects.
- High-cost bank debt should decline after de-risking, with infrastructure debt funds refinancing assets for pension funds and insurers.

Policy Architecture for PPP 2.0

- The RBI should mandate dynamic risk-based pricing, since banks often retain construction-stage premia after projects become de-risked.
- Reviving infrastructure debt funds can bridge operational infrastructure and long-term institutional investors, improving refinancing and capital recycling.
- Every rupee locked in mature assets reduces finance for the next highway, transmission line or renewable-energy project.
- PPP 1.0 mobilised private capital; PPP 2.0 must make the same capital finance successive generations of infrastructure.
- For an economy that must build, decarbonise and maintain fiscal discipline, capital circulation is as vital as capital mobilisation.

Beyond Editorial

The Missing Governance Backbone in PPP 2.0

- Risk allocation: The Kelkar Committee advised assigning each PPP risk to the entity best able to manage it, especially land-related risks.
- Renegotiation rules: PPP contracts need built-in renegotiation frameworks, with full disclosure of long-term costs, risks and benefits before revisions.
- Dispute resolution: Kelkar proposed IPRC and IPAT mechanisms to address actionable stress in PPP projects through specialised, time-bound review.
- Project preparation: IIPDF supports transaction advisers and consultants, helping governments prepare bankable PPP projects before bidding begins.
- Appraisal discipline: PPPAC appraises central-sector PPP projects, giving large infrastructure proposals an institutional filter before approval.
- Risk-sharing model: Highway HAM reduces revenue risk by giving 40% construction support and paying the remaining 60% through annuities.
- Audit learning: CAG's Maharashtra HAM audit flagged DPR and monitoring lapses, showing PPP success needs strong oversight, not only innovative financing.