EDITORIALS - 15TH SEP 2026

1. Government trusts Aadhaar on welfare. It needs to rely on it to make voter lists (GS Paper II Governance)

This editorial '**Government trusts Aadhaar on welfare. It needs to rely on it to make voter lists**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 15th Sep 2026, highlights the case for voluntary **Aadhaar-based voter verification** over document-intensive electoral roll revision.

Limitations of Special Intensive Revision

- Rolling since June 2025, **Special Intensive Revision** has deleted over **13 crore names** while expanding across almost the entire country.
- The **Supreme Court** upheld SIR but clarified that citizenship determination belongs to the **Ministry of Home Affairs**, not the Election Commission.
- Paper-based verification under compressed deadlines disproportionately burdens **poor and vulnerable groups**, while delayed appeals leave many **wrongfully excluded voters** without timely relief.
- Linking roll deletions with welfare databases can deprive excluded families of **rations and pensions**, extending electoral errors into **welfare deprivation**.
- Each cycle deploys nearly **10 lakh public servants**, mainly teachers, and costs thousands of crores, making **manual verification** expensive and repetitive.
- Field documents cannot establish citizenship reliably: passports, Aadhaar, PAN and voter IDs are insufficient, while **birth registration** remains patchy and the **Assam NRC** caused mass exclusion without resolution.

Case for Aadhaar Verification

- **Aadhaar** establishes identity and residence, while biometric enrolment before 2013 can confirm that a person meets the **18-year age threshold**.
- As a benefit-neutral identity record, Aadhaar offered little incentive for false age declarations, while postal delivery supported **address verification** and strengthened **data reliability**.
- Covering **1.36 billion residents**, Aadhaar has enabled PAN de-duplication, closure of benami accounts and removal of **ghost beneficiaries**, reportedly saving over ₹2.7 lakh crore.

- Aadhaar-based **face authentication** already supports over 10 crore DigiYatra transactions and enables 1.47 crore pensioners to submit **Jeevan Pramaan** certificates remotely.
- Its **privacy-by-design** architecture returns only authentication approval or rejection, without revealing the **underlying personal data**.

Proposed Electoral-Roll Model

- A voluntary **Aadhaar–EPIC application** could authenticate voters remotely, identify duplicates and ghost entries, verify age and cross-check addresses without paperwork or office visits.
- Those declining Aadhaar linkage could retain **manual verification**, while analytics could flag exceptional cases for citizenship determination by the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- The Election Commission should collaborate with **UIDAI** and make face authentication the primary revision method, creating faster, cheaper and **auditable electoral rolls**.

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Constitutional Concerns in Aadhaar-Based Voter Authentication

- **Citizenship mismatch:** UIDAI clarifies that Aadhaar proves identity, not citizenship; even eligible resident foreign nationals can obtain Aadhaar under prescribed conditions.
- **Privacy test:** The Puttaswamy judgments require any Aadhaar-based electoral system to satisfy legality, necessity and proportionality before restricting informational privacy.
- **Voluntary linkage:** The Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 protects voters unable to provide Aadhaar and permits prescribed alternative identity documents.
- **Exclusion risk:** Fingerprint or facial-authentication failures among elderly persons, manual workers and persons with disabilities require accessible offline verification mechanisms.
- **Function creep:** ECI's National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme in 2015 illustrates why expanding Aadhaar use requires clear purpose limitations.
- **Data protection:** Section 29 of the Aadhaar Act restricts sharing core biometric information; electoral verification should receive authentication results, not underlying biometric data.
- **Due process:** The Supreme Court's 2026 SIR judgment emphasised accurate, inclusive rolls; every proposed deletion requires notice, response opportunity, reasoned orders and appeals.

2. From Bengal to Boston, politicians love a 'revdi' (GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial '**From Bengal to Boston, politicians love a 'revdi'**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 15th Sep 2026, highlights the universal electoral appeal, fiscal scale and welfare rationale of **cash-transfer politics**.

Trump's Proposed Dividend

- Donald Trump promised a **$5,000 dividend** to every American adult if Republicans retain Congress in the **November midterm elections**.
- Covering nearly 245 million adults, the proposal's **fiscal cost** exceeds $1 trillion, almost one-fourth of India's **$3.92 trillion GDP**.
- US **per capita income** is $94,430, nearly 34 times India's $2,813, but deep **income inequality** makes the transfer significant for poorer Americans.
- For the **bottom 20 per cent** earning $17,132 annually, $5,000 exceeds 100 days' income; the **top 5 per cent** earns over 30 times more.

Cash-Transfer Politics in India

- **Direct Benefit Transfers**, enabled through the **JAM trinity** under UPA-II, made instantaneous welfare payments politically and administratively feasible.
- Regional parties, Congress and BJP increasingly include **cash handouts** in election manifestos, producing competitive **revdi politics** despite earlier criticism.
- Prime Minister Modi warned against **revdi culture** in 2022, but BJP state units later adopted transfers for their perceived **electoral returns**.
- The **Sixteenth Finance Commission** estimates large-group unconditional state transfers at ₹1.96 lakh crore in 2025-26, largely benefiting **women beneficiaries** in Maharashtra, Karnataka and West Bengal.

Welfare Rationale and Fiscal Uncertainty

- Cash transfers also reflect **state failure** in health, education and skilling, providing **social protection** through job guarantees, women's assistance and unemployment allowances.
- Trump's proposal remains dependent on **Congressional approval**, leaving both its implementation and the promised **$1 trillion expenditure** uncertain.

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A Framework to Distinguish Welfare from Electoral Freebies

- **Public purpose:** Rights-based programmes such as MGNREGA and the National Food Security Act address livelihood and food security, unlike benefits lacking identifiable social objectives.
- **Legal position:** In S. Subramaniam Balaji (2013), the Supreme Court held that manifesto promises, including Tamil Nadu's consumer-goods schemes, were not corrupt practices under existing law.
- **Capability creation:** Expenditure on school meals, public healthcare or skill development produces lasting human capabilities, unlike short-term consumption transfers without developmental outcomes.
- **Fiscal sustainability:** RBI's State Finances: A Risk Analysis warned that expanding non-merit subsidies can worsen indebted States' finances and displace productive capital expenditure.
- **Targeting quality:** A 2026 CAG audit found ₹42 crore in Delhi electricity subsidies reached dormant connections, demonstrating the cost of weak beneficiary verification.
- **Manifesto transparency:** ECI guidelines require parties to explain the rationale, fiscal implications and financing methods behind electoral promises, enabling informed voter assessment.
- **Outcome evaluation:** Schemes such as PM-KISAN have defined beneficiaries and budgetary support; comparable transfers should undergo audits, impact assessment and periodic eligibility reviews.

3. Our healthcare boom hides a public-system deficit (GS Paper I Society)

This editorial '**Our healthcare boom hides a public-system deficit**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 15th Sep 2026, highlights how healthcare expansion remains undermined by inadequate public **funding**, unequal **capacity,** high private **costs** and weak **regulation**.

Expansion without Public Capacity

- **Government health expenditure** remained 1.43% of GDP in 2022-23, against the 2.5% target under **National Health Policy 2017**.
- Despite expanding AIIMS, medical colleges and Ayushman Bharat, the **Parliamentary Standing Committee** identified continuing deficits in **capacity, affordability and regulation**.

- India has **818 medical colleges** and 1,28,875 undergraduate seats, yet 70-80% specialist shortages and 17,788 building-less sub-centres expose weak **rural capacity**.
- Expanding doctor numbers cannot ensure access without equitable distribution, affordable treatment and adequate **health infrastructure**, especially across **underserved regions**.
- Growing **commercialisation of medical education** through private and PPP institutions makes effective oversight and **regulatory integrity** increasingly important.

Private Dependence and Financial Burden

- The **private sector** handles over 60% of hospitalisations and nearly 70% of outpatient care, reflecting inadequate **public alternatives**.
- Average **hospitalisation expenditure** is approximately ₹6,631 in government facilities against ₹50,508 in private hospitals, creating severe **affordability pressures**.
- **Ayushman Bharat** protects insured families from immediate hospital bills but cannot control prices or reduce the system's overall **treatment costs**.
- Over 40 crore Indians remain the **missing middle** without comprehensive protection, while **out-of-pocket expenditure** constituted 43.4% of health spending in 2022-23.

Investment and Universal Healthcare

- Rising demand has attracted **private investment** and major acquisitions, but capital may prioritise scalable chains and profitable segments over **primary care** and underserved districts.
- The **Lancet Commission 2026** advocates a stronger publicly financed and provided system as the foundation of **universal healthcare** and reduced household vulnerability.

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Cooperative Federalism in Health-System Reform

- **Constitutional division:** Health is primarily a State subject, while centrally supported programmes such as NHM require State-specific planning, financing and implementation.
- **Fiscal devolution:** Fifteenth Finance Commission health grants funded sub-centres and diagnostics, but a Sixteenth Finance Commission study reported utilisation of only about 39%.

- **Common standards:** Indian Public Health Standards 2022 provide national benchmarks for health facilities while permitting States to adapt services to regional requirements.
- **Treatment portability:** Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY allows beneficiaries to obtain cashless care at any empanelled hospital nationwide, supporting migrant and interstate access.
- **Digital coordination:** By August 2026, eSanjeevani had delivered over 49 crore consultations through more than 2.4 lakh providers, expanding specialist access across States.
- **Surveillance federalism:** The Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme connects district, State and central units, enabling coordinated detection and response to outbreaks crossing administrative boundaries.
- **Local participation:** A Sixteenth Finance Commission study found Panchayat exclusion delayed health-grant utilisation, showing that decentralised implementation is essential for grassroots infrastructure.