EDITORIALS - 24TH SEP 2026

1. Trading smart (GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial '**Trading smart**' was published in **The Hindu** on 24th Sep 2026, highlights how **smaller trade agreements** can **diversify** export markets while protecting sensitive sectors.

Trade diversification and export access

- The **India–New Zealand FTA**, effective from 20 October, targets a doubling of bilateral goods trade by 2030, though its current $1.1 billion value is below 1% of India's goods trade.
- Smaller markets support **exporters**, nearly half of whom are **micro, small and medium enterprises**, and offer alternative routes amid tariff and trade disruptions.
- New Zealand grants **duty-free access** to all Indian exports, benefiting textiles and gems alongside pharmaceuticals, machinery, vehicular parts, mineral fuels, and iron and steel.
- India excluded **dairy** and nearly **30% of import lines** from tariff concessions, despite New Zealand's demand for dairy access.
- The agreement offers **visa concessions** for workers and students as several Western countries restrict foreign worker inflows.
- New Zealand committed to facilitating **$20 billion in investment** in India over 15 years, alongside expanded trade access

Protected sectors and wider gains

Beyond Editorial

Making FTA benefits accessible to small exporters

- **Exporter guidance:** The Trade Connect ePlatform's Product Guide can help first-time exporters identify requirements for goods such as garments entering New Zealand.

- **Tariff clarity:** Its Tariff Explorer can help a textile exporter check the applicable tariff line before pricing a shipment under the FTA.
- **Origin compliance:** Product-specific **rules of origin** require exporters to establish that goods qualify for preference; duty-free access alone does not establish eligibility.
- **Digital documentation:** The Directorate General of Foreign Trade's **eCoO 2.0** system offers a paperless route for obtaining preferential certificates of origin.
- **Regulatory access:** Indian pharmaceutical exporters can benefit from New Zealand's acceptance of specified foreign regulators' inspection reports, reducing duplicative checks.
- **Buyer discovery:** Trade Connect's **Buyer Connect** can help a small supplier find overseas buyers after it has confirmed its product's eligibility and requirements.
- **Benefit tracking:** Comparing eligible shipments with certificates issued and preferences claimed would reveal whether smaller exporters actually use the agreement's concessions.

2. Quality control and India's manufacturing growth (GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial '**Quality control and India's manufacturing growth**' was published in **The Hindu** on 24th Sep 2026, highlights the need to improve **product quality** without raising **input costs** or weakening manufacturing **competitiveness**.

Expansion and reassessment of quality controls

- Products covered by **Quality Control Orders (QCOs)** rose from 88 in 2019 to 765 by December 2024; expansion slowed in 2025 amid concerns over intermediate inputs.

- At India's **WTO Trade Policy Review** in July 2026, the European Union, United States, Brazil, China and Indonesia raised concerns about QCOs and other non-tariff barriers.
- The **Transition Facilitation (Quality Control) Order, 2026** permits eligible firms in specified sectors to source temporarily from BIS Scheme-II-licensed suppliers when Scheme-I certification is difficult.
- Over **600 QCO-covered products** await reassessment, including inputs used in chemicals, steel, textiles, machinery and electronics; restrictions on these goods can disrupt downstream supply chains.

Effects on downstream manufacturers

- A **CSEP study** found that chemical products under QCOs rose to 52 by 2024, increasing the share of chemical-using firms exposed to regulated inputs from 11.8% in 2019 to 56.6%.
- Among **larger firms**, input QCOs coincided with 9.6% higher production but 37% lower gross value added, suggesting that higher input costs reduced value addition.
- Among **smaller firms**, input QCOs had no statistically significant effect on production or gross value added but were associated with a 47.6% fall in profitability.

Policy direction

- Future **QCO design** should assess input availability, costs and supply-chain effects; smaller firms need certification support and suitable exemptions or transition periods.
- The measure of **quality standards** is whether they improve quality while sustaining the scale, efficiency and competitiveness of Indian manufacturing.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Strengthening India's testing infrastructure

- **Shared facilities:** Bureau of Indian Standards guidelines allow **cluster-based test facilities** to serve micro, small and medium manufacturers that cannot maintain every test in-house.
- **Regional access:** Recognised MSME testing centres in **Mumbai** and **Kolkata** illustrate how facilities closer to industrial clusters can reduce travel and sample-shipping costs.
- **Accredited alternatives:** BIS product manuals permit testing through recognised laboratories or suitably accredited facilities for specified products, easing dependence on a single laboratory.
- **Complete test coverage:** BIS's laboratory listings identify each facility's product scope and exclusions; a nearby laboratory may still lack a required test.
- **Transparent charges:** BIS's laboratory system publishes **standard-wise testing fees**, allowing small firms to compare costs before submitting samples.
- **Cost relief:** BIS has relaxed the in-house laboratory requirement for MSME manufacturers and increased the minimum marking-fee concession for small units.
- **Capacity before enforcement:** Before extending a QCO to an intermediate input, regulators could check whether recognised laboratories can perform all required tests within workable times.

3. Two ECs stand up to ask; CEC must answer, SC must not turn away (GS Paper II Governance)

This editorial '**Two ECs stand up to ask; CEC must answer, SC must not turn away**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 24th Sep 2026, highlights **internal objections** to the **Special Intensive Revision** and the need for institutional accountability.

Election Commission's internal objections

- Updating **electoral rolls** is the Election Commission's duty; the deletion of 13 crore names from draft rolls alone does not establish an effect on election outcomes.
- Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi raised objections **14 times in 10 months** to aspects of the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)**, but their concerns went unaddressed.
- They questioned changes to **Form 6**, centralisation of the voter database and decisions taken without sufficient consensus; when internal objections failed, they appealed to the Cabinet Secretary.

Voter safeguards and judicial oversight

- In Bihar and West Bengal, the editorial identifies demanding paperwork, short deadlines and limited **appeal mechanisms** as risks to **eligible voters**, especially vulnerable groups.
- The SIR placed the **burden of proof** on voters and, in the editorial's assessment, risked turning roll revision into an opaque **citizenship test** with consequences beyond voting.
- The **Supreme Court** directed the Commission to accept Aadhaar as a document and give reasons for deletions, but the editorial questions its broader deference to the SIR process.
- The editorial calls for restoration of the earlier **Form 6**, state officials' access to the voter database, and point-by-point answers from the **Chief Election Commissioner** to his colleagues' objections.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Independent audits of electoral roll revisions

- **Sample checks:** Independent field checks of randomly selected entries could test whether names marked deceased or shifted were correctly identified, as in Bihar's **2025 SIR** categories.

- **Deletion accuracy:** Bihar's draft revision removed about **65 lakh names**; auditing a representative sample would measure errors that the aggregate figure cannot reveal.
- **Missing voters:** Household checks could compare eligible residents with the published roll, complementing the existing **Form 6** route for people whose names are absent.
- **Duplicate flags:** Auditors could examine how **ERONET's** photo-similar and demographic-similar entry reports are verified before an official decides to remove a name.
- **Local scrutiny: Booth Level Agents** already review draft rolls with Booth Level Officers; audit teams could examine whether discrepancies they flag receive recorded decisions.
- **Software checks:** In Goa, an investigation reported that software prevented decisions finding **97 voters eligible** from being properly recorded, making decision-to-roll checks essential.
- **Public results:** The Election Commission already publishes lists of roll changes; aggregate audit findings could add measured error rates without disclosing voters' personal records.