

EDITORIALS - 27TH AUG 2026

1. The high cost of India's private health-care boom (GS Paper II Governance, GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial '**The high cost of India's private health-care boom**' was published in **The Hindu** on 27th Aug 2026, highlights the need to balance **private health investment** with **affordability**, **ethical care** and stronger public health systems.

High Costs and Policy Contradictions

- The **176th Parliamentary Committee Report** places average hospitalisation expenditure at ₹50,508 in private facilities against ₹6,631 in government hospitals.
- Children's **out-of-pocket expenditure** averages ₹37,630 in private facilities, compared with only ₹2,299 in public facilities.
- Its **368 recommendations** include standardised package rates, mandatory pre-treatment estimates and metropolitan room tariffs linked to nearby three-star hotels.
- Large corporate hospitals should cross-subsidise poorer patients and reserve beds for **Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana** beneficiaries at regulated rates.
- India simultaneously seeks greater **private capital** in underserved regions while considering stricter foreign investment rules for acquiring and managing existing hospitals.

Investment and Clinical Incentives

- Private hospitals fill gaps in secondary and tertiary care, while **foreign investment** brings capital, technology, management expertise and network expansion.
- Excessive or unpredictable **regulation** may divert investment, delaying hospitals and medical manufacturing in underserved cities and districts.
- Health care involves **information asymmetry** because providers influence investigations, admission duration and procedures, allowing financial incentives to shape care volume.
- Corporate competition for specialists, technology and premium infrastructure creates high costs, while **revenue targets** and procedure-linked incentives may influence institutional behaviour.
- Intervention-focused systems risk **medicalisation** through unnecessary follow-ups, admissions, surgeries, diagnostic packages and prolonged medication, requiring strong clinical safeguards.
- Investment must be assessed by whether it creates new beds, serves underserved areas and improves **competition**, rather than merely acquiring hospitals or expanding premium facilities.

Regulatory and Public-System Priorities

- India should promote **greenfield investment** and manufacturing while scrutinising acquisitions that increase market concentration or excessive pricing.
- Isolated room-price ceilings cannot ensure **affordability** because hospitals may shift charges elsewhere, while room costs also include nursing, infection control and emergency support.
- **Package rates**, transparent estimates, billing standards and audits are preferable to component-wise caps; Diagnosis-Related Groups can reimburse fixed amounts based on diagnosis and procedures.
- India cannot regulate its way out of weak public care, as understaffed or inaccessible **government hospitals** perpetuate dependence on private providers.
- **OECD experience** shows that strong public hospitals provide a credible alternative, while primary care prevents disease and reduces avoidable hospitalisation.

- Public insurance, including **AB-PMJAY**, should reward appropriate treatment rather than procedure volumes, supported by clinical audits, evidence-based protocols and transparent billing.

Beyond Editorial

Patient Rights Framework

- **Informed consent:** The Supreme Court in *Samira Kohli v. Dr. Prabha Manchanda* (2008) required valid, procedure-specific consent to protect patient autonomy before invasive treatment.
- **Treatment information:** The **NHRC Charter of Patients' Rights** recognises access to clear information on diagnosis, risks, treatment alternatives and expected costs.
- **Billing transparency:** Displayed tariffs, advance estimates and itemised bills can operationalise the **Clinical Establishments Act, 2010** and prevent unexplained hospital charges.
- **Medical records:** The NHRC Charter grants patients access to case papers, investigation reports and discharge summaries, enabling second opinions and continuity of treatment.
- **Emergency access:** In *Parmanand Katara v. Union of India* (1989), the Supreme Court held that every doctor must prioritise life-saving treatment over procedural requirements.
- **Data privacy:** The **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission** uses consent managers for health-record exchange, demonstrating how patients can retain control over personal medical data.
- **Accessible redressal:** *Indian Medical Association v. V.P. Shantha* (1995) brought paid medical services under consumer protection, enabling patients to challenge deficient care.

2. Making India's food system climate-proof cannot wait (GS Paper I Society, GS Paper III Environment)

This editorial '**Making India's food system climate-proof cannot wait**' was published in **The Hindu** on 27th Aug 2026, highlights the need to integrate **climate resilience**, **nutritional diversity** and sustainability into India's food-security architecture.

Food-Security Gains and Climate Risks

- India progressed from 1960s food dependence to a major producer with buffer stocks and subsidised food entitlements for nearly 800 million people under the **National Food Security Act, 2013**.
- This transformation rests on **public investment** in seeds, irrigation, procurement, storage, price support and distribution, which must now withstand frequent climate extremes.
- India must ensure affordable and nutritious food for **1.4 billion people** despite rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, extreme weather and water scarcity.
- Foodgrain production exceeded **350 million tonnes** in 2024-25, while digitised Public Distribution System operations and **One Nation One Ration Card** improved access and portability.
- Climate risks affect the entire **food value chain** as heat reduces wheat yields, erratic monsoons cause floods and droughts, and extreme weather disrupts storage and transport.

Diversified and Climate-Responsive Food System

- National procurement remains concentrated in rice, wheat and a few regions, including areas facing severe **groundwater stress**, reflecting priorities shaped by earlier production constraints.
- Procurement should progressively diversify across crops and regions, with **price support** encouraging commodities suited to local water availability and climatic conditions.
- Rice and wheat will remain essential, but **millets, pulses and oilseeds** can reduce production risks, improve dietary diversity and build a resilient national food portfolio.
- The **Public Distribution System** should include locally appropriate millets and pulses, linking food security with nutrition, water conservation and climate adaptation.

Information, Infrastructure and Financing

- **India Meteorological Department** forecasts should guide procurement, buffer stocks and contingency planning, while NFSA monitoring should track heat, water stress and supply-chain resilience.
- Farmers require **climate-resilient seeds**, micro-irrigation, watershed development, precision farming, digital advisories and weather-indexed insurance to manage production risks.
- **Public-private collaboration** can accelerate research, certification and last-mile delivery, while public safeguards protect smallholders and climate-exposed regions.
- Flood-resilient warehouses, heat-suitable storage, expanded **cold chains** and robust transport links are necessary to protect grain and perishables.
- Adaptation incentives and standards should cover **procurement, logistics and market stabilisation**, extending climate resilience beyond agricultural production.
- Green bonds, adaptation finance, insurance and resilient value chains can mobilise **climate finance**, while measurable emission, sequestration and resilience targets enable coordinated action.
- A broader **climate buffer** combining diversified crops, procurement regions, resilient infrastructure, climate information, insurance and water management can reduce systemic food-system risks.

Beyond Editorial

Circular Food Systems

- **Waste prevention:** The **UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024** estimated Indian household food waste at 55 kg per person annually in 2022.
- **Surplus redistribution:** FSSAI's **Indian Food Sharing Alliance** connects food businesses with recovery organisations to provide safe surplus food to vulnerable communities.
- **Waste valorisation:** Indore processes nearly 20 tonnes of coconut waste daily into cocopeat and coir fibre, creating value from discarded agricultural material.
- **Bioenergy generation:** By January 2026, **GOBARdhan** had 979 operational biogas plants covering 51.4% of districts and processing dung, crop residues and food waste.
- **Nutrient recovery:** Indore's 550-tonne-per-day Bio-CNG plant produces about 100 tonnes of compost daily, which is supplied to farms for improving soil health.
- **Water reuse:** Delhi supplies treated sewage from plants such as Okhla, Keshopur and Coronation Pillar for irrigation, reducing dependence on freshwater.
- **Packaging circularity:** The **Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2022** mandate recycling, rigid-packaging reuse and recycled content through Extended Producer Responsibility.

3. Restoring lakes by going beyond quick fixes (GS Paper III Environment)

This editorial 'Restoring lakes by going beyond quick fixes' was published in **The Hindu** on 27th Aug 2026, highlights the need to restore urban lakes as living ecosystems through **ecological planning, legal protection and accountable governance.**"

Ecological Importance and Decline

- Covering nearly **6% of Earth's surface**, wetlands store substantial carbon, support biodiversity, regulate climate and promote human well-being.
- Degraded or eutrophic **urban lakes** weaken natural defences against climate change, damage public health and threaten urban liveability.
- **CAG reports** recorded shrinkage of over 500 Jammu and Kashmir lakes since 1967, while Hyderabad lost about 61% of its lake area after 1979.
- Hyderabad also lost **268 water bodies** between 2002 and 2012, intensifying the need to treat lakes as climate buffers and urban sponge systems.

Causes and Governance Failures

- Rapid, unplanned **urbanisation** treats lakes as vacant land rather than ecological infrastructure, encouraging encroachment and systematic disappearance.
- Untreated sewage, industrial effluents and municipal waste reflect **institutional apathy**, leaving lakes degraded through both encroachment and neglect.
- Rising urban land values have converted agricultural fields and **lake catchments** around Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Mumbai into lucrative real estate.
- Lakes increasingly carry an **opportunity cost**, incentivising their filling, fragmentation and conversion into housing, highways and commercial complexes.
- Expanded **Ramsar recognition** has not ensured local conservation because ambiguous boundaries, encroachment and disrupted catchments persist.
- Missions such as **AMRUT**, Jal Shakti Abhiyan and Mission Amrit Sarovar provide policy frameworks, but fragmented responsibility weakens implementation.
- Municipal bodies often prioritise **cosmetic beautification** through promenades, lighting and fencing while neglecting feeder channels, catchments and water quality.

Restoration Models and Structural Reforms

- Telangana's **HYDRAA** reclaimed encroached lakebeds, cleared structures within Full Tank Levels and restored hydrological flows by desilting blocked feeder channels.
- These measures nearly doubled the water spread of **Nalla Cheruvu** from 16 acres to 30 acres, demonstrating the value of institutional commitment.
- Citizen-led "lake champions" revived **Puttenahalli, Jakkur and Kudikunta** in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, showing the potential of sustained community ownership.
- Successful interventions require statutory backing, assured funding and consistent **legal enforcement** to become replicable rather than isolated models.
- Water bodies and catchments must be integrated into **city planning**, receive absolute legal protection and face strict penalties against encroachment.
- Fragmented administration should give way to **unified authorities**, while citizen participation must be institutionalised within permanent governance frameworks.

Beyond Editorial

Judicial Framework for Lake Protection

- **Constitutional protection:** **Article 21**, supported by Articles 48A and 51A(g), provides the constitutional foundation for protecting clean water and healthy ecosystems.
- **Public trust doctrine:** *M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath* (1997) established that the State holds natural resources in trust and cannot divert them for private commercial use.
- **Pond restoration:** *Hinch Lal Tiwari v. Kamala Devi* (2001) held that public ponds cannot be allotted for construction merely because they have become dry or neglected.
- **Commons protection:** *Jagpal Singh v. State of Punjab* (2011) directed States to remove illegal occupation from village commons and restore them for community use.
- **Ecological priority:** *Intellectuals Forum, Tirupathi v. State of Andhra Pradesh* (2006) protected the historic Peruru and Avilala tanks from conversion for urban development.
- **Restoration liability:** *Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India* (1996) recognised the precautionary and polluter-pays principles, including liability for ecological restoration.
- **Expanded coverage:** The Supreme Court's 2025 Futala Lake ruling extended the **public trust doctrine** to artificial lakes and reservoirs performing essential ecological functions.