EDITORIALS - 28TH JUL 2026

1. FORCED LABOUR FARCE

(GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'Forced labour farce' was published in The Hindu on 28th Jul 2026, highlights how the U.S.'s selective forced-labour tariffs expose their trade-driven purpose and should not pressure India into a deal.

Tariff design and trade incentives

- The U.S. imposed a 10% tariff on Indian and other imports allegedly made with forced labour, using it to restore permanent duties and promote trade deals.
- The U.S. Supreme Court's February 2026 ruling weakened reciprocal tariffs, while President Trump's temporary universal tariff expires in 150 days and treats all countries alike.
- Unlike temporary duties, Section 301 forced-labour tariffs are more permanent and provide concessions to countries with U.S. trade agreements.
- Indian goods face 10% above the base tariff, while the European Union and Taiwan face a total 10%; Japan, South Korea and Switzerland receive similar trade-linked benefits.
- If forced-labour prevention were the primary aim, tariffs would apply equally regardless of trade-deal status, without extensive product exemptions and country-specific quotas.

India's position and unresolved risks

- India faces penalties despite no forced-labour accusation, effectively being punished for third-country practices despite U.S. assurances against acting as the "world police".
- India reduced the proposed tariff from 12.5% to 10%, matching competitors, merely by notifying a ban on imports produced through forced labour.
- Enforcement may require China and Malaysia to permit Indian inspections of labour conditions, while a separate Section 301 investigation into excess capacity could trigger further tariffs.

Beyond Editorial

WTO Legality of Labour-Linked Tariffs

- MFN scrutiny: GATT Article I generally requires equal tariff treatment; a WTO panel found U.S. exemptions for selected countries from steel and aluminium duties violated this principle.

- Bound tariff limits: The same panel found that U.S. steel and aluminium duties exceeded its scheduled tariff ceilings and were inconsistent with GATT Article II.
- Public morals defence: In EC–Seal Products, animal welfare qualified as a public-morals concern, but the EU failed to justify its discriminatory implementation under Article XX.
- Ends-means nexus: In US–Tariff Measures on China, the panel rejected the public-morals defence because the U.S. failed to connect selected Section 301 tariffs with its stated objective.
- Fair application: In US–Shrimp, brought by India and three Asian countries, the U.S. lost because it offered Western Hemisphere exporters greater assistance and transition time.
- Risk-based enforcement: The U.S. Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act creates a rebuttable presumption for Xinjiang-linked goods, illustrating targeted action based on identified supply-chain risks.
- Origin-neutral alternative: The EU Forced Labour Regulation will prohibit forced-labour products from December 2027 regardless of their origin or whether they are imported or domestically produced.

2. NILEKANI PANEL MANDATE MUST BE EXPANSIVE

(GS Paper II Governance)

This editorial 'Nilekani panel mandate must be expansive' was published in The Indian Express on 28th Jul 2026, highlights the need to expand examination reform into a broader education and employment transformation agenda.

Institutional response to the education crisis

- Month-long youth protests pushed education reform onto the political agenda, prompting the Centre to constitute a high-level task force after the Education Minister's resignation.
- The panel acknowledges a deep confidence crisis in a system shaping millions of lives, while its experts and former bureaucrats signal an approach extending beyond immediate crisis management.
- Nandan Nilekani's experience with Aadhaar and digital public infrastructure could help unite government, industry and civil society around large-scale institutional reform.

Examinations and the changing labour market

- Repeated examination failures triggered the agitation, but the deeper concern is whether education can create opportunities amid rapid changes in the world of work.
- Artificial intelligence is reshaping white-collar employment, automation is altering skill demand, and India's IT and outsourcing sectors face technological disruption.
- Young people confront double uncertainty from an examination system with declining credibility and a labour market whose requirements are rapidly changing.
- Nilekani advocates digital infrastructure, skilling and continuous learning to make AI a job multiplier and shift outsourcing professionals towards higher-value expertise.

Mandate and implementation

- The task force should not become a supra National Testing Agency; it must initiate broader reform and engage continuously with the changing knowledge economy.
- Recommendations require clear timelines and measurable milestones to prevent the delays that weakened earlier reform efforts.
- Major proposals of the K. Radhakrishnan Committee after the 2024 NEET failure, including accountability, institutional restructuring and technological upgrades, remain unevenly implemented.

Beyond Editorial

Safeguards for Technology-Led Education Reform

- Multimodal access: PM e-VIDYA combines digital, online and broadcast education, demonstrating how technology-led reforms can retain alternatives for learners without reliable internet access.
- Accessible design: DIKSHA provides audiobooks for visually impaired learners and an Indian Sign Language dictionary for hearing-impaired students, offering a model for inclusive platforms.
- Child data protection: The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 generally prohibits behavioural monitoring, tracking and targeted advertising involving children.
- Algorithmic fairness: Britain's 2020 A-level algorithm disadvantaged high-performing students from historically low-performing institutions, leading authorities to replace calculated results with school-assessed grades.
- Cyber resilience: The 2024 UGC-NET examination was cancelled after the I4C's cyber-threat unit reported that its integrity might have been compromised.

- Human oversight: The EU AI Act treats AI used for admissions, learning assessment and test monitoring as high-risk and requires oversight by competent authorised persons.
- Evidence-based scaling: UNESCO found limited robust evidence of educational technology's benefits, while products change every 36 months on average, supporting pilots before nationwide adoption.

3. INDIA, BANGLADESH MUST NOT JUST RENEW GANGA TREATY. THEY SHOULD REIMAGINE IT

(GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial 'India, Bangladesh must not just renew Ganga Treaty. They should reimagine it' was published in The Indian Express on 28th Jul 2026, highlights the need to transform the bilateral water-sharing pact into a wider framework for regional cooperation and climate resilience.

Treaty context and expanded agenda

- As the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty nears the end of its 30-year term, negotiations must address changed political, institutional and ecological conditions beyond water-sharing at Farakka.
- The treaty created a flow-dependent formula, including 50:50 sharing below a specified flow, but Bangladesh remained dissatisfied with its dry-season allocation.
- The next agreement must cover the Teesta dispute, other shared rivers and climate risks affecting Himalayan glaciers, hydrological extremes and ecosystem resilience.

Political constraints

- The 1996 treaty followed sustained Track 1 diplomacy and Track 2 engagement during stable bilateral relations, whereas present negotiations face greater domestic political polarisation.
- Negotiations must address anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh and India's federal politics, including West Bengal's water demands and Bihar's concerns over upstream siltation and floods.
- Dhaka's engagement with China in the Teesta basin may strengthen short-term leverage but could securitise negotiations, while India must secure state participation through federal diplomacy.

Negotiating framework

- Both countries must avoid the territorial trap of treating negotiations solely as exchanges between Delhi and Dhaka, since water diplomacy depends upon managing domestic constituencies.

- Shared rivers create unavoidable interdependence, making stable cooperation more beneficial than zero-sum bargaining over water allocations.
- Cooperation on flood management, fisheries, inland navigation, forecasting and ecological restoration can generate shared gains and give the treaty a regional character.

Institutional and regional vision

- The Joint Rivers Commission and Joint Committee were designed to implement agreements, not manage uncertainty; stronger institutions must cover data, monitoring, disputes and emerging risks.
- Both countries must rebuild political capital through Track 1 negotiations and Track 2 dialogue that sustains intellectual and political support for cooperation.
- The treaty offers an opportunity to revive the regional vision once associated with SAARC, although its institutional form may evolve to address shared vulnerabilities and a fragmented global economy.

Beyond Editorial

Principles of International Water Law

- Equitable utilisation: The 1997 UN Watercourses Convention requires allocation based on geography, population, dependence, existing uses and alternatives rather than equal division alone.
- No-significant-harm rule: Article 7 requires states to prevent substantial cross-border harm and consult affected countries over mitigation or compensation when damage occurs.
- Limited sovereignty: The 1957 Lake Lanoux arbitration required France to consider Spain's downstream interests in good faith, rejecting absolute control over shared waters.
- Prior consultation: In the Pulp Mills case, the ICJ held that Uruguay breached procedural cooperation obligations by failing to properly inform the joint river commission.
- Environmental assessment: In its 2015 Costa Rica–Nicaragua judgment, the ICJ reaffirmed that projects posing significant transboundary harm require an environmental impact assessment.
- Ecological flows: The 2013 Kishenganga award permitted India's hydropower diversion but required a minimum downstream release of nine cubic metres per second.
- Graded dispute resolution: The Indus Waters Treaty assigns questions to the Permanent Indus Commission, differences to a Neutral Expert and disputes to a Court of Arbitration.