EDITORIALS – 3rd SEP 2026

1. "EARLY HARVEST" — LARGER BUT NOT NECESSARILY SAFER

(GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial '**"Early Harvest" — larger but not necessarily safer**' was published in **The Hindu** on 3rd Sep 2026, highlights the strategic risks of pursuing a partial **India-China boundary settlement** without an agreed comprehensive framework.

Early-Harvest Proposal

- The **25th Special Representatives' talks** proposed an "Early and Substantial Harvest" through two expert groups, but their pending terms of reference show that negotiations remain preliminary.
- India coined **Early Harvest** around 2019, proposing settlement of Sikkim and the entire Middle Sector along the watershed after rejecting China's Sikkim-only approach.
- China earlier offered to include only **undisputed stretches** of the Middle Sector, potentially creating an "agreement with holes" that leaves contested pockets and trijunctions unresolved.
- Beijing's acceptance of India's original formulation appears doubtful because it would require relinquishing claims over nearly **2,450 sq km** south of the Middle Sector watershed.

Legal and Strategic Risks

- A selective settlement would create an **asymmetric outcome**, requiring Indian concessions in stronger sectors without Chinese flexibility in the Eastern and Western Sectors.
- Such piecemeal delimitation could undermine **Article III** of the 2005 Agreement, which requires a package settlement across all strategically interconnected boundary sectors.
- The Sikkim boundary remains disputed because the **1890 Convention** invokes both the watershed and Mount Gipmochi, while later British maps placed the trijunction 6.5 km north.
- India and Bhutan locate the trijunction at **Batang La**, whereas China's Gipmochi claim pushes it south towards the strategically important Jampheri Ridge.
- Even excluding the trijunction from settlement could weaken India's position in Bhutan, where China's proposed territorial exchange involves **Doklam** and threatens the nearby Siliguri Corridor.
- China has built roads, villages and military facilities across western Bhutan since the **2017 Doklam standoff**, strengthening its de facto presence around the plateau.

Conditions and Unresolved Issues

- A genuine settlement must apply the **highest-watershed principle** throughout both sectors, exclude third-country trijunctions and faithfully extend India's 2019 proposal.
- Starting delimitation before establishing the **agreed framework** required by Article IX raises procedural concerns, especially as China uses delimitation and demarcation interchangeably.
- New hotlines, meeting points, pilgrimage, border trade and river talks are useful **confidence-building measures**, but should not be presented as progress towards boundary settlement.
- The Eight Points report no progress on hydrological cooperation and omit the **Medog hydropower project**, despite its border proximity and location in an earthquake-prone region.

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Domestic Consensus for Boundary Settlements

- **Parliamentary legitimacy:** The 2015 India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement gained democratic legitimacy through the unanimously passed 100th Constitutional Amendment, enabling the exchange of 162 enclaves.
- **Federal consultation:** Boundary decisions must involve affected States, as the India-Bangladesh settlement directly concerned territories in Assam, West Bengal, Meghalaya and Tripura.
- **Community consent:** Enclave residents under the 2015 agreement could remain where they lived or relocate across the border, demonstrating a people-centred approach to territorial settlement.
- **Bipartisan continuity:** The India-Bangladesh agreement, signed in 1974 but implemented in 2015, shows that durable boundary settlements require political support across governments and parties.
- **Border development:** The Vibrant Villages Programme identified 2,967 northern-border villages for development to reduce outmigration, improve livelihoods and strengthen India's frontier presence.
- **Institutional coordination:** India-China agreements concluded in 1993, 1996, 2005 and 2013 demonstrate how sustained diplomatic, military and political engagement can maintain continuity in border management.
- **Public communication:** The External Affairs Minister's parliamentary statements on the 2024 Depsang and Demchok disengagement illustrate how official briefings can build trust without revealing operational details.

2. RIVER-LINKING IS NOT THE SOLUTION

(GS Paper III Environment)

This editorial '**River-linking is not the solution**' was published in **The Hindu** on 3rd Sep 2026, highlights why river interlinking cannot replace timely **dispute resolution**, **ecological safeguards** and **demand-side water management**.

Water Disputes and Institutional Delays

- The proposal to link the **Brahmaputra, Godavari and Cauvery** promises long-term water security, but cannot resolve complex inter-State sharing disputes by itself.
- Tamil Nadu sought a **Pennaiyar tribunal** in November 2019, yet two committees, 11 meetings and a Supreme Court deadline have not produced an adjudicatory body.
- The Centre proposed transferring the Pennaiyar dispute to the **Mahadayi Tribunal**, despite lacking commonality and authorisation under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956.
- The Centre has also not responded to Tamil Nadu's March demand for a tribunal over Karnataka's proposed **Mekedatu project**, reinforcing concerns about delayed adjudication.

Limitations of River Interlinking

- Proponents describe linking as diversion of **surplus water**, but experts fear recipient regions may demand supplies during distress, depriving original beneficiaries.
- River diversion may cause serious **ecological damage**; Kerala argues that the Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar link would threaten the Vembanad wetland system.
- India has completed only a few **inter-basin transfers** in 130 years, including Mullaperiyar, Parambikulam-Aliyar, Krishna Water Supply and Indira Gandhi Canal projects.
- The **Special Committee for Interlinking of Rivers**, constituted in 2014, has held over two dozen meetings without achieving significant progress.
- The ₹44,000-crore **Ken-Betwa Link Project**, launched in 2024, has triggered protests among tribal communities in Chhatarpur over its local consequences.

Sustainable Water Management

- Governments should prioritise **demand-side management** because land scarcity, acquisition difficulties and public resistance increasingly constrain mega-irrigation projects.
- Large-scale awareness and incentives must encourage farmers to adopt **optimal water use**, conserving existing supplies instead of perpetually expanding infrastructure.
- **Groundwater over-extraction**, encouraged by free agricultural electricity in several States, risks ecological disaster and requires immediate restraint.

- Genuine **water conservation** must guide governments, citizens and other stakeholders; otherwise, recurring inter-State disputes will remain unavoidable.

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Climate Uncertainty in River-Basin Planning

- **Surplus uncertainty:** Government assessments acknowledge that river flows depend on rainfall intensity, catchment conditions and withdrawals, making the fixed surplus-deficit classification behind 30 proposed links increasingly uncertain.
- **Monsoon volatility:** India's temperature rose about 0.7°C during 1901–2018, with the Ministry of Earth Sciences linking warming to greater monsoon variability, heavy rainfall, droughts and floods.
- **Synchronous scarcity:** The 2016 Cauvery crisis showed how the same weak monsoon can simultaneously affect donor and recipient regions, leaving little dependable water available for transfer.
- **Glacial vulnerability:** The 2023 South Lhonak glacial lake outburst flood damaged infrastructure across the Teesta basin, demonstrating the cascading risks facing Himalayan water projects.
- **Ecological flows:** The National Green Tribunal directed States to maintain 15–20% of average lean-season flows, while a 2018 notification prescribed minimum flows for the upper Ganga.
- **Cumulative assessment:** Carrying-capacity studies of the Siang and Subansiri basins illustrate why interconnected projects require basin-wide ecological evaluation rather than isolated project clearances.
- **Adaptive monitoring:** The E-Flow Monitoring System launched in 2024 tracks inflows, outflows and mandated releases across 11 Ganga projects, offering a model for climate-responsive river operations.

3. CONTROVERSY OVER GDP NUMBERS IS UNWARRANTED

(GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial '**Controversy over GDP numbers is unwarranted**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 3rd Sep 2026, highlights why India's **revised GDP estimates** remain **credible** when compared on a **consistent base** and supported by underlying economic indicators.

Basis of the Controversy

- Countries routinely revise GDP due to **base-year changes** and updated data; emerging economies may see larger revisions as informal, digital and consumer sectors evolve.
- Under the **2011-12 series**, Q1 FY26 nominal GDP was ₹86.11 lakh crore; the 2022-23 series revised it to ₹80.4 lakh crore and estimated Q1 FY27 at ₹88.3 lakh crore.
- The disputed **2.6% growth** compares Q1 FY27 under the new series with Q1 FY26 under the old series, creating an invalid hybrid calculation.
- A **like-for-like comparison** of ₹88.3 lakh crore with ₹80.4 lakh crore yields 9.7% nominal growth, marginally below the reported 10.3%.
- Even after adjusting this difference through the **GDP deflator**, hypothetical real growth would be 7.4%, close to the officially reported 7.8%.

Credibility of Revised Estimates

- The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation** annually reconciles quarterly estimates with revised national accounts, which can raise or lower earlier figures.
- Including revised historical quarterly data improves **statistical transparency** and aligns GDP estimates with rebased CPI, IIP, WPI and PPI series.
- Base alignment ensures that **GDP deflators** and volume estimates remain consistent with updated price and production indices.
- Q1 FY27 **real GVA growth** of 8.2%, alongside GST collections of ₹10.42 lakh crore through August, supports strong underlying activity.
- Domestic passenger vehicle sales rose 25.6%, tractors 19%, **industrial production** 6.2%, steel 4.8% and cement 8.8%.
- Exports grew 17% through July, while **net FDI** increased from $4.75 billion to $7.8 billion, contradicting claims of only 2.6% expansion.
- The **World Bank** recognises revisions as necessary for accuracy and comparability, while cautioning that rebased series require consistent historical linking.
- Q1 FY27 estimates will be finalised only by **February 2029**, and the present rebasing reduced GDP size rather than artificially enlarging it.

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Limitations of GDP as a Measure of Welfare

- **Distributional blindness:** The United Nations' 2026 Beyond GDP initiative recognises that aggregate output overlooks inequality and poverty, even when national production records rapid growth.
- **Employment disconnect:** The India Employment Report 2024 found that young people constituted nearly 83% of India's unemployed population in 2022, exposing the gap between output and employment.
- **Job-quality deficit:** The same report estimated that nearly 82% of workers were engaged in the informal sector and almost 90% remained informally employed despite sustained economic expansion.
- **Unpaid work:** The 2024 Time Use Survey found that female participants spent 305 minutes daily on unpaid domestic work and 140 minutes on caregiving, compared with 74 minutes for men.
- **Environmental exclusion:** United Nations assessments note that GDP ignores natural-resource depletion, allowing deforestation, extraction and subsequent restoration expenditure to increase measured economic activity.
- **Social-outcome gap:** National Family Health Survey-5 recorded stunting among 35.5% of children below five, showing that economic growth does not automatically eliminate nutritional deprivation.
- **Multidimensional assessment:** NITI Aayog estimated that multidimensional poverty fell from 29.17% in 2013–14 to 11.28% in 2022–23, demonstrating the value of health, education and living-standard indicators.