

EDITORIALS - 7TH SEP 2026

1. STEADY GAZE

(GS Paper III Science and Technology)

This editorial ‘Steady gaze’ was published in **The Hindu** on 7th Sep 2026, highlights **EOS-05’s geosynchronous Earth-imaging** capabilities, wide applications and implications for ISRO’s institutional credibility.

EOS-05: Technological Significance

- **EOS-05**, India’s first Earth-imaging satellite in **geosynchronous orbit**, can continuously observe the same location by matching Earth’s rotation.
- Placed initially in a **transfer orbit**, onboard thrusters will raise it to nearly **36,000 km** over the coming weeks.
- Its **multispectral sensors** analyse reflected wavelengths rather than conventional images, distinguishing vegetation, water and other **land cover**.
- The higher orbit sacrifices **fine spatial detail** but enables frequent observation of the same broad areas, improving **revisit frequency**.
- Unlike the geostationary **INSAT-3D weather series**, dedicated Earth-imaging relied on low **polar satellites** that provide finer detail but revisit locations after several days.

Strategic and Developmental Applications

- EOS-05 can track **rapid disasters** such as floods, cyclones and forest fires while monitoring crops, forests, water bodies and **land use**.
- After the **Bhote Koshi deluge** in Nepal claimed 1,344 lives, persistent imaging could help detect landform changes preceding **glacier breaks** and avalanches.
- Frequent observation can determine whether **stubble fires** have declined or merely shifted timing to evade **polar-satellite passes**.
- Its designation as a **strategic satellite** reflects uses extending from security to weather, but effectiveness requires rapid conversion of images into **actionable forecasts**.

Launch Reliability and Institutional Credibility

- ISRO's first successful launch of **2026** reinforces confidence in the **cryogenic stage** that failed in 2021, though launch systems remain temperamental.
- Consecutive **PSLV failures** traced to its third stage show that past dependability does not guarantee **infallibility**.

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Governance of Earth Observation Data

- **Open-data access:** The National Geospatial Policy, 2022 promotes wider geospatial-data use, while the 2021 Guidelines introduced self-certification for Indian entities.
- **Data sovereignty:** The 2021 Guidelines require geospatial data finer than the prescribed threshold to be created by Indian entities and processed on domestic servers.
- **Privacy safeguards:** Linking satellite imagery with identifiable property or household records could attract safeguards under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023.
- **Disaster cooperation:** ISRO led the International Charter on Space and Major Disasters for six months from April 2025, facilitating satellite support during global emergencies.
- **Integrated governance:** The National Database for Emergency Management combines multi-scale geospatial data with decision-support tools for coordinated disaster planning.
- **Public accessibility:** ISRO's Bhuvan platform provides information on floods, cyclones, landslides and earthquakes, expanding administrative and public access to non-sensitive observations.
- **Continuous monitoring:** The National Agricultural Drought Assessment and Monitoring System has provided near-real-time drought information since 1989, demonstrating the value of institutionalised satellite monitoring.

2. JUDICIAL INTEGRITY — A CASE THE COURT CANNOT IGNORE

(GS Paper II Governance)

This editorial ‘**Judicial integrity — a case the Court cannot ignore**’ was published in **The Hindu** on 7th Sep 2026, highlights how **allegations** against a **Rajasthan High Court judge** expose structural weaknesses in judicial **appointments**, accountability and institutional response.

Allegations and Institutional Response

- **Justice Sandeep Mehta’s** three letters dated August 2, 10 and 17 sought Acting Chief Justice **Sanjeev Prakash Sharma’s** transfer, alleging victimisation, maladministration, roster manipulation, favouritism and nepotism.
- Although Justice Sharma denied the allegations, no official denial of the reported letters emerged, while the **CJI’s delayed response** risked allowing the matter to lapse upon Sharma’s **September 26 retirement**.
- Sharma’s unexplained return to Rajasthan in 2025, after his **2023 repatriation request** was rejected, preceded an unhealthy **11-month acting tenure** with extensive administrative powers.
- A **lawyers’ sit-in** led Sharma to stop hearing cases, while the Collegium’s August 31 recommendation resulted in **Justice Sanjay Agrawal’s** appointment as Rajasthan High Court Chief Justice.
- The allegations were exceptional because a sitting Supreme Court judge reportedly supplied verifiable material, yet the CJI maintained that findings required the **established institutional mechanism**, despite its delayed activation.
- **Transparency International’s 2002 report** reflected a judicial trust deficit, but individual aberrations should not tarnish the many judges preserving **judicial integrity**.

Structural Failures in Judicial Accountability

- Absence of **selection criteria** and opaque Collegium–Executive collaboration make appointments partisan and arbitrary, weakening identification of the most meritorious and **incorruptible candidates**.
- Transparent models such as inviting applications in **Canada** or using an independent selection body in the **United Kingdom** remain absent from India's appointment framework.
- The **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968** is practically defunct, while *K. Veeraswami vs Union of India* (1991) requires **CJI permission** before registering a First Information Report against a higher judiciary judge.
- This permission creates a circular barrier: police require evidence to seek investigation approval but cannot obtain **clinching evidence** without first conducting an **investigation**.
- The **Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill** passed by the Lok Sabha in 2012 lapsed in 2014, while impeachment under **Articles 124(4) and 217(1)(b)** and the 1999 in-house mechanism remain ineffective.

Precedents and the CJI's Responsibility

- During the **Justice V. Ramaswami inquiry**, successive CJIs advised leave and withheld judicial work even after the impeachment motion failed due to Congress abstention.
- After burnt currency notes were reportedly found at **Justice Yashwant Varma's residence**, **CJI Sanjiv Khanna** promptly transferred him to the Allahabad High Court, where he received virtually no judicial work.
- **XXX vs Union of India (2025)** affirmed the CJI's responsibility in matters involving **judicial integrity**, making prompt action essential where allegations are serious and immediately verifiable.

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Safeguarding Judicial Independence within Accountability Reform

- **Constitutional firewall:** In 2015, the Supreme Court invalidated the 99th Constitutional Amendment creating the NJAC, holding that its structure threatened judicial independence.
- **Complaint separation:** The United Kingdom's Judicial Conduct Investigations Office examines personal misconduct but excludes judicial decisions, which must be challenged through appeals.
- **Independent review:** The United Kingdom's Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman can review mishandled complaints or delays exceeding six months, adding external procedural oversight.
- **Time-bound inquiry:** The British system targets acknowledgement within two working days, an initial response within 15 working days and completion within 26 weeks.
- **Proportionate sanctions:** Formal advice, warnings, reprimands and removal under the British framework allow punishment to correspond with the seriousness of judicial misconduct.
- **Public accountability:** The British authority publishes disciplinary statements and annual reports, improving transparency without disclosing confidential information from ongoing proceedings.
- **Ethical benchmark:** The Bangalore Principles identify independence, impartiality, integrity, propriety, equality and competence as the core standards of judicial conduct.

3. THE POLITICAL COST OF UCT SCHEMES

(GS Paper II Governance)

This editorial '**The political cost of UCT schemes**' was published in **The Hindu** on 7th Sep 2026, highlights how **targeting errors** can undermine the developmental and **electoral benefits** of women-focused **cash transfers**.

Expansion and Rationale of UCT Schemes

- Since 2020, **Unconditional Cash Transfers** such as Tamil Nadu's Kalaigiar Magalir Urimai Thittam, West Bengal's Lakshmir Bhandar and Karnataka's Gruha Lakshmi have targeted **women voters**, yet some implementing governments still lost elections.
- UCTs provide women financial support and advance **SDG 5.4** by recognising unpaid domestic and care work; States were expected to spend **\$18 billion** on them in 2025-26.
- Critics call UCTs **electoral freebies** that increase deficits or divert funds from employment, self-employment and other **productive investments**.
- Cash dependence makes withdrawal politically difficult and encourages **competitive welfarism**, potentially converting temporary transfers into enduring **fiscal commitments**.

Targeting Errors and Political Costs

- Informal-sector incomes are difficult to observe, forcing reliance on **proxy indicators** such as land, electricity use and assets, which create **inclusion and exclusion errors**.
- Tamil Nadu initially promised ₹1,000 monthly to all women-headed households but imposed **income and asset criteria** when fiscal constraints shaped the scheme's **September 2023 launch**.
- Coverage expanded from **1.13 crore women** to include another 16.94 lakh beneficiaries in December 2025, while expenditure reached **₹13,807 crore** in 2025-26.
- Dissatisfaction persisted because excluded women felt greater unfairness when newly eligible beneficiaries received three months' advance entitlement and a **special summer payment**, though the precise **electoral impact** remained immeasurable.
- Political costs arise from both **actual errors** and perceived unfairness: ineligible households may feel wrongly excluded, while affluent eligible households may appear **undeserving**.

- Economics favours **targeted welfare** for efficient resource allocation, but politics rewards wider inclusion because voters assess both benefits received and benefits **unfairly denied**.

Outcome-Linked Alternative

- **Conditional transfers** tied to socially desirable behaviour can produce broader development gains and lower political costs than unconditional payments.
- Tamil Nadu's **Midday Meal Scheme** links benefits with school enrolment, allowing **self-selection** to reduce grievances while advancing educational outcomes.

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Women's Economic Agency beyond Cash Transfers

- **Direct ownership:** Under the 2020 PM Garib Kalyan package, ₹500 monthly was transferred for three months to about 20.64 crore women Jan Dhan account holders.
- **Active account use:** A World Bank-supported SEWA programme reported women operating bank accounts rising from 56.2% to 81.3% after digital financial-inclusion interventions.
- **Control over earnings:** A Madhya Pradesh experiment found that depositing MGNREGA wages into women's accounts with training increased their work participation and reduced social stigma.
- **Collective empowerment:** By August 2026, DAY-NRLM had mobilised approximately 10.08 crore women into 92 lakh self-help groups, strengthening collective savings and credit access.
- **Enterprise creation:** The Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme had supported 4.32 lakh rural enterprises by June 2026, helping convert financial access into sustainable livelihoods.

- **Last-mile inclusion:** More than 50,000 trained Bank Sakhis provide women with local access to deposits, credit, remittances, pensions, insurance and government payments.
- **Care infrastructure:** The Palna component of Mission Shakti provides crèche facilities through Anganwadi-cum-Crèches and standalone centres, enabling mothers to pursue employment.