

Daily Editorial Analysis 28 March 2026

March 28, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



India's Growth Claims, A Clash with Data Reality

Context

- For years, India has been celebrated as **one of the fastest-growing major economies** in the world, with strong GDP figures reinforcing a narrative of sustained progress.
- However, economic realities for ordinary citizens often diverge sharply from these optimistic headlines.
- Daily life is shaped not by growth rates but by wages, employment opportunities, inflation, and business stability. T
- his contrast raises a fundamental question: **do official economic statistics accurately reflect the lived experiences** of India's population?

Questioning GDP Estimates and Why Small Errors Matter

- **Questioning GDP Estimates**

- A recent study by Abhishek Anand, Josh Felman, and Arvind Subramanian challenges the reliability of India's GDP data.
- Their research suggests that economic growth since 2011 may have been **overstated by approximately 1.5 to 2 percentage** points annually.

• Why Small Errors Matter

- While this discrepancy may appear minor, its cumulative impact is substantial. Over time, even slight overestimations can significantly distort:
 - Policy decisions
 - Investment strategies
 - Public perception of government performance
- Thus, what seems like a technical issue becomes a matter of national importance.

Structural Weakness in Economic Measurement

• Overreliance on the Formal Sector

- India's GDP estimation increasingly depends on **data from the formal sector**, such as corporate filings and organised industry reports.
- However, a large proportion of India's workforce operates in the informal sector, small businesses, daily wage labour, and cash-based activities.

• The Visibility Problem

- This creates a structural imbalance:
 - The formal sector is easier to measure and therefore **overrepresented**
 - The informal sector, though larger, remains underrepresented
- As a result, economic data may reflect what is visible rather than what is truly happening across the economy.

Disconnect Between Growth and Lived Experience

- Despite high reported growth rates, several key indicators suggest a weaker economic reality:
 - Sluggish private investment
 - Stagnant or slow real wage growth
 - Limited job creation in manufacturing
 - Rising unemployment concerns, especially among youth
- This disconnect has made the growth narrative increasingly difficult for citizens to relate to.

Impact of Economic Shocks

- **Major Disruptions to the Informal Economy**

- A series of economic shocks further exposed the gap between data and reality:
- Demonetisation disrupted cash-dependent sectors
- Goods and Services Tax increased compliance burdens on small firms
- COVID-19 disproportionately affected informal workers

- **Statistical Blind Spots**

- Because GDP calculations rely heavily on formal-sector indicators, the damage to informal sectors may not be fully captured, masking the true extent of economic distress.

The Deeper Contradiction in India's Growth Model

- **Rising Inequality**

- Economic growth has increasingly benefited:
 - Large corporations
 - Financial elites
- At the same time, public welfare systems have weakened in effectiveness.

- **The Illusion of Formalisation**

- Formalisation is often presented as progress, but it can also conceal:
 - The closure of small businesses
 - Market concentration in the hands of large firms
- While national accounts may record this as efficiency, it may actually represent economic displacement and reduced livelihood opportunities.

Concerns About Data Transparency

- **Missing and Controversial Data**

- Recent developments have raised concerns about the transparency of India's statistical system:
 - Delay in conducting the Census
 - Non-release of the 2017-18 consumption survey
 - Controversies over unemployment data

- **Implications for Democracy**

- These patterns suggest a growing discomfort with unfavourable data, which undermines:
 - Public trust
 - Policy effectiveness
 - Institutional credibility

The Role of Statistics in a Democracy

- Statistics are not merely tools for showcasing achievements; they are essential public infrastructure.

Reliable data enables:

- Citizens to hold governments accountable
- Economists to design effective policies
- Governments to identify and address emerging crises
- Without credible statistics, economic management becomes guesswork rather than informed decision-making.

The Way Forward

- To restore trust and accuracy in economic measurement, India must:
 - Strengthen independent statistical institutions
 - Improve methods to capture informal sector activity
 - Ensure transparency in data collection and publication
 - Avoid reliance on selective or incomplete indicators

Conclusion

- India's economic success cannot rest solely on impressive GDP figures. True progress must be reflected in the everyday experiences of its citizens.
- If growth is genuine, it should **withstand scrutiny and align with reality**.
- Ultimately, statistics should serve the purpose of truth, not political convenience.
- For a country of India's scale and ambition, credible and transparent data is not optional, it is essential for building an inclusive, resilient, and trustworthy economic future.

India's Growth Claims, A Clash with Data Reality FAQs

Q1. What is the main concern about India's GDP data?

Ans. The main concern is that India's GDP growth may have been overstated, making it less reliable.

Q2. Who conducted the study questioning GDP estimates?

Ans. The study was conducted by Abhishek Anand, Josh Felman, and Arvind Subramanian.

Q3. Why is the informal sector important in this discussion?

Ans. The informal sector is important because it employs a large part of the population but is not accurately reflected in GDP data.

Q4. Name one major event that affected the informal economy.

Ans. One major event that affected the informal economy was the Demonetisation.

Q5. Why are reliable statistics important in a democracy?

Ans. Reliable statistics are important because they help citizens, policymakers, and economists make informed decisions.

A Mislabelling of a Supreme Court Handbook

Context

- The recent observation by the **Chief Justice of India**, Justice Surya Kant, that the Supreme Court's Handbook on **Combating Gender Stereotypes (2023)** is technical and too Harvard-oriented has its relevance and accessibility.
- While the emphasis on improving judicial training is undeniably important, such criticism risks overlooking the handbook's actual purpose and contribution.
- A closer reading shows that the handbook is neither excessively academic nor detached from Indian realities; instead, it is a practical, precedent-based tool aimed at reforming judicial reasoning and language.

Purpose and Objectives of the Handbook

- **Identifying Stereotypical Language**

- It seeks to highlight language in judicial decisions that perpetuates gender stereotypes and recommends more appropriate alternatives.

- **Challenging Faulty Reasoning**

- The handbook examines common reasoning patterns rooted in stereotypes and explains why they are legally and constitutionally flawed.

- **Compiling Binding Precedents**

- It brings together Supreme Court judgments that have already rejected such stereotypes, making them accessible in a structured format.
- These objectives demonstrate that the handbook is not theoretical but deeply practical, designed to influence how judges write and reason in real cases.

The Role of Language in Judicial Reasoning

- **Problematic Terminology in Judgments**

- For instance, in **Velusamy vs D. Patchaiammal (2010)**, the term 'keep' was used to describe a woman in a live-in relationship.
- This expression reflects patriarchal assumptions and diminishes women's agency.
- Similarly, the use of the term ravished in rape cases carries outdated and moralistic undertones, shifting focus away from consent and bodily autonomy.

- **Corrective Approach of the Handbook**

- The handbook identifies such expressions and offers alternatives grounded in constitutional values like dignity and equality.
- In doing so, it promotes more sensitive and accurate judicial communication.

Grounding in Indian Legal Context

- **Reliance on Supreme Court Precedents**

- It compiles binding decisions of the Supreme Court that reject gender stereotypes.
- For example, it reiterates that the absence of physical injuries in sexual assault cases should not be used to discredit survivors.

- **Recognition of Survivor Realities**

- The handbook also acknowledges that there is no correct way for a survivor to behave, encouraging courts to adopt a contextual and empathetic approach.
- This reliance on existing Indian case law underscores its practical relevance and accessibility for legal professionals.

Understanding the Intended Audience

- **Designed for Legal Professionals**

- The handbook is intended for judges and lawyers, individuals trained to interpret legal texts, evaluate evidence, and write judgments.
- Technical language is therefore appropriate and necessary.

- **Not Meant for Laypersons**

- It is not designed as a public-facing document for survivors or the general population. Simplifying it excessively could undermine its effectiveness as a professional resource.

Scope for Improvement

- **Need for Continuous Evolution**

- Feedback from the judiciary, legal practitioners, and civil society can help improve its clarity and application.

- **Constructive Criticism over Dismissal**

- Rather than dismissing it as overly technical, stakeholders should engage with it critically to enhance its impact.

Conclusion

- The Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes represents an important **institutional effort** by the judiciary to address the subtle ways in which bias can influence legal reasoning.
- By focusing on language, precedent, and constitutional values, it **promotes a more equitable and accountable judicial process**.
- Labelling it as technical or Harvard-oriented risks undermining its significance and the progress it embodies.
- A more constructive approach would be to recognise its strengths while working towards its continuous improvement.

A Mislabelling of a Supreme Court Handbook FAQs

Q1. What is the main purpose of the handbook?

Ans. The handbook aims to identify and eliminate gender stereotypes in judicial reasoning and language.

Q2. Why is judicial language important according to the handbook?

Ans. Judicial language is important because it can reinforce or challenge social biases and inequalities.

Q3. On what basis is the handbook criticized as “Harvard-oriented”?

Ans. The handbook is criticized as “Harvard-oriented” due to the perception that it is overly technical and academic.

Q4. Is the handbook actually based on foreign ideas?

Ans. No, the handbook is primarily based on Indian legal precedents and Supreme Court judgments.

Q5. Who is the intended audience of the handbook?

Ans. The handbook is intended for judges and lawyers who are trained legal professionals.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India’s NDC 2035 - Balancing Climate Ambition with Energy Realities

Context:

- India recently announced its **updated** Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for 2030–2035 under the Paris Agreement.
- These targets emerge amid a **fragile global order** marked by geopolitical conflicts, weakening multilateralism, and renewed reliance on fossil fuels by developed nations.

India’s Enhanced Climate Targets:

- **Emissions intensity reduction:**

- Emissions intensity of GDP growth has now been set at **47%** reduction by 2035 (from 2005 levels) against the previous target of 45% and the actual figure of 36% already achieved.
- **Insight:** Incremental gains become harder as efficiency improves, yet India is likely to overachieve.

- **Non-fossil fuel energy capacity:**

- The previous target of 50% for 2030 has already been overtaken, as the current figure is 52.5%. The target of **60%** for 2035 is realistic, given a much more challenging energy outlook.
- **Key concern:** Installed capacity is not equal to actual generation, as renewable energy contributes only ~**20%** of electricity generation currently.
- **Need:** To improve grid integration, storage, and dispatch efficiency.

- **Carbon sink expansion through afforestation:**

- Against the previous target of adding 2.5-3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent by 2030, the current achievement is estimated to be 2.296 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.
- The target for 2035 has now been set at **5-4** billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, which appears realistic.
- **Risks:** Biodiversity loss, monoculture impacts, and inclusion of plantations may undermine ecological integrity.

Adaptation - A Strategic Priority:

- **Why does adaptation matter?** Even with zero emissions, climate impacts persist due to accumulated greenhouse gases.
- **Key measures:**
 - Heat Action Plans (HAPs) for rising temperatures.
 - Monitoring Himalayan glaciers and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).
 - Protection of Mangroves (coastal defense), marine ecosystems (fish stocks, biodiversity).
- **Regional cooperation:** Collaboration with neighbours essential for Himalayan ecosystem monitoring, and maritime ecological security.

Clean Energy Transition Pathways:

- **Green hydrogen:**

- India's green hydrogen mission holds great promise in meeting the twin challenge of **climate change** and energy security.
- **Challenge:** Currently, hydrogen is a byproduct from petrochemical production, so its generation is carbon intensive.
- **Solution:** Hydrogen can be produced through electrolysis, but whether this process uses fossil energy or renewable energy will determine how "green" and clean hydrogen can be as a fuel.

- **Nuclear energy push:**

- The government has set an ambitious target of **100 GW** of nuclear power by **2047**, coinciding with the Viksit Bharat target, against the current installed capacity of only **8 GW**.
- **Policy support:**
 - The **SHANTI Act 2025** opens this hitherto sensitive sector to the private sector, permitting up to 49% FDI in nuclear power generation.
 - It has also amended the liability clause in the existing legislation to bring it in line with international practice.
 - Promotes Small Modular Reactors (**SMR**) [200-250 MW capacity currently under development], providing decentralised and distributed power.

Structural Challenge - Energy Poverty:

- India's annual per capita electricity consumption is **1,460 KWh** as against a world average of 3,800 KWh.
- The challenge lies in significantly increasing this consumption but in as ecologically sustainable a manner as possible.

Global Context and Constraints:

- **Meagre climate finance:** Less than \$100 billion a year (developed countries promised \$100 billion a year since the Paris Agreement).
- **Challenges:** This meagre climate finance will be further squeezed under the impact of war, incipient inflation and competing demands of national security and relief from economic distress.
- **Need:** The world needs to recognise that energy transition requires resources that are limited in the absence of international support.

Key Challenges for India:

- **Domestic:** Bridging the gap between capacity and generation. Ensuring ecological integrity in afforestation. Scaling clean technologies affordably. Managing energy transition with limited resources.
- **External:** Lack of adequate climate finance. Weak global cooperation mechanisms. Pressure on developing countries to bear disproportionate burden.

Way Forward:

- **Policy and technology:** Invest in energy storage, smart grids, and transmission. Promote truly green hydrogen via renewables. Accelerate SMR-based nuclear expansion.
- **Ecological balance:** Prioritise natural forests over plantations. Strengthen coastal and marine ecosystem protection.
- **Adaptation and resilience:** Scale up HAPs nationwide. Enhance disaster preparedness (GLOFs, cyclones).
- **Diplomacy and cooperation:** Push for climate justice and finance accountability. Strengthen regional climate cooperation frameworks.

Conclusion:

- India's updated NDCs present a credible and balanced climate strategy, tackling the twin challenges of climate change and energy security with its own limited resources, and navigating the dual imperatives of development and sustainability.
- India's approach offers a **pragmatic model** for the Global South, but without robust international support, the transition risks being slower and more uneven.

India's NDC 2035 FAQs

Q1. What is the significance of India's updated NDCs for 2035?

Ans. They reflect enhanced ambition despite weakening global commitments, highlighting its leadership in climate action.

Q2. Why is there a gap between renewable energy capacity and actual generation in India? **Ans.** The gap arises due to intermittency and storage constraints, limiting the effective contribution of renewables to energy security.

Q3. What is the role of adaptation in India's climate strategy?

Ans. Adaptation is crucial as climate impacts persist despite mitigation, necessitating measures like Heat Action Plans and disaster preparedness.

Q4. What is the potential of green hydrogen and nuclear energy in India's clean energy transition?

Ans. Green hydrogen and nuclear energy offer scalable, low-carbon solutions to balance energy security with climate goals.

Q5. What are the challenges posed by energy poverty in achieving India's climate targets?

Ans. Low per capita energy consumption necessitates increased energy access, complicating the transition to sustainable and low-carbon pathways.

Source: IE

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/daily-editorial-analysis-28-march-2026/>

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