

## EDITORIALS – 15TH JUN 2026

### 1. The 'seven-point IQ opportunity' for Indian children (GS Paper I Society)

This editorial 'The 'seven-point IQ opportunity' for Indian children' was published in The Hindu on 15th Jun 2026, highlights how holistic Anganwadi-led early childhood intervention can improve Indian children's cognitive development through nutrition, stimulation, preschool learning and household engagement.

#### Early Childhood as a High-Impact Development Window

- India's early childhood agenda reduced under-five mortality from 43 in 2012 to 32 in 2020, but the next priority is developmental outcomes through health, nutrition and learning support.
- The Anganwadi system reaches nearly eight crore children aged 0-6 through supplementary nutrition, growth monitoring, health services, counselling and home visits, creating scale for early intervention.
- Early development is ecological because nutrition, health and learning interact through the body, brain and environment, while the developing brain consumes nearly one-fifth of resting energy.
- The first year is highly sensitive, with grey matter rising 149% and cerebellum 240%, making early stimulation vital for movement, language and planning skills.

#### Evidence on Nutrition, Environment and Cognition

- Jamaica's paediatric research showed nutrition improved physical health, but regular psychosocial stimulation through love-talk-play and responsive interaction generated stronger cognitive gains.

- A Vellore birth cohort of 250 children found early stunting worsened later cognition, while children who recovered physically showed better cognitive outcomes.
- International evidence on enteric dysfunction shows food intake alone is insufficient because sanitation, infection, inflammation, toxic exposure and stimulation shape nutrient absorption.
- Studies in Vellore found iron deficiency or high lead exposure lowered developmental scores even when height and weight were normal, proving growth charts miss neurodevelopmental risk.
- Children attending preschool regularly for 18–24 months, including Anganwadis, scored seven IQ points higher, while a Brazilian cohort showed an eight-unit cognition gain at age five.

### Anganwadi-Centred Policy Shift

- Indian policy is incorporating holistic early childhood development through Aadharshila, Navchetana and Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi, redefining Anganwadis as education-cum-care centres.
- Aadharshila strengthens play-based preschool inside centres, while Navchetana extends early stimulation into homes by guiding caregivers through everyday interactions.
- Daily routines such as feeding, cooking and play can become learning opportunities through loving, talking and playing, while Anganwadis deepen peer learning from ages three to six.
- Poshan Pakhwada 2026 promoted early brain development, play-based learning, parental engagement, screen reduction and stronger community mobilisation around Anganwadis.

### Wider Social and Developmental Gains

- Reliable childcare supports mothers' confidence and time for work, study or economic contribution, linking child development with women's agency.

- In Vellore, trained women childcare workers gained dignity and livelihood, creating a local care economy where children learn, women work and communities benefit.
- The editorial argues that Viksit Bharat needs enriching physical, intellectual and play-based environments in homes, Anganwadis and communities, not calories alone.

## Beyond Editorial

### From Child Welfare to Capability Building

- Learning poverty: Early childhood care must improve school readiness because poor foundational learning, as ASER 2023 showed in reading and arithmetic, begins before formal schooling.
- Nutrition-learning link: Nutrition schemes must track cognition because anaemia, seen in NFHS-5, and stunting reduce attention, memory and classroom participation despite enrolment.
- Parental agency: Caregiver training can turn homes into learning spaces, as UNICEF's Care for Child Development model uses play, naming, counting and responsive talk.
- Disability inclusion: Anganwadis should identify delays early because referral under Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram can prevent avoidable exclusion of children with developmental risks.
- Gender equity: Quality childcare improves women's work participation by reducing unpaid care burdens, as SEWA childcare models showed among informal women workers.
- Local capacity: Anganwadi workers need training, digital support and manageable workload because POSHAN Tracker, preschool teaching and home counselling require different skills.
- Demographic dividend: India's young population becomes an asset only when early investment, as stressed by NEP 2020, builds health, cognition and socio-emotional capability.

## 2. Make it clear: Indian sailors are not collateral damage (GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial 'Make it clear: Indian sailors are not collateral damage' was published in The Indian Express on 15th Jun 2026, highlights India's need to protect Indian seafarers through firm diplomatic red lines amid West Asian maritime conflict and strained India-US ties.

### Diplomatic Protest and India-US Strain

- The killing of three Indian sailors on MT Settebello in a US strike in the Gulf of Oman is a tragic incident that has further complicated an already uneasy India-US relationship.
- India's response, including strong objections, two summons to the US Chargé d'affaires and S. Jaishankar's protest to Marco Rubio, was justified because Washington's call summary ignored the deaths and only stressed compliance with US forces.
- Donald Trump's claim blaming Iran for alleged drone strikes on "Indian" ships, denied by Tehran, was unhelpful because it added confusion instead of acknowledging the gravity of civilian casualties.
- The incident has emerged alongside possible higher tariffs through USTR investigations, unsettling trade ties despite Rubio's visit and Ambassador Sergio Gora's efforts to steady relations.

### Seafarer Vulnerability and Legal Ambiguity

- Indian seafarers are highly exposed because they number around 3.08 lakh, nearly 12% of the global pool, with many working on routes affected by the West Asia conflict.
- Attacks on neutral merchant shipping remain contentious under international law, while open registries, flags of convenience and globalised crews make responsibility harder to assign.
- The Settebello case shows this ambiguity: the ship was flagged in Palau, run by a Dubai-based operator and crewed by Indians, while the US

justified the strike through blockade-violation claims that the operator denied.

- The episode shows that global shipping structures cannot dilute India's concern when the direct human cost falls on Indian citizens.

### India's Red Lines in Conflict-Zone Diplomacy

- With lakhs of citizens potentially at risk, India must ensure such attacks do not recur, mariners receive better protection and civilian seafarers are not treated as collateral damage.
- A possible peace deal and reopening of the Strait of Hormuz would relieve global shipping, especially for those risking their lives on contested high seas.
- New Delhi should keep engaging Washington, but must repeatedly underline that the life and death of Indian citizens remains a non-negotiable red line.

### Beyond Editorial

#### Consular Protection in Conflict Zones

- Citizen security: India's foreign policy must treat overseas workers as strategic citizens, as Operation Ganga in Ukraine and Operation Kaveri in Sudan showed.
- Maritime labour: Indian seafarers need stronger protection protocols because the Gulf of Aden piracy and Red Sea attacks exposed crews to sudden maritime risk.
- Consular preparedness: Embassies need worker databases, helplines and evacuation plans, as Vande Bharat Mission showed during COVID-19 repatriation.
- Legal assistance: Citizens in conflict-linked cases need diplomatic support because flags of convenience, as in Panama or Liberia-flagged ships, blur accountability.

- Employer liability: Shipping firms and recruiters must ensure insurance and compensation, as Migrant Workers' Act, 1983 makes safe overseas recruitment a state concern.
- Diaspora diplomacy: India's image depends on protecting ordinary workers too, as Kuwait 1990 evacuation showed during the Gulf War crisis.
- Strategic balance: India can protect citizens while engaging major powers, as Operation Rahat in Yemen evacuated Indians and foreigners amid conflict.

### 3. Our parched cities need to make every drop count, recycle water (GS Paper III Environment)

This editorial 'Our parched cities need to make every drop count, recycle water' was published in The Indian Express on 15th Jun 2026, highlights the need for India's cities to institutionalise treated wastewater reuse through policy, finance, technology and behavioural reform.

#### Urban Water Stress and Reuse Potential

- Heatwaves, high evaporation and rising domestic demand have worsened urban water scarcity, forcing cities such as Delhi to source water from distant places and increasing dependence on upper riparian regions.
- India's per capita water availability has fallen to about 1,500 cubic metres and may fall below 1,200 cubic metres by 2050, pushing the country towards water scarcity thresholds.
- The Council on Energy, Environment and Water estimates that treated wastewater reuse can unlock a market of over ₹3 lakh crore and regenerate 1,00,000 additional jobs by 2047.

- A circular water economy can help cities reduce deficits, with Thane potentially bridging its 53 million litres per day gap by scaling up treated water reuse.

### Policy, Planning and City-Specific Reuse

- Water reuse policy must be city-specific because Delhi, Varanasi and Bengaluru need agriculture-focused reuse in peri-urban areas, while Chennai, Thane and Surat need it for lake rejuvenation, construction or industry.
- About 14 Indian States have reuse policies, with Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha latest to frame them, but cities still need clear targets, quality norms, revenue models and implementation mechanisms.
- Urban reuse remains underdeveloped because less than half of municipal sewage receives treatment capacity and less than one-third was actually treated in 2021.
- Weak sewerage networks, limited sewage transport, staff shortages, energy deficits and poor operations keep reuse low despite public investments in sewage treatment plants.

### Financing, Technology and Institutional Reform

- Private investment is needed for treatment and reuse infrastructure, with blended finance models such as National Mission for Clean Ganga's hybrid annuity model sharing risk between government and developers.
- Treatment quality must improve because many plants fail Central Pollution Control Board discharge norms due to weak maintenance, industrial mixing and poor microbial treatment performance.
- Technological solutions, including small decentralised faecal sludge treatment plants and AI-based monitoring, can improve compliance, especially in peri-urban areas.

- Financial incentives should support reuse, with Gujarat-style assistance for industries adopting zero liquid discharge offering a workable policy example.
- A national circular water mission should shift urban water governance from linear use-and-dispose to reuse-led management through technological, institutional, financial and behavioural reforms.
- User charges for reclaimed water can improve viability, but targeted subsidies must keep access affordable for low-income users and protect the economic base.
- Institutional reforms should enable urban local bodies to create special-purpose instruments for reuse projects and convert treated wastewater into a business opportunity.

## Beyond Editorial

### Demand-Side Urban Water Governance

- Consumption efficiency: Cities must cut demand through metering, leak control and rational pricing, as Singapore's NEWater shows supply must pair with reuse discipline.
- Water audit: Urban local bodies need ward-level water audits, as Nagpur's 24x7 water project showed non-revenue water weakens conservation and finances.
- Behaviour change: Public campaigns can reduce wasteful use of freshwater, as Cape Town's Day Zero campaign showed demand restraint can delay crisis.
- Building codes: Apartments and institutions should mandate rainwater harvesting and greywater reuse, as Bengaluru rules require harvesting in large plots.
- Pricing equity: Progressive tariffs can curb luxury use while protecting basic needs, as Delhi's free water lifeline shows equity can guide pricing.

- Urban planning: Cities must link water demand with land-use planning, as Chennai's 2019 crisis exposed borewell dependence and groundwater depletion.
- Data governance: Smart meters and leakage dashboards can improve accountability, as SCADA systems help cities track losses before scarcity worsens.