

EDITORIALS – 20TH JUL 2026

1. THE STARK REALITY OF THE MISSING JOBS FOR INDIA'S GEN Z (GS PAPER III ECONOMY)

This editorial 'The stark reality of the missing jobs for India's Gen Z' was published in The Hindu on 20th Jul 2026, highlights India's faltering education-to-employment transition, marked by youth unemployment, gender exclusion and insecure work.

Weakening demographic dividend

- India's 371-million youth population becomes a dividend only through an effective education-to-work transition, which remains increasingly weak.
- PLFS 2023-24 estimates 29.94 crore working-age Gen Z individuals, but their labour force participation is 41.7%, against 75% among Millennials.
- Gen Z participation is higher in rural areas at 44.1% than urban areas at 37.2%, partly reflecting longer urban education and training.
- About 41.7% of young men and 38.4% of young women remain in education, delaying labour-market entry without ensuring adequate employment.

Gender disparity and graduate unemployment

- Among young men, 15.8% are unpaid family workers, 12.3% casual workers and only 14.8% regular wage earners, revealing widespread informal employment.
- Nearly 27.1% of Gen Z women perform domestic duties, compared with 0.32% of men, reflecting childcare, safety, mobility and social constraints.
- Gen Z unemployment is 11.9%, against 2% among Millennials; it rises to 17.1% in urban India and 22.6% among urban women.

- Unemployment among Gen Z graduates reaches 29% for men and 36.9% for women, exposing a severe graduate trap and skill-job mismatch.

Insecure work and required response

- Only 20.1% of Gen Z workers receive social security, 14.1% hold formal contracts and merely 17.3% have any contractual employment.
- Millennials fare only marginally better, with 26% receiving social security and 28.6% holding contracts, confirming persistent labour informality and weak protection.
- Automation and artificial intelligence compound educational mismatches, weakening employment prospects, family investment in education and confidence in economic growth.
- Violent labour protests in Noida reflect frustration produced by insecure, poorly protected work, low wages and inadequate working conditions.
- Skill programmes cannot replace job creation; labour-intensive sectors, employer-linked training, apprenticeships, formal hiring incentives, urban employment, safe transport and childcare require integration into labour policy.

Beyond Editorial

Can Gen Z become job creators?

- Employment multiplier: By March 2026, over 2.23 lakh recognised start-ups had created 23.3 lakh direct jobs, showing entrepreneurship can complement salaried employment.
- Geographical inclusion: Nearly half of recognised start-ups originate in Tier-II and Tier-III cities, enabling educated youth to create opportunities outside major metropolitan centres.
- Credit democratisation: Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana provides collateral-free loans up to ₹20 lakh, allowing asset-poor youth to establish micro and small enterprises.

- Innovation support: The Startup India Seed Fund Scheme supports prototypes, product trials and market entry through approved incubators, addressing the financing gap faced by first-time founders.
- Digital market access: Open Network for Digital Commerce can connect young entrepreneurs with buyers, sellers and logistics providers without dependence on a single dominant platform.
- Inclusive ownership: Women participate in nearly half of recognised start-ups, while Stand-Up India supports women, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe entrepreneurs through institutional credit.
- Quality safeguard: Entrepreneurship must not become disguised distress employment; mentoring, market linkages, formalisation and social security are essential for sustainable youth-led enterprises.

2. SPREADING WINGS (GS PAPER III ECONOMY)

This editorial 'Spreading wings' was published in The Hindu on 20th Jul 2026, highlights Vikram-1's engineering success alongside the commercial and regulatory challenges facing India's private space sector.

Vikram-1 and private launch capability

- Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 launch from Sriharikota marked India's first private orbital flight, demonstrating indigenous engineering capability.
- The four-stage launcher offers a satellite cab service, allowing customers to select launch schedules, orbital slots and drop-off points for a premium price.
- Carbon-composite structures aim to keep launch prices below the PSLV and projected SSLV, while the more powerful Vikram-2 is planned.
- Founded by former ISRO engineers in 2018, Skyroot progressed from 2020 engine tests to a 2022 suborbital flight and subsequent orbital launch.

Policy support and national ambition

- Reforms since 2020 and the Space Policy 2023 opened launch activities to private firms while refocusing ISRO on research and scientific missions.
- In 2024, India permitted 49% foreign direct investment in launch vehicles through the automatic route, supporting private-sector expansion.
- India seeks to expand its space economy from around \$8 billion to \$44 billion by 2033 across launches, manufacturing, communications, navigation and Earth observation.
- India became only the third country where a private enterprise demonstrated orbital launch capability, establishing important technical credibility.

Commercial and regulatory challenges

- Skyroot must prove launch repeatability and stable costs in a competitive market dominated by SpaceX, Rocket Lab and rapidly expanding Chinese firms.
- Cheaper rideshares on larger rockets challenge Vikram-1's premium scheduling model, making market demand and long-term commercial viability uncertain.
- Scaling production may expose batch variability and manufacturing weaknesses, making consistent quality harder than one-time engineering success.
- The absence of a Space Activities Act leaves liability governed by policies, contracts and existing laws, creating persistent regulatory uncertainty, especially after launch failures.

Beyond Editorial

Why private launches matter strategically

- Assured access: Multiple domestic launch providers can prevent single-point dependence on ISRO, reduce launch bottlenecks and

maintain access during technological failures or scheduling disruptions.

- **Crisis responsiveness:** Small private launchers can rapidly replace damaged satellites, preserving essential communication, navigation and surveillance capabilities during conflicts or national emergencies.
- **Strategic autonomy:** Indigenous launch capacity reduces exposure to foreign export restrictions, geopolitical pressure and international supply disruptions affecting critical satellite deployment.
- **Disaster readiness:** Private launch capacity can strengthen Earth observation and communication networks supporting cyclone tracking, flood mapping, wildfire monitoring and emergency connectivity.
- **Industrial spillovers:** Domestic launch companies deepen capabilities in propulsion, composites, avionics, precision manufacturing and software, strengthening the wider aerospace and defence industrial base.
- **Space diplomacy:** Affordable launch services can expand India's partnerships across the Indo-Pacific and Global South while supporting the national target of \$11 billion in space exports.
- **Security safeguards:** Private expansion requires strong cybersecurity, payload screening, export controls, debris mitigation and space-situational-awareness standards to protect national interests and orbital assets.

3. INDIA ONCE DOMINATED TEXTILE TRADE. IT NEEDS INSTITUTIONS TO MAKE A MARK AGAIN (GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'India once dominated textile trade. It needs institutions to make a mark again' was published in The Indian Express on 20th Jul 2026, highlights the institutional and ecosystem reforms required to restore India's global textile competitiveness.

Historical strength and present stagnation

- India's textile heritage extends from Harappan spinning artefacts to globally prized Dhaka muslin and Bengal silk, supporting nearly one-fourth of global output in 1700.
- The Industrial Revolution replaced artisanal advantage with technology, productivity and scale, turning India into a raw-cotton supplier and market for British textiles.
- India now possesses an integrated textile chain, while apparel generates 153 jobs per ₹1 crore invested, against 27 in automobiles and 14 in steel.
- India's global apparel share remained near 3% during 2000–2024, while Bangladesh reached 9.2% and Vietnam 6.4% in a \$521.4-billion market.

Comparative lessons and competitiveness gaps

- Apparel competitiveness rests on five pillars: scale and ecosystems, capital, labour and skilling, clusters and institutions, and trade facilitation.
- China built vertically integrated clusters, concessional finance, export-credit insurance and strong governance, while currency undervaluation provided an implicit export subsidy.
- Bangladesh combined LDC preferences, garment-specific finance, export zones and single-window regulation; Vietnam aligned foreign investment, industrial parks, FTAs and industry-academia partnerships.
- India lacks mid-sized, export-ready firms capable of fulfilling large orders quickly, while its 60:40 cotton–non-cotton mix differs from the global 25:75 fibre composition.
- Limited man-made fibre capacity restricts participation in activewear, technical textiles and athleisure, requiring investment beyond correcting the inverted duty structure.
- India's real interest rates of 6.2–8.2% exceed China's 3.1%, Vietnam's 1% and Bangladesh's negative rates, while delayed GST refunds weaken export liquidity.

- Migrant-dependent clusters face seasonal absenteeism and high attrition; locating factories near labour-surplus regions, as in Muzaffarpur, can reduce migration costs and increase female employment.

Institutional reform priorities

- The UK-CETA and EU-EFTA arrangements provide tariff parity with competitors, but competitiveness also requires seamless movement of goods, documents and approvals through integrated trade processes.
- India's \$100-billion export target by 2030 requires scale, finance, skills, diversified fibres, efficient logistics and predictable regulation across the entire textile value chain.
- PM-MITRA parks seek to integrate scale, infrastructure, finance, skills and market access, but their effectiveness depends on timely and coordinated institutional implementation.
- The proposed Export Promotion Mission and integrated textile programme can reposition India as a scale-driven, digitally enabled and women-inclusive global sourcing hub.

Beyond Editorial

The green test for India's textile resurgence

- Changing market access: The European Union increasingly expects textiles to be durable, repairable, recyclable and environmentally responsible, making sustainability central to future export competitiveness.
- Traceability requirement: Textile apparel is a priority category for the EU's Digital Product Passport, which will disclose materials, origin, sustainability and lifecycle information.
- Domestic foundation: Kasturi Cotton Bharat uses blockchain-based QR certification for end-to-end traceability, providing India with a foundation for premium and verifiable cotton exports.

- **Cleaner production:** Water-efficient dyeing, renewable energy, safer chemicals and zero-liquid-discharge systems can reduce environmental damage while meeting global buyer requirements.
- **Circular manufacturing:** Recycling production waste and discarded garments into usable fibres can reduce dependence on virgin materials, lower landfill pressure and create new industrial activities.
- **Social compliance:** Sustainable sourcing increasingly covers worker safety, fair wages and transparent supply chains, making labour standards important for both ethical production and export credibility.
- **MSME transition:** Green finance, shared treatment facilities, testing laboratories and technical assistance are necessary to prevent sustainability standards from excluding smaller textile exporters.