

EDITORIALS – 6TH JUL 2026

1. Old wine, new bottle

(GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'Old wine, new bottle' was published in The Hindu on 6th Jul 2026, highlights EPFO's recent changes as continuity with the Social Security Code rather than radical pension reform.

Continuity in EPFO Framework

- Fresh rules for EPF, EPS and EDLI are procedural, following enforcement of the Code on Social Security, 2020.
- The CBT had approved measures aligning EPFO schemes with the Code, which subsumes nine social security laws.
- With nearly eight crore subscribers, PF rule changes carry wide implications for workers and families.
- The notification mainly signals continuity, not reform, by aligning the existing PF framework with the Code.
- Voluntary PF contributions above the ₹15,000 wage ceiling remain unchanged, preserving a pre-COVID contribution practice.

Unmet Pension Expectations

- Pensioners expected revision of the ₹1,000 minimum monthly pension and the ₹15,000 wage ceiling fixed 12 years ago.
- EPFO's 2024-25 report shows 36.8 lakh of 81.5 lakh pensioners receive ₹1,000 or less monthly.
- The government has deferred both issues despite repeated demands from pensioners and other stakeholders.
- Raising grant-in-aid for minimum pension would cost around ₹1,000 crore annually and benefit about 20.6 lakh pensioners.

Fiscal Burden and Administrative Reform

- The Centre's ₹11,000 crore EPS outlay mainly funds its 1.16% wage-linked contribution, limited to the wage ceiling.
- The government should restore EPS applicability to all workers, irrespective of pay.
- If EPFO is overburdened, a tailored scheme may be framed under the PFRDA.
- Efforts to expedite and simplify claim settlements must continue, as EPFO decisions affect crores of employees.

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Beyond Editorial

Widening India's Social Security Net

- Informal gap: EPFO reform must connect with the wider informal workforce, as e-Shram had over 31.48 crore registered unorganised workers by January 2026.
- Gig economy: Platform workers need portable protection, because NITI Aayog projected India's gig workforce to rise to 2.35 crore by 2029–30.
- Legal recognition: The Social Security Code, 2020 recognises gig and platform workers, but the real challenge is contribution design and benefit delivery.
- Migrant portability: Social security should follow workers across States, similar to One Nation One Ration Card enabling ration access from any fair price shop.
- Women workers: Welfare design must cover domestic and home-based workers, as women formed 53.68% of e-Shram registrations by March 2025.
- Database convergence: e-Shram's One-Stop-Solution can reduce duplication by integrating welfare schemes, employment services, Skill India, DigiLocker and myScheme.
- Pension floor: PM-SYM's ₹3,000 monthly pension model shows how contributory support can extend old-age security beyond formal payroll workers.

2. From the Iran conflict, four geopolitical shifts India cannot afford to miss

(GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial 'From the Iran conflict, four geopolitical shifts India cannot afford to miss' was published in The Indian Express on 6th Jul 2026, highlights four geopolitical shifts from the Iran conflict that India must factor into energy security and regional strategy.

Diminishing U.S. Security Assurance

- The conflict exposed limits of U.S. deterrence and security assurance, as Gulf allies faced Iranian missiles, drones and economic damage.
- Despite heavy strikes on Iran's military infrastructure, America failed to achieve stated aims such as regime change and uranium-cache dilution.
- This dent in American credibility opens space for non-Western security ties and opportunities for India's defence manufacturing firms.

Chokepoints as Strategic Leverage

- The Strait of Hormuz, carrying around 20% of global petroleum supplies, remains a major market-disruption risk.

- Iran showed that asymmetric power can disrupt shipping sentiment through missile threats, fast boats and messaging without a formal blockade.
- Countries or firms controlling chokepoints gain leverage, as seen in Arm, TSMC, ASML and China's rare earth dominance.
- India should reduce exposure by expanding strategic petroleum reserves from about eight days to at least 30, preferably 60 days.

Weakening of Oil Cartel Influence

- OPEC appears weakened, with the UAE out, others reportedly near exit, and Iran at military loggerheads with Arab members.
- Oil prices peaked at \$126/bbl but later stayed in the \$90s, below the feared \$150-\$200 range.
- The moderate trajectory reflected lower China imports, IEA reserve drawdown and higher non-OPEC production, reducing cartel leverage.

Iran's Re-emergence and India's Opening

- Iran may re-emerge as a responsible state as power shifts toward technocratic, pragmatic and nationalist leaders.
- India's civilisational links and past energy ties with Iran support renewed technical, manpower and financial assistance.
- Supporting Iran's development can strengthen Tehran while improving India's chances of preferential energy access.

Beyond Editorial

Protecting Indians in a Volatile West Asia

- **Diaspora safety:** West Asia strategy must include citizen protection, because MEA data shows large Indian communities across UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain.
- **Evacuation readiness:** Operation Rahat in Yemen showed the need for advance advisories, naval deployment, air evacuation and coordination with host governments.
- **Remittance security:** Regional conflict can affect household incomes, as India remained the world's top remittance recipient with an estimated \$129 billion in 2024.
- **Consular capacity:** Platforms like MADAD should be strengthened, since online grievance registration, tracking and escalation are crucial during conflict disruptions.

- Labour diplomacy: India's manpower agreements with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Jordan provide a framework for worker welfare negotiations.
- Insurance cover: Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana protects ECR-category emigrant workers, making insurance a key layer of external human security.
- Wage protection: Qatar's Wage Protection System shows that Gulf labour reforms need enforceable payment monitoring, not only diplomatic reassurance.

3. Rice-to-ethanol policy is deepening economic and environmental stress (GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'Rice-to-ethanol policy is deepening economic and environmental stress' was published in The Indian Express on 6th Jul 2026, highlights how rice-to-ethanol policy deepens fiscal, food-security and environmental distortions.

Rice Surplus and Fiscal Distortion

- India produced 154 MMT rice in 2025-26 and exported 24.5 MMT in 2025, nearly 40% of global rice trade.
- Despite free foodgrain support under NFSA, FCI stocks were almost five times buffer norms on April 1, 2024.
- Excess rice stocks imposed ₹10,712 crore carrying cost, pushing the government to divert rice into ethanol production.
- In FY26, nearly 5 MMT FCI rice may go to ethanol, costing FCI ₹44/kg but supplied to plants at ₹23/kg.
- The policy revives the food-vs-fuel debate because ethanol production is being subsidised through cheap rice transfers.

Subsidy-Driven Rice Economy

- Open-ended MSP procurement sustains overproduction, while state bonuses raise paddy incentives above the 2025-26 MSP of ₹2,369/quintal.
- Free or cheap power encourages groundwater extraction because rice needs up to 25 irrigations per season.
- Urea pricing is heavily distorted, with the retail price frozen at ₹242 per 45-kg bag while government absorbs 85-90% cost.
- Combined subsidies for power, fertiliser and canal water made Punjab's paddy support ₹38,973/hectare in 2023-24.
- These incentives caused FCI stock overflow, but the government chose rice diversion to ethanol instead of correcting subsidy distortions.

Environmental and Policy Stress

- One kg rice requires about 4,000 litres of irrigation water, with much lost through absorption and evaporation.
- Transplanted rice emits large methane, while excessive fertiliser use releases nitrous oxide and contaminates groundwater with nitrates.
- Fertiliser overuse adds hidden health risks, including blue baby syndrome, thyroid disorders, diabetes and cancer concerns.
- The ethanol blending programme is valid, but mandating rice-based feedstock from FCI is counterproductive.
- Policy reform needs MSP change, no state bonuses, capped procurement beyond 40% production and no compulsory rice use for ethanol.
- Free PDS supplies should be limited to the most vulnerable under Antyodaya, with remaining households charged at least half MSP.
- Direct seeded rice and income support can save water, rationalise subsidies and make farm policy more sustainable.

Beyond Editorial

Reorienting Farm Support towards Climate-Resilient Crops

- Crop diversification: Haryana's Mera Pani Meri Virasat offered ₹7,000 per acre to shift from paddy to crops like maize, pulses and oilseeds.
- Nutrition security: The International Year of Millets, 2023 highlighted millets as climate-resilient crops that grow on arid land with minimal inputs.
- Price assurance: PM-AASHA can support diversification, as its Price Support Scheme procures notified pulses, oilseeds and copra when prices fall below MSP.
- Fertiliser reform: PM-PRANAM incentivises States to reduce chemical fertiliser use by sharing 50% of the subsidy saved with them.
- Water-saving farming: Direct Seeded Rice schemes, such as Haryana's DSR incentive, can reduce transplanting dependence and encourage water-conscious paddy cultivation.
- PDS reform: Nutri-cereals can be distributed through PDS under NFSA, helping link procurement reform with nutrition-sensitive food security.
- Incentive correction: Climate-smart farming needs price support, fertiliser reform and water accounting together, otherwise farmers remain locked into rice-wheat incentives.