

EDITORIALS - 11TH SEP 2026

1. A unilateral America in a post-unipolar world (GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial '**A unilateral America in a post-unipolar world**' was published in **The Hindu** on 11th Sep 2026, highlights how America's **post-9/11 military interventions** weakened its global primacy in an emerging **multipolar order**.

From War on Terror to Regime Change

- The **9/11 attacks** struck when the United States enjoyed unmatched military power after the **Cold War**.
- The **war on terror** expanded beyond al-Qaeda into regime-change wars intended to reshape Afghanistan, West Asia and North Africa.
- Believing a **democratic deficit** caused terrorism, the U.S. toppled the Taliban and established the **Islamic Republic**, but failed to eliminate al-Qaeda.
- The **Iraq invasion** diverted attention from Afghanistan, enabling the Taliban to regroup and ultimately defeat the U.S.
- Iraq's collapse created space for **al-Qaeda in Iraq**, which later evolved into the **Islamic State** amid Syria's civil war.
- Saddam's removal dismantled a regional buffer, empowering Iran-linked **Shia forces** and expanding **Iranian influence** in Iraq.
- NATO's **2011 Libya intervention** removed Muammar Qaddafi but caused state collapse, weapons proliferation and jihadist expansion across the **Sahel**.

Strategic Retreat and Regional Consequences

- By Obama's departure, Iraq remained unstable, the Taliban was resurgent, Libya divided and Russia's **Syria intervention** had strengthened Bashar al-Assad.
- Prolonged wars restricted Washington's response to China's rise, forcing **strategic retrenchment** and wider global **repositioning**.
- The **2020 Taliban agreement** preceded the August 2021 withdrawal and Kabul's capture, confirming America's defeat in Afghanistan.
- The withdrawal created a perceived **power vacuum**, followed by Russia's February 2022 invasion challenging the **European security order**.

- The **October 7 attack** triggered Israel's Gaza offensive and wider regional escalation, culminating in the February 2026 **U.S.-Israeli bombing of Iran**.
- Washington's failure to separate itself strategically from Israel trapped it in another West Asian crisis shaped by **regime-change thinking** and **strategic overreach**.

The Emerging Post-Unipolar Order

- Terrorist organisations survived through **localised networks**, while transatlantic divisions widened as allies questioned American **transactionalism**.
- **China** emerged as the second pole of a fluid multipolar order, while **Russia** challenged U.S.-led security arrangements in Europe.
- American interventions eroded the strategic freedom gained after the Cold War, making continued **unilateralism** incompatible with **post-unipolar realities**.

Beyond Editorial

Implications for India's Strategic Autonomy

- **Multi-alignment:** India participates in the Quad alongside the U.S. while remaining in BRICS and SCO with Russia and China.
- **Security balancing:** The Quad's Critical Minerals Initiative helps India reduce China-centric supply risks without joining a NATO-style military alliance.
- **Defence diversification:** India combines Russian S-400 systems, French Rafale aircraft and American MQ-9B drones to avoid dependence on one supplier.
- **Energy autonomy:** India increased Russian crude purchases after 2022 despite Western pressure while retaining energy partnerships with the U.S. and Gulf countries.
- **Connectivity choices:** India simultaneously supports Iran's Chabahar Port, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and I2U2-based regional cooperation.
- **Global South leadership:** India secured permanent G20 membership for the African Union during its 2023 presidency, strengthening its independent diplomatic influence.

- **Crisis diplomacy:** India abstained from several Ukraine-related UN votes while providing humanitarian assistance, demonstrating issue-based rather than bloc-based foreign policy.

2. Should the use of Gen AI be banned among younger students in schools? (GS Paper I Society, GS Paper III Science and Technology)

This editorial ‘**Should the use of Gen AI be banned among younger students in schools?**’ was published in **The Hindu** on 11th Sep 2026, highlights the need for **regulated, teacher-guided AI** use instead of a **complete ban** in primary education.

Educational Applications

- **AI-enabled tools** support concept explanation, personalised learning, assessments and gamified activities through applications like Kahoot! and Quizlet.
- **Seesaw** records learning portfolios and uses AI transcription to assess reading fluency, pronunciation and accuracy.
- AI can reduce **teacher preparation** time by generating worksheets, stories, quizzes and slide decks for classroom instruction.
- **Visual explanations** can support differentiated learning, helping teachers explain concepts like fractions to children with varied needs.
- In **teacher-deficient areas**, AI can improve content accessibility and extend teachers’ capabilities, but cannot replace them.

Risks to Learning

- Ready-made AI answers can weaken **independent thinking** by removing struggle, trial and error essential for problem-solving.
- Excessive reliance may reduce **cognitive engagement** and hinder neuroplasticity during elementary years, when substantial mental development occurs.
- AI systems may produce **hallucinations** or wrong information, requiring teachers to verify all generated educational content.
- Speech-assessment tools may misjudge **Indian accents** and other Asian pronunciations, exposing algorithmic limitations and the need for human oversight.
- Treating technology as a **learning crutch** can suppress reflection, idea incubation and children’s ability to contribute independently.

Regulated and Teacher-Led Use

- A complete **AI ban** is impractical because children already encounter AI through searches, emails, games and home Internet use.
- Schools should preserve **critical thinking** by requiring students to attempt answers before using AI for verification or assistance.
- A temporary **moratorium** provides limited relief unless accompanied by safeguards governing the purpose, extent and method of AI use.
- AI should remain a **learning assistant**, while teachers provide human relationships, stories, conversations and values central to primary education.
- Schools must build **AI literacy**, enabling children to understand its benefits, limitations and risks rather than merely restricting access.

Beyond Editorial

Framework for Age-Appropriate AI Governance

- **Minimum age:** UNESCO's 2023 guidance recommends 13 years as the threshold for independent classroom use of generative AI tools.
- **Phased exposure:** CBSE's 2026 Computational Thinking and AI curriculum for Classes III-VIII demonstrates structured, age-appropriate technological introduction.
- **Human agency:** Australia's national school framework requires generative AI to support learning while teachers retain responsibility for educational decisions.
- **Data protection:** India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 requires verifiable parental consent before processing a child's personal information.
- **Risk classification:** The European Union's AI Act treats certain educational evaluation and admission systems as high-risk, requiring transparency and human oversight.
- **Capacity building:** India's SOAR initiative introduced 15-hour AI-readiness modules for Classes VI-XII while also providing resources for teacher training.
- **Controlled deployment:** Australia's framework emphasises privacy, fairness, accountability and regular review, offering a model for monitored school-level AI adoption.

3. Debate: Should India Prioritise BRICS or Look West? (GS Paper II International Relations)

This debate combines the editorials '**Forget BRICS, look West**' and '**Bridge for India, big tent for Global South**', published in **The Indian Express** on 11th Sep 2026, examines whether BRICS serves **India's interests** or **Western partnerships** offer greater strategic value.

Context

- India's hosting of the **18th BRICS Summit** invites scrutiny of the grouping's economic, institutional and strategic value.
- The debate contrasts BRICS' potential as a **Global South platform** with its limited support for India's **national interests**.

Argument: India Should Look West

- BRICS members support India's **UNSC aspirations**, but internal divisions prevent explicit endorsement of its permanent membership candidature.
- India committed substantial capital to the **New Development Bank** and **Contingent Reserve Arrangement**, whose financial impact remains limited.
- The grouping avoids confronting Russia's Ukraine war and China's **mercantilist policies**, reducing India's ability to shape collective decisions.
- Stagnating incomes in Russia, Brazil and South Africa weaken BRICS' credibility as an alternative **development model**.
- India's economic ties with China remain unequal, marked by limited investment, strategic supply restrictions and a **\$112 billion trade deficit**.
- The **United States** remains more important for Indian exports, software services, remittances, investment and portfolio capital.
- These asymmetries suggest India's growth prospects depend more upon **Western markets** than politically diverse BRICS partnerships.

Counterargument: India Should Strengthen BRICS

- BRICS provides emerging economies a collective voice as the **United Nations**, World Trade Organization and Bretton Woods institutions lose effectiveness.
- Its diversity does not preclude cooperation because members share demands for **multipolarity**, sovereign equality and democratised global governance.
- BRICS is **non-Western rather than anti-Western**, seeking institutional reform without creating a confrontational alternative world order.

- The **New Development Bank** has financed 120 sustainable infrastructure projects worth nearly \$39 billion without political conditionalities.
- BRICS constitutes over 20% of global trade, while **intra-BRICS trade** increased from \$84 billion in 2003 to \$1.17 trillion in 2024.
- Growing **local-currency trade** reduces members' exposure to dollar shortages and U.S. monetary shocks, despite limited prospects for a common currency.
- BRICS allows India to represent the **Global South** while serving as a bridge between developing countries and the West.

Beyond Editorial

A National-Interest Test for BRICS Engagement

- **Economic returns:** Intra-BRICS trade reached about \$1.17 trillion in 2024, but India's \$112 billion China deficit questions the distribution of benefits.
- **Institutional reciprocity:** China and Russia support India's UNSC aspirations without endorsing its candidature, exposing limits to BRICS diplomatic solidarity.
- **Security cooperation:** The 2021 BRICS Counter-Terrorism Action Plan provides a benchmark for assessing members' action against terrorist financing and safe havens.
- **Development finance:** The New Development Bank approved about \$39 billion across 120 projects, requiring evaluation against India's infrastructure and local-currency financing needs.
- **Supply resilience:** Chinese restrictions affecting rare-earth magnets demonstrate why India must assess critical dependencies even within supposedly cooperative BRICS arrangements.
- **Global South delivery:** India's success in securing African Union membership of the G20 offers a concrete benchmark for judging BRICS reform commitments.
- **Partnership flexibility:** India's simultaneous participation in BRICS and the Quad shows that membership should expand strategic choices without restricting Western economic cooperation.