EDITORIALS - 19TH AUG 2026

1. Employment guarantee has slipped into limbo

GS Paper II Governance, GS Paper I Society)

This editorial 'Employment guarantee has slipped into limbo' was published in The Hindu on 19th Aug 2026, highlights how the poorly managed MGNREGA-to-VB-G RAM G transition caused an unprecedented collapse in rural employment.

Scale of Employment Collapse

- July 2026 employment initially appeared 50% lower than July 2025; even the estimated final nine crore person-days imply an above-40% decline.
- During April–July 2026, employment fell to 70 crore person-days, 43% below the two-year average of 128 crore and 119 crore.
- Employment declined across all major States; 10 of 19 States recorded 60–85% falls, with virtual standstills in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand.

Administrative Transition Failure

- The replacement Bill passed in December 2025, but absent transition rules delayed the announced April 1, 2026 rollout and created prolonged administrative confusion.
- Draft Rules appeared on May 22 and largely rehashed MGNREGA provisions; finalisation near the July 1 transition left officials unprepared and works unopened.
- The Ministry's Section 6 explanation is unconvincing because suspending States represented little employment, while the decline persisted after their exclusion.

Budgetary Contradiction

- The ₹95,692 crore allocation marginally exceeded MGNREGA's 2025–26 expenditure, while the ₹300 wage broadly matched ₹100 at 2009–10 prices.
- Including 40% State contributions, projected total expenditure approached ₹1.5 lakh crore, nearly 70% higher, yet employment generation collapsed instead of rising.
- Future expenditure and payments remain uncertain because facial recognition may disrupt attendance verification, while Centre-State cost-sharing could strain implementation.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Employment Guarantee as a Rural Resilience Institution

- Crisis cushion: MGNREGA generated 389.09 crore person-days during COVID-affected 2020–21, demonstrating its capacity to absorb sudden rural employment shocks.
- Migration buffer: Research cited by the World Bank estimated that MGNREGA reduced rural-to-urban migration by around 8% by expanding local employment opportunities.
- Women's agency: Women generated 58.9% of MGNREGA person-days in 2023–24, substantially exceeding the statutory minimum participation requirement of one-third.
- Wage bargaining: ILO research recorded agricultural wages for women in Kerala rising from ₹80 to ₹110 as MGNREGA strengthened workers' bargaining power.
- Water security: Over 1.25 crore water-conservation assets were created under MGNREGA since 2014, including farm ponds, check dams and community tanks.
- Productive assets: Individual-beneficiary works increased from 9.6% of completed projects in 2013–14 to 73.3% in 2023–24, supporting livelihood diversification.
- Household welfare: ILO assessments found that women used MGNREGA earnings for food, healthcare, children's education and debt repayment, strengthening household resilience.

2. ON MINERALS AND MINES, STRIKE FEDERAL BALANCE
(GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'On minerals and mines, strike federal balance' was published in The Indian Express on 19th Aug 2026, highlights the need to balance mining-sector predictability with States' revenue interests and fiscal autonomy.

Rationale for Tax Rationalisation

- The MMDR Amendment Bill, 2026 restricts States' mineral levies to strengthen regulatory certainty, attract investment and contain infrastructure costs.
- States impose 14 kinds of levies with differing tax and royalty rates; rationalisation seeks greater price uniformity across major minerals.
- India's effective mining tax exceeds 50% of revenue, compared with 35–40% elsewhere, supporting investment-oriented rationalisation, according to FIMI-EY.

- The Critical Mineral Mission requires a predictable framework capable of attracting investment into a sector vital for national growth.

Federalism Concerns

- The Supreme Court upheld States' taxation powers and permitted recovery of arrears from April 1, 2005, encouraging additional mineral-based levies.
- Jharkhand initially taxed iron ore at ₹100 per tonne, while Tamil Nadu fixed ₹160 per tonne on limestone.
- Restricting these powers could weaken fiscal federalism, as mineral revenues constitute significant non-tax income for Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.
- Although States will reportedly retain the overwhelming revenue share, unresolved Centre-State friction may undermine the certainty sought through reform.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Ecological Justice in Mineral Governance

- Sustainable extraction: The National Mineral Policy, 2019 promotes environmentally sustainable mining, stakeholder participation and restoration of mined areas alongside mineral development.
- Community consent: In the 2013 Niyamgiri case, the Supreme Court empowered Gram Sabhas to decide whether bauxite mining threatened Dongria Kondh religious and cultural rights.
- Local benefit-sharing: By November 2024, District Mineral Foundations had collected ₹1.02 lakh crore and completed over 2.01 lakh projects in mining-affected regions.
- Intergenerational equity: The Supreme Court-directed Goa Iron Ore Permanent Fund preserves part of mining proceeds for future generations rather than exhausting finite wealth today.
- Ecological limits: In Karnataka's Bellary mining cases, the Supreme Court linked permissible production to approved reclamation plans and imposed regional extraction ceilings.
- Just transition: The RECLAIM framework, launched in 2025, promotes community consultation, livelihood diversification and productive reuse of land after coal-mine closure.
- Circular economy: The National Critical Mineral Mission, approved in 2025, covers recycling, tailings recovery and extraction from end-of-life products to reduce fresh mining.

3. A CHANGING ASIA DEMANDS MORE FROM DELHI AND TOKYO, TOGETHER

(GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial 'A changing Asia demands more from Delhi and Tokyo, together' was published in The Indian Express on 19th Aug 2026, highlights the need for a stronger operational and technological India–Japan defence partnership amid Asia's changing balance of power.

Changing Asian Security Environment

- Koizumi's visit reflects Japan's shift from military restraint towards stronger national defence and active regional diplomacy.
- China's growing power and persistent probing challenge Japan's maritime frontier and India's Himalayan border by gradually altering the territorial status quo.
- Both countries value the American military presence, but Trump's second presidency has renewed concerns over Washington's strategic reliability.

Japan's Defence Transformation

- Japan's post-war model combined economic reconstruction with U.S. security dependence, defence spending near 1% of GDP and strict military constraints.
- Japan's 2022 defence reforms targeted spending near 2% of GDP by 2027, with additional expenditure accelerating the military expansion.
- Tokyo is developing counterstrike capabilities, including Tomahawk and indigenous missiles, alongside stronger air, missile, cyber, space and unmanned systems.
- Japan is revitalising its defence-industrial base, easing arms-export restrictions and supplying friendly countries through Official Security Assistance.
- Expanding ties with Australia, Europe and regional neighbours show Japan increasingly treating military power and security partnerships as normal statecraft instruments.

India–Japan Defence Agenda

- India–Japan defence cooperation has expanded but remains below the rhetoric surrounding their Special Strategic and Global Partnership, lacking sufficient operational weight.
- Existing institutional architecture includes the 2+2 Dialogue, logistics agreement and regular exercises, providing a foundation for deeper cooperation.

- Recent initiatives include sophisticated exercises, stronger maritime awareness and the UNICORN antenna, their first bilateral defence co-development project.
- Both countries must expand joint research and co-production while strengthening coordination in anti-submarine warfare, maritime surveillance, air defence and military logistics.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

India–Japan Partnership as a Provider of Regional Public Goods

- Maritime order: The 2026 Quad statement reaffirmed UNCLOS, freedom of navigation and peaceful dispute settlement, reflecting shared Indian and Japanese regional priorities.
- Disaster response: The 2022 Quad HADR Guidelines established mechanisms through which India, Japan, Australia and the United States can coordinate emergency assistance.
- Anti-piracy security: Indian and Japanese naval ships have coordinated anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, protecting commercial shipping along critical energy routes.
- Regional capacity: Japan has supplied patrol vessels and training to the Philippines and Vietnam, offering a model for complementary Indian maritime capacity-building.
- Supply-chain resilience: India, Japan and Australia formally launched the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative in 2021 to diversify vulnerable Indo-Pacific production networks.
- Health security: Under the 2021 Quad Vaccine Partnership, Japan proposed concessional financing to expand Indian vaccine manufacturing for distribution across the Indo-Pacific.
- Technology security: The 2023 India–Japan Semiconductor Supply Chain Partnership promotes resilient chip ecosystems, trusted technology networks and reduced dependence on concentrated suppliers.