

EDITORIALS - 22ND AUG 2026

1. ENSURING EQUITY AMID INDIA'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (GS Paper I Society)

This editorial 'Ensuring equity amid India's educational progress' was published in **The Hindu** on 22nd Aug 2026, highlights persistent **regional and social disparities** despite improvements in India's school education system.

Educational Progress amid Persistent Inequality

- The **UDISE+ 2025–26** report covers 1.47 million schools, 240 million students and 10.2 million teachers, recording improvements in enrolment, retention, staffing and **school infrastructure**.
- Despite national progress, **regional disparities** persist in educational access, resources, learning opportunities, pupil-teacher ratios and **learning outcomes**.
- Aadhaar seeding ranges from **99.6% in Andhra Pradesh** and 99% in Chandigarh to 35% in Meghalaya, against the **90.2% national average**.
- Uttar Pradesh has the largest shares of schools and enrolment, while Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh have fewer schools relative to enrolment, indicating high **student-school ratios**.
- West Bengal has 79% foundational-preparatory schools but only 11% secondary schools, while Chandigarh records the **reverse distribution** at 5% and 83%.
- General-category enrolment is highest in Chandigarh and Delhi; **ST enrolment** is high in several hill regions, SC representation in Punjab and OBC participation in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.
- Group-wise **gross enrolment ratios** are highest for OBCs at 49%, while girls outperform boys on gender parity across most States and minorities exceed **20% of enrolment**.

Regional Variations in Educational Indicators

- Average enrolment per school ranges from **1,194 in Chandigarh** and 788 in Delhi to 64 in Ladakh, revealing major differences in **school size**.
- Secondary pupil-teacher ratios range from **43 in Jharkhand** to six in Sikkim and are generally higher than ratios at earlier **school stages**.
- Meghalaya records the highest foundational and preparatory GERs at 131 and 171, while Bihar and Gujarat record the **lowest corresponding levels** at 24 and 74.
- Chandigarh and Meghalaya lead middle-level GER at 118, while Chandigarh tops secondary GER at 109; Bihar records the **lowest rates** at 70 and 48.
- Bihar records the highest preparatory and middle-level dropout rates at **7.9% and 9%**, while several States report no dropouts or **unavailable data**.
- Ladakh has the highest secondary dropout rate at **14.8%**, followed by Karnataka, while West Bengal records the **lowest rate** at 1.5%.

Persistent Barriers and Policy Response

- Children in **remote, hilly and border districts** still face inadequate schools and transport, restricting regular attendance despite wider **educational access**.
- Children from **SCs, STs, minorities** and poor families face greater barriers affecting enrolment, attendance and **school completion**.
- Drinking water and electricity access has improved, but **rural schools** in educationally backward districts still lack adequate **learning infrastructure**.

- Remote schools often lack subject teachers, while multigrade teaching and administrative duties increase workloads and reduce **individual attention**.
- Girls continue to face dropout and transition barriers, while children with disabilities require **accessible classrooms** and supportive **teaching practices**.
- In line with **NEP 2020**, deprived regions require targeted investment, digital infrastructure, equitable teacher deployment and stronger support for **disadvantaged groups**.

Beyond Editorial

Consequences for India's Demographic Dividend

- **Human-capital loss:** The World Bank's 2022 India Learning Poverty Brief estimated that 56% of late-primary-age children could not read proficiently, weakening future workforce productivity.
- **Employment mismatch:** The India Employment Report 2024 found youth constituted nearly 83% of India's unemployed population in 2022, reflecting inadequate conversion of education into employable skills.
- **Regional divergence:** Secondary GER ranges from 109 in Chandigarh to 48 in Bihar, creating unequal skill pools and concentrating productive investment in educationally advanced regions.
- **Intergenerational poverty:** ASER 2024 found that 29.4% of surveyed mothers remained unschooled, illustrating how educational deprivation can restrict family incomes and children's learning opportunities.
- **Gendered exclusion:** The India Employment Report 2024 identified young women as disproportionately excluded from employment, education or training, reducing India's effective workforce and household prosperity.
- **Innovation deficit:** UNESCO's 2026 Global Education Monitoring Report warns that unequal digital access restricts disadvantaged learners from acquiring technological skills required in emerging knowledge-based industries.
- **Demographic burden:** The ILO noted that India's working-age population share reached 63% in 2021, but inadequate education and employment could convert this advantage into social pressure.

2. Unimpeded trade needs IPMDA as the answer (GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'Unimpeded trade needs IPMDA as the answer' was published in **The Hindu** on 22nd Aug 2026, highlights how multilateral **maritime domain awareness** can safeguard Indo-Pacific trade amid growing surveillance and security threats.

Indo-Pacific Trade and IPMDA

- Despite sanctions, visa disputes and the West Asian energy crisis, India and the U.S. require stronger **maritime cooperation** to protect shared interests and **unimpeded trade**.
- The **Indo-Pacific** carries nearly \$7 trillion in annual trade, connecting Persian Gulf energy producers, East Asian manufacturing centres and consumer markets across the Americas.
- The Malacca, Lombok, Sunda, Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb and Mozambique channels are vital **maritime chokepoints** for global energy and container supplies.
- State-backed coercion, illegal maritime activity and fragmented surveillance increasingly threaten this **trade artery**, exceeding the response capacity of any **single country**.
- The **IPMDA**, launched under the Quad in 2022, shares near-real-time maritime data among partners to detect, deter and respond to threats.

- Its operationalisation depends on **India-U.S. cooperation** under the Quad, strengthened by India's 2025 purchase of **SeaVision technology**, training and logistical support.

Maritime Surveillance Deficit

- Effective **maritime domain awareness** improves understanding of activities affecting security, navigation safety, economic interests and the **marine environment**.
- Hundreds of vessels disable **Automatic Identification System** transponders to evade sanctions, conceal cargo and undertake unsafe or environmentally harmful activities.
- Smuggling and ship-to-ship transfers exploit surveillance gaps, while smaller fishing vessels outside mandatory AIS rules facilitate **illegal fishing** and threaten **food security**.
- State-affiliated and non-state actors conduct **grey-zone operations** involving intimidation and coercion while remaining below thresholds inviting legal or military responses.
- The **IPMSC 2026** under IPMDA integrates satellite radio-frequency monitoring, radar fusion and partner sensor networks into a **near-continuous maritime picture**.

Institutional Cooperation and Beneficiaries

- Regional cooperation allows the U.S. to focus beyond the Indian Ocean, while India's **IFC-IOR**, established in Gurugram in 2018, provides a complementary institutional hub.
- IPMDA respects **national sovereignty** while extending surveillance reach, but India-U.S. cooperation alone cannot cover the Indo-Pacific's vast maritime expanse.
- Its potential requires participation from existing Quad partners, **ASEAN states**, Pacific Island nations and the **European Union** across critical maritime corridors.
- Capacity-constrained countries such as Bangladesh, Maldives, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and Fiji possess surveillance infrastructure but struggle against **cross-border maritime crimes**.
- Shared surveillance can help these countries curb illegal exploitation of their waters while strengthening wider **regional maritime security**.
- As freedom of navigation becomes increasingly contested, **maritime transparency** must function as deterrence against coercion and protect **open trade**.

Beyond Editorial

Operational Risks within IPMDA

- **Data-sovereignty risk:** The Quad's 2024 Wilmington Declaration stated that over two dozen countries received dark-vessel data, making clear access, ownership and retention rules essential.
- **Cyber vulnerability:** The IMO, ICAO and ITU warned in 2025 about increasing GNSS jamming and spoofing, which can corrupt navigation signals and shared maritime assessments.
- **Technology dependence:** SeaVision is an American maritime-awareness platform supplied to Indo-Pacific partners, creating potential dependence on foreign software, technical support and data-processing infrastructure.
- **Interoperability gaps:** The Quad launched IPMSC in 2026 to integrate newer technologies with IPMDA, reflecting continuing challenges in connecting different sensors, standards and national systems.
- **Trust deficit:** ASEAN and island partners may hesitate to share sensitive vessel data if IPMDA appears directed against particular powers rather than supporting neutral maritime security.
- **Capacity asymmetry:** Quad-funded satellite data and UNODC's Maritime Domain Awareness School in Fiji show that smaller partners still require training, maintenance funding and enforcement capabilities.

- **Misidentification risk:** The International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation warned in 2024 that cheaper AIS-spoofing tools can create false vessel identities and misleading enforcement alerts.

3. SAVING FACES (GS Paper II Polity and Governance)

This editorial ‘**Saving faces**’ was published in **The Hindu** on 22nd Aug 2026, highlights how **unregulated facial recognition** at protest sites threatens privacy, proportionality and the right to protest.

Expansion of Biometric Surveillance

- India appears to be normalising **searchable biometric surveillance** at political gatherings without legislation or judicial oversight defining the circumstances permitting its **lawful use**.
- Delhi Police positioned facial recognition equipment at a protest site while demonstrations were underway, despite continuing disputes over its handling of **political protests**.
- Its Supreme Court affidavit disclosed AI-enabled cameras conducting **real-time facial matching**, a surveillance van, command centre, smart spectacles, drones and videographers.
- The police has not clarified whether every person captured underwent **biometric processing**, even if images producing no match were subsequently discarded.
- Private contractors were connected to the surveillance van and smart spectacles, creating concerns over **data access** and unclear **contractual safeguards**.

Legal and Regulatory Vacuum

- No specific statute governs **facial recognition systems**, while the data-processing obligations of the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act** are not yet operational.
- The DPDP Act also provides broad exemptions for **state agencies**, weakening safeguards against indiscriminate governmental processing of biometric data.
- The NCRB’s **Automated Facial Recognition System** identifies criminals and unidentified bodies, while the **Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, 2022** permits records only from specified categories of persons.
- Existing legal provisions allow targeted identification of defined groups, not **indiscriminate surveillance** of everyone attending a political gathering.

Constitutional Concerns

- Facial recognition at protests can produce a **chilling effect**, discouraging potential participants from exercising their **right to protest**.
- Any state interference with the **right to privacy** must satisfy proportionality by establishing a legitimate objective, necessity and suitable safeguards.
- Mass facial recognition may fail this test because it captures everyone indiscriminately, while **conventional policing** provides a less restrictive alternative.
- Unanswered questions regarding data agreements, access, legal authorisation, decision-making and **false-positive rates** make surveillance of all protesters unjustifiable.

Beyond Editorial

Global Regulatory Approaches to Facial Recognition

- **European Union:** The EU AI Act generally prohibits real-time biometric identification in public spaces, permitting narrow law-enforcement exceptions subject to prior authorisation and fundamental-rights assessments.
- **United Kingdom:** In the 2020 *Bridges* judgment, the Court of Appeal found South Wales Police's facial-recognition deployment unlawful due to inadequate safeguards and equality assessment.
- **Canada:** Canadian privacy regulators held Clearview AI's mass image-scraping unlawful, while the RCMP's use of its illegally constructed database violated the Privacy Act.
- **Illinois model:** The Biometric Information Privacy Act requires private entities to disclose collection purposes and retention periods while obtaining informed written consent before processing biometric information.
- **New York City:** Local Law 55 of 2025 requires the NYPD to publish facial-recognition policies and undergo biannual audits, strengthening public transparency and institutional accountability.
- **China:** Facial-recognition measures effective from June 2025 require necessity, minimal intrusion, impact assessments and alternative verification where facial identification is not legally compulsory.
- **United Nations:** The UN human rights framework supports restricting public-space facial recognition and imposing moratoriums until privacy, accuracy and non-discrimination safeguards are demonstrably established.