EDITORIALS - 24TH OCT 2026

1. FALLING SHORT (GS PAPER II INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS)

This editorial '**Falling short**' was published in **The Hindu** on 24th Oct 2026, highlights the limited outcomes of **Marco Rubio's India visit** amid unresolved bilateral tensions.

Political Context and Expectations

- Rubio's second visit in five months preceded the **U.S. midterm elections**, as Trump's focus shifts towards his legacy and potential presidential contenders, including Rubio, cultivate **international partnerships**.
- India sought a **bilateral reset** after two years of uncertainty, including progress on the **Bilateral Trade Agreement** and reassurance over U.S. sanctions targeting Russian oil imports.
- Expectations included preparations for **Trump–Modi meetings** at the Manila ASEAN and Miami G-20 summits, a **Quad Summit** alongside ASEAN, and a date for Trump's India visit.
- Engagement with the UAE offered scope to address the **Gulf situation** and restore energy security and connectivity; the Jamnagar refinery visit raised **oil-deal expectations** as Rubio promoted American and U.S.-licensed Venezuelan crude.

Limited Outcomes and Continuing Frictions

- No **agreements** or **joint press address** emerged; visiting Mumbai and Jamnagar while excluding New Delhi also prompted Opposition questions about the visit's purpose.
- Despite repeated ministerial visits, disputes over **trade and tariffs**, **H-1B restrictions** and anti-immigrant measures remain unresolved, keeping relations strained.

- U.S. claims concerning **Operation Sindoor (2025)**, closer **Pakistan ties**, and rhetoric targeting India's economy, diaspora and Russian oil purchases have intensified Indian dissatisfaction.
- At Mumbai's Freedom 250 event, Rubio acknowledged inevitable **differences** while describing alignment on core **national interests** as extraordinary; this assurance requires concrete follow-through.

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Structural Drivers of the India–U.S. Partnership

- **Indo-Pacific security:** Shared maritime interests sustain cooperation, illustrated by Malabar 2024, which brought Indian, American, Japanese and Australian naval forces together in the Bay of Bengal.
- **Defence interoperability:** Agreements such as LEMOA, signed in 2016, facilitate reciprocal logistics support, creating practical military cooperation that extends beyond individual diplomatic visits.
- **Technology complementarities:** The TRUST initiative, announced in February 2025, connects government, academia and industry across AI, semiconductors, quantum technologies and biotechnology, reflecting shared innovation interests.
- **Supply-chain resilience:** The October 2024 critical-minerals memorandum provides a framework for cooperation in exploration, processing and recycling, supporting diversification of essential clean-energy inputs.
- **Commercial incentives:** The February 2025 "Mission 500" target of $500 billion in bilateral trade by 2030 illustrates the economic ambition underpinning cooperation, although targets require implementation.
- **Knowledge networks:** Jointly funded Fulbright–Nehru fellowships sustain academic exchanges, building research relationships and professional networks that give bilateral engagement continuity beyond political cycles.

- **Societal interdependence:** The February 2025 joint statement recorded over 300,000 Indian students contributing more than $8 billion annually to the American economy, demonstrating tangible mutual benefits from mobility.

2. IN THE CROSSFIRE (GS PAPER II INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS)

This editorial '**In the crossfire**' was published in **The Hindu** on 24th Oct 2026, highlights the need for proactive **Indian diplomacy** and **citizen protection** amid the escalating **Saudi–Houthi conflict**.

Conflict Escalation and Indian Exposure

- Since fighting resumed in July, at least **2 Indians have died** and **14 been wounded**, including a death in the Dammam airport attack; flight disruptions have stranded thousands of Indian pilgrims.
- The **Houthis claimed** Saudi forces targeted a yacht carrying **14 Indians** near Yemen's Zuqar island, with rescue operations underway; Indians constitute Saudi Arabia's largest expatriate community.
- Following the **2014 Houthi takeover** of Sana'a, Saudi Arabia intervened in **2015**; prolonged bombing proved counterproductive as the Houthis consolidated northern tribal support and built powerful territorial and naval forces.
- The **2022 ceasefire** collapsed in **July 2026** after Saudi forces bombed Sana'a airport to prevent an Iranian aircraft carrying a Houthi delegation from landing; Houthi infrastructure attacks and a ground offensive followed.
- Saudi air strikes have neither defeated the Houthis nor restored **deterrence**, leaving infrastructure exposed to missiles and drones; possible renewed Israeli–U.S. strikes on Iran could deepen **regional instability** and complicate India's choices.

India's Immediate and Diplomatic Priorities

- India has condemned Houthi attacks and expressed **solidarity with Saudi Arabia**, but must prepare **contingency plans**, prioritising the evacuation of stranded Indian pilgrims.
- India should articulate a stronger position favouring **regional stability** and work with Arab countries and Tehran for a **diplomatic settlement**, addressing the wider confrontation involving Iran.

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Economic Spillovers of West Asian Instability

- **Oil-price shocks:** Regional escalation can raise India's import bill and external vulnerability; following Iran's October 2024 attack on Israel, Brent crude reached $81 per barrel on October 7.
- **Shipping disruptions:** Red Sea diversions increased delivery times by at least 10 days on average in early 2024, illustrating how insecurity delays inputs and weakens inventory-dependent businesses.
- **Insurance escalation:** After the August 2024 attack on the tanker Sounion, quoted Red Sea war-risk premiums rose from around 0.4% to as much as 0.75% of vessel value, increasing voyage costs.
- **Remittance exposure:** Gulf employment disruptions can affect Indian household incomes; RBI's 2023–24 survey attributed 38% of inward remittances to Gulf Cooperation Council countries, underlining this transmission channel.
- **Agricultural costs:** The World Bank identified fertiliser exporters' reliance on the Suez Canal as a vulnerability, with longer routes potentially raising delivered fertiliser costs and agricultural production expenses.
- **Fiscal pressure:** Absorbing international energy-price increases can strain public finances; India approved ₹22,000 crore in 2022 to compensate public-sector oil companies for domestic LPG losses, illustrating this mechanism.

- **Connectivity uncertainty:** Instability threatens the commercial rationale of proposed corridors such as IMEC, whose September 2023 memorandum envisaged linking India with the Gulf and Europe through integrated transport infrastructure.

3. ON IT, INDIA HAD EARLY ADVANTAGE. IT HASN'T CAUGHT UP WITH AI ERA (GS PAPER III SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY)

This editorial '**On IT, India had early advantage. It hasn't caught up with AI era**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 24th Oct 2026, highlights India's **AI capability deficit** and the limits of prioritising **data centres** over **domestic innovation.**

AI Capability and Employment Gaps

- Anthropic's June 12 suspension of Claude Fable 5 and Claude Mythos 5 under U.S. **export controls**, reversed within three weeks, exposed **technology dependence**: model-producing countries control frontier AI access.
- Despite software talent and IT leadership, India lacks **frontier models**; **R&D spending** was 0.84% of GDP in FY24, against China's 2.6% and America's 3.4%, weakening its innovation base.
- AI's ability to write, test and maintain code threatens India's **labour advantage** in **IT services**, whose firms prospered by customising and maintaining foreign-developed software.
- Despite booming global capability centres, **ICRIER's survey** of 651 firms across 10 cities found entry-level employment declining in 55% and rising in 35%, with senior employment stable; **Nomura** found AI hiring exceeding layoffs, but losses concentrated in support and entry-level roles.
- The **IndiaAI Mission (2024)** provides around $1.2 billion over five years and over **45,000 subsidised GPUs**; projected 2026 training and inference costs of $45.8 billion for OpenAI and $19 billion for Anthropic illustrate resource disparities, despite limited comparability.

- Greater spending alone is insufficient; India needs a **research ecosystem** capable of supporting **home-grown models**, as China's experience suggests.

Data-Centre Strategy: Limits and Safeguards

- **Data centres** support domestic model training and **data sovereignty**, but foreign-owned models, imported hardware and construction-heavy employment can limit domestic economic gains and confine India to low-value activities.
- Eligible foreign cloud providers receive a **tax holiday until 2047**, alongside state concessions; projected AI data-centre electricity demand of **26.3 GW by FY32** is expected to be met mostly through renewables.
- **Round-the-clock electricity** requires costly storage or firm power because renewables are intermittent; interim coal dependence and higher supply costs could burden **stretched grids** and other consumers.
- Of **12 approved semiconductor facilities**, nine assemble, test and package existing chips; despite strategic supply-chain value, none produces **leading-edge AI chips**, which require a major manufacturing leap.
- State support should secure **compute-access guarantees**, sovereign cloud capacity and **domestic linkages** in hardware and services, while preserving a favourable investment climate.

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AI Adoption for Inclusive Development

- **Agricultural assistance:** Kisan e-Mitra, a voice-based AI chatbot answering PM-KISAN queries, illustrates how accessible interfaces can help farmers obtain scheme information without navigating complex administrative systems.
- **Healthcare access:** "Cough Against TB" supports community-level tuberculosis screening, while MadhuNetrAI assists diabetic-retinopathy

screening by non-specialist health workers, illustrating AI's potential to extend scarce clinical expertise.

- **Personalised learning:** A Delhi evaluation of a Mindspark-based supplementary programme found gains of 0.37 standard deviations in mathematics and 0.23 in Hindi over 4.5 months, supporting carefully designed adaptive instruction.
- **Small-enterprise productivity:** Affordable AI could support inventory management and customer communication; the government's July 2026 parliamentary reply explicitly identified MSME productivity and competitiveness as objectives of wider AI adoption.
- **Local governance:** SabhaSaar, launched in August 2025, generates structured minutes from Panchayat meeting recordings, illustrating administrative assistance that can reduce documentation burdens while retaining official verification.
- **Language inclusion:** Adi Vaani applies AI to tribal-language translation and documentation, illustrating how language technologies can widen digital participation beyond English-speaking users and dominant regional-language communities.
- **Outcome accountability:** Adoption should be assessed through measurable benefits rather than deployment counts; the government identifies NITI Aayog's Output-Outcome Monitoring Framework as a mechanism for evaluating interventions supporting MSME digital adoption.