EDITORIALS - 25TH JUL 2026

1. A GROWTH STORY THAT NEEDS WOMEN AT WORK

(GS Paper III Economy, GS Paper I Society)

This editorial 'A growth story that needs women at work' was published in The Hindu on 25th Jul 2026, highlights women's employment as essential for sustained growth, productivity and achieving Viksit Bharat.

Structural weaknesses and growth imperative

- India's youth unemployment has doubled since 2012, while post-2016 policy shocks weakened structural transformation, manufacturing and non-farm employment.
- Rising inequality compressed aggregate demand and investment, limiting actual GDP growth to around 4.5%, against the government's 6.2% estimate.
- A 10-percentage-point rise in female WPR could add nearly two percentage points to GDP growth, supporting the sustained 8–9% growth required for Viksit Bharat.
- Women's paid work expands labour supply, household income, consumption and savings while improving children's nutrition, education and human capital; gender-diverse workplaces also raise productivity and innovation.
- India's female WPR remains below 30%, among the world's lowest, while its female LFPR trails countries with comparable per capita income.

Decline and distress-driven recovery

- Female WPR was high in the 1980s due to agricultural work but declined as mechanisation reduced manual labour demand and rising educational attainment increased school attendance.

- The fall until 2018–19 represented the downward phase of the U-shaped curve associated with structural transformation, consistent with Claudia Goldin's analysis.
- The post-2020 increase followed slowing GDP growth and COVID-19 reverse migration, which pushed women into subsistence agriculture and unpaid family labour, producing a distress-driven feminisation of agriculture.
- India's capital-intensive growth in finance, information technology and organised manufacturing generated limited employment, while labour-intensive sectors recorded absolute job losses during 2013–19.
- Manufacturing employed fewer women in 2019 than in 2004 and recovered to its earlier level only by 2022, revealing weak industrial job creation despite Make in India and production-linked incentives.

Regional divide and excluded potential

- Tamil Nadu employs over 40% of India's women factory workers despite having only 5–6% of its population, reflecting labour-intensive industry, higher female literacy and supportive hostel and transport facilities.
- Hindi-belt States require stronger public health and education, especially for girls, because malnutrition, stunting and weak social infrastructure constrain women's economic participation.
- Some post-2020 gains came from older women entering animal husbandry and poultry, but educated young women continue to face high and rising unemployment.
- Women aged 15–29 outside both employment and education increased from below 70 million in 2004 to over 100 million by 2018, while Bihar's female WPR remains only 15%.

Beyond Editorial

Care infrastructure as economic infrastructure

- Time poverty: Indian women spend 5.6 hours daily on unpaid work, against 30 minutes for men, reducing their time for employment and skilling.

- Childcare coverage: The Palna Scheme envisaged 17,000 Anganwadi-cum-Crèches by 2025–26, with 14,599 approved by July 2025.
- Employer responsibility: The Maternity Benefit Act mandates crèches in establishments with at least 50 employees, but effective implementation requires regular compliance monitoring.
- Supportive infrastructure: Tamil Nadu's Thozhi Hostels provide secure accommodation, kitchens and crèches, enabling women to migrate and remain in urban employment.
- Employment multiplier: Investing 2% of GDP in care services could create 11 million jobs, nearly 70% of them for women.
- Worker formalisation: Palna crèche workers receive ₹5,500 and helpers ₹3,000 monthly, highlighting the need for better wages, training and social security.
- Five-R framework: Kenya's National Care Policy applies the ILO framework to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care while rewarding and representing care workers.

2. INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY MUST LOOK SEAWARD

(GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial 'India's foreign policy must look seaward' was published in The Hindu on 25th Jul 2026, highlights the need for maritime diplomacy that protects Indian seafarers across borders, flags and jurisdictions.

A fragmented maritime protection system

- Indian seafarers often work through foreign employers on foreign-flagged ships across multiple jurisdictions, creating diffused responsibility during attacks, detention or abandonment.
- Of 14 Indians killed in attacks linked to the recent West Asia conflict, at least eight were commercial seafarers caught in wars they had not chosen, exposing gaps in consular protection.

- India had about 3.2 lakh seafarers in June 2025, nearly three times the 2014 figure, and supplied over 12% of the global workforce, ranking behind only the Philippines.
- Seafarers continually cross jurisdictions while India's consular system remains territorially organised; missions may learn of their presence only after seizure or abandonment, leaving no authority continuously responsible.
- The International Transport Workers' Federation recorded 1,125 abandoned Indian seafarers in 2025, the world's highest number, with responsibility dispersed among flag States, owners, insurers, ports and missions.

From emergency response to continuous protection

- The post-conflict Seafarer First response should track every Indian seafarer, ship and threat regardless of vessel flag, while assigning a liaison officer to each affected family.
- Risks extend beyond West Asia to missiles, drones and mines in the Black and Red Seas and piracy or hostage-taking around the Gulf of Aden and West Africa, requiring continuous risk-based monitoring.
- A tracking dashboard cannot compel owners or flag States to act; recruitment agencies must provide updated crew and route data whenever activated under a standing maritime protocol with clear responsibility after distress signals.
- Indian missions in major shipping centres need designated officers connected with ports, hospitals, insurers and lawyers because local response networks cannot be improvised after a maritime emergency.
- India should press flag States to enforce the Maritime Labour Convention when wages stop or crews require rescue, abandonment assistance and repatriation.

Diplomatic coordination and seafarers' rights

- India's bilateral maritime agreements recognise certificates and expand employment but inadequately address legal assistance, consular access, detention and repatriation.

- India, the Philippines and Indonesia should pursue common standards through the IMO and ILO, preventing shipowners from bypassing unilateral protections by recruiting elsewhere.
- India should oppose attacks on commercial shipping regardless of the perpetrator because civilian crews are not combatants and open sea lanes are essential for their safety.
- Before signing contracts, seafarers must know vessel ownership, route, sanctions exposure, insurance validity and abandonment history, with a right to refuse deployment to designated high-risk regions without penalty.
- The Directorate General of Shipping barred licensed agencies from placing Indians on 366 abandonment-linked vessels unless compliant; agencies must disclose this list before recruitment and face penalties for violations.

Beyond Editorial

Strengthening domestic seafarer protection law

- Legal consolidation: The Merchant Shipping Act, 2025 introduced safeguards against abandonment and strengthened regulation of agencies recruiting Indians for domestic and foreign vessels.
- Unified registry: India can link seafarer records with the IMO-ILO database, which identifies abandonment cases involving particular vessels, owners and flag States.
- Agency accountability: The Maritime Labour Rules, 2016 regulate recruitment agencies, while joint liability can deter fraudulent contracts and placement on unsafe vessels.
- Financial security: The Maritime Labour Convention requires financial guarantees covering unpaid wages, essential supplies and repatriation when shipowners abandon their crews.
- Emergency assistance: The Seafarers' Welfare Fund Society supports insurance and critical illnesses, providing an institutional base for an emergency repatriation fund.

- Legal protection: IMO's 2025 guidelines protect detained seafarers against arbitrary detention while preserving due process, wages, healthcare and repatriation rights.
- Compliance oversight: Global abandonment cases rose from 142 in 2023 to 310 in 2024, requiring audits, licence suspension and vessel blacklisting.

3. INDIA HAS RIDDEN OUT CRISIS OF IRAN WAR, BUT A MUCH BIGGER CHALLENGE IS UPON IT

(GS Paper II International Relations, GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'India has ridden out crisis of Iran war, but a much bigger challenge is upon it' was published in The Indian Express on 25th Jul 2026, highlights India's need to build strategic economic capabilities and recalibrate its foreign policy amid widening global power asymmetries.

The 1991 crisis and strategic reset

- In 1991, Gulf War-driven import costs pushed India towards sovereign default, forcing an IMF loan and overseas shipment of gold reserves.
- The Soviet collapse removed India's security backstop against China and the United States, while Washington increased pressure on nuclear policy, human rights and the closed economy.
- China's post-1979 reforms produced 9% annual growth and a $380-billion economy by 1991, while India grew around 5% and remained at $270 billion, widening the economic gap.
- Pakistan entered the post-Cold War period confidently after partnering the U.S. and China against the Soviets in Afghanistan, leaving India in strategic isolation amid a changing global order.

The four economic capability gaps

- India's finances are stronger than in 1991, but the Iran war has caused energy shortages and inflation amid rupee depreciation, FII outflows and growth of only 6%.

- India's deeper challenge lies in four Cs: manufacturing, critical minerals, computer chips, and software and infrastructure for artificial intelligence.
- Manufacturing has stagnated for three decades, while limited mining and processing of critical minerals have created 50–100% dependence on China across several minerals and metals.
- NITI Aayog estimates that imports will meet 90–95% of India's chip demand until 2035, revealing persistent dependence in semiconductors.
- India has strengths in AI adoption and talent but limited presence across the AI value chain, making the four-Cs challenge more complex than the 1991 reforms.

Widening geopolitical asymmetries

- The U.S. is retreating from traditional alliances and treating India as a transactional opportunity, while potential U.S.–China accommodation weakens India's former strategic backstop against Beijing.
- U.S. pressure has shifted from nuclear policy and human rights in 1991 to Indian exports, labour and trade standards, and imports of Russian oil in 2026.
- China's economy stands at $20 trillion and may double by 2050 at 3% growth, while India's $4-trillion economy may reach $16 trillion at 6%, expanding the GDP gap to $24 trillion.
- Pakistan has deepened military integration with China, maintained ties with the U.S. and Russia, signed a Saudi defence agreement in 2025 and mediated between Washington and Tehran in 2026.

Strategic choices before India

- India requires a Manhattan Project-scale effort on the four Cs; otherwise, growth may remain near 6% and become harder to sustain as strategic weaknesses reinforce economic stagnation.

- India must reassess whether to avoid friction with both powers, prioritise accommodation with China, or use Chinese investment and innovation to drive growth, which would require a fundamental Beijing reset.

Beyond Editorial

Fiscal architecture for strategic transformation

- Mission financing: India's major initiatives include the ₹76,000-crore Semiconductor Mission, ₹10,300-crore IndiaAI Mission and ₹1 lakh-crore RDI Scheme.
- Patient capital: The RDI Scheme provides low-interest loans, equity and deep-tech funding for strategic projects that conventional lenders consider excessively risky.
- Risk sharing: The Centre committed 50% fiscal support for Tata Electronics' ₹91,000-crore Dholera semiconductor project, reducing the burden of high initial costs.
- Shared infrastructure: IndiaAI provides over 38,000 GPUs at ₹65 per hour, lowering computing costs for start-ups, researchers and public institutions.
- Circular financing: The ₹1,500-crore Critical Mineral Recycling Scheme supports mineral recovery from batteries, electronic waste and industrial scrap, reducing import dependence.
- Federal clustering: Budget 2026–27 proposed Rare Earth Corridors in four mineral-rich southern States to integrate mining, processing, research and manufacturing.
- Outcome accountability: The Output Outcome Monitoring Framework links public spending with measurable results, enabling regular evaluation of strategic technology missions.