

EDITORIALS - 28TH AUG 2026

1. Himalaya needs shared early-warning system (GS Paper III Environment)

This editorial '**Himalaya needs shared early-warning system**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 28th Aug 2026, highlights the need for **transboundary monitoring** and **early-warning cooperation** against rising Himalayan disasters.

Nepal Disaster

- The **Bhote Koshi flash flood** in Nepal killed at least 270 people and left several hundred missing, exposing the Himalayan ecosystem's acute fragility.
- Satellite analysis indicates that collapsing **glacial ice and rock** in Tibet temporarily blocked the river before releasing a destructive downstream surge, though the exact cause remains uncertain.
- The cascading debris resembled a **mud tsunami** at the China-Nepal border, requiring immediate rescue followed by detailed investigation to protect vulnerable communities and tourists.

Recurring Himalayan Risks

- The **2013 Kedarnath disaster** killed thousands after exceptional rainfall triggered floods and landslides across the Mandakini and Alaknanda valleys.
- A rock-and-ice avalanche caused the **2021 Chamoli disaster**, killing over 200 people and damaging hydropower projects in Uttarakhand.
- The **2023 South Lhonak glacial lake collapse** sent water through Sikkim's Teesta Valley, killing at least 50 people and damaging dams, bridges and roads.
- Unlike earlier events, the Nepal disaster occurred during the **peak monsoon**, when swollen rivers intensified erosion and accumulated more rocks and debris downstream.

Regional Early-Warning Cooperation

- Cooperation among upstream and downstream **Himalayan countries** must extend beyond post-disaster rescue and relief to preparedness and risk reduction.
- Rising temperatures require joint monitoring of **river levels, intense rainfall and seismic activity** near melting glaciers and thawing permafrost.
- The World Meteorological Organization's **South Asia Hydromet Forum** already connects regional meteorological and hydrological agencies.
- The **South Asia Flash Flood Guidance System** provides regional forecasting and guidance, forming another institutional base for cooperation.
- Existing mechanisms must be expanded for cross-border **data sharing, forecasting expertise and early warnings** across the Himalayan region.
- Despite geopolitical differences, India and China share positions in **climate negotiations** and must translate their concern for development into cooperation that protects lives.

Beyond Editorial

Development-Induced Vulnerability in the Himalayas

- **Urban subsidence:** The 2023 Joshimath crisis exposed how construction, inadequate drainage and wastewater seepage can aggravate instability in settlements built over ancient landslide material.

- **Hydropower exposure:** The 2021 Chamoli disaster destroyed the 13.2 MW Rishiganga project and severely damaged the 520 MW Tapovan-Vishnugad project, concentrating infrastructure losses in hazard-prone valleys.
- **Road instability:** In the Char Dham road case, the Supreme Court directed stabilisation of hill-cutting sites, highlighting the landslide risks created by extensive slope excavation.
- **Tourism overload:** Shimla's 2018 water crisis saw availability fall to about 18 million litres daily against peak demand of 45 million litres, exposing weak urban carrying capacity.
- **Muck generation:** The Char Dham road programme required around 480 muck-disposal sites covering 153 hectares, illustrating the ecological risks posed by poorly managed excavated material.
- **Project clustering:** The Supreme Court noted that proposed hydropower development could affect 81% of the Bhagirathi and 65% of the Alaknanda, leaving limited space for river regeneration.
- **Assessment failure:** In 2013, the Supreme Court halted further hydropower clearances in Uttarakhand pending scientific assessment of cumulative impacts from dams, tunnels, blasting, mining and deforestation.

2. India's return to its Central Asian neighbourhood (GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial 'India's return to its Central Asian neighbourhood' was published in **The Hindu** on 28th Aug 2026, highlights India's **renewed engagement** with **Central Asia** to strengthen its strategic, economic and diplomatic influence.

Central Asia's Strategic Context

- **Central Asia**, landlocked between Russia and China, is witnessing a post-1991 generational transition and search for a new internal equilibrium.
- Though **Islam** is the dominant religion, it neither exclusively defines regional identity nor forms a common political project.
- Regional states firmly oppose **radicalisation**, while the 2024 Crocus City Hall attack and instability from Afghanistan underline continuing security threats.
- Diverse ethnicities, languages and resources shape distinct foreign policies, while border, water and overlapping-ethnicity disputes complicate **regional relations**.
- As Russia weakens and China expands, **Türkiye, Iran, the United States and European Union** are also increasing their regional influence.

India's Renewed Engagement

- Modi's **2015 visit** to all five Central Asian countries ended India's earlier policy of treating the region as Russia's strategic periphery.
- India joined the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** in 2017 with Russian support, while Pakistan entered with Chinese backing.
- India invited all Central Asian leaders as **Republic Day** chief guests in 2022, while virtual engagement during COVID-19 created mechanisms such as the India-Central Asia Dialogue.
- Central Asia forms India's wider **civilisational neighbourhood** through shared cultural, religious, linguistic and architectural links despite weak physical connectivity.
- Pakistan's attempt to monopolise regional affinity and obstruct India's access cannot erase these **historical connections**, while Central Asian countries increasingly seek partners beyond Russia and China.

Strategic Priorities and Uzbekistan

- India should consolidate agreements across **trade, defence, natural resources and technology**, alongside cultural, educational, health and tourism exchanges.
- Uzbekistan's foreign-policy diversification under President Mirziyoyev since 2016 makes it a dynamic partner with strong **historical resonance** and public goodwill towards India.
- Uzbekistan's uncompromising stance against terrorism, knowledge of Afghanistan and pragmatic approach towards the **Taliban** enhance its strategic value for India.
- India and Uzbekistan must revisit proposed **rail and road connectivity** through Iran and Afghanistan in light of recent regional developments.

India and the SCO

- The SCO has expanded from the **Shanghai Five** of 1996 to 10 members, 15 dialogue partners and two observers, with Modi regularly attending its summits except in 2024.
- India's engagement is driven by **geography, not ideology**; negotiating with the China-Pakistan grouping is difficult but essential for protecting its continental interests.
- India has promoted economic, technological and civilisational cooperation, while its Tianjin vision prioritised **security, connectivity and opportunity**.
- For China-dependent Kyrgyzstan, the **SCO and India** provide valuable geopolitical alternatives and strategic space.

Beyond Editorial

Constraints on India's Central Asian Outreach

- **Connectivity barrier:** Pakistan's refusal to provide land transit forces India to rely on alternatives such as Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor.
- **Sanctions exposure:** United States sanctions on Iran complicate payments, insurance and freight movement through Chabahar, reducing the reliability of India's principal western access route.
- **Afghan instability:** Persistent insecurity has delayed the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline for decades, preventing India from converting Central Asian energy resources into dependable supplies.
- **Chinese dominance:** China's trade with the five Central Asian states exceeded \$100 billion in 2025, while India's regional trade remained around \$2 billion, revealing a major economic asymmetry.
- **Russian leverage:** Central Asian participation in Russian-led institutions such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization and Eurasian Economic Union preserves Moscow's institutional influence over the region.
- **Narrow commerce:** Pharmaceuticals constituted nearly 38% of India's exports to Central Asia in 2023, reflecting limited diversification despite opportunities in technology, agriculture and manufactured goods.
- **Execution deficit:** Repeated commitments on Chabahar, the International North-South Transport Corridor and biennial summits have progressed slowly, revealing weak financing and project-level follow-through.

3. Is English a foreign language in India? (GS Paper I Society)

This editorial 'Is English a foreign language in India?' was published in **The Hindu** on 28th Aug 2026, highlights **English's Indianisation, social role** and complex relationship with India's multilingual identity.

Status and Historical Evolution

- The **Supreme Court**, while examining the CBSE three-language formula, questioned English's classification as non-indigenous despite its long role in governance, higher education and national communication.
- Apoorvanand argues that English, though externally introduced, has been **Indianised** through diverse local uses and cannot remain foreign merely because of its geographical origin.
- Ganesh Devy notes that Hindi and English belong to the **Indo-European family**, reaching India through different historical routes, while Tamil is the only major language not originating outside India.
- English entered through traders and missionaries before becoming a language of **administration and education**; its institutional presence predates Macaulay's Minute of 1835.
- English carried a dual legacy of **colonial rule and liberation**, creating elites while also spreading nationalist ideas and empowering communities historically excluded from education.

Power, Mobility and Linguistic Hierarchies

- The English-speaking elite resembles the earlier **Sanskrit-based elite**, but English also supported modernisation and weakened inherited social restrictions.
- English provides unmatched **social mobility and geographical mobility**, particularly for higher education, employment and migration outside one's State.
- Policymakers promoting **mother-tongue education** often send their own children to English-medium schools, reflecting English's recognised social, cultural and economic value.
- English publishing and private schooling involve **commercial interests**, but their growth also reflects genuine public demand rather than merely manufactured preference.
- Hindi's expansion has marginalised living languages such as Maithili, Braj, Awadhi and Bhojpuri, making **Hindi dominance** a greater immediate threat to linguistic diversity in many regions.

Multilingualism and Cultural Identity

- The **2011 Census** recorded about 10% of Indians as English speakers, but this likely excludes millions using it as a second language in higher education.
- Census classification absorbs nearly 56 languages into Hindi and similarly subsumes smaller languages under Tamil, Kannada and Marathi, reflecting state-driven **linguistic homogenisation**.
- Indians commonly use different languages for different functions; English, Hindi and regional languages can therefore coexist within **functional multilingualism** without replacing one another.
- India's changing literary production from Sanskrit to Persian and then English did not eliminate earlier languages, showing that **language shifts** do not automatically produce cultural replacement.
- Ganesh Devy views English's cultural absorption as gradual and selective, while Apoorvanand argues that English music or writing does not make younger Indians **culturally uprooted**.
- Declaring English foreign obscures how Hindi and other dominant languages also subordinate smaller languages; English has instead established a distinct **Indian identity** through prolonged social use.

Beyond Editorial

Constitutional Framework for Language Policy in India

- **No national language:** The Gujarat High Court clarified in 2010 that Hindi is not India's national language; the Constitution only specifies official and recognised languages.
- **Union bilingualism:** Article 343 designates Hindi in Devanagari as the Union's official language, while the Official Languages Act, 1963 permits continued use of English.

- **State autonomy:** Article 345 allows States to select official languages, reflected in Tamil Nadu's adoption of Tamil and Karnataka's adoption of Kannada for official purposes.
- **Scheduled recognition:** The Eighth Schedule contains 22 languages after the 92nd Constitutional Amendment added Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali in 2003.
- **Minority protection:** Articles 29, 30, 350A and 350B protect linguistic identity, minority-run institutions, mother-tongue instruction and constitutional oversight through the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities.
- **Medium choice:** In the 2014 Karnataka language-policy case, the Supreme Court held that the State cannot compel recognised private schools to use only the mother tongue or regional language.
- **Policy flexibility:** The National Education Policy, 2020 retains the three-language formula but prohibits language imposition and allows States, regions and students to choose their languages.