EDITORIALS - 29TH JUL 2026

1. INDIA AMONG THE POWERS: FOREVER RISING, NEVER RISEN?

(GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'India among the powers: Forever rising, never risen?' was published in The Indian Express on 29th Jul 2026, highlights how weak domestic foundations constrain India's transition from an emerging power to a great power.

Great-power benchmark and India's status

- Mark Carney's call for middle-power cooperation revived debate, but S. Jaishankar argued that the label understates India's geopolitical weight and great-power potential.
- Brendan Simms classifies India, France, Germany and Japan as "almost great powers", possessing major capabilities but lacking sufficient power to shape the international system.
- Wars in Ukraine and West Asia, US-China rivalry and the weaponisation of trade, finance and technology mark the return of hard power after post-Cold War globalisation failed to tame geopolitics.
- Great-power status requires industrial strength, technological leadership, nuclear and conventional military capacity, global force projection and influence over war and peace across multiple theatres.
- India possesses continental scale, the world's largest population, nuclear weapons and a major economy, but remains a transitional power behind the US and China in technology, manufacturing and global military reach.
- India's nearly $4-trillion economy remains far below the US at $31 trillion and China at $20 trillion; even after surpassing Britain, Japan and Germany, it would remain a distant third.
- India's per capita income remains below $3,000, while dependence on imported military technologies and modest research investment expose weak economic and technological foundations.

- Michael Beckley argues that demographic ageing, slowing productivity and US-China concentration of economic and technological power make latecomer advancement harder; India's skill deficits further restrict its rise.

Historical trajectory and stalled momentum

- India's great-power aspiration predates Independence, when its economic size, political institutions and human capital supported expectations of a prominent global role.
- India subsequently fell behind East Asian economies and China, while its geopolitical drift towards the Soviet Union placed it on the losing side of the Cold War.
- Reforms initiated by P.V. Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh revived growth, diversified foreign relations and encouraged Washington to view India as a rising Asian balancing power.
- India failed to sustain early-21st-century momentum as productivity growth slowed, manufacturing underperformed, science and technology investment remained inadequate and structural reforms stalled.
- Global headwinds contributed, but domestic policy choices widened the gap between India's geopolitical ambitions and the economic foundations required to support them.

Domestic constraints and future outlook

- Political polarisation, resurgent pre-modern forces and pressures on democratic institutions weaken India's capacity to navigate sharper geopolitical rivalry, less-open markets and disruptive technologies.
- Pessimists foresee permanently emerging status, while optimists believe India can mobilise its people and natural advantages through unfinished economic, technological and social modernisation, national unity and political cohesion.

Beyond Editorial

Lessons from Successful Power Transitions

- Export orientation: South Korea adopted export-led industrialisation in the 1960s, helping firms such as Samsung and Hyundai achieve global scale.
- Reform experimentation: China tested market reforms in Special Economic Zones such as Shenzhen before expanding them nationwide.
- Human-capital creation: Japan combined formal education with company training, while South Korea aligned workforce skills with industrial needs.
- State capacity: South Korea used bureaucratic reform and state-business coordination to direct investment towards competitive export industries.
- Technological upgrading: Japan progressed from technology absorption to innovation through quality control, industrial clusters and scientific investment.
- Connectivity backbone: South Korea connected industrial centres with global markets through early investment in transport and communication networks.
- Strategic sequencing: China built manufacturing and technological strength before launching the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, linking global influence with domestic capacity.

2. LEARNING THE RIGHT LESSONS AT THE BANK

(GS Paper II Governance, GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial 'Learning the right lessons at the bank' was published in The Indian Express on 29th Jul 2026, highlights governance failures at HDFC Bank and the need for stronger internal oversight to preserve trust in banking.

Governance failure at HDFC Bank

- The HDFC Bank board warned and fined three senior officials ₹1 lakh each after ₹45 crore was camouflaged as marketing expenditure to pay higher interest to the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation.

- The unprecedented action against the managing director, chief financial officer and retail-assets head signals board accountability, but also exposes serious corporate-governance concerns at India's largest private bank.
- On March 12, the audit committee ordered an external vigilance investigation into payments made during 2023-24 and 2024-25, which an earlier internal audit had flagged while rating the marketing division "unsatisfactory".
- The payments represented interest above specified deposit rates, violating RBI directions that prohibit negotiated interest rates between banks and depositors.
- The differential interest was routed through the marketing department as funding for awareness campaigns instead of being credited directly as interest to the corporation.
- Six days after the investigation began, then chairman Atanu Chakraborty resigned, citing practices inconsistent with his personal values and ethics.

Oversight gaps and corrective imperative

- HDFC's earlier claim of robust internal controls conflicts with its disclosure of two such deposits, including one from 2017, raising the possibility of additional instances overlooked by audits or the board.
- A review of at least five years of internal audits is necessary to establish the extent of irregularities, assess oversight effectiveness and ensure institutional learning.
- Since public trust is central to banking stability, comprehensive and urgent corrective action is essential to strengthen governance and accountability.

Beyond Editorial

Whistle-blower Protection in Private Banks

- Legal foundation: Section 177 of the Companies Act, 2013 mandates vigil mechanisms, protection against victimisation and access to the audit committee chairperson.
- Regulatory coverage: RBI's 2007 scheme covers private and foreign banks, while SEBI Regulation 22 mandates whistle-blower policies for listed entities.
- Inclusive access: RBI allows employees, customers, stakeholders, NGOs and citizens to report fraud, corruption and regulatory violations.
- Identity protection: RBI protects complainants' identities but excludes anonymous complaints, balancing confidentiality with verifiable investigation.
- Anti-retaliation safeguards: US authorities reviewed 51 retaliation complaints against Wells Fargo, showing how employee insecurity can conceal misconduct.
- Independent escalation: A 2024 SEC penalty of $18 million against JPMorgan showed that firms cannot restrict direct reporting to regulators.
- Reporting incentives: The US SEC awards eligible whistle-blowers 10–30% of collected sanctions, encouraging credible financial-fraud disclosures.

3. OUR STRATEGIC IMAGINATION MUST LOOK BEYOND GEOGRAPHY

(GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial 'Our strategic imagination must look beyond geography' was published in The Indian Express on 29th Jul 2026, highlights the need to redefine India's strategic outlook around expanding interests rather than physical borders alone.

From geography to strategic interests

- India's post-Independence security outlook centred on the Himalayas, Line of Control, Line of Actual Control, Indian Ocean and immediate neighbourhood, with Pakistan and China dominating strategic discourse.

- This geographical framework suited territorial defence and regional stability, but India's emergence as the world's fourth-largest economy, technology power and maritime nation has expanded its interests far beyond contiguous borders.
- Twenty-first-century geopolitics follows a geometry of interests: energy security begins in the Persian Gulf, while sea lanes from Hormuz to Malacca sustain economic growth.
- Critical minerals, continental supply chains and maritime trade make strategic proximity dependent on connectivity, partnerships, technology, maritime reach and the capacity to shape outcomes.
- India's strategic horizon must consequently extend across the Gulf, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific, matching strategic thinking with national transformation.

Expanded strategic continuum

- A narrow South Asian lens ignores China's expanding technological, commercial, infrastructural and maritime influence; Pakistan requires vigilance but should not restrict India's wider choices.
- Bangladesh's stability affects Northeast connectivity, Bay of Bengal security and the eastern frontier, making it central to India's regional strategy rather than merely an immediate neighbour.
- Afghanistan shapes Central Asian connectivity, counter-terrorism and regional stability, while the Middle East has evolved from an energy source into a vital strategic partner.
- The Indo-Pacific connects India's maritime ambitions, economic future and strategic partnerships; this broader strategic continuum incorporates rather than diminishes the immediate neighbourhood.

Civilisational influence and strategic trust

- India's civilisational legacy, exemplified by Nalanda, shows that durable influence rests on intellectual and cultural attraction rather than coercive power alone.

- Credibility, openness and shared opportunities strengthen influence, while historical ties reinforce India's engagement with Southeast Asia, the Gulf, Central Asia and Africa.
- India's rise inspires confidence because of its strategic autonomy, democratic institutions, developmental partnerships, humanitarian assistance and respect for sovereignty.
- This accumulated strategic trust must be preserved, as foreign policy ultimately succeeds by creating a stable, connected external environment supportive of national development.

Beyond Editorial

Risks of Strategic Overextension

- Consular burden: Operation Ganga evacuated 18,282 people from Ukraine, while Operation Kaveri rescued 4,097 people from Sudan.
- Neighbourhood responsibility: India provided nearly $4.1 billion during Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis, requiring substantial diplomatic and financial resources.
- Military dispersion: Operation Sankalp deployed over 5,000 personnel and 21 ships across the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden and Somali coast.
- Fiscal pressure: Simultaneous spending on border infrastructure, naval capability, overseas projects and surveillance can constrain domestic development expenditure.
- Project vulnerability: Security problems and political instability in Myanmar delayed the Kaladan project, exposing overseas investments to local disruptions.
- Partnership complexity: Membership of the Quad, BRICS and SCO requires India to balance differing expectations involving the US, Russia and China.
- Priority discipline: Classifying interests as vital, important or desirable can prevent global ambitions from weakening neighbourhood security and development priorities.