EDITORIALS - 2ND NOV 2026

1. EVEN AS UNEMPLOYMENT FALLS, LACK OF 'DECENT WORK' IN INDIA (GS PAPER III ECONOMY)

This editorial '**Even as unemployment falls, lack of 'decent work' in India**' was published in **The Hindu** on 2nd Nov 2026, highlights persistent deficiencies in **job quality, social protection** and **equitable employment** despite falling unemployment.

Employment Gains and Job Quality

- **Unemployment** fell from 6.1% in 2017–18 to 3.2% in 2023–24 alongside rising female workforce participation; employment alone does not ensure **dignity, security or stable livelihoods**.
- The **ILO** defines decent work through equitable income, workplace rights, social security and dignity; **SDG-8** incorporates this standard, which persistent informality and insecurity undermine.
- Using PLFS 2017–18 and 2023–24, the **Decent Work Index**, covering employment status, opportunity and social security across five industries, rose from **0.247 to 0.302**; improvement remained low and uneven.
- **Manufacturing** improved from 0.324 to 0.411 through formalisation and digitalisation; **transport** rose from 0.285 to 0.350 through urban logistics and platform work, without comparable gains in worker protection.

Structural Deficits and Unequal Outcomes

- **Agriculture**, the largest employer, remained the lowest-quality sector despite its index rising from 0.211 to 0.267; self-employment and unpaid family work dominate, while construction and retail retain **insecure labour arrangements**.
- Nearly **90% of workers** remain informally employed, with the share rising since 2019 according to the India Employment Report 2024; **contractualisation and outsourcing** extend informality into organised industries.
- **Education and skill training**, alongside formal-enterprise employment, improve decent-work outcomes; **ST and OBC women** nevertheless experienced deterioration while men improved, with intersecting disadvantages intensifying after COVID-19.
- **Regional disparities** persist: Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Haryana perform substantially better in decent-work creation, while **Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh** lag.
- Inadequate **social security** reduces spending, savings and resilience to shocks; **informality** depresses productivity, weakens tax capacity and increases inequality, limiting the significance of employment and income gains.

Policy Priorities and Reform Gaps

- Extend **portable social protection** across employment categories, including gig workers, farmers and the self-employed; **e-Shram registration** must translate into actual benefits.

- Link **enterprise incentives** to written contracts, paid leave and social security contributions; **formalisation** must improve working conditions beyond business registration.
- Adopt **intersectional labour policies** through childcare, safe transport, training and anti-discrimination safeguards for marginalised women; place **workers' needs** at the centre of reforms.
- The **four Labour Codes**, introduced in 2025, face partial and inconsistent implementation; critics contend that easier compliance alongside rising **contractualisation** may have weakened worker protection.

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Constitutional Foundations of Decent Work

- **Workplace dignity:** In *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997), the Supreme Court issued workplace sexual-harassment guidelines, connecting safe employment with constitutional equality and dignity.
- **Protection from exploitation:** In *PUDR v. Union of India* (1982), the Court held that payment below minimum wages could constitute forced labour under Article 23.
- **Equal remuneration:** *Randhir Singh v. Union of India* (1982) recognised equal pay for equal work as a constitutional goal, linking Article 39(d) with enforceable equality guarantees.
- **Employment support:** Reflecting Article 41's policy objective, MGNREGA, 2005 established a demand-based guarantee of at least 100 days' annual unskilled employment per eligible rural household.
- **Maternity protection:** Giving legislative expression to Article 42, the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act, 2017 expanded paid leave to 26 weeks for eligible women with fewer than two surviving children.
- **Living-wage standard:** Article 43 extends the constitutional objective beyond subsistence wages to a decent living standard, leisure and cultural opportunities, offering a broader benchmark for employment quality.
- **Worker participation:** The 42nd Constitutional Amendment inserted Article 43A, directing worker participation in industrial management and recognising workplace voice as a dimension of decent employment.

2. IN FERTILISER SALES DIP, A LESSON FOR POLICYMAKERS (GS PAPER III ECONOMY)

This editorial '**In fertiliser sales dip, a lesson for policymakers**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 2nd Nov 2026, highlights how falling fertiliser demand signals **climate-driven agricultural stress**, requiring **import relief** and structural policy reform.

Fertiliser Demand and Agricultural Stress

- April–September **fertiliser sales**, including urea, fell despite higher production and imports, reflecting subdued demand from **El Niño-induced dryness**.

- **Monsoon rainfall** was 12.6% below normal, with widespread regional shortfalls; reduced fertiliser application could lower **kharif yields** despite broadly maintained acreage.
- October's **31.4% rainfall deficit** depleted soil moisture for rabi sowing; warmer winters associated with El Niño could further reduce **acreage and yields**.

Weather Outlook and Inflation Risks

- The strong-to-very-strong **El Niño** is projected to persist through January–March, weakening to moderate-to-weak levels around **April–May 2027**.
- Agricultural shortfalls could intensify **food inflation**, which rose from 4.2% to over 7.7% during April–September; the July 2023–December 2024 episode averaged **over 8.5%**, also amid prolonged, strong El Niño conditions.

Immediate Relief and Structural Reform

- Permit **duty-free imports** of pulses, including masoor, chana and yellow peas, alongside raw sugar and cotton until March 31; consider removing **basic customs duty** on crude palm and soyabean oils.
- An extended **zero/low-duty window** would encourage importers to contract substantial quantities, helping offset **domestic production shortfalls**.
- Treat **climate change** and geopolitical tensions as baseline realities; invest in **climate-smart breeding** and efficient use of water, fertilisers, energy and other scarce resources.
- Reorder the inefficient **subsidy regime** and **fiscal priorities** to support these changes, recognising that implementation poses a political challenge beyond economic policy.

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Policy Trade-offs in Managing Food Inflation

- **Consumer affordability:** The May 2025 reduction in basic customs duty on crude edible oils from 20% to 10% illustrates how import liberalisation can address rising retail prices.
- **Producer protection:** Conversely, the September 2024 increase in crude edible-oil duties sought to protect domestic oilseed growers, illustrating the tension between cheaper imports and remunerative farm prices.
- **Harvest sensitivity:** Import decisions must consider crop arrivals; the government explicitly linked its September 2024 duty increase to securing better prices for farmers approaching the harvest season.
- **Retail transmission:** Lower duties do not automatically ensure consumer benefits; the government's June 2025 advisory sought immediate price reductions and weekly brand-wise reporting from edible-oil industry associations.
- **Domestic processing:** The 2025 crude–refined edible-oil duty differential of 19.25 percentage points illustrates how tariff design can encourage domestic refining while pursuing consumer price relief.
- **External exposure:** The Economic Survey 2023–24 noted that imports met over half of India's edible-oil requirements, making domestic prices sensitive to international market movements.

- **Alternative intervention:** In 2023, NAFED and NCCF procured tomatoes for subsidised retail sale under the Price Stabilisation Fund, illustrating consumer relief through market intervention rather than tariff changes alone.

3. A LARGER RECKONING LIES BEHIND US MID-TERMS (GS PAPER II INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS)

This editorial '**A larger reckoning lies behind US mid-terms',** was published in **The Indian Express** on 2nd Nov 2026 and highlights how US electoral outcomes could constrain **presidential power** and reshape **foreign policy**.

Electoral Context and Discontent

- Elections cover **35 Senate seats**, all **435 House seats** and governorships in 35 states; domestic concerns include living costs, technology-driven job insecurity, immigration and cultural polarisation.
- Trump's popularity may be declining even within his **MAGA base**, reflecting disappointment over prolonged wars, inflation and disconnected elites; inconsistent handling of the **Epstein Files** has further dented support.
- The largely unilateral **invasion of Iran** and resulting commodity-price pressures have intensified hardship for **middle- and working-class Americans**.
- **Redistricting** efforts and challenges to **mail-in voting** have produced mixed results, with courts rejecting the latter challenges.

Congressional Balance and Foreign Policy

- Republican losses in both chambers would sharpen **legislature–executive conflict**, increasing scrutiny of tariff weaponisation and policies towards **Ukraine and Iran**; retaining or expanding strength would embolden existing policies.
- The outcome will determine Trump's **political capital** during his remaining term and the White House's **foreign-policy flexibility**, particularly regarding wars in West Asia and Eastern Europe.

Implications for India and Presidential Power

- **New Delhi** hopes Washington's recent policies, which run against three decades of deepening **bilateral relations**, will be moderated after November 4.
- Organised **political opposition** and domestic institutional complexity can constrain presidential unilateralism, checking the arbitrary exercise of **American power abroad**.

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Comparative Accountability in Presidential Systems

- **Executive survival:** Vajpayee's government lost its confidence motion 269–270 in 1999, illustrating parliamentary dependence on legislative confidence; a US congressional electoral defeat does not itself remove the President.

- **Financial restraint:** The Boland restrictions limited funding for US support to Nicaragua's Contras during the Reagan administration, demonstrating congressional capacity to constrain foreign-policy instruments through appropriations.
- **Appointment scrutiny:** The Senate rejected Reagan's Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork in 1987, illustrating an institutional confirmation check without a general parliamentary equivalent in India.
- **Treaty constraint:** The Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 despite President Wilson's support, demonstrating that presidential diplomacy cannot guarantee domestic approval of formal treaties.
- **Investigative oversight:** The Senate Watergate Committee's public hearings in 1973 exposed presidential campaign-related misconduct, illustrating how legislative investigations can generate accountability independently of ordinary elections.
- **Removal safeguards:** Clinton's Senate acquittal in 1999 despite House impeachment demonstrates that impeachment does not automatically remove a President; conviction requires a two-thirds Senate majority of members present.
- **Judicial restraint:** In *United States v. Nixon* (1974), the Supreme Court compelled disclosure of subpoenaed recordings, establishing that executive privilege could not override the demonstrated evidentiary requirements of criminal justice.