EDITORIALS - 2nd SEP 2026

1. TAKE BISHKEK TO BRICS

(GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial '**Take Bishkek to BRICS**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 2nd Sep 2026, highlights India's need to overcome **connectivity and security constraints** through stronger bilateral engagement with Central Asian states.

Changing Central Asian Context

- Central Asia is pursuing **diversified partnerships**, retaining Russian links while seeking Chinese investment and southern access through Iran and the Gulf despite ongoing conflict.
- The region's **strategic importance** and shared terrorism concerns have produced Indian partnerships with every Central Asian state except permanently neutral **Turkmenistan**.
- Central Asian countries increasingly follow **multi-vector diplomacy**, seeking several market-access options rather than choosing between competing powers.

India's Connectivity and Security Challenges

- India's **geographical constraints**, including blocked access through Pakistan and insecure Afghan airspace, restrict trade and wider economic and cultural engagement.
- Since connectivity shapes Eurasia's **strategic geography**, India should prioritise road-independent services, digital systems and **technological investments**.
- India seeks collective action against the **terror ecosystem**, but weakened SCO consensus is evident in failed ministerial references to terrorism and Pakistan's coming **chairmanship**.
- China's superior financial capacity and **Belt and Road Initiative** investments require India to strengthen **individual partnerships** with Central Asian states.

Bilateralism through Multilateral Platforms

- India's agreement with **Uzbekistan** for long-term uranium supplies demonstrates how targeted bilateral cooperation can overcome broader **regional constraints**.
- India should use the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** to deepen bilateral relations and carry this approach into the **18th BRICS Summit**.

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India's Soft-Power Leverage in Central Asia

- **Cultural familiarity:** Indian cinema, music and dance retain considerable appeal in Central Asia, with Bollywood films routinely broadcast on Turkmenistan's national television.
- **Wellness diplomacy:** India has institutionalised yoga and Ayurveda through the Yoga and Traditional Medicine Centre in Ashgabat and the Ayush Centre in Bishkek.
- **Capacity development:** Since 2014, 114 Turkmen officials have received Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation training, while 185 students have studied in India through scholarships.
- **Youth engagement:** India hosted 100-member youth delegations from all five Central Asian countries in 2024 and 2025 to cultivate relationships with emerging regional leaders.
- **Shared heritage:** The 2022 India–Central Asia Summit proposed Buddhist exhibitions and a dictionary of common words to revive the region's historical linguistic and spiritual connections.
- **Language outreach:** Hindi is taught at Ashgabat's Azadi Institute, while a statue of Rabindranath Tagore was installed at the Magtymguly Cultural Complex in 2024.
- **Developmental credibility:** India established an information technology centre in Ashgabat in 2011 and upgraded its industrial training centre there in 2017, demonstrating practical partnership.

2. RED LABEL FOR SALT, SUGAR AND FAT IS A GOOD START

(GS Paper II Governance, GS Paper I Society)

This editorial '**Red label for salt, sugar and fat is a good start**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 2nd Sep 2026, highlights **front-of-pack warning labels** as a useful but limited tool requiring **clear design** and wider **public-health action** against obesity.

Proposed Warning Labels

- The **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India** proposes red hexagonal **front-of-pack warnings** for packaged foods high in sugar, refined carbohydrates, salt or unhealthy fats, with separate warnings for sweetened beverages.
- Introduced after **Supreme Court** criticism of regulatory delay, the proposal addresses rising **childhood obesity**, with India ranking second globally after China.

Effectiveness and Design

- Although **eating behaviour** depends on gender, income, awareness and faith, Chile recorded a **24% decline** in sugary-drink consumption after introducing black octagonal labels in 2016.
- **Clarity and legibility** are essential because the earlier **health star rating** was perceived positively and associated with increased unhealthy-food consumption.

Implementation Gaps and Wider Response

- The notification and timeline remain pending, while the **two-ingredient threshold** may exclude products high in one harmful ingredient and the proposed **font size** may be ineffective.
- India's **double burden** of obesity and malnutrition requires warning labels to complement nutritional awareness, stronger junk-food regulation and **healthy-lifestyle nudges**.

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Regulating the Obesogenic Food Environment

- **Marketing controls:** The World Health Organization's 2023 guidelines recommend comprehensive restrictions on unhealthy-food advertising targeting children across television, digital platforms, influencers and sponsorships.
- **School protection:** India's 2020 school-food regulations prohibit the sale and promotion of foods high in fat, sugar or salt within campuses and 50 metres of school gates.
- **Fiscal deterrence:** The United Kingdom's tiered Soft Drinks Industry Levy, introduced in 2018, encouraged manufacturers to reduce sugar content to avoid higher tax rates.

- **Product reformulation:** India reduced the permissible industrial trans-fat content in oils, fats and food products to 2% from January 2022, creating a precedent for mandatory nutrient limits.
- **Retail regulation:** England restricts unhealthy-food placement near checkouts, store entrances and aisle ends, recognising that product visibility and promotional positioning influence consumption choices.
- **Nutritious access:** The PM POSHAN scheme provides cooked school meals containing cereals, pulses and vegetables, helping children access healthier food regardless of household purchasing power.
- **Active environments:** The Streets4People Challenge encouraged Indian cities to develop walkable public spaces, illustrating how urban planning can reduce sedentary behaviour and support daily physical activity.

3. CHINA, US ARE IN RACE TO CONNECT SCIENCE WITH INDUSTRY. INDIA MUST CATCH UP

(GS Paper III Economy)

This editorial '**China, US are in race to connect science with industry. India must catch up**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 2nd Sep 2026, highlights how China and the United States are integrating science with industry while India risks falling behind due to **inadequate investment** and **institutional reform**.

China–United States Science-Industry Race

- China seeks to replace cheap labour, infrastructure and capital-led growth with **new quality productive forces** driven by scientific **innovation**.
- Beijing aims to diffuse **artificial intelligence** across robotics, automobiles, biotechnology, energy and agriculture, combining it with China's **manufacturing depth**.
- China is progressing from adapting foreign technologies to original discovery, spending **2.8% of GDP** on research and development as **basic-research expenditure** rose 11% in 2025.
- The United States' **Science: A New Golden Age** seeks to reverse globalisation's separation of domestic discovery from overseas production by closing the **knowledge-production gap**.

- China is moving from manufacturing towards science, while the United States is moving from science towards manufacturing to build an integrated **science-industrial ecosystem** generating economic and **geopolitical power**.

India's Structural Gaps and Required Strategy

- Despite missions on artificial intelligence, semiconductors, quantum technology and robotics, today's **private capital** lacks the institution-building ambition once shown by Jamsetji Tata, the Kirloskars and Sir Dorabji Tata in supporting **scientific research**.
- The Economic Survey 2025–26 places India's research expenditure at **0.64% of GDP**, against China's 2.8% and the United States' 3.5%, while purchasing-power-adjusted spending is only **$75 billion**, against $786 billion and $782 billion respectively.
- China combined Deng-era reforms, American university training, domestic investment and researcher-return incentives, while India's **scientific institutions** remain unreformed and struggle with **talent attraction**.
- Congress-era **bureaucratisation** and BJP-era **cultural nationalism** have weakened scientific temper, as civilisational pride cannot substitute evidence, experimentation and future-oriented research.
- Past self-reliance isolated India from technological advances; renewed sovereignty rhetoric must give way to **global cooperation** alongside stronger **domestic capacity** in research, industry and institutions.

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Strategic Public Procurement for Innovation

- **Demand aggregation:** Energy Efficiency Services Limited used bulk procurement under UJALA to reduce LED bulb prices and rapidly expand the market for energy-efficient lighting.
- **Startup access:** Government e-Marketplace's Startup Runway permits recognised startups to showcase innovations and receive trial orders without restrictive prior-turnover, experience or earnest-money requirements.
- **Challenge-based procurement:** Innovations for Defence Excellence invites startups to solve operational problems identified by the armed forces, linking defence requirements directly with entrepreneurial innovation.
- **Order assurance:** The defence Make-II procedure provides procurement assurance after successful prototype development and trials, reducing the commercial uncertainty faced by domestic innovators.

- **Risk sharing:** The Technology Development Fund finances industry-led research undertaken with academic institutions and supports subsequent commercialisation and procurement through the Defence Research and Development Organisation.
- **Domestic scaling:** The Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India) Order, 2017, gives eligible local suppliers purchase preference and can create markets for domestically developed technologies.
- **Performance accountability:** Government e-Marketplace evaluates vendors through reliability, delivery quality, timeliness and incident history, helping public agencies reward credible innovators while filtering poor performers.