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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# Global Rankings Distort the Reading of India's Growth Story

 **INDIAN EXPRESS**23 April 2026 · **ECONOMY** · **GS3** · **GS2**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# Global Rankings Distort the Reading of India's Growth Story

 The Indian Express

23 April 2026

GS3

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3 tags ▾

## INTERVIEW ANGLE



*"India ranks poorly on HDI, press freedom, and hunger indices while ranking highly on GDP growth and ease of doing business. Which indices are more reliable — and what methodology biases should a UPSC aspirant be aware of when citing global rankings?"*

## THE CORE ARGUMENT

International indices and rankings — Ease of Doing Business, World Press Freedom Index, Global Hunger Index, Human Development Index — profoundly shape narratives about India's development. The editorial argues that many of these rankings use **flawed methodologies, outdated data, inadequate sample sizes, or ideological biases** that systematically misrepresent India's actual trajectory. While India should acknowledge genuine governance failures, it should also critically examine the **methodology and data sources** behind rankings before accepting them as definitive assessments. The key insight: **different indices measure different things**, and conflating them produces a confused rather than accurate picture of India's development.

## THE PROBLEM WITH GLOBAL RANKINGS

### What Rankings Get Right (and Wrong)

INDEX	PUBLISHER	WHAT IT MEASURES	KEY METHODOLOGICAL CONCERN
<b>Human Development Index (HDI)</b>	UNDP	Income + Education + Health	Uses GNI per capita (PPP) — undervalues public service quality
<b>Global Hunger Index (GHI)</b>	Welthungerhilfe + Concern Worldwide	Undernourishment, child wasting, mortality	India-specific: uses telephone surveys with ~3,000 sample for 1.4B population
<b>World Press Freedom Index</b>	Reporters Without Borders (RSF)	Journalistic freedom	Survey-based; critics question selection of respondents
<b>Democracy Index</b>	Economist Intelligence Unit	Political freedoms, governance	Conceptual framework contested; treats “electoral authoritarianism” inconsistently
<b>Ease of Doing Business</b>	World Bank (discontinued 2021)	Business regulatory environment	Discontinued after data manipulation scandal; India’s rankings were disputed
<b>Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)</b>	Transparency International	Perceived corruption	Perception-based; lag in capturing reforms

## INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT — WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

### Economic Growth — Genuine Achievement

INDICATOR	2013-14	2025-26
GDP (nominal)	~\$2 trillion	~\$4.2 trillion
GDP rank	10th	5th
Per capita income (nominal)	~\$1,500	~\$2,800
Manufacturing share of GDP	~15%	~18%
UPI transactions	0	~\$2 trillion/year
Mobile internet users	~200 million	~900 million

**Genuine achievements:** GDP growth, digital infrastructure, financial inclusion (PM Jan Dhan — 540+ crore accounts), electrification, LPG connections (PMUY), road connectivity.

### Human Development — Where Gaps Remain

INDICATOR	INDIA'S STATUS	GLOBAL COMPARISON
HDI rank (2023)	134th of 193	Medium human development
Multidimensional Poverty Index	~11-12% poor (2023) — falling	Significant improvement from 25%+ (2015)
Maternal mortality ratio	~97/lakh live births (2020)	Down from 254 (2004); still above WHO target
Under-5 mortality	~32/1000	Improved; still high vs. China (~8)
Infant mortality rate	~27/1000	Down from 57 (2005)
Female labour force participation	~24-26%	Low; one of lowest in world

## THE GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX CONTROVERSY

**GHI 2024 ranked India 105th of 127 countries** — below North Korea and Pakistan.

#### India's rebuttal:

- 1 GHI’s “undernourishment” data is based on a **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) survey** using a telephone survey of ~3,000 respondents for India’s 1.4 billion population — statistically inadequate
- 2 FAO data uses a **2022-24 survey period** that partly preceded India’s expanded food distribution (PMGKAY)
- 3 **PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):** Free food grain to 80 crore beneficiaries — not adequately captured in GHI methodology
- 4 Child wasting data (one GHI component) reflects India’s own NFHS-5 (2019-21) data — acknowledged but attributed to COVID disruption

**Valid criticism:** Despite growth, India’s child malnutrition (stunting: ~35%; wasting: ~19%) remains high by international standards — this is a genuine policy gap.

## INDIA’S HDI TRAJECTORY

YEAR	HDI VALUE	RANK
1990	0.429	—
2000	0.493	—
2010	0.571	—
2020	0.633	131st
2022-23	0.644	134th

India’s HDI has improved substantially — but neighbouring countries (Sri Lanka: 0.78; China: 0.79; Bangladesh: 0.67) have progressed faster on some metrics.

## HOW TO CRITICALLY ANALYSE RANKINGS FOR UPSC

### A Framework for Evaluating Any Index

QUESTION	WHY IT MATTERS
Who publishes it?	Government, NGO, multilateral – each has incentives
What is measured?	Inputs vs. outcomes; perception vs. data
What data source?	Self-reported, administrative, survey – each has biases
Sample size?	3,000 survey responses for 1.4B population = low confidence
Base year?	Data from 3-4 years ago may not reflect current reality
Comparators?	India vs. OECD ≠ India vs. similar economies (Indonesia, Bangladesh)
Trend?	Rank can fall even as absolute score improves (if others improve faster)

### UPSC ANGLE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS3 – Economy	India's GDP, growth trajectory, HDI, development indices
GS2 – Governance	Policy outcomes vs. rankings; data quality in governance
GS1 – Society	Human development, poverty, gender, nutrition outcomes

**Mains Keywords:** HDI, Global Hunger Index, GHI, UNDP, FAO, PMGKAY, multidimensional poverty, female labour force participation, perception-based indices, Corruption Perceptions Index, development narrative

**Probable Question:** “Global indices often fail to capture India’s development trajectory accurately. Critically examine the methodology of two major international rankings.” (GS2/GS3 Mains)



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