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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Superpower India Wants To Be Cannot Keep Losing the People Who Would Build It

HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 August 2026 · ECONOMY · GS3

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Hindustan Times 10 August 2026 **GS3**

INTERVIEW ANGLE

"If the government's own data shows over two lakh Indians renouncing citizenship every year without the state tracking their skill level or reasons for leaving, is talent retention actually a stated policy priority, or a slogan without a measurement system behind it?"

Source: Original editorial ↗ Hindustan Times

Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

A nation can celebrate the global success of its people, or it can ask why so many of them had to leave home to have it. Independence Day rhetoric usually manages only the first.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Brain drain answers in the GS3 economy paper often default to a generic list of push and pull factors. This editorial supplies the sharper, more testable argument: retention is a competitiveness problem measured against specific rival economies, not a vague national mood, and the government's own admitted data gap on who leaves and why is itself part of the policy failure. It also gives you the comparative-model angle, China and the US as different but convergent case studies, that examiners reward in a 250-word answer.

GS Paper 3: Indian economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation of resources, growth and employment; human resource development; innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT IS TESTABLE
Brain drain	Emigration of a country's skilled, educated workforce to other economies	The baseline concept, but this editorial pushes past the definition into policy design
Brain circulation	A pattern where skilled emigrants eventually return with capital, expertise and networks, rather than leaving permanently	The strongest counter-argument to a purely loss-framed reading
Citizenship renunciation data	Government figures on Indians formally giving up Indian citizenship, tracked by the Ministry of External Affairs	A concrete, Parliament-reported Prelims-grade statistic
Talent competitiveness	A country's ability to retain or attract skilled workers relative to specific rival economies, not in the abstract	The editorial's central reframe, retention as a competitive, not moral, question
Diaspora dividend	Economic and soft-power returns from an outward-migrated population, remittances, investment, global networks	The main evidence for the counter-argument

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Union government data placed before Parliament recorded **over two lakh (200,000+) Indians renouncing citizenship in 2024**, the third consecutive year above the 200,000 mark after renunciations climbed sharply from **85,256 in 2020** to **2,25,620 in 2022**, with the cumulative total since 2014 crossing **1.7 million**. The government has told Parliament it **does not maintain data** on the educational qualifications, professional background or stated reasons of those who renounce citizenship.

INDICATOR	DETAIL
Indians renouncing citizenship, 2024	**Over 2,00,000** (per government data tabled in Parliament)
Annual renunciations, 2020 to 2024	**85,256 (2020) rising to above 200,000 every year since 2022**
Cumulative renunciations since 2014	**Over 1.7 million**
Government data on emigrants' skill/profession	**Not maintained**, per Parliament reply
Leading destination countries	**United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada**

Writing ahead of India's 2026 **Independence Day**, Hindustan Times editor **Shashi Shekhar** frames this trend against India's stated ambition to become a leading global economy, arguing that matching what **China** and the **United States** offer skilled professionals and entrepreneurs, competitive compensation, flexible work structures, and credible long-term career and research support, should be treated as a national economic priority rather than an afterthought to growth-rate headlines.

THE ANALYSIS

1. The retention gap is now a documented, sustained trend, not a periodic anxiety. Three consecutive years of 200,000-plus annual citizenship renunciations, following a sharp rise from 85,256 in 2020, and concentrated toward a small set of identifiable rival economies, moves this from an episodic concern into a structural feature of India's talent market that policy has not yet been designed to address directly.

2. The government's own data gap is itself part of the argument. A state that does not track the professional or educational profile of departing citizens cannot design retention policy against actual causes, it can only respond to assumption. This is a governance failure independent of whatever the underlying economic causes turn out to be.

3. The China-US comparison is useful because the two countries differ in method but agree on the premise. China's approach has leaned on state-directed compensation packages, dedicated research infrastructure and return incentives for scientific and technical talent; the United States relies on market-driven compensation, deep venture capital markets and immigration pathways that let talent self-select into high-reward roles. Both nonetheless treat globally benchmarked opportunity, not appeals to loyalty, as the retention mechanism. India's policy discourse has historically leaned more heavily on the latter than either comparator does.

4. The destinations are not random, which sharpens the competitive framing. Talent moving overwhelmingly to the US, UK, Australia and Canada, economies that compete directly with India in technology, medicine, research and finance, means India is not merely experiencing diffuse globalisation but losing specific contests for specific people to specific rivals.

5. The counter-argument about brain circulation and diaspora dividend is real, but incomplete as a rebuttal. Remittance inflows and diaspora investment are genuine returns, and some outward migration is genuinely circulatory. But circulation still depends on India eventually offering a competitive re-entry proposition, career infrastructure, funding continuity, equity-linked compensation, that professionals returning after years abroad would actually choose over staying put. The diaspora-dividend argument explains why outward migration is not pure loss; it does not explain why India should not still compete harder to retain talent in the first place.

6. Independence Day timing sharpens rather than softens the argument. A national narrative built around India's rising global standing sits awkwardly against citizenship-renunciation data the state itself does not disaggregate enough to act on, which is precisely the tension the editorial is using the calendar moment to highlight.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

- Indians renouncing citizenship, 2024: over 2,00,000 (government data, Parliament)
- Annual renunciations rose from 85,256 in 2020 to above 200,000 every year since 2022
- Cumulative renunciations since 2014: over 1.7 million
- Government does not maintain data on the professional/educational profile of those renouncing citizenship
- Leading destination countries: United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada
- Nodal ministry for citizenship data: Ministry of External Affairs
- Author: Shashi Shekhar, Editor, Hindustan Times, writing ahead of India's 2026 Independence Day (15 August)

WATCH THE TRAP: CITIZENSHIP RENUNCIATION IS A PROXY FOR OUTWARD MIGRATION, NOT A DIRECT MEASURE OF "BRAIN DRAIN" BY ITSELF, SINCE THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT TRACK THE SKILL PROFILE OF THOSE WHO LEAVE. DO NOT PRESENT THE RENUNCIATION FIGURE AS IF IT WERE A VERIFIED COUNT OF SKILLED EMIGRANTS; THE EDITORIAL'S OWN ARGUMENT IS THAT THIS PRECISE DATA GAP IS PART OF THE PROBLEM.

THE DEBATE

Argument FOR treating talent retention as an urgent national priority. A sharp rise in citizenship renunciations, from 85,256 in 2020 to a sustained run of over 200,000 a year since 2022, concentrated toward India's direct economic rivals, represents a real and measurable competitiveness gap. An economy that cannot retain enough of its own highly trained professionals is unlikely to sustain the innovation-led growth a superpower ambition requires, regardless of aggregate GDP trajectory.

Argument AGAINST treating outward migration as primarily a loss. Diaspora remittances and global professional networks generate substantial, ongoing returns for India, and a meaningful share of outward migration is circulatory rather than permanent. An economy producing talent globally competitive enough to be recruited by the world's leading firms and universities is, on this reading, demonstrating success, not failure, and heavy-handed retention framing risks obscuring that.

Balanced verdict. Both readings are compatible: outward migration generates real diaspora returns, and the absence of a deliberate strategy to remain competitive for top talent is still a policy gap worth closing. The disagreement is less about whether migration happens, it will, than about whether India is doing enough to make staying, or eventually returning, at least as attractive as leaving. The government's own admitted failure to track who leaves and why is the most concrete, actionable starting point available.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

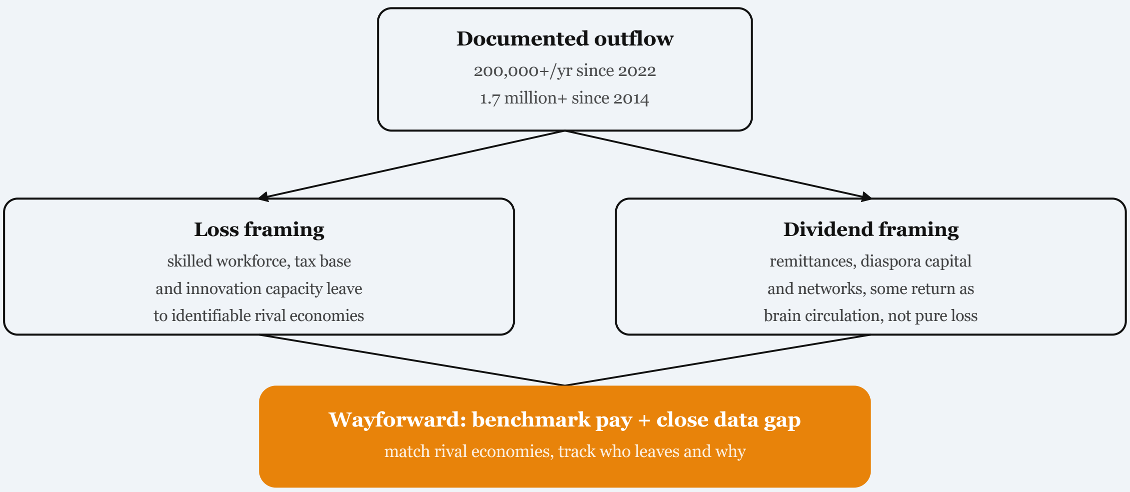
The transferable pattern: **when a favourable aggregate trend (rising GDP, growing diaspora success, improving global rankings) coexists with a persistent underlying outflow, ask whether the aggregate is succeeding despite the outflow or because policy has simply not yet had to reckon with its cost.**

An economy can grow while continuing to lose skilled workers if the loss is currently smaller than the gains from other sources, population scale, domestic consumption, capital inflows. That does not mean the outflow is costless, it means its cost has not yet become binding. The right analytical move is to identify the point at which a persistent structural gap, if left unaddressed, would start constraining the very growth it currently coexists with, rather than assuming a good current headline number rules out a real underlying problem.

This same pattern applies to reading India's high services-sector growth alongside stagnant manufacturing employment, or rising renewable energy capacity alongside continued coal dependence, favourable topline trends can mask underlying structural gaps that only become costly once other advantages are exhausted.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

From outflow data to a retention strategy



Both readings of the outflow, loss and dividend, point to the same practical gap: India has not yet built a measured strategy to compete for the talent it is losing to specific rival economies.

TAKEAWAY BOX

An economy can grow while its best people leave, for a while. The question a superpower ambition eventually has to answer is what happens once that stops being true.

Indians renouncing citizenship in **2024***:* **over 2,00,000***; annual renunciations rose from* **85,256 in 2020** *to* **above 200,000 every year since 2022***; cumulative since 2014:* **over 1.7 million***; leading destinations* **US, UK, Australia, Canada***; government* **does not track** *the professional profile of those who leave; author* **Shashi Shekhar**, **Hindustan Times**, *ahead of* **India's 2026 Independence Day**.

should a government be judged more on the opportunities it creates for its citizens to stay, or on the global success its citizens achieve after leaving, and can a state credibly claim credit for the latter while under-investing in the former?

UPSC has tested brain drain, human resource development and innovation ecosystem themes under GS3; this editorial updates the theme with a current, government-sourced statistic and a comparative China-US retention framework that strengthens both Mains and interview answers.

"Retaining talent is a competitiveness problem, not a sentiment." Examine this claim with reference to India's sustained outward migration of skilled professionals and the policy measures needed to address it.

Sources: Hindustan Times, Ministry of External Affairs, PIB

KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Hindustan Times editor Shashi Shekhar argues that India cannot credibly aim to become an economic superpower while it continues to lose a substantial share of its most capable professionals and entrepreneurs to countries that simply offer them better compensation, more flexible work environments and stronger institutional support, and that closing this gap, not merely celebrating outward achievement, should be a national priority as India approaches this Independence Day.

✓ SUPPORTING

- The scale of the outflow is no longer a marginal phenomenon: government data placed before Parliament recorded over two lakh Indians renouncing citizenship in 2024 alone, the third consecutive year above 200,000 after renunciations jumped from 85,256 in 2020 to over 200,000 by 2022, with the cumulative total since 2014 crossing 1.7 million, and the government itself has told Parliament it does not maintain data on the educational or professional profile of those who leave, which is itself a governance gap.
- China's and the United States' talent strategies differ in method but converge on the same principle, that retaining or attracting top talent requires deliberately matching global compensation benchmarks and offering credible career and research infrastructure, rather than relying on patriotic appeal or family ties alone to hold people who have globally competitive options.
- The destinations are consistent and telling: renunciations concentrate overwhelmingly toward the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, economies that compete directly with India for the same high-skill workforce in technology, medicine, research and finance, meaning this is a competitive loss to identifiable rivals, not a diffuse global trend.
- The compensation gap compounds with a flexibility and career-structure gap: rigid promotion timelines, limited research funding continuity, and comparatively weaker venture and early-stage capital ecosystems inside India push professionals toward markets where career progression and entrepreneurial risk-taking are both faster and better cushioned.

⚠ COUNTER

The migration of skilled Indians is not an unqualified loss and can be read instead as a sign of India's success in producing globally competitive talent in the first place, since institutions like the IITs and AIIMS would not be globally sought after if their graduates were not genuinely world-class. Remittances from the Indian diaspora, among the highest in the world, and the diaspora's growing role in technology leadership, investment and soft power for India, are real returns on this outward flow that a narrow retention framing understates.

Moreover, not every departure is permanent, a meaningful share of outward-bound professionals return with capital, networks and expertise after some years abroad, a pattern often described as brain circulation rather than brain drain, and forcing retention through restriction rather than attraction would be both impractical and counterproductive.

→ WAY FORWARD

Treat talent retention as an economic competitiveness problem requiring measurable targets, not a sentiment to be invoked around Independence Day. This means benchmarking compensation and research funding against the specific countries India loses talent to, rather than against its own historical baseline, building the flexible-work and equity-linked compensation structures that private Indian firms increasingly need to compete for the same people foreign employers court, and closing the data gap the government has itself acknowledged, so that policy is designed against actual reasons for departure rather than assumption.

It also means actively converting outward migration into brain circulation, through diaspora investment channels, return fellowships tied to research infrastructure, and recognition that a superpower ambition is compatible with, and indeed depends on, participating in global talent mobility rather than resisting it.

MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

India aspires to become a leading global economy while continuing to see sustained outward migration of skilled professionals. Examine the structural factors driving this outflow and discuss policy measures needed to convert brain drain into brain gain. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Hindustan Times editor Shashi Shekhar, writing ahead of India's 2026 Independence Day, argues that India's ambition to become an economic superpower is undermined by its continued inability to retain a meaningful share of its most skilled professionals, and that matching the compensation, flexibility and institutional support that China and the United States offer talent should be treated as a national economic priority rather than a peripheral concern.

BODY

The scale of the issue is documented rather than anecdotal. Government data placed before Parliament recorded over two lakh Indians renouncing citizenship in 2024, the third straight year above 200,000 following a sharp rise from 85,256 in 2020, and a cumulative total exceeding 1.7 million since 2014, concentrated toward the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, the same economies India competes with for high-skill technology, research, medical and financial talent.
Notably, the government has itself told Parliament it does not track the educational or professional profile of those who leave, a data gap that itself constrains evidence-based retention policy. The comparative frame the editorial draws is instructive: both China and the United States, despite very different economic systems, converge on treating competitive compensation and credible long-term career infrastructure as prerequisites for holding onto or attracting top talent, rather than assuming national loyalty or family ties will substitute for globally comparable opportunity.
India's gap is not only about salary levels but about career-progression speed, continuity of research funding, and the depth of its early-stage venture ecosystem relative to markets professionals are choosing instead. The counter-view, that outward migration reflects the genuine global competitiveness of Indian talent and generates substantial returns through remittances and diaspora networks, and that departures are increasingly circulatory rather than permanent, is a legitimate corrective against treating every departure as pure loss, but it does not by itself resolve the structural compensation and infrastructure gap the editorial identifies.

CONCLUSION

The reasonable synthesis is that talent mobility itself is not the problem, an economy aspiring to superpower status will always have globally mobile citizens, but the absence of a deliberate, measured strategy to remain competitive for that talent is. Independence Day rhetoric about India's rise rings differently against citizenship-renunciation data the government's own agencies do not disaggregate, and closing that specific data and policy gap, rather than treating outward migration as an inevitability, is the more defensible starting point for any credible retention strategy.

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