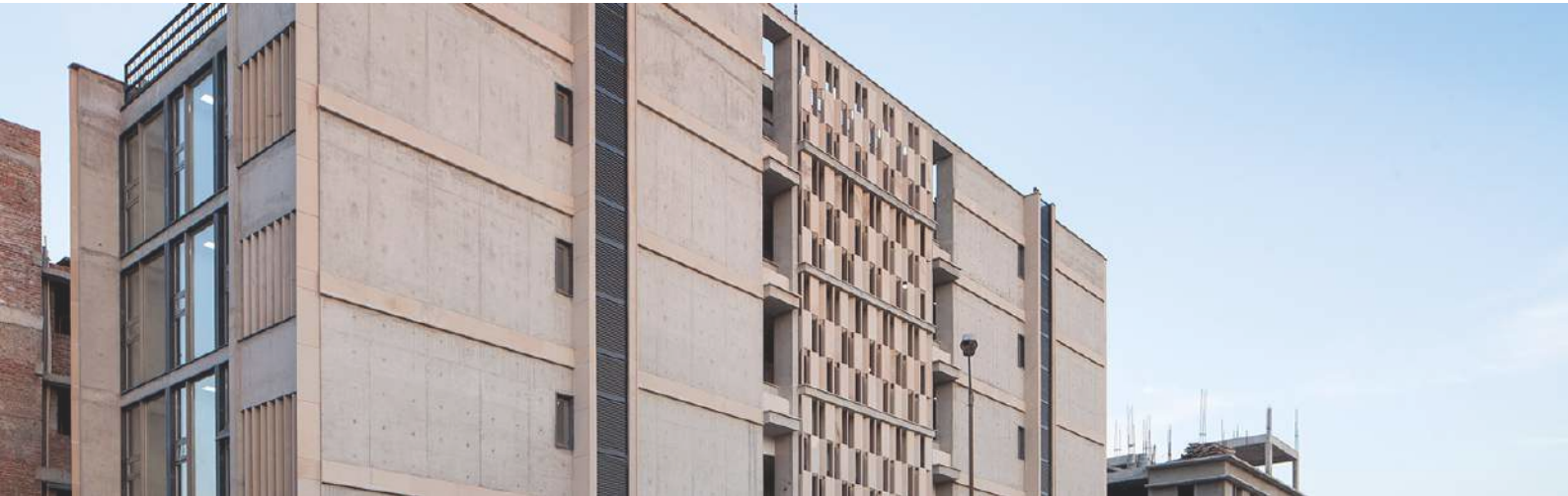


September 2026 INSIGHTS

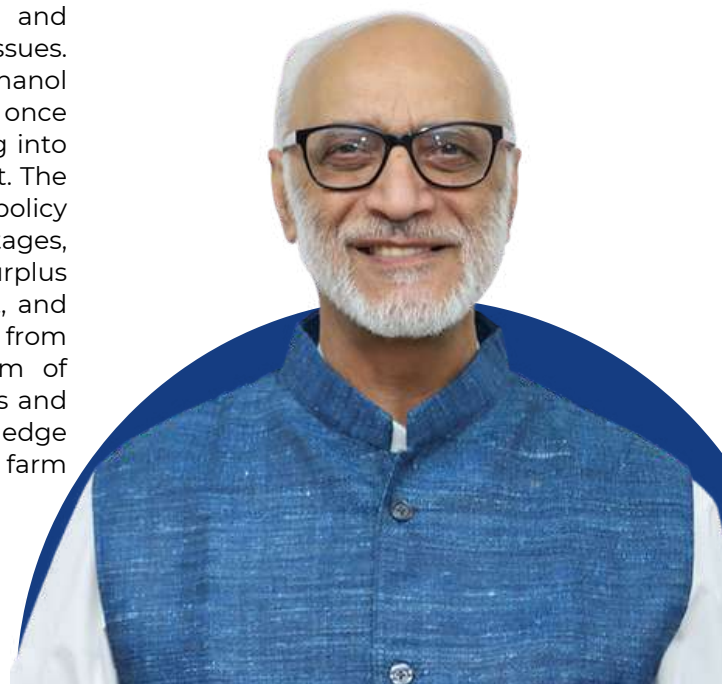
Highlights from August 2026



Message from the Leadership

The month of August has perhaps left everyone with a bitter aftertaste. The month witnessed the sharpest spike in sugar prices in recent memory, a 44 per cent rise in modal retail prices between July and 29 August (₹45 to ₹65). While India crossing the 20 per cent ethanol blending mark this year, five years ahead of the original schedule, is a genuine achievement, it has come with costs that are now becoming visible. Ethanol supplied to oil marketing companies increased from 173.03 crore litres in ESY 2019–20 to a projected 1,200 crore litres in ESY 2025–26, implying a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR), of about 38 per cent. Over the same period, growth in the underlying feedstocks was substantially slower — maize at 11.4 per cent annually, rice at 4.4 per cent, and sugarcane at 4.1 per cent. The resulting divergence is at the heart of the emerging food-versus-fuel trade-off, now visible in the sugar market amid low opening stocks, lower production, and that sharp rise in retail prices.

Our researchers at the Agriculture Policy, Sustainability and Innovation (APSI) vertical have been working to highlight the issues. Our recent Policy Brief, Food vs Fuel: Recalibrating India's Ethanol Blending Strategy, finds that the true economic cost of ethanol, once we account for the subsidised power, water, and fertiliser going into these crops, is far higher than what procurement prices suggest. The way forward is not to walk back from ethanol, but to make the policy more adaptive by allowing sugar imports during shortages, restricting Food Corporation of India (FCI) rice to genuine surplus while moving its pricing closer to at least the acquisition cost, and switching over the longer term to second-generation ethanol from agricultural residues and other non-food biomass. Our team of researchers remains dedicated to highlighting these challenges and supporting policymakers through them. We must also acknowledge the policy nexus at work here, and recognise that food, fuel, and farm policy cannot be thought of in isolation.



Ashok Gulati

Distinguished Professor, ICRIER

POLICY IN ACTION

Strengthening Climate-Resilient Agriculture through Policy and Governance | Workshop for MPs & MLAs

1 August, 2026 | **New Delhi**

Ramesh Chand (Distinguished Professor, ICRIER) delivered the keynote lecture at a workshop for Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assemblies, organised by the Nation First Policy Research & Change Foundation at the India Habitat Centre. The session brought policy and governance questions on climate-resilient agriculture directly to legislators, with a substantive round of discussion on the challenges facing India's agricultural transition and the reforms needed to build resilience.



The Geography of AI Firms | IPCIDE Visiting Scholar Seminar

5 August, 2026 | **New Delhi**

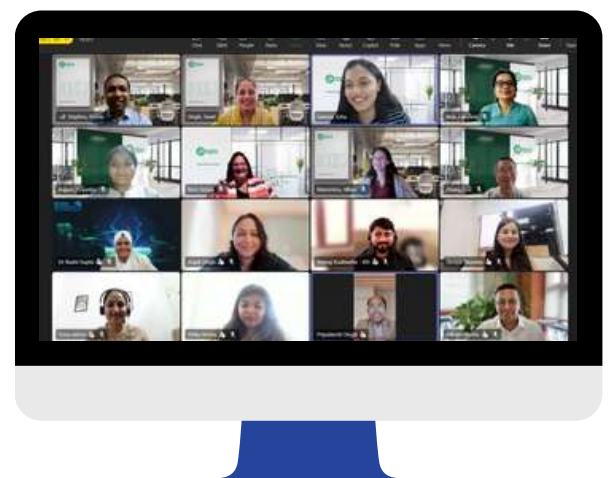
The ICRIER Prosus Centre for Internet and Digital Economy (IPCIDE) hosted a Visiting Scholar Seminar featuring Vatsala Shreeti (Economist, Bank for International Settlements, Basel) on the geography of AI firms. Drawing on a new database of 1,246 AI-producing firms across 32 economies, she mapped how the five layers of the AI supply chain — compute, cloud and infrastructure, data tools, AI models, and AI applications, are unevenly distributed across the global economy.



Circular Battery Ecosystem (CBE) Standards Working Group | Phase 2 Convening

6 August, 2026 | **Virtual**

Ritika Verma (Research Associate, ICRIER) moderated *Pillar 1 — Battery Data, Traceability & Systems Safety* at the Phase 2 Convening of the Circular Battery Ecosystem Standards Working Group. The session was convened by UL Standards & Engagement and Battery360. The session also brought diverse perspectives to a critical question — how can India build a reliable, interoperable, and future-ready data ecosystem that allows batteries to be traced safely across their lifecycle?



ISA-SAWP 2026 Conference | South Asia in a Changing International Order

6 August, 2026 | **Sri Lanka**

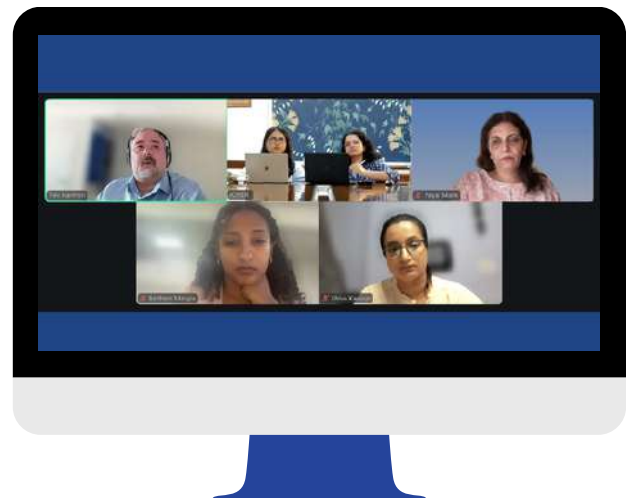
Arpita Mukherjee (Professor, ICRIER) participated in three sessions at the ISA-SAWP 2026 Conference on South Asia in a Changing International Order in Colombo, Sri Lanka — a roundtable on Economic Statecraft, Tradecraft, and the Current World Order, a panel she chaired on The Politics of Borders, Boundaries and Connectivity, and a roundtable on New Developments in EU-India Relations.



CoP DPI4D 22: Continual Learning and Improvement — Insights from Digital ID

19 August, 2026 | **Virtual**

As part of the continuing CoP DPI4D webinar series, ICRIER organised a session with the Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL) on continual learning and improvement in Digital ID systems. Trev Harmon (Associate Director, Digital Impact Alliance) and Betlhem Mergia (Monitoring and Evaluation Director, Ethiopia National ID Program) led the discussion, chaired by Payal Malik (Visiting Professor, ICRIER) and moderated by Krishnapriya V.S. (Fellow, ICRIER).



Leading the Next Harvest: Women in Agriculture and Food Systems

19 August, 2026 | **New Delhi**

Arpita Mukherjee (Professor, ICRIER) participated in the panel on Recognising and Advancing Women's Participation Across Agriculture and Food Systems at Leading the Next Harvest, convened by AMCHAM India with Corteva Agriscience to mark the UN International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026. The panel explored how access to skills, finance, technology, and markets can strengthen women's participation and leadership across agrifood value chains, bringing together speakers from the FAO, UNDP, and the World Food Programme.



बंदरगाह, बाज़ार और भारत | News24 Bharat Nirman Summit 2026

21 August, 2026 | New Delhi

Saon Ray (Senior Visiting Professor, ICRIER) participated in a panel discussion at the News24 Bharat Nirman Summit 2026, offering an evidence-based read on India's trade resilience and the infrastructure needed to become a global manufacturing and export hub as part of India's 2047 vision. Despite a year of US tariffs and the West Asia conflict, she noted, India's exports have grown around 20% over the past six months, with new markets opening up.



SPOTLIGHT: NEW RESEARCH



India Macro Monitor | Issue No. 1 | Q1 FY2026-27

Authors: Shekhar Aiyar, Aashi Gupta, Yougesh Khatri

The inaugural edition of ICRIER's new quarterly assessment of India's macroeconomic landscape, the India Macro Monitor tracks economic activity, inflation, employment, the external sector, and financial markets through high-frequency indicators and emerging macro signals. This edition finds India entering Q1 FY27 with strong momentum, supported by resilient consumption and a strengthening investment cycle — even as headline CPI crossed the RBI's 4% target for the first time in 18 months, the labour market showed signs of cooling, and persistent rupee underperformance signaled emerging external vulnerabilities.



Estimating Employment in India's Cultural and Creative Economy: Evidence from the Periodic Labour Force Survey

Authors: Havishaye Puri, Tanu Goyal, Shravani Prakash, Anjhana Ramesh

India's cultural and creative economy employed approximately 57 million workers in 2025, nearly 9% of the total workforce, up 40% from 40.6 million in 2017–18. This Working Paper adapts UNESCO, ESSnet, and Eustat frameworks to map eight cultural domains onto India's National Industrial Classification, producing the first replicable, regularly updatable estimates of the sector. It finds female employment more than doubled to 18.8 million, though concentrated largely in low-value tailoring work, and calls for a dedicated Cultural Satellite Account, a gender-specific agenda on wages and mobility, and IP reform.

IN THE NEWS

India-China Himalayan trade route reopening explained

Arpita Mukherjee & Nisha Taneja quoted
1 August, 2026 | The Financial Express

A new compact between AI and agriculture: An Andhra Pradesh opportunity

Authors: Ashok Gulati, Baskar S Reddy & Kalyan Chakravarthy Guntuboyina
3 August, 2026 | The Indian Express

India must move quickly on digital trade— its agreement with the UK could play catalyst

Authors: Arpita Mukherjee & Geetika Gupta | 3 August, 2026 | Mint

India's Clean Energy Transition: Domestic Capabilities and the Next Phase

Author: Bidisha Banerjee | 5 August, 2026 | PV magazine India

India's Next Startup Revolution: Beyond Digital Consumer Plays

Authors: Payal Malik & Krishnapriya V.S. | 6 August, 2026 | The Policy Edge

Manpower issues in space, nuclear power

Author: Somit Dasgupta | 7 August, 2026 | The Hindu BusinessLine

How market participants read RBI's order of priority has a bearing on how well monetary policy works

Author: Puja Mehra | 7 August, 2026
Mint

Rajasthan's Farmer-Owned Agri-PV Project under PM-KUSUM

ICRIER research cited | 7 August, 2026
CNBC-TV18

India enters FY27 with strong momentum, but external risks emerge: ICRIER

ICRIER bulletin cited | 11 August, 2026
Fortune India

VOICES FROM ICRIER



India's Sugar Crisis and the Policy Missteps Behind It | The Federal

In an interview with The Federal, Ashok Gulati (Distinguished Professor, ICRIER) explains how a mix of government policy missteps sparked India's sugar crisis, a shortage that has pushed prices sharply upward. The conversation traces the interconnected policy decisions across ethanol diversion, procurement, and pricing that combined to create the shortfall, and outlines the reforms needed to restore stability.



India's Sugar Prices: A Fiasco of Policy Missteps | The Wire

In an interview with Karan Thapar for The Wire, Ashok Gulati (Distinguished Professor, ICRIER) calls the sharp rise in sugar prices "a fiasco" driven by government mismanagement. He unpacks how ethanol blending targets, sugarcane pricing, and export restrictions have interacted to create the current shortage, and outlines the structural reforms needed to prevent similar crises in the future.

IN THE NEWS

India @ 80: Not Out — Building the Foundations for Viksit Bharat @ 2047

Arpita Mukherjee quoted | 15 August, 2026 | The Times of India

India's sweet revolution depends on this: Safeguard the bee, and sustainability is key

Authors: Ashok Gulati, Suvangi Rath & Tanmoy Adhikary | 16 August, 2026
The Indian Express

Let's honour the busy bee

Authors: Ashok Gulati, Suvangi Rath & Tanmoy Adhikary | 16 August, 2026
The Financial Express

A difficult ministerial: Strategic implications from WTO MC14

Authors: Rajesh Aggarwal, Shekhar Aiyar & Nisha Taneja | 16 August, 2026 | The Hindustan Times

How the EU's Carbon Border Tax is Reshaping Indian MSMEs

Saon Ray quoted | 16 August, 2026
The Wire

Data | Girls conditioned from childhood to take up domestic burden

Authors: Tanu Goyal, Mohd Tahoor & Shravani Prakash | 17 August, 2026
The Hindu

Setting standards from domestic market to global forums

Authors: Arpita Mukherjee, Eshana Mukherjee & Samriddhi Dube
17 August, 2026 | Food And Beverage News

Red Sea blockade threat: Why India's trade faces a wider supply-chain shock

Nisha Taneja quoted | 18 August, 2026
The Economic Times

A forced pause for India's solar power generation

Author: Somit Dasgupta | 20 August, 2026
The Hindustan Times



Sugar Crisis: Why India is Paying More at the Sweet Counter | India Today

In an interview with Rajdeep Sardesai for India Today, Ashok Gulati (Distinguished Professor, ICRIER) attributes the sharp surge in sugar prices to a combination of policy decisions across ethanol, sugarcane, and trade — arguing that the crisis reflects deeper structural distortions in India's sugar sector rather than a one-off supply shock.

PODCAST



The Exciting World of Indian Startups

Arvind Gupta (Head and Co-Founder, Digital India Foundation) joins Puja Mehra (Senior Fellow (Consultant), ICRIER) and Krishnapriya V.S. (Fellow, ICRIER) on the latest ICRIER Podcast to discuss what makes India's startup ecosystem exciting. The conversation traces how UPI has become the foundation for a new generation of Indian startups, and asks when or whether India will build its own Google or Meta.

IN THE NEWS

Dear Editor, I Disagree: For deep-tech fund, members' connections are valuable assets

Authors: Payal Malik & Krishnapriya V.S.
20 August, 2026 | The Indian Express

Yes, Sugar Is Pricier. No, Ethanol Isn't The Villain

Author: Ramesh Chand | 24 August, 2026 | The Times of India

Ethanol didn't shield India from oil shock. Mainly subsidies borne by government and OMCs did

Authors: Sanjeev Gupta & Pratik Tiwary
24 August, 2026 | Moneycontrol

Sowing the seeds of a solar power intervention

ICRIER research cited | 25 August, 2026
The Hindu

Can India's Trade Outreach Help Globalise Ayush?

Authors: Arpita Mukherjee & Samriddhi Dube | 25 August, 2026 | Mint

A flickering trade

Author: Somit Dasgupta | 26 August, 2026
The Financial Express

How quick commerce has turned into a critical formalization engine for India's workforce

Author: Arpita Mukherjee | 27 August, 2026 | Moneycontrol

Atmanirbharta in fuel must strengthen, not undermine, India's food security

Authors: Ashok Gulati, Tanmoy Adhikary
31 August, 2026 | The Indian Express

Food vs fuel: Time to recalibrate

Authors: Ashok Gulati, Tanmoy Adhikary
31 August, 2026 | The Financial Express

TEAM SPOTLIGHT



Bidisha Banerjee is a Research Associate with the APSI team. She has two years of professional experience in renewable energy technologies, specialising in innovative applications of solar photovoltaics, such as agriphotovoltaics and building-integrated photovoltaics. Her expertise extends to green hydrogen, covering production, storage, transportation, and financing, as well as bioenergy policies and guidelines and the technical concept of virtual power plants.