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MACRO PERSPECTIVES

March 2026

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Global Economic Briefs

- On 28thFebruary 2026, Israel and the U.S. launched joint airstrikes on Iran which killed the supreme leader of Iran and other Iranian officials, starting a war with the goal of regime change. Iran responded with missile and drone strikes against Israel and US bases and the US allies in the region including Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi, Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The war has entered day 11 on March 10 (Tuesday).
- While the most tragic and immediate costs of war are measured in terms of "lives lost", a prolonged conflict will have deeper consequences for global economy. The biggest threat lies in rising energy prices. Between Feb 28 and March 8, the Brent crude price surged by 49.3% to $108.23 per barrel in global markets. Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz and Iranian attacks on key energy production facilities in Qatar & Saudi Arabia have paralysed a substantial chunk of the world's energy supply. On hopes that the Middle East conflict could see some diplomatic movement, Brent crude price eased on March 11 to 87.92 per barrel.
- With 15 million barrels per day (mbpd) of Gulf supply suddenly offline, global oil demand will need to fall to rebalance the market, a process that could require prices to reach $150 per barrel, according to wood Mackenzie, a global energy & natural resources consultancy firm. Iran military command warned on March 11 the world should be prepared for oil to hit $200 a barrel, as three more ships came under attack in the blockaded gulf.
- The International Energy Agency (IEA) agreed to discharge 400 million barrels from emergency oil reserves, its largest ever release. IEA coordinates stockpile releases for OECD nations. Its 32 members hold over 1.2 billion barrels in public emergency stockpiles.
- History has shown that oil price shocks quickly translate into broader economic stress by fuelling cost-push inflationary pressures, reducing households' purchasing power and pushing countries into stagflation or recession. There will be geopolitical and trade shifts as higher energy prices often trigger massive income transfers from

energy-importing to energy-exporting nations. On the positive side, high, volatile fossil fuel prices may encourage investment in renewable energy to improve long-term energy security. A prolonged war may force governments around the world to reconsider fiscal priorities. Defence budgets may rise at the expense of developmental spending.

- According to Reuters news, the escalating crisis in the Middle East has dramatically changed the outlook for Asian central banks as cutting interest rates has become a risky bet not just because of the fuel price induced inflation but also due to the elevated risk of capital outflows through worsening terms of trade with the US.
- The combination of elevated energy prices, disrupted logistics and a generalised loss of confidence would act as a drag on global trade, when it has already been disrupted due to the tariff shock.
- The Middle East conflict has caused significant volatility across global financial markets. While global equity indices faced sharp "risk-off" declines, gold prices hit record highs and the US dollar strengthened, as the U.S. remains largely energy self-sufficient. Bond markets are also responding to the new environment with a lot of nervousness. The US 10-Yr treasury bond yield climbed from 3.97% on Feb 27 to 4.16% on March 11.
- The IMF has warned that the Iran conflict coupled with Gulf oil production cuts and a near-halt of Strait of Hormuz shipping, is destabilising global markets. Energy prices are surging, trade is disrupted, and fears of stagflation are mounting as policymakers face limited tools to respond. Long-term impacts could reshape regional alliances, economic networks, and global energy flows.

Indian Economy: Agriculture & Rural Belts

- The Middle East conflict threatens India's fertiliser supply, as the region provides ~40% of India's urea and 32% of its DAP imports, besides crucial raw materials like sulphur & phosphoric acid. While India has sufficient inventories for a few months, prolonged conflict and shipping disruptions through the strait of Hormuz could cause fertiliser price spikes, increase subsidy burdens and disrupt urea production due to LNG shortages.
- India's agricultural exports to West Asia could face disruptions as the ongoing conflict affects shipping routes and raises logistics costs, according to the Global Trade Research Initiative. West Asia accounted for 21.8% of India's agricultural and food exports last year, making it a key market for products such as rice, bananas, spices, meat & dairy.
- India's automobile sector posted record sales in February, 2026 surging on strong rural demand, GST-driven affordability, and new model launches. The farm equipment sector also recorded strong growth in February, 2026, as per the FADA data.
- According to the Indian government's latest Periodic Labour Force Survey, rural unemployment increased from 3.9% in December, 2025 to 4.2% in January, 2026. The National Statistical Office said seasonal factors, post-harvest slack, etc. played a key role in raising rural unemployment. Typically, in winter months, there is a slowdown

in rural activities like construction, allied agricultural work, transport and small trade while urban areas remain largely stable.

- The Second Advance estimate of India's foodgrain production, places India's total food grain production across the kharif and rabi seasons in FY26 at 348.66 million tonnes (MT), up by 3% (y-o-y). Unfortunately, weather forecasts indicate a strong possibility of El Nino in 2026, which combined with supply disruptions from the West Asia conflict may stress agricultural output during FY27 and push prices higher for major commodities.

Indian Economy: Economic & Policy Briefs

- Global rating agency – Moody's has indicated that a prolonged conflict in West Asia could reduce India's real GDP growth by about one percentage point and raise inflation & interest rates by 1.5 to 2.0 percentage points. Sustained level of crude oil prices above $100 per barrel would slow economic activity, weaken demand and affect the banking sector.
- As India struggles to receive shipments from West Asia, the country has secured additional supplies of LPG and LNG which do not pass through the Strait of Hormuz. The government has prioritised allocation of the two fuels for domestic cooking gas, with commercial and industrial users experiencing supply cuts.
- During Apr-Jan, FY26, India's merchandise trade deficit widened to US$ 284 billion from US$ 247 billion in Apr-Jan, FY25 as exports increased by just 2.1% (y-o-y) and imports by 7.4% (y-o-y) during this period. India's structural deficit in merchandise trade is largely driven by the imports of crude oil, gold, electronics and capital goods. During the same period, services trade was in the surplus of US$ 180.58 billion. India's services trade remains the strongest offset to the merchandise deficit.
- India reported a current account deficit (CAD) of US$ 13.2 billion in the December, 2025 quarter, which amounted to 1.3% of GDP. India had witnessed CAD at 1.5% of GDP in the preceding quarter and 1.1% in the year-ago quarter. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East could widen India's CAD by billions of dollars, as higher energy costs raise the country's import bill and fuel inflation risks. Experts warn that a sustained increase in oil prices can quickly worsen India's balance of payments, which includes trade in goods and services, investment flows, remittances and financial transfers.
- India still enjoys the buffer of US$ 728.5 billion of foreign exchange reserves as on February 27, 2026 – thanks to the RBI's prudent management of reserves. The share of gold reserves in total FER increased from 11.5% as on Feb 28, 2025 to 18.1% as on Feb 27, 2026.
- Indian commercial banks' credit growth stood at 13.6% (y-o-y) while deposit growth at 11.2% (y-o-y) as on Feb 15, 2026 taking the Credit-Deposit ratio to 82.47%. A mismatch in the growth rates of credit and deposits has forced banks to take recourse to costly certificates of deposits (CDs) and bulk deposits amid funding squeeze.
- E-way bill generation in India touched 132.6 million, up 18.8% (y-o-y) in February, 2026. This is the third highest monthly figure reported so far. Robust E-way bill growth

suggested a broad-based pickup in goods movement and sustained economic momentum in India.

- India's new consumer price index (CPI) series using 2024 as a base year was unveiled on February 12, 2026. The revision was made to enhance the coverage, improve transparency and widen the representation of inflation estimate. In terms of the new series, the headline CPI print came in at 2.75% (y-o-y) for January, 2026. Food inflation, which was in negative territory till December 2025 under the old series, turned positive in the new series at 2.13%.
- India's fiscal deficit for Apr-Jan, FY26 was at Rs 9.81 trillion, equivalent to 63% of annual estimates, narrowing from the previous year's 74.5%. The government aims to narrow the fiscal gap to 4.4% of GDP in FY26 from 4.8% a year earlier. Revenue deficit was at Rs 1.96 trillion or 37.3% of the fiscal year's budget target. One major concern in the Central government's finances is the weak tax buoyancy.
- Indian government's data show the Centre's combined disinvestment and asset monetisation receipts have reached Rs 344 billion so far in FY26. The collection has exceeded the revised estimate of Rs 338.5 billion for FY26. While disinvestment contributed Rs 155.6 billion, asset monetisation added Rs 188.4 billion.
- According to experts, fiscal pressures for India may mount in FY27 because of a likely shortfall in revenues due to a likely growth slowdown and higher burden of subsidies on food and fertilisers if the war in West Asia drags for long. Since the crisis broke out, there has been a significant increase in the urea and DAP prices. In FY25, India imported from gulf countries roughly 70% of its urea, 42% of DAP, 83% of Ammonia and 60% of LNG. The war will not significantly increase the subsidy burden in FY26 as most deliveries were tied up before the crisis.

Indian Economy: Industry & Services Sectors

- India's industrial output, measured by the index of industrial production (IIP), rose by 4.8% (y-o-y) in January 2026. The growth was lower than the eight per cent growth registered in the preceding month. Cumulative IIP during Apr-Jan, FY26 increased by four per cent, as compared to a 4.2% growth recorded during the same period a year ago.
- The core industrial output growth was also 4.0% (y-o-y) in January, 2026 versus 4.7% in the previous month, dragged down by crude oil, natural gas & refinery products.
- The 2026 Iran-US conflict has heavily impacted Indian industries by disrupting energy supplies and shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz, causing Brent crude oil price to spike above $120 per barrel on March 9th and severely impacting LPG availability. Key sectors like manufacturing, gems & jewellery, and restaurants face imminent operational crises and rising input costs due to fuel shortages and shipping delays.
- Fitch Group company BMI said in its latest report that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East could discourage investment in India, and offset the positive effects of trade deals with the EU and US on GDP.

- Rating agency Moody's has warned that high oil prices will intensify financial pressure on India's state-owned oil marketing companies (OMCs). These companies will bear rising input costs from higher energy prices without corresponding increases in selling prices because the government's influence over retail pricing prevents timely cost pass-throughs, said the Moddy's in the report.

Indian Financial Markets

- Indian bonds are facing significant upside pressure on yields due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. A movement in bond yields is governed by the movement in global oil prices and US treasuries. While the yield on the GOI 10-Yr bond surged to 6.76% on March 9th, the RBI's active management of volatility through open market operations and bond buying has capped yields to some extent. The yield is hovering ~ 6.66% as of today (March 12).
- The escalating Iran-US conflict has put significant pressure on Indian stocks that have lost trillions in market capitalisation during February 27 and March 11, 2026. While the Sensex crashed by 5.44%, the Nifty lost 5.21% during this period, with oil marketing companies, aviation and banking sectors facing heavy selling pressure. The FIIs pulled out US$ 4.83 billion from the Indian equity, debt, MFs & AIFs markets during the first ten days of March, 2026 due to geopolitical, high-risk environment.
- With Brent crude oil prices crossing $100 per barrel on March 12th as Iran stepped up attacks on oil and transport facilities in West Asia, the Indian rupee touched its record low of 92.3530 per US dollar on March 12th. During 27 Feb – 12 Mar, 2026, Indian currency has depreciated by 1.54% against the US dollar. As per media reports, the RBI likely to have sold US$ 18 to US$ 20 billion in forex markets last week to support the rupee, with much of the intervention taking place offshore. The RBI has been managing liquidity well by using buy-sell swaps.
- The intensifying war in the Middle East has led to high demand for safe-haven assets like the US currency and gold. While gold has rallied due to geopolitical risks, with spot prices rising significantly (e.g., nearing Rs 161,750 per 10 grams on Mar 12 from Rs 160, 500 on Feb 27), the US dollar index has strengthened by 1.82% during Feb 27 to Mar 12 due to increased oil prices and risk-off sentiment.

Director's Insights

In this section, ***Dr Jyoti Chandiramani*** *– the* ***Director of the Symbiosis School of Economics*** *has contributed an article on the* ***Indian Statistical Data-System*** *covering the key aspects of its evolutionary journey. In particular, she elucidates the relevance of the base year, & institutional structure and explains methodological debates and emerging data gaps for critical economic indicators like inflation, GDP, employment, environmental indicators and the census for India. She has strongly recommended transparency, robustness of methodology and institutional credibility in official statistics to strengthen evidence-based policy formulation for India.*

Indian Statistical Databases and the Changing Base Year: Institutional Structure, Methodological Debates, and Emerging Data Gaps

1. What is the current statistical framework in India?

A multilevel, federal statistical system provides reliable and timely statistics that support national planning, governing and making timely and smart decisions. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) coordinates the system at the national level and serves as the principal agency for developing, coordinating and distributing national official statistics[1].

MoSPI, formed on 15 October 1999, when its constituent departments of Statistics and Programme Implementation were merged. MoSPI is charged with establishing national standards for statistics; undertaking major statistical surveys; ensuring the compilation of national accounts; and coordinating with central ministries, state governments and international statistical agencies.

The Indian statistical system is governed by the Collection of Statistics Act, 2008 (Government of India, 2008), which gives the central government the authority to collect, compile and publish statistical information while protecting the confidentiality of the data providers. Specific to the census of India is the Census Act of 1948; the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner administers the census process. Within MoSPI, the statistical system is organised through specialised divisions.

The **National Accounts Division (NAD)** compiles Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross Value Added (GVA), savings, and capital formation using the internationally recognised System of National Accounts (SNA 2008) framework (United Nations, 2009).

The **Economic Statistics Division (ESD)** produces macroeconomic indicators such as the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), conducts the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), and maintains the National Statistical Business Register.

The **Price Statistics Division (PSD)** compiles and releases the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which serves as the principal measure of inflation in India and is used by the Reserve Bank of India for monetary policy calibration.

The **Social Statistics Division (SSD)** coordinates statistics related to health, education, gender, and demographic indicators.

At the state level, statistical activities are conducted by Directorates of Economics and Statistics, which collect regional data on agriculture, employment, prices, and socioeconomic indicators. These data feed into national statistical aggregates and support decentralised planning.

According to the International Monetary Fund, the Indian statistical system has the necessary quality of data for macroeconomic analysis, while recommending modifications to improve timeliness, completeness, and methodological transparency. (IMF 2025).

[1] https://www..gov.in/

2. What have been the major changes in India's statistical databases in recent years?

India periodically revises the base years and methodologies of its macroeconomic databases to reflect structural changes in the economy. The most important revisions relate to inflation indices and national income statistics.

Inflation Measurement in India

Inflation is one of the most closely monitored macroeconomic indicators. The price index can be gauged either at the wholesale level (Wholesale Price Index - WPI) or at the retail end of the marketing channel or Consumer Price Index (CPI). Between 1980 – 2013, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) primarily relied on the WPI to monitor inflation. The WPI base year, post the 1991 economic reforms was revised.

- **Base year 1993-04** – implemented in 1999, expanding the item coverage; revising the weight structure; improved price collections.

- **Base year 2004-05** – implemented in 2010, expanded the commodity basket to 676 items; price quotations increased from 1918 in the old series to 5482; the weights assigned – 20.12% for primary articles, 14.91% for fuel, power, light and lubricants, and 64.97% manufactured products (MoSPI, 2022).

- **Base Year 2011-12** – implemented in 2017, increase in the items to 697, with 199 new items being added and 146 old items being dropped; increasing the number of quotations to 8331 by 52%; weights being revised for 22.62% for primary articles, 13.15% for fuel, power, light and lubricants, and 64.23% manufactured products (Office of the Economic Adviser, 2017)

The Government of India (GOI) in January 2025, constituted a Working Group, under the Chairmanship of Prof Ramesh Chand, for base revision of the current series of WPI from base 2011-12 to 2022-23 to suggest improvement in compilation and presentation and recommend roadmap for switch over from WPI to Producer Price Index (PPI)**.**
Based on the Urjit Patel Committee recommendations (2014), the GOI moved to the CPI as the primary measure of inflation for its monetary policy framework.

The RBI was mandated to maintain a consumer inflation target of **4%,** with a tolerance band of **±2%** (i.e., a range of 2%–6%). The 4% target was set for August 5, 2016 – March 31, 2021 - initially, and was extended for another five years (April 1, 2021 – March 31, 2026). In case the CPI inflation remains above 6% or below 2% for **three consecutive quarters**, in such a situation, the RBI is considered to have failed in marinating the inflation target.

Before 2000, India had multiple CPI indices for different population groups, compiled by the Labour Bureau and the National Statistics Office, to include

i) ***CPI – IW (Industrial Wages)***
ii) ***CPI – AL (Agricultural Labourers)***
iii) ***CPI – RL (Rural Labourers)***
iv) ***CPI – UNME (Urban Non-Manual Employee)***

The varied CPI measures used different consumption patterns for each type. This posed a problem for macroeconomic policy due to the absence of a unified CPI - representing the entire population. Prior to the 1991 economic reforms, the CPI series used 1982 as its base year and implemented in 1986.

However, post 2000, there have been three major revisions, which included revision in methodology as well as reflecting changing consumption patterns. There have been several key steps taken to update the CPI series.

- ***The 2006 CPI series, followed a 2001 base year*** **– with updated consumption weights using National Sample Survey (NSS) consumption expenditure surveys.**

- ***In 2011, a Combined Consumer Price Index*** *was introduced for both urban and rural areas using 2010 as the base year (MoSPI, 2013).*

- ***In 2015, the CPI was revised to use 2012 as the base year.*** *This was the most significant reform in India's CPI system – and has updated consumption weights for goods and services; expanded the commodity basket – particularly the services; price data covered across a larger number of markets and geographical area; creation of a CPI Combined (Rural and Urban)*

- ***On 12th February 2026, a new revision of the CPI series, using 2024 as the base year, was released after a long lag.*** *The delay has been justified on account of methodological and operational issues in order to maintain statistical standards. Consequently, there have been alterations made to the weights used to determine how much goods and services contribute to CPI.*

The new CPI reflects current consumption patterns, based on the 2023-24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey. It, therefore, has a more representative consumption basket with 358 items as against 299 items included in the earlier index. The additional items are more representative of services such as health, education, communication, transport and digital services. Further, the weights for food have declined from 45.9% to 36.7%. As per the new database, India's Inflation for January 2026 was reported as 2.75% as against 2.52% according to the 2012 database.

GDP Measurement

India's national income accounting system post-independence was prepared by the National Income Committee (NIC) in 1949, chaired by Prof P.C. Mahalanobis and submitted its report in 1951.

The data has been periodically revised (5 times) and since 1991 to reflect structural changes (service and now digital sector inclusion), include new industries that have emerged (IT, e-fintech, commerce), changing weights, update price structures, incorporate better data sources like the MCA21 database (Ministry of Corporate Affairs), which contains financial filings of registered companies, to align with international methodology, mapping the UN's System of National Accounts (SNA) framework. A major methodological revision occurred in 2015, when the government changed the GDP base year from 2004-05 to 2011-12 and shifted from GDP at factor cost to GDP at market prices, consistent with international accounting standards under the System of National Accounts (SNA 2008) (MoSPI, 2015).

As of February 27th, 2026 – India revised the GDP with a base year to 2022-23, reflecting India's current economic structure (digital economy, start-ups, changes in manufacturing and supply chains).

Introduction of real-time systems such as e-vahan (vehicle registrations), the improved data sources which include – Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises (ASUSE), Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Public Financial Management System (PFMS), and the GST network now provide more granular economic insights that enhance the robustness of GDP estimates.

Consequently, the real GDP growth for 2025-26 is estimated at **7.6%, higher than the 7.1% recorded in 2024-25** (PIB, 27th February, 2026).

3. What are the recent major contentious issues related to Indian statistical databases?

Although India's statistical framework is institutionally well developed, several methodological debates have emerged in recent years.

Inflation Measurement and Changes in CPI Weights

The contentious issues related with the changes in the CPI touch on measurement philosophy, distributional, and macro-policy credibility. The revision in weights – reflects consumption patterns from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24 – as has been highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of Weights of CPI (2012) and CPI (2024)

Groups	Weights of CPI 2012 (%)	Revised Groups	Weights of CPI 2024 (%)
Food and Beverage	45.86	Food and Beverage	36.75
Pan Tobacco and Intoxicants	2.38	Pan Tobacco and Intoxicants	2.99
Clothing and Footwear	6.35	Clothing and Footwear	6.38
Housing	10.07	Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels	17.67
Fuel and Light	6.84	Furnishing, household equipment and routine household maintenance	4.47
Miscellaneous	28.32	Health	6.10
		Transport	8.80
		Information and Communication	3.61
		Recreation, sport and culture	1.52
		Education services	3.33
		Restaurant and accommodative services	3.35
		Personal Care, social protection and miscellaneous goods and services	5.04

Consequently, the reduction in weights for food and beverages, has been argued that it understates the felt inflation for the marginalised and vulnerable population. Food inflation disproportionately

affects rural households, lower income groups and informal workers. It can result in the reduction of total CPI measured inflation (i.e., even though the prevalence of volatile prices for food has been continuing).

- ***A lower inflation as reflected by the CPI is used by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for its monetary targeting and will potentially impact monetary policy calibration (RBI, 2022).***

- ***While the periodic change in the way people consume needs to be reflected in the CPI basket, which must therefore also evolve. What is therefore included in the CPI basket – reflect the modern consumption items and services, giving a more urban consumption bias. Therefore, the CPI is less representative of rural cost of living.***

- ***The new CPI has an expanded basket of 358 compared to the previous 259 items – incorporating the COICOP 2018 classification framework introduced by the UN Department of Economics and Statistics. This will logically distort long-term inflation comparison – resulting in a structural change in inflation measurement.***

- ***Another issue is that the perceived inflation is much higher than the official inflation. As a result, the new CPI measurement will have an impact on wage indexation, Dearness Allowance (DA) adjustments and minimum wage revision – thus bringing about a distributional political economy angle to the revision.***

- ***Finally, a deeper structural question arises – whether CPI should reflect average consumption pattern or cost of living pressures faced by median and marginalised households?***

Debate on GDP Methodology

The 2015 GDP series which preceded the 2026 series was controversial as the new growth estimates appeared inconsistent with several macroeconomic indicators like the relatively weak export growth, credit expansion and industrial indicators. It raised concerns that the methodology overstated economic activity.

Dholakia, Nagraj and Pandya (2018) highlighted that biases may have crept in the many imputations of the MCA data base. The revision found the RBI Governor in Dr Raghuram Rajan puzzled as the growth for 2013-14 was raised to 6.9% (later revised to 6.4%) which stood at 4.7% as per the 2004-05 GDP series (Upasani, 2026). Subramanian (2019), findings showed "a likely annual overstatement in the reported economic growth rate of about 2.5 percentage points," which would place the actual growth rate over that same time period at approximately 4.5 percent as opposed to 7 percent as has been officially reported.

The 2026 released GDP series, attempts to address the above concerns by including more granular price indices and elements of double deflation. The double deflator is a shift from using a single price index to deflate both input and output (single deflation) to a more accurate, yet complex, method of deflating input and output prices separately. However, the double deflator issues is not fully convincing as it will use deflators such as WPI, CPI, Unit Value Index, etc.

While the new series of CPI will be considered, the new series for WPI/PPI is being adopted to be released in near future (Press Information Bureau, 2026). Finally, the introduction of a new base year – does create a **structural break in historical GDP series,** complicating long-term growth comparisons until a fully consistent back-series is available.

The 2026 GDP series, represents an evolutionary improvement – and what is critical is the need for ongoing methodological refinement, transparency in statistical system for strengthening confidence in macroeconomic indicators.

4. How often should a base year be revised in national statistics?

Accurate economic measures require accurate economic details. This would include things such as an accurate reflection of production weights and prices that must have current data on how the world economy functions. The UN considers revising its whole economic database every five years to reflect this.

The Indian statistical framework is moving in this direction by introducing new economic metrics every three to five years from the present in order to get current data reflecting the changing structure within Indian society through the advancement of the digital economy, the growth of the service sector, and subsequent formalisation after GST has been implemented.

In addition, the International Monetary Fund recommended through their 2025 Article IV Consultation that improving the timeliness and accuracy of statistical databases would provide evidence of macroeconomic credibility.

5. What problems have been created by the postponement of the 2021 Census?

Since 1881, India has held a national census every decade. Because of this, the Indian Census is one of the longest-running collections of statistical data in the world (Office of the Registrar General of India, 2011). Scheduled for April 2021, the current census was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is now expected to commence from October 2026. This delay has been contentious as more than 100 countries have resumed census operations after 2020.

The lack of current census data has created a vacuum in the statistical system, impacting estimations related with demographic changes, migration and urbanisation. Since census data is used for fiscal transfers, welfare targeting, and infrastructure planning – it will continue to be estimated based on the 2011 Census, and may result in under coverage in welfare programmes. In the interim, there have been significant changes in demographics like fertility rate, mortality rate and population distribution, which may not get accurately factored.

There are many large-scale surveys such as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)) that sample from census data to establish their sampling frames. Without current census data, the quality of these large surveys may be affected due to a lack of representativeness, and we also do not have granular data for urban.

6. How reliable is employment data in India?

Employment and unemployment data are estimated from various statistical sources, and not one unified source, which include –

- ***Periodic Labour Force Survey****, since 2017 conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) – releases monthly bulletins, quarterly results and annual reports.*

- ***The NSSO Employment-Unemployment Survey (EUS)*** *- which has been discontinued, after the 68th round (2011-12) and replaced by the annual PLFS.*

- ***Economic Census*** *– with the Seventh Economic Census released in 2019-20 and the next being expected in 2027. This is a useful data set for measuring informal sector.*

- ***Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)*** *– collected annually, with its first reference year being 1959. It is a key source of formal manufacturing.*

- ***Employee's Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)*** *– is an important source for formal employment with social security and acts a proxy indicator of formal jobs.*

- ***The decennial Census of India (Population Census)*** *has been conducted since 1872. The 2011 Census was the 15th, while the 16th census will commence from 1st October 2026.*

- ***Consumer Pyramid Household Survey (CPHS)*** *was first introduced in January 2014 and released by a private research organisation – Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). CPHS provides high frequency panel data - monthly estimates for large households and is popular with researchers for real time labour markets.*

Since the data sources are varied, researchers often triangulate between them to get a clear picture about the labour market. Given the predominance of the informal nature of the Indian labour market - 83-90% (ILO, 2018) and 75-80% (PLFS) – it becomes highly complex to measure such a market.

Till 2011-12, the 68th round/NSSO round, was the comprehensive report of the full extent of national employment. Since 2017 to the present, eight PLFS reports have been released and has become an important source used to generate more frequent data on employment levels. PLFS was intended to compete with traditional employment calculations to provide average annual estimates of employment and quarterly indicators for urban labour force data (MoSPI; 2022).

However, the first PLFS 2017/18 survey, reported that unemployment reached its highest level in 45 years, at 6.1%. The report was immediately withdrawn. The Government argued that this was a draft and not the final report. This became a contentious issue and the report was finally released in May 2019, after the general elections. Over time, methodological refinements have been introduced in the PLFS series, including improvements in sampling design, rotation panels for urban labour markets, and greater integration with digital data processing systems.

Presently researchers use both PLFS and CPHS, however, both the data sets have their limitations. The PLFS provides annual estimates for rural and urban areas and quarterly estimates for only urban areas, a large time lag in publication of the data – limiting the real-time policy analysis. While the sample size has been revised – critics are of the opinion that it misses out highly mobile and migrant populations, especially the informal urban workers (Desai & Narayan, 2025). On the other hand, CPHS, provides monthly and quarterly trends and has been widely used by researchers because of its high frequency panel household survey design, providing timely labour market indicators. However, it has been criticised as its sample size may underrepresent poorer households (Dreze, Somanchi, 2021).

7. What are the environmental data gaps in India?

India's environmental statistics are an emerging new area within the overall statistical framework of the country.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) publishes environmental indicators as part of its EnviStats India publication series, but many different organisations, including the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and individual state agencies, are engaged in various types of environmental monitoring (MoSPI, 2023b).

The 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India (1992) encouraged urban local bodies to conduct and prepare **Environment Status Reports (ESRs).** However, there is great variability in compliance between cities, with many urban areas lacking a coherent environmental monitoring system. Even those cities having timely publication of ESRs have seen a steady deterioration in the Air Quality Index (AQI) – posing a question – whether we are acting and responding to the data at the city level.
Additionally, air quality monitoring networks across cities are uneven, with several cities still unable to establish continuous AQI measuring systems.

The health impact of environmental degradation is significant, and studies show that cases of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) in India rose from around 28 million in 1990 to over 58 million in 2016, making this disease one of the leading causes of death in India (GBD Study, 2017). Between 1998 and 2003, COPD and asthma combined as the second leading cause of death in India and continue to prevail even at the present, having a higher impact on females than males.

India has adjusted its PM2.5 (particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter) air quality standards to account for local air quality conditions; however, these standards are still significantly different from those set out in the World Health Organization (WHO) standards that are stringent by comparison.

A centre for research into energy and clean air (CREA), an independent research organisation based in Finland, reported that 204 of the 238 Indian cities did not meet the national ambient air quality aid standard of 40 μg/m³ during the winter of 2025 (compared to a WHO-recommended limit of much lower than that) (The Hindu, March 7, 2026).

The Lancet Countdown report (2025) has further demonstrated the degree of severity of the problem through estimating the total deaths from exposure to PM2.5 that have occurred in India over the past 12 months (approximately 17.2 lakh), an increase of about 38 per cent since the year 2010. Another major concern as a result of the continuance of India's implementation of the NAAQS (National Ambient Air Quality Standards) that were implemented in 2009, is that the PM2.5 permissible limit for 24-hour exposure to PM2 (particulate matter less than 2.5 microns) has a national ambient air quality standard PM2 (60 μg/m³) that is significantly higher than the revised WHO-recommended 5 μg/m³ (2021); and the 12-month annual average has a national ambient air quality standard PM2.5 of 40 μg/m³.

There is another problem with having an inequitable distribution of monitoring infrastructure throughout the country. A large part of the country is lacking ground level air pollutants' surface monitoring stations and the existing monitoring network is distributed only around the larger cities. This type of uneven distribution of monitoring stations results in not being able to accurately evaluate the true level of exposure of air pollutants throughout the country evidencing the larger governance problem: that is, environmental risks pose insufficiently measured and therefore not appropriately addressed hazards to human health.

Conclusions

India's statistical databases have over the years significantly aligned to international standards like SNA (System of National Accounts) through both time periods and periodic revisions of CPI, GDP, and other macroeconomic indicators - due to the expansion of services, increasing digitalisation and new data sources on account of structural changes in the economy over time.

Transparency, robustness of methodology and institutional credibility in official statistics are key issues highlighted by ongoing debate about how inflation is measured, how GDP is calculated and how employment statistics are collected and reported; and the challenges researchers face on account of the census delay.

Moving forward, as India prepares to adopt future revisions of global statistical standards such as SNA 2025, maintaining internationally comparable, timely and transparent statistical systems will be essential for evidence-based policy decision-making and to sustain macroeconomic computability as well as comparability.

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