THE DAILY UPSC BRIEF

HIGH-YIELD DAILY SOURCES & ANALYSIS | 17 SEPTEMBER 2026

TODAY'S COVERAGE

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GS PAPER 1: Indian Society & Urbanisation

'Census Town' Criteria Flagged as Outdated Ahead of Census 2027

Why in news: The Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry has told Parliament that the four-decade-old Census Town definition understates India's real urbanisation, but the RGI will retain it unchanged for Census 2027.

Key Details:

- **Current test:** Min. population 5,000, ≥75% male working population in non-agricultural work, density ≥400/sq km — unchanged since 1981.
- **Ministry's objection:** Density is computed on administrative boundaries, not built-up area, causing misclassification of fast-growing peri-urban belts.
- **Scale of undercount:** Satellite-based estimates put 2015 urbanisation near 63%, well above the Census 2011 figure of 31.2%.
- **RGI's position:** Called it too late to alter the Census 2027 framework despite the Ministry's objections; a parliamentary panel discussed a draft report on the issue.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **2011 snapshot:** Of 121 crore Indians, 83.3 crore (68.8%) were rural and 37.7 crore (31.2%) urban.
- **Governance gap:** A Census Town meets urban criteria on paper but is governed as a village panchayat, not an Urban Local Body.
- **Ministry's fix:** Proposed a 'transitional areas' category, satellite imagery use, and counting female (not just male) non-agricultural workforce.

Census Town: Current Criteria vs Ministry's Proposed Fix

Parameter	Current (since 1981)	Ministry Proposes
Population	Minimum 5,000	Retain, but cross-check via satellite data
Workforce test	≥75% of male workers in non-agriculture	Include female workforce participation
Density basis	Administrative boundary, ≥400/sq km	Built-up area via satellite imagery
Peri-urban belts	Not separately classified	New 'transitional areas' category

How to use in UPSC Mains: Cite the Census Town/Statutory Town gap as a live example of India's 'under-bounded' urbanisation — a settlement can be urban in character yet lack an elected Urban Local Body and 74th Amendment protections, straining service delivery.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the classification of towns under the Census of India, consider the following statements:
1. A 'Census Town' is administered by an elected Urban Local Body constituted under the 74th Constitutional Amendment.
2. The current criteria for a Census Town include a minimum population of 5,000 and at least 75% of the male working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits.
3. Population density for classifying a Census Town is presently computed using satellite-derived built-up area data.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 2 only

Explanation: A Census Town is precisely a settlement with urban characteristics but no elected Urban Local Body (statement 1 wrong — that describes a Statutory Town). Density is currently computed using administrative boundaries, not satellite-derived built-up area — that is the Ministry's proposed reform, not current practice (statement 3 wrong). Only statement 2 correctly states the existing criteria.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** RGI: Registrar-General of India | ULB: Urban Local Body

Cabinet Clears ₹10,998-Crore Elevated Corridor to Decongest Varanasi

Why in news: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved a 43.2 km elevated corridor along the Varuna river in Varanasi, aimed at cutting chronic congestion in one of India's most heritage-dense, pilgrimage-heavy cities.

Key Details:

- **The route:** A 6/4-lane, predominantly elevated corridor linking NH-31 with the Varanasi Ring Road along the Varuna river, with flyovers, loops, ramps and service roads, designed for 80-100 km/h operating speed.
- **Cost and model:** Total capital cost ₹10,998.32 crore (₹4,565.33 crore civil construction, ₹934.91 crore land acquisition), to be built by the NHAI on a Hybrid Annuity Model.
- **Expected impact:** Travel time between NH-31 and Kashi Railway Station is projected to fall from about 40 minutes to 20 minutes, easing access to the airport, multiple railway stations, and six major logistics nodes.
- **Governance angle:** Approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister — illustrates how heritage pilgrimage cities balance rapid urban growth against congestion.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Implementing agency:** National Highways Authority of India (NHAI).
- **Funding model:** Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) — government funds part of the cost during construction; the developer funds the rest, recovered via annuities over the concession period.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Pair this with the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor as a case of infrastructure-led heritage-city management, or use it to explain HAM as a hybrid financing model between EPC and pure BOT-Toll structures.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) used in India's highway projects, consider the following statements:
1. Under HAM, the government funds a part of the project cost during construction while the developer arranges the remaining share.
2. The developer's investment is recovered through annuity payments made by the government over the concession period.
3. Highway projects executed under HAM are free of toll collection for their entire concession period.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Under HAM, the government funds part of the project cost during construction in milestone-linked tranches, and the developer funds the rest, recovered via annuity payments (with interest) from the government over the concession period — statements 1 and 2 are correct. Toll collection continues under HAM; it is typically retained by the government/NHAI rather than the developer (whose return comes from annuities, insulating it from traffic/toll risk), so the road is not toll-free — statement 3 is false.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** CCEA: Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs | NHAI: National Highways Authority of India | HAM: Hybrid Annuity Model

GS PAPER 2: Polity, Governance & International Relations

MMDR Amendment, 2026: A New Centre-State Flashpoint Over Mining Revenue

Why in news: A provision in the newly enacted Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2026 restricts States from taxing mineral rights or mineral-bearing land, reviving the fiscal-federalism debate just two years after the Supreme Court affirmed States' taxing power.

Key Details:

- **The provision:** Section 9D bars State levies on mineral rights or mineral-bearing land except as conditions prescribed by the Centre; the Centre says this ensures a predictable tax regime for long-gestation mining investment.
- **States' objection:** Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka argue Section 9D could render nugatory the 2024 nine-judge Supreme Court verdict affirming States' power to tax minerals.
- **Constitutional hook:** Entry 50 (State List) lets States tax mineral rights, subject to Parliament's limitations via a law on mineral development; Entry 49 separately lets States tax mineral-bearing land — Section 9D reaches both.
- **Fiscal stakes:** NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index shows Odisha and Chhattisgarh lean heavily on mining non-tax revenue to fund resettlement, environmental, and infrastructure costs in mining districts.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **2024 verdict:** A nine-judge Supreme Court Bench (Mineral Area Development Authority vs Steel Authority of India) held that royalty on minerals is not a tax, and States can tax mineral rights and mineral-bearing land.
- **States affected:** Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka hold the bulk of India's coal and iron-ore reserves.

Who Can Tax What — Before Section 9D

Constitutional Entry	Subject	Power
Entry 50, State List	Mineral rights	States tax, subject to Parliament's limits via a mineral-development law
Entry 49, State List	Lands and buildings (incl. mineral-bearing land)	A separate, unconditional State taxing power
Section 9D, MMDR (2026)	Both of the above	Now conditional on Centre-prescribed limits

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this as a live case of Union-State fiscal federalism tension — pair it with the 2024 nine-judge verdict and the 15th Finance Commission's resource-sharing debates for a well-rounded answer.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Discuss how Section 9D of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2026 interacts with the constitutional distribution of taxing powers between the Union and the States, and examine its implications for cooperative fiscal federalism. (250 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** MMDR: Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act | SC: Supreme Court

Delhi's Electoral Roll Deletions Under SIR Fall Below 2025 Turnout in 24 Seats

Why in news: An analysis of Delhi's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) draft electoral rolls shows 24 of 70 Assembly constituencies now have fewer registered electors than the number of people who actually voted there in the February 2025 election.

Key Details:

- **The anomaly:** If every deletion since the 2025 poll is treated as legitimate, the implied city-wide turnout in these 24 seats would work out to an implausible 97%, since the usual 'buffer' of non-voting registered electors has nearly vanished.
- **Scale of deletions:** Delhi's rolls had 1.56 crore electors in February 2025; two rounds of culling (pre-SIR and the SIR draft phase) have cut this to 97.5 lakh electors now.
- **Worst-hit seat:** Tughlakabad's draft roll has just 1,00,386 electors — 14,575 fewer than the 1,14,961 people who actually voted there in 2025.
- **Not final yet:** The draft roll is open to claims and objections; the Election Commission's final roll will determine the eventual voter list before Delhi's next polls.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **City-wide, Feb 2025:** 1.56 crore electors; 94.9 lakh (about 60.9%) voted.
- **Pattern elsewhere:** States that underwent SIR Phase 3 — Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra — also show a shrinking 'buffer', but Delhi's cut is the sharpest.

Tughlakabad AC: Registered Electors vs Actual 2025 Turnout

Metric	Figure
Actual voters, Feb 2025 election	1,14,961
Electors left in current SIR draft roll	1,00,386
Shortfall	14,575 fewer electors than 2025 turnout

How to use in UPSC Mains: Frame this as a test case for balancing roll accuracy (removing bogus/duplicate entries) against the risk of disenfranchising genuine electors during a mass revision exercise.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the revision of electoral rolls in India, consider the following statements:
1. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is carried out by the Election Commission of India under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
2. A Booth Level Officer's house-to-house enumeration is part of a Special Intensive Revision.
3. Once a name is deleted in the draft roll during SIR, it cannot be restored before the final roll is published.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: The ECI conducts roll revisions under the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and a Special Intensive Revision involves house-to-house enumeration by Booth Level Officers — both correct. However, a draft roll is exactly that — a draft; a claims-and-objections window allows erroneously deleted names to be restored before the final roll is published, so statement 3 is false.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** SIR: Special Intensive Revision | EC/ECI: Election Commission of India | AC: Assembly Constituency

India Rejects Pakistan-China 'Boundary Joint Commission', Reasserts Sovereignty

Why in news: India has rejected the first meeting of a Pakistan-China Boundary Joint Commission held in Islamabad, calling it legally baseless since it touches territory — including the Shaksgam Valley — that India regards as under illegal occupation.

Key Details:

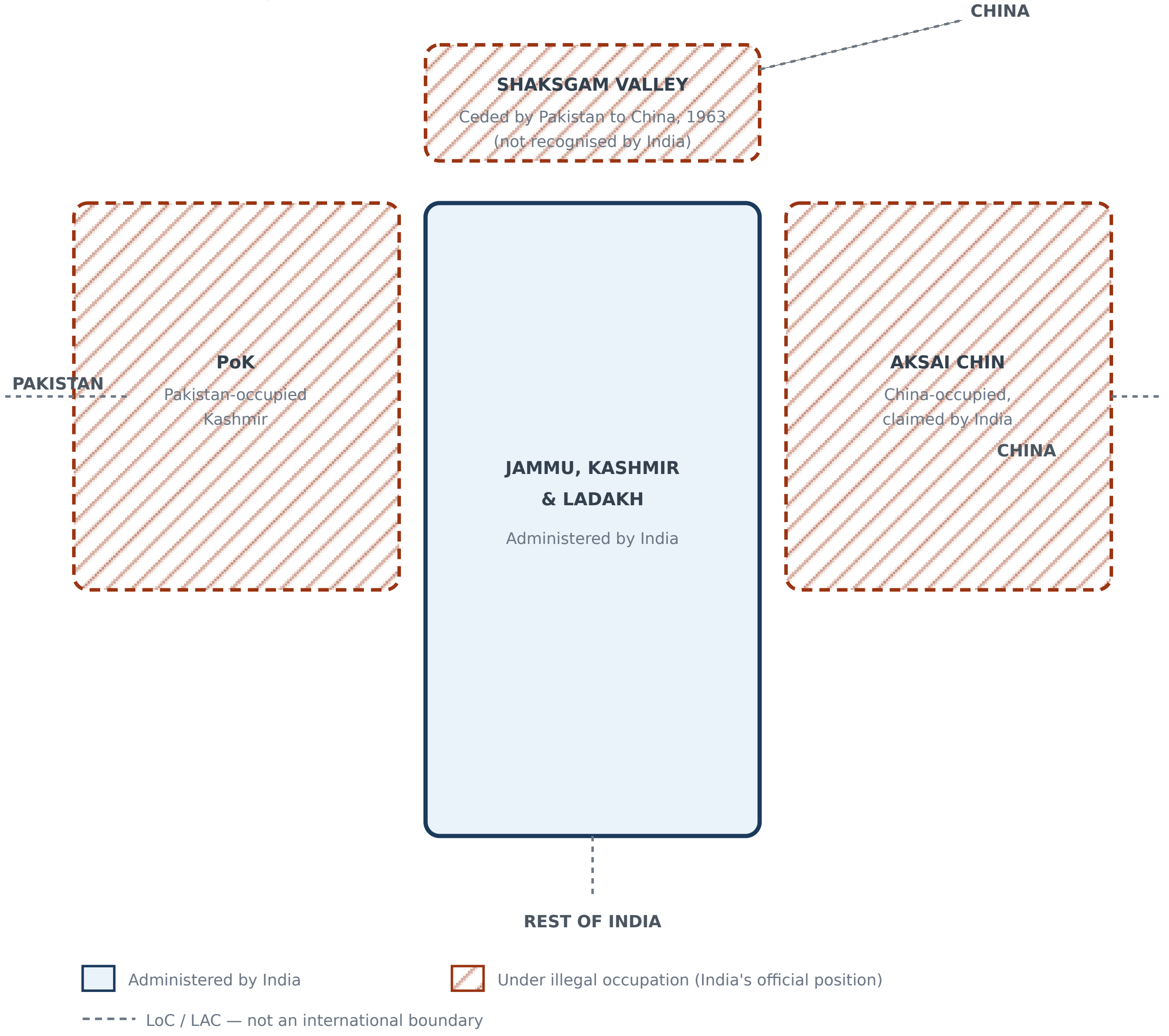
- **India's position:** The MEA said Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, including territory covered by the 1963 Pakistan-China boundary arrangement, are 'integral and inalienable' parts of India; it called that 1963 agreement itself illegal.

- **What the Commission covers:** Pakistan and China set up the body to manage boundary matters over territory Pakistan does not lawfully hold, in India's view, since it forms part of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.
- **CPEC angle:** India separately opposes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor because it runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), reinforcing India's territorial objection.
- **Same-week friction:** The rejection came days after India protested a Pakistan Navy corvette's 'unsafe and unprofessional' manoeuvre near an Indian Navy warship in the Arabian Sea.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **1963 agreement:** Pakistan ceded the Shaksgam Valley (Trans-Karakoram Tract) to China under a bilateral boundary agreement India was never party to and has never recognised.
- **Longstanding position:** India maintains there is 'no boundary between Pakistan and China' in this sector, since Pakistan had no legal title to cede the territory.

Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh — India's Official Position



Schematic diagram, not to scale.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Link India's rejection to its consistent 'PoK is part of India' doctrine and to CPEC's passage through disputed territory — a recurring India-Pakistan-China trilateral IR theme.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Shaksgam Valley, consider the following statements:
1. It lies in territory that India regards as part of Ladakh.
2. It was ceded by Pakistan to China under a bilateral boundary agreement signed in 1963.
3. India was a signatory to the 1963 Pakistan-China boundary agreement covering this territory.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: The Shaksgam Valley is territory India claims as part of Ladakh, and it was indeed ceded by Pakistan to China in a 1963 boundary agreement — statements 1 and 2 are correct. India was never a party to that agreement and has consistently rejected its validity, so statement 3 is false.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** PoK: Pakistan-occupied Kashmir | CPEC: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor | MEA: Ministry of External Affairs

Centre Tells Delhi HC an Adult May Nominate a Same-Sex Partner for Medical Decisions

Why in news: The Union Health Ministry and the National Medical Commission have told the Delhi High Court that a competent adult can nominate any partner — including one in a same-sex relationship — to take medical decisions on their behalf if they become incapacitated.

Key Details:

- **The case:** The submission came in a plea by a woman in a same-sex relationship since 2015 (married abroad in 2023) who said she had no legal mechanism to act for her partner in a medical emergency.
- **Centre's stand:** Called such nomination a 'logical and tailored extension' of the existing principle that lets a competent adult name a nominee for medical decisions, subject to applicable law and safeguards.
- **Reasoning offered:** The Centre said there is 'no medical or ethical rationale' for excluding a nominated partner merely on account of sex, gender, or sexual orientation.
- **Limits of the submission:** It addresses only medical decision-making authority during incapacity — it does not extend to recognising same-sex marriage or civil unions.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Legal backdrop:** India decriminalised consensual same-sex relations in Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India (2018).
- **2023 precedent:** In Supriyo vs Union of India (2023), the Supreme Court declined to grant marriage equality to same-sex couples but urged the Centre to examine incidental civil rights such as this one.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Connect incremental rights recognition (medical nomination) with the broader, still-unresolved marriage-equality debate — a useful contrast between judicial restraint and executive accommodation.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Examine the significance of allowing a competent adult to nominate a same-sex partner for medical decision-making, in the context of the evolving jurisprudence on the rights of LGBTQ+ persons in India. (150 words)

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2018, GS Paper 1: "Right to Privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the Right to Life and Personal Liberty. Which of the following in the Constitution of India correctly and appropriately implies the above statement?" (a) Article 14 and the provisions under the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution (b) Article 17 and the Directive Principles of State Policy in Part IV (c) Article 21 and the freedoms guaranteed in Part III (d) Article 24 and the provisions under the 44th Amendment to the Constitution — Answer: (c). Same core idea as today's story: personal autonomy in intimate/medical decisions flows from Article 21 read with Part III, the constitutional thread the Centre's submission itself extends.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** NMC: National Medical Commission | LGBTQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and other sexual/gender minorities

GS PAPER 3: Economy, Internal Security & Science

Merchant Discount Rate Returns to Large UPI Transactions from October 15

Why in news: A 0.4% Merchant Discount Rate will apply from October 15, 2026 to UPI payments of ₹2,000 or more made to mid-sized and large merchants, ending nearly a decade of zero-MDR UPI and triggering political pushback.

Key Details:

- **Who it hits:** NPCI data shows the charge affects only about 2.5% of UPI transactions by volume; Person-to-Person transfers, payments up to ₹2,000, and small-merchant QR transactions up to ₹1 lakh/month stay fully exempt.
- **Who gains:** Of the MDR collected, the biggest share goes to the customer's/payer's bank, the next-biggest to the merchant's bank, then the UPI app; Yes Bank, Axis, ICICI and HDFC dominate the receiving-bank side, while PhonePe and Google Pay handle roughly 80% of UPI transaction volume.
- **Scale:** The MDR-liable transactions form only about 20% of total UPI value, capping the estimated monthly revenue at roughly ₹2,400 crore.
- **Political reaction:** Congress calls it a 'UPI tax' driven by U.S. pressure favouring card networks like Visa/Mastercard; the RSS-linked Swadeshi Jagran Manch has separately urged the government to reconsider it.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Essential sectors:** Railways, telecom, insurance, fuel and agri-input payments above ₹2,000 face a flat ₹5 MDR per transaction, regardless of amount.
- **Capital-market transactions:** Payments to mutual funds, stockbrokers, dealers and for equities attract 0.02% MDR, capped at ₹300 per transaction.

UPI MDR Slabs From October 15, 2026

Transaction Type	MDR
Person-to-Person (any amount)	Nil
Payments up to ₹2,000 to any merchant	Nil
Small-merchant QR, up to ₹1 lakh/month	Nil
Mid/large-merchant payments ≥₹2,000	0.4%
Railways, telecom, insurance, fuel, agri-inputs (≥₹2,000)	Flat ₹5/transaction
Capital-market transactions	0.02%, capped at ₹300

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use the MDR rollout to discuss the trade-off between digital-payment infrastructure's fiscal sustainability (banks/NPCI need revenue) and India's financial-inclusion goal of near-zero-cost transactions.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) notified for UPI payments effective October 15, 2026, consider the following statements:
1. It applies to all Person-to-Person and Person-to-Merchant UPI transactions without exception.
2. Payments up to ₹2,000 made to merchants remain free of the charge.
3. Payments to railways, telecommunications and fuel above ₹2,000 attract the same 0.4% rate as other large-merchant transactions.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1 and 3 only

Answer: (b) 2 only

Explanation: Person-to-Person transfers remain free regardless of amount, so statement 1 is false. Payments to merchants up to ₹2,000 are exempt — statement 2 is correct. Essential/thin-margin sectors such as railways, telecom and fuel attract a flat ₹5 per transaction, not the 0.4% ad valorem rate, so statement 3 is false.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2017, GS Paper 1: "Consider the following statements: 1. National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) helps in promoting the financial inclusion in the country. 2. NPCI has launched RuPay, a card payment scheme. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?" (a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2 — Answer: (c). Same core idea as today's story: NPCI is the institutional backbone of UPI, and today's MDR decision is exactly the kind of NPCI policy call this PYQ tests awareness of.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** MDR: Merchant Discount Rate | NPCI: National Payments Corporation of India | P2P: Person-to-Person

India's Real GDP Grows 7.8% in Q1 FY27 as New 2022-23 Base Year Kicks In

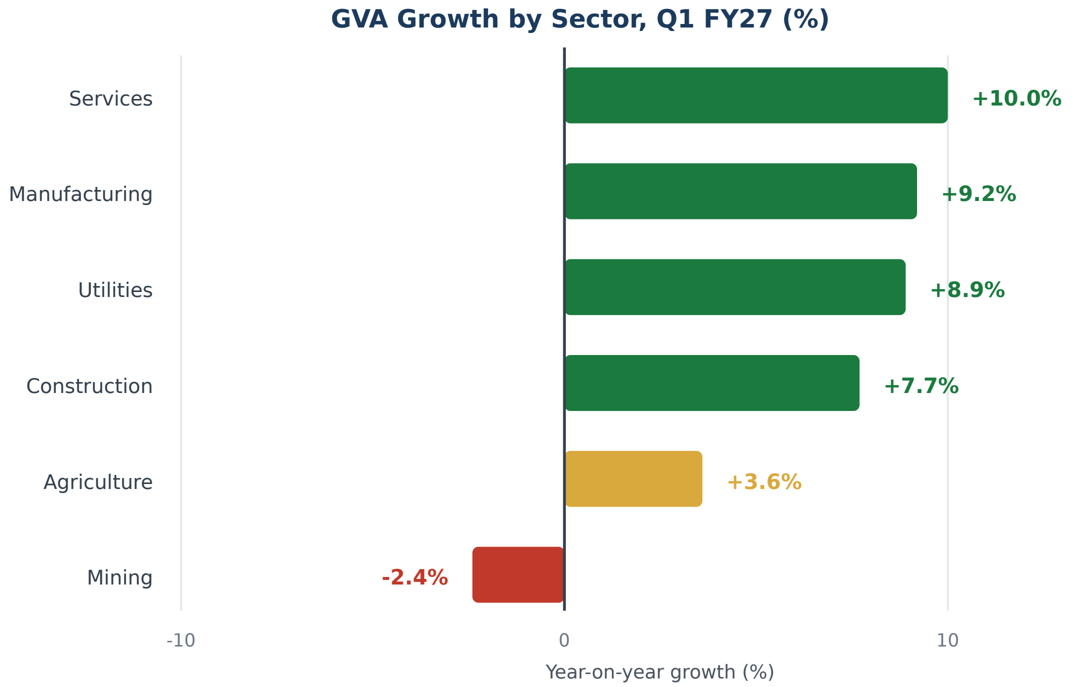
Why in news: India's real GDP grew 7.8% in April-June 2026 — its fastest quarterly pace in three years — even as the government simultaneously updated the GDP/GVA base year from 2011-12 to 2022-23.

Key Details:

- **The headline number:** Real GDP rose to ₹81.36 lakh crore and real Gross Value Added (GVA) grew 8.2% to ₹73.82 lakh crore, beating the RBI's 7% forecast despite the West Asian conflict, high energy prices and trade uncertainty.
- **Sector spread:** Services led at 10% (finance, real estate, IT), followed by manufacturing at 9.2%, utilities 8.9%, and construction 7.7%; agriculture grew a modest 3.6% while mining alone contracted 2.4%.
- **Demand side:** Gross Fixed Capital Formation (investment) rose 11.9%, private consumption 7.1%, and real exports 12%, pointing to broad-based rather than one-off growth.
- **The base-year change:** Updating the base year to 2022-23 replaces an outdated market basket with current products, services and prices; it does not itself shrink or grow the economy — only comparable year-on-year data changes.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Global comparison:** India's 7.8% growth exceeded China's 4.3%, Malaysia's 6%, Singapore's 5.9% and Indonesia's 5.29% over the same period.
- **Jobs context:** RBI KLEMS-based data cited 17.19 crore jobs added between 2014-15 and 2023-24, with women's labour-force participation rising to 41.7% in 2023-24.



How to use in UPSC Mains: Distinguish nominal vs real GDP and explain why a base-year revision is a measurement recalibration, not economic growth or contraction in itself — a frequently confused concept.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to India's national income accounting, consider the following statements:
1. Real Gross Value Added is derived by adjusting nominal GVA for price changes.
2. Revising the base year of the GDP series changes the absolute size of the economy in real terms.
3. Real GDP equals real GVA plus net product taxes (taxes minus subsidies), adjusted for inflation.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Real GVA is indeed nominal GVA adjusted for inflation (statement 1 correct), and Real GDP is derived from real GVA plus net product taxes (statement 3 correct). Changing the base year updates the reference weights and prices used for measurement — it does not change the economy's actual real size, so statement 2 is false.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** GVA: Gross Value Added | GFCF: Gross Fixed Capital Formation | RBI: Reserve Bank of India

The E20 Ethanol Blend: Savings Claim Undercut by Mileage Loss, Finds Analysis

Why in news: An independent analysis finds India's E20 petrol blend has cost consumers an estimated ₹88,234 crore in extra fuel spending over three years because of lower mileage, undermining the policy's central savings claim.

Key Details:

- **What E20 is:** A litre of E20 petrol is 80% motor gasoline and 20% ethanol; it was first introduced in February 2023 and scaled up nationally this year amid rising crude prices from the West Asian conflict.
- **Mileage loss confirmed:** Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari told the Lok Sabha that E20 cuts fuel economy by 2%-6% depending on vehicle category and vintage, citing a joint ARAI-SIAM-IOCL study.
- **Emissions trade-off:** Because ethanol carries less energy per litre than petrol, a mileage loss beyond about 4% can raise, not lower, per-km emissions in older, incompatible vehicles — cutting against the blend's climate rationale.

- **Forex and food-security angle:** Rising ethanol demand from sugarcane and maize forced sugar-export bans in 2023 and again in 2026, turning India into a net sugar importer last year and weakening the claimed forex-saving logic.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Consumer cost:** ₹88,234 crore in additional fuel spending over the last three years, rising every year, per an analysis by The Reporters Collective.
- **Suggested fixes:** Give consumers an E10/E20 choice, apply countercyclical fuel taxes, and expand public transport, cycling and walking infrastructure instead of a blanket mandate.

What's In a Litre of E20 Petrol?

E20's Three Claims vs the Evidence

Claim	Evidence Found
Saves consumers money	Mileage loss offsets the cheaper-ethanol saving; ₹88,234 cr. extra spent over 3 years
Lowers carbon emissions	Uncertain — emissions can rise if mileage loss exceeds ~4% in older vehicles
Saves foreign exchange	Partly offset by falling sugar-export earnings and rising sugar imports

How to use in UPSC Mains: A ready-made case study on policy trade-offs between energy security, farmer income (sugarcane/maize demand) and consumer costs — pair with India's biofuel and food-security policy debates.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Critically examine the trade-offs between energy security, farmer income, and consumer costs embedded in India's ethanol-blending programme. (250 words)

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2020, GS Paper 1: "According to India's National Policy on Biofuels, which of the following can be used as raw material for the production of biofuels? 1. Cassava 2. Damaged wheat grains 3. Groundnut seeds 4. Horse gram 5. Rotten potatoes 6. Sugar beet. Select the correct answer using the code given below." (a) 1, 2, 5 and 6 only (b) 2, 3, 4 and 5 only (c) 1, 3, 4 and 6 only (d) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 — Answer: (a). Directly on-topic: the same National Policy on Biofuels underpins today's E20 programme.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** ARAI: Automotive Research Association of India | SIAM: Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers | IOCL: Indian Oil Corporation Limited

Jhiram Valley Verdict: All 10 Convicts Get Death Penalty in 2013 Maoist Attack

Why in news: A special NIA court in Jagdalpur has sentenced all 10 convicts to death for the 2013 Jhiram Valley ambush in Chhattisgarh that killed 27 people, including senior Congress leaders, even as critics say the conspiracy's masterminds remain unidentified.

Key Details:

- **The 2013 attack:** CPI (Maoist) cadres ambushed a 'Parivartan Yatra' convoy of about 20 vehicles with a landmine blast followed by indiscriminate firing, killing senior Congress leaders Vidya Charan Shukla, Nand Kumar Patel and Mahendra Karma among 27 dead.
- **The verdict:** All 10 chargesheeted persons convicted five weeks earlier (September 5, 2026) were sentenced to death; one accused had died in judicial custody during the trial.
- **Unresolved conspiracy:** The NIA chargesheeted 39 people, but two top Naxal leaders named in the original police inquiry were never charged — a former Chhattisgarh CM says those who 'hatched' the plot remain free.
- **Political reactions:** The current Chhattisgarh CM called the verdict a victory for the Centre's anti-Naxal campaign; opposition leaders demanded that conspiracy-level leaders also be booked.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Toll and haul:** 27 killed, 35-plus injured; attackers looted 9 AK-47 rifles, 7 INSAS rifles, 2 SLRs and 4 pistols before fleeing.
- **Trial length:** Evidence from 101 prosecution witnesses was recorded before the September 5, 2026 conviction and this sentencing.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this verdict to discuss the distinction between operational convictions and unresolved conspiracy-level accountability in Left-Wing Extremism cases — a recurring internal-security theme.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), consider the following statements:
1. Following the 2019 amendment to the NIA Act, it can investigate certain scheduled offences, including those related to Left-Wing Extremism, without prior State government consent.
2. Special NIA courts to try scheduled offences are designated by the Central Government acting alone, without consulting the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court.
3. The NIA was constituted in the aftermath of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: The 2019 NIA (Amendment) Act expanded the agency's jurisdiction to investigate certain scheduled offences, including Left-Wing Extremism cases, even without State consent (statement 1 correct), and the NIA was indeed set up after the 2008 Mumbai attacks (statement 3 correct). However, Special Courts under the NIA Act are designated by the Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned, not by the Centre acting alone — statement 2 is false.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** NIA: National Investigation Agency | CPI (Maoist): Communist Party of India (Maoist) | LWE: Left-Wing Extremism

SEMICON India 2026 Opens as Government Unveils Semiconductor Mission 2.0

Why in news: The fifth edition of SEMICON India, the government's flagship chip-industry event, opens today in New Delhi even as the Centre pivots to 'Semiconductor Mission 2.0' to consolidate India's chip ecosystem and integrate it into global supply chains.

Key Details:

- **The event:** September 17-19, 2026 at Yashobhoomi, New Delhi, themed 'Silicon to Systems: Building the Ecosystem'; scale includes 500+ exhibitors, 240+ international companies, and delegations from 40+ countries.
- **From 1.0 to 2.0:** 12 projects were approved under Semicon 1.0, with 3 already in commercial production; Semicon 2.0 adds new pillars to shift focus from 'ecosystem creation' to 'consolidation and global integration'.

- **Money and ministry:** Semiconductor Mission 2.0 carries a ₹1,000 crore FY27 provision, part of an ₹8,000 crore Modified Programme for the Semiconductor and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem run by the Ministry of Electronics and IT.
- **The targets:** India aims to design/manufacture chips for 70-75% of domestic applications by 2029, reach advanced 3nm/2nm technology nodes by 2035, and grow its own semiconductor market from about \$100 billion to \$200 billion as global demand doubles to \$2 trillion.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Design-linked support:** 24 start-ups approved under the Design Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme; chip-design tools extended to 332+ academic institutes and 105 start-ups.
- **Market trajectory:** India's semiconductor market is projected to reach \$100-110 billion by 2030, up from \$45-50 billion in 2024-25.

India's Semiconductor Roadmap

Milestone	Target
Domestic chip design/manufacturing share	70-75% of domestic applications by 2029
Technology nodes	3nm and 2nm by 2035
Global standing	Among the top semiconductor nations by 2035
Market size	\$100-110 billion by 2030 (from \$45-50 bn in 2024-25)

How to use in UPSC Mains: Link this to Atmanirbhar Bharat and supply-chain diversification away from Taiwan/China — a strong GS3 (economy/S&T) and GS2 (international relations, strategic autonomy) crossover theme.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to India's semiconductor policy, consider the following statements:
1. The India Semiconductor Mission is administered by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
2. Semiconductor Mission 2.0 was announced through the Union Budget 2026-27.
3. India's Design Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme extends support only to foreign semiconductor design companies operating in India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: The India Semiconductor Mission is run by MeitY (statement 1 correct), and Semiconductor Mission 2.0 was indeed announced through the Union Budget 2026-27 (statement 2 correct). The DLI scheme is aimed at supporting India's own semiconductor design start-ups and academic institutes, not 'only foreign' companies, so statement 3 is false.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** ISM: India Semiconductor Mission | MeitY: Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology | DLI: Design Linked Incentive

GS PAPER 4: Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude

Ethics Case Study: Rebuilding Institutional Integrity After the NEET-UG Paper Leak

Why in news: Following this year's NEET-UG paper leak, the National Testing Agency has removed 600 subject-matter experts linked to question-setting and is recruiting fresh experts and translators — a live governance-ethics question on restoring integrity in high-stakes public examinations.

Key Details:

- **What happened:** The NTA found that some of the 600 removed experts — external, contracted and panel-based personnel responsible for setting and vetting NEET-UG questions — were complicit in or responsible for the leak.
- **The fix underway:** New recruits must show competence in high-order question design, translation fidelity across languages, and psychometric review for difficulty calibration, alongside standard vetting for conceptual accuracy.
- **Stakes involved:** The episode affects lakhs of NEET-UG aspirants nationally, whose trust in a fair, tamper-proof selection process is central to the legitimacy of medical admissions.
- **The governance dilemma:** Institutions must balance the speed needed to keep the exam calendar on track against the rigour of re-vetting personnel and content — too little rigour repeats the failure, too much delays lakhs of careers.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Scale of the reset:** 600 subject-matter experts removed; recruitment of replacements open till October 9, 2026.

How to use in UPSC Mains/Ethics: Frame this as a case study on institutional integrity, accountability, and rebuilding public trust after a probity breach in public administration — map it to Ethics concepts like probity in governance, whistleblowing, and organisational culture.

MAINS CASE STUDY EXERCISE

Q. You are the newly appointed head of a national testing agency, months after a major paper leak involving insiders undermined public trust in an all-India entrance examination. A large number of subject-matter experts who set and vetted questions have had to be removed, and lakhs of anxious candidates are demanding transparency before the next exam cycle. Some officials in your agency suggest handling the removals and re-recruitment quietly to avoid further loss of public confidence, while others insist on making the process fully public even if it invites short-term criticism. (a) Identify the ethical issues involved in this situation. (b) What course of action would you adopt, and why? (250 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** NTA: National Testing Agency | NEET-UG: National Eligibility cum Entrance Test — Undergraduate