

THE DAILY UPSC BRIEF

HIGH-YIELD DAILY SOURCES & ANALYSIS | TUESDAY, 27 OCTOBER 2026

TODAY'S COVERAGE

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PRELIMS POINTERS — TODAY IN ONE LINE EACH

1. **Right to Privacy** — recognised as a fundamental right by a nine-judge Supreme Court bench in 2017.
2. **Article 136** — discretionary special-leave jurisdiction; it is not an appeal as of right.
3. **NBS** — covers phosphatic and potassic fertilisers; urea remains outside the same pricing framework.
4. **PM-KUSUM** — supports solarisation in agriculture; proposed agrivoltaics is a possible future-phase addition.
5. **E85** — petrol-ethanol blend containing up to 85% ethanol by volume; vehicle compatibility is model-specific.
6. **Green propulsion** — Manastu project uses a hydrogen-peroxide-based propellant; target is TRL-6 to TRL-9.
7. **Conciliation** — a non-adjudicatory process for resolving industrial disputes through facilitated settlement.

HOW TO READ THIS BRIEF

• Why in News • Target Prelims MCQ • How to Use in UPSC Mains • Mains Practice / Case Study Question

GENERAL STUDIES PAPER II

Digital Privacy Law Meets RTI and Investigative Journalism

GS2 • FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS & GOVERNANCE

WHY IN NEWS

A 21-member publishers’ group has challenged provisions of the DPDP Act, 2023 before the Supreme Court, arguing that its reach could hinder investigative reporting and expose confidential sources.

- Key Details:**
- **Rights in tension:** The dispute tests how informational privacy can be protected while preserving the public’s ability to scrutinise public authorities.
 - **RTI amendment:** Section 44(3) amended Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, replacing its earlier privacy-and-public-interest wording with an exemption for information relating to personal information.
 - **Press-freedom concern:** The publishers argue that data-protection duties could burden journalism involving personal data; these are petitioners’ claims, not a court finding.
 - **Judicial status:** The challenge is pending. No final ruling has settled the constitutional questions.

- Data/Facts/Example:**
- **Constitutional anchor:** The Supreme Court’s nine-judge K.S. Puttaswamy ruling (2017) recognised privacy as a fundamental right, including under Article 21.
 - **Balancing test:** Restrictions on fundamental rights require legality, a legitimate state aim, proportionality and safeguards; privacy and transparency are both constitutionally significant.



PRELIMS ANGLE

The 2017 Puttaswamy privacy ruling was delivered by a nine-judge Constitution Bench.

HOW TO USE IN UPSC MAINS

For GS2, assess the design of data-protection rules through privacy, transparency, press freedom and accountable administration. Separate allegations in pending litigation from settled law.

ANSWER SKELETON

Intro	Privacy and access to information are both necessary for constitutional democracy.
Body	Rights; RTI disclosure; press freedom; safeguards; institutional independence.
Way forward	Proportionate exemptions, reasoned public-interest review and independent oversight.

Mains value-add: The nine-judge bench in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India (2017) located privacy within Part III freedoms—use it to frame privacy as a constitutional, not merely statutory, interest.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ • MODERATE

Q. With reference to the right to privacy in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Supreme Court recognised privacy as a constitutionally protected fundamental right in 2017.
2. The right is absolute and cannot be restricted by law.
3. The proportionality test is relevant when assessing restrictions on fundamental rights.

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

The nine-judge bench in K.S. Puttaswamy recognised privacy as a fundamental right. It is not absolute; restrictions must satisfy constitutional requirements including legality and proportionality.

RELATED PYQ

UPSC CSE Prelims 2024, GS Paper I: “Under which of the following Articles of the Constitution of India, has the Supreme Court of India placed the Right to Privacy?” Answer: Article 21.

• **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** DPDP: Digital Personal Data Protection | RTI: Right to Information

Special Leave Petitions and the Supreme Court's Docket

GS2 · JUDICIARY & ACCESS TO JUSTICE

WHY IN NEWS

An Indian Express explainer on 26 October asks whether the rising volume of Special Leave Petitions (SLPs) is adding to the Supreme Court's caseload, even as its sanctioned strength has increased to 38 judges.

Key Details:

- **Constitutional power:** Article 136 gives the Supreme Court discretion to grant special leave to appeal from a judgment, decree, determination, sentence or order of a court or tribunal in India.
- **Exceptional jurisdiction:** An SLP is not an appeal as of right. The Court generally uses this power sparingly to address exceptional questions or grave injustice.
- **Military-law exception:** Article 136(2) excludes courts or tribunals constituted by or under laws relating to the Armed Forces.
- **Capacity and access:** More sanctioned posts can improve capacity, but admission filters and case-management reforms must preserve access for meritorious claims.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Strength snapshot:** The Department of Justice listed 38 sanctioned Supreme Court posts, 32 working judges and six vacancies as of 1 June 2026.
- **Institutional balance:** Article 136 is a discretionary constitutional remedy; any reform should protect access to justice and avoid turning screening into an arbitrary barrier.



PRELIMS ANGLE

Article 136 is discretionary; Article 136(2) excludes Armed Forces courts and tribunals.

HOW TO USE IN UPSC MAINS

For GS2, connect Supreme Court pendency with Article 136, access to justice and judicial capacity. Distinguish an SLP seeking leave from an appeal heard after leave is granted.

ANSWER SKELETON

Intro	The Supreme Court's docket reflects both constitutional access and institutional capacity.
Body	Article 136 scope; SLP as discretionary leave; pendency drivers; access-versus-filter trade-off.
Way forward	Transparent admission criteria, stronger lower courts and data-led case management.

Mains value-add: Use the distinction between admission and merits: the Court first decides whether to grant leave; only then does the matter proceed as an appeal.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ · MODERATE

Q. With reference to Article 136 of the Constitution, consider the following statements:

1. It empowers the Supreme Court, in its discretion, to grant special leave to appeal from decisions of courts or tribunals in India.
2. A litigant has an appeal as of right under Article 136.
3. Article 136(2) excludes courts or tribunals constituted under laws relating to the Armed Forces.

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: (c) 1 and 3 only

Article 136 creates a discretionary special-leave jurisdiction, not an appeal as of right. Clause (2) excludes Armed Forces courts and tribunals.

- **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** SLP: Special Leave Petition

GENERAL STUDIES PAPER III

Fertiliser Pricing and the Nutrient Imbalance in Indian Soils

GS3 · AGRICULTURE & SOIL RESOURCES

WHY IN NEWS

An Indian Express analysis links relative fertiliser prices to worsening nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium imbalance, soil degradation and higher subsidy pressures.

Key Details:

- **Price signal:** Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) covers phosphatic and potassic fertilisers, while urea remains outside that pricing framework; the resulting relative prices can favour nitrogen use.
- **Nutrient gap:** A 2026 ICRIER analysis cited by the paper found nitrogen use above recommended levels nationally, while potassium application remained substantially below crop-specific requirements.
- **Soil consequences:** Imbalanced application can impair soil structure, nutrient uptake and water quality; yield response depends on crop, soil and local conditions.
- **Policy choices:** Options include calibrated subsidy reform, soil-test-based advice, extension services and crop diversification; price changes alone cannot deliver balanced use.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **NBS origin:** Introduced in 2010 for phosphatic and potassic fertilisers; urea remains under a separate administered-price arrangement.
- **Soil Health Card:** The scheme provides farmers with soil-test information and recommendations on nutrient application; test results should guide plot-specific decisions.



PRELIMS ANGLE

NBS applies to phosphatic and potassic fertilisers; urea does not follow that same pricing framework.

HOW TO USE IN UPSC MAINS

For GS3 agriculture, connect input subsidies with farm incentives, fiscal costs and environmental externalities. Pair reforms with extension and transition support for farmers.

ANSWER SKELETON

Intro	Soil health is a productive asset and a foundation of food security.
Body	Price signals; nutrient imbalance; soil and water impacts; subsidy burden.
Way forward	4R recommendations, extension, calibrated support and diversified cropping.

Mains value-add: The 4R nutrient-stewardship framework—right source, right rate, right time and right place—turns soil-test results into an actionable extension model.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ · MODERATE

Q. With reference to the Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) policy, consider the following statements:

1. It was introduced in 2010 for phosphatic and potassic fertilisers.
2. Urea is covered by the same NBS pricing framework.
3. Balanced nutrient use can require soil testing and crop-specific extension.

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: (c) 1 and 3 only

NBS began in 2010 for phosphatic and potassic fertilisers; urea follows a separate administered-price regime. Soil testing and crop-specific extension help address nutrient imbalance.

• **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** NBS: Nutrient-Based Subsidy | ICRIER: Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations | 4R: Right source, right rate, right time and right place

Agrivoltaics: Keep Farming Viable as Solar Power Expands

GS3 · ENERGY & AGRICULTURE

WHY IN NEWS

The Indian Express reports that agrivoltaics may be considered under the next phase of PM-KUSUM, pairing elevated solar panels with continued cultivation on the same land.

Key Details:

- **Model:** Agrivoltaics co-locates PV generation and crop cultivation; panel height and spacing must permit farming activity.
- **Potential gains:** It may add electricity income and reduce pressure to convert separate land for solar projects, but results depend on crop, local climate and system design.
- **Risks:** Shade can affect yields; elevated structures raise capital costs and can complicate irrigation, machinery access, land rights and grid connection.
- **Evidence gap:** Most Indian projects remain pilots; compare crop output and farmer net income against a credible open-field baseline before scaling.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Policy link:** PM-KUSUM supports solarisation in agriculture. The proposed agrivoltaic element belongs to a future phase and is not yet an implemented scheme component.
- **Evaluation:** Track both energy output and crop yield, plus lease terms, payments and restoration obligations.



PRELIMS ANGLE

Agrivoltaics means co-location of solar panels and farming; ground-mounted solar parks generally dedicate the site to power generation.

HOW TO USE IN UPSC MAINS

For GS3 energy and agriculture, frame agrivoltaics as a land-use and distributional choice. Expansion should preserve crop productivity, fair contracts and cultivator control.

ANSWER SKELETON

Intro	Renewable expansion competes for land and can affect rural livelihoods.
Body	Land efficiency; crop response; farmer income; grid and contract risks.
Way forward	Region-specific pilots, yield monitoring and farmer-led safeguards.

Mains value-add: Evaluate solar projects through a “dual-use” lens: report crop yield and net farm income alongside megawatt-hours, with local comparison plots and transparent contracts.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ · EASY-MODERATE

Q. Consider the following statements about agrivoltaics:

1. It combines solar photovoltaic generation with cultivation on the same land.
2. A single panel design can be assumed to maximise crop yields in every agro-climatic region.
3. Farmer income and land-restoration obligations are relevant to project assessment.

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: (c) 1 and 3 only

Agrivoltaics combines farming and solar generation, but crop response and design suitability vary by region. Project assessment should include farmer returns and obligations to restore land.

RELATED PYQ

UPSC CSE Prelims 2018, GS Paper I: “With reference to solar power production in India, consider the following statements: 1. India is the third largest in the world in the manufacture of silicon wafers used in photovoltaic units. 2. The solar power tariffs are determined by the Solar Energy Corporation of India. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?” Answer: Neither statement.

- **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** PV: Photovoltaic | PM-KUSUM: Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyaan

E85/E100 Certification Opens a Narrow Flex-Fuel Pathway

GS3 · ENERGY SECURITY & ENVIRONMENT

WHY IN NEWS

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways notified Central Motor Vehicles Rules amendments on 26 October 2026 to recognise E100 alongside E85 in emission certification for eligible flex-fuel vehicles.

Key Details:

- **Fuel labels:** E85 contains up to 85% ethanol by volume; E100 is predominantly ethanol. A vehicle must be engineered and certified for the relevant blend.
- **Consumer safeguard:** Compatibility with E10 or E20 does not establish E85/E100 suitability. Existing vehicle owners are not required to switch or modify their vehicles.
- **Energy security:** Ethanol can reduce imported crude dependence, but lifecycle emissions vary with feedstock, cultivation and processing.
- **Regulatory scope:** The amendment enables certification for designed vehicles; it does not mandate fleet conversion or make high-ethanol fuel appropriate for all vehicles.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Legal instrument:** The notified amendments update the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989; they take effect on Gazette publication.
- **Technology:** Flex-fuel vehicles use fuel-system materials and engine controls designed for a certified range of petrol-ethanol blends.



PRELIMS ANGLE

E85 and E100 require dedicated vehicle certification; E20 compatibility alone does not imply flex-fuel capability.

HOW TO USE IN UPSC MAINS

For GS3 energy security, assess ethanol through import substitution, lifecycle emissions, feedstock competition and consumer protection. Distinguish an enabling standard from a blending mandate.

ANSWER SKELETON

Intro	Transport decarbonisation also serves energy-security goals.
Body	Import dependence; feedstocks; lifecycle emissions; vehicle compatibility.
Way forward	Certified fleets, consumer information and sustainable feedstock safeguards.

Mains value-add: The IPCC’s lifecycle approach counts emissions across feedstock production, processing and use; apply this boundary when comparing bioethanol with fossil fuels.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ · MODERATE

Q. With reference to E85/E100 flex-fuel vehicles, consider the following statements:

1. E85 denotes a petrol-ethanol blend containing up to 85% ethanol by volume.
2. Compatibility with E20 automatically means a vehicle can use E85.
3. The recent rules require existing vehicle owners to modify their vehicles.

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: (a) 1 only

E85 is a high-ethanol blend, but each vehicle needs design and certification for that fuel. The notification does not require current vehicle owners to switch or modify vehicles.

• **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** E85: Fuel blend with up to 85% ethanol by volume | E100: Predominantly ethanol fuel | MoRTH: Ministry of Road Transport and Highways

Indigenous Green Propulsion for Satellites and Launch Vehicles

GS3 • SPACE TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

WHY IN NEWS

On 26 October, the Technology Development Board (DST) signed a INR 116 crore RDI Fund support agreement with Manastu Space to advance an indigenous hydrogen-peroxide-based propulsion system.

Key Details:

- **Technology:** The system uses a hydrogen-peroxide-based propellant with additives and an integrated engine and catalyst; the project targets applications from small satellites to higher-thrust systems.
- **Scale:** The planned system spans 5 mN to 300 N thrust. The range reflects different propulsion needs, not one engine configuration.
- **Development stage:** The programme aims to advance the technology from TRL-6 to TRL-9 through further engineering, integration, testing and validation. PIB says the system has already been demonstrated in space; broader deployment remains a project goal.
- **Policy instrument:** The INR 116 crore support is through optionally convertible debt under the Research Development and Innovation Fund; total project cost is INR 277.63 crore.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **TRL:** Technology Readiness Levels describe maturity from early principles to proven operational systems; TRL-9 denotes a system proven in its operational environment.
- **Propulsion role:** Spacecraft propulsion enables orbit changes, station-keeping and manoeuvres; required thrust and propellant depend on mission and vehicle design.



PRELIMS ANGLE

TRL-9 indicates technology proven in its operational environment; thrust is measured in newtons (N), with 1 N = 1,000 mN.

HOW TO USE IN UPSC MAINS

For GS3 science and technology, explain the role of propulsion in satellite operations, then assess indigenous development through reliability, scale-up, testing and environmental claims across the full lifecycle.

ANSWER SKELETON

Intro	Indigenous propulsion capability can strengthen mission autonomy and the domestic space ecosystem.
Body	Mission role; peroxide-based system; maturity and testing; scale-up and reliability challenges.
Way forward	Independent validation, flight heritage, safety standards and transparent lifecycle assessment.

Mains value-add: A space mission's propulsion subsystem supports orbit insertion and maintenance as well as planned manoeuvres; thrust must be read alongside mission duration and spacecraft mass.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ • MODERATE

Q. With reference to technology readiness and spacecraft propulsion, consider the following statements:

1. A spacecraft propulsion system can support orbit changes and station-keeping.
2. TRL-9 generally denotes a technology proven in its operational environment.
3. The same thrust level is suitable for every satellite and launch-vehicle application.

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

Propulsion needs vary by mission and vehicle, so one thrust level cannot serve every application. TRL-9 denotes a system proven in its operational environment.

• **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** TDB: Technology Development Board | DST: Department of Science and Technology | TRL: Technology Readiness Level | RDI: Research, Development and Innovation

GENERAL STUDIES PAPER IV

Conciliation as Empathy and Timely Public Service

GS4 · EMPATHY, ACCOUNTABILITY & PUBLIC SERVICE

WHY IN NEWS

A Labour Ministry conciliation process led to the redeployment of 37 contract workers at an ESIC hospital in Karnataka and payment of approximately INR 7.40 lakh in pending wages.

Key Details:

- **Ethical value:** The outcome illustrates empathy and responsiveness: officials addressed the immediate livelihood impact while bringing the employer and contractor into dialogue.
- **Administrative method:** Conciliation offers a non-adversarial route to resolve an industrial dispute and can prevent avoidable escalation.
- **Public-service setting:** The dispute concerned workers at a public health institution, where fair labour practices also support continuity and dignity at work.
- **Caution:** One reported settlement is an example, not evidence that every grievance is resolved effectively or that all claims were adjudicated.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Outcome:** The workers were redeployed effective 23 October 2026; September wages were reported paid.
- **Institutional anchor:** The Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) Organisation facilitates conciliation in eligible industrial disputes under the labour-law framework.



HOW TO USE IN UPSC MAINS

Use the case to show that empathy in administration needs a fair process: hear affected people, convene responsible parties, secure a time-bound outcome and verify implementation.

ANSWER SKELETON	
Intro	Treat timely wages and dignity at work as core public-service concerns.
Body	Stakeholders; contract compliance; livelihood; due process; continuity of care.
Conclusion	Use impartial conciliation, documented timelines and follow-up on wages and redeployment.

Mains value-add: The Second Administrative Reforms Commission’s 10th Report, “Refurbishing of Personnel Administration” (2008), emphasises citizen-centric administration and accountability—use these principles to assess grievance handling.

MAINS CASE STUDY EXERCISE

MAINS CASE STUDY EXERCISE You are a labour officer informed that a contractor has disengaged hospital support workers before their contracts end and withheld wages. Identify the stakeholders and ethical issues. What steps would you take to secure a fair, lawful and timely resolution? (150 words)

RELATED PYQ

UPSC CSE Mains 2022, GS Paper IV, Q1(b): “Apart from intellectual competency and moral qualities, empathy and compassion are some of the other vital attributes that facilitate the civil servants to be more competent in tackling the crucial issues or taking critical decisions. Explain with suitable illustrations.” (150 words).

• **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** ESIC: Employees’ State Insurance Corporation