

THE DAILY UPSC BRIEF

HIGH-YIELD DAILY SOURCES & ANALYSIS | 26 SEPTEMBER 2026

TODAY'S COVERAGE

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HOW TO READ THIS BRIEF

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GS PAPER 1: Indian Geography & Disaster Management

Deep Depression Over Bay of Bengal Triggers Odisha's Wettest Monsoon Since 2000, Floods in Andhra Pradesh

Why in news: A deep depression over the Bay of Bengal has pushed Odisha towards its wettest monsoon since 2000 and triggered flooding in coastal Andhra Pradesh, taking the AP flood death toll to nine.

Key Details:

- **Record rainfall:** Odisha logged 1,453.1 mm rain (June 1–Sept 25), 29% above normal, with five days of the season left.
- **Cause:** 11 weather systems, including low-pressure areas and depressions over the Bay, drove this year's rain; the current deep depression triggered the single highest spell.
- **Andhra Pradesh impact:** Heavy inflows swelled the Nagavali, Vamsadhara and Bahuda rivers in Srikakulam; four fresh deaths pushed the State's flood toll to nine.
- **Response:** North Coastal AP shifted to restoration mode; Odisha and AP administrations are coordinating on upstream flow monitoring.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **IMD classification:** Low-pressure systems over the Bay are graded strictly by sustained wind speed, from a low-pressure area up to a super cyclonic storm.
- **Formation zone:** Most such systems form in the monsoon trough/ITCZ over the head Bay of Bengal in September–October, a peak north-east monsoon onset window.

IMD's wind-speed classification of low-pressure systems

Category	Sustained Wind Speed
Low Pressure Area	< 31 km/h
Depression	31–49 km/h
Deep Depression	50–61 km/h
Cyclonic Storm	62–88 km/h
Severe Cyclonic Storm	89–117 km/h
Very Severe Cyclonic Storm	118–166 km/h
Super Cyclonic Storm	> 221 km/h

How to use in UPSC Mains: Cite this as a live example of geophysical phenomena (Bay of Bengal cyclogenesis, ITCZ shift) under GS1, and link it to inter-State disaster coordination and NDMA's early-warning protocols under GS3 disaster management.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to low-pressure systems over the Bay of Bengal, consider the following statements:

1. A 'Deep Depression' has a sustained wind speed higher than a 'Depression' but lower than a 'Cyclonic Storm'.
2. Such systems are classified by the India Meteorological Department solely on the basis of central atmospheric pressure, not wind speed.

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: (a) 1 only

Explanation: IMD classifies Bay of Bengal low-pressure systems primarily by sustained wind speed (depression, deep depression, cyclonic storm, and so on), not by pressure alone.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** IMD: India Meteorological Department | ITCZ: Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone | NDMA: National Disaster Management Authority

GS PAPER 2: Polity, Governance & Federalism

Nationwide Protests Demand CEC's Resignation Amid SIR Row; SC Plea Seeks Probe

Why in news: Congress led nationwide protests demanding Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar's resignation and arrest over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, after reports that two Election Commissioners repeatedly objected to SIR decisions.

Key Details:

- **The trigger:** A media report said Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi had formally recorded objections to SIR-related decisions at least 14 times over 10 months.
- **Political response:** Congress accused the CEC of 'artificial manipulation' of public opinion and demanded reversal of all SIR-linked decisions; several non-BJP parties, including the BJD and CPI(M), separately sought a review.
- **Legal route:** A Supreme Court plea sought an independent Judicial Inquiry Commission or SIT, plus an end-to-end audit of ECI databases, arguing the CEC is an 'ordinary accused' if the nexus with his office breaks down.
- **Institutional stakes:** The row has renewed scrutiny of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, which governs the CEC's appointment and removal safeguards.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Constitutional basis:** Article 324 vests 'superintendence, direction and control' of elections in the Election Commission of India.
- **2023 Act:** It replaced the 1991 Act and set up a selection panel of the PM, a Union Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of Opposition – notably excluding the Chief Justice of India, who was part of an interim Supreme Court-devised panel.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Frame this around ECI's institutional independence, the 'basic structure'/essential-features argument from the Anoop Baranwal case, and the balance between executive appointment power and electoral neutrality.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Election Commission of India, consider the following statements:

1. Article 324 of the Constitution vests the superintendence, direction and control of elections in the Election Commission.
2. An Election Commissioner other than the Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only through the same process as a Supreme Court judge.

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: (a) 1 only

Explanation: Article 324 does vest superintendence of elections in the ECI. However, only the CEC has the same removal protection as a Supreme Court judge (impeachment-like process); other Election Commissioners can be removed on the CEC's recommendation, per Article 324(5).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** CEC: Chief Election Commissioner | ECI: Election Commission of India | SIR: Special Intensive Revision | SIT: Special Investigation Team

J&K Assembly Passes Statehood Resolution 'in Continuation' of 2000 Autonomy Resolution

Why in news: J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah moved a resolution in the Assembly seeking restoration of full Statehood, triggering a BJP walkout and House uproar over any discussion linked to Article 370.

Key Details:

- **What was moved:** The resolution invokes the Assembly's 26 June 2000 and 6 November 2024 resolutions and urges the Union government to restore full Statehood 'immediately and urgently'.
- **CM's clarification:** Mr. Abdullah stressed the resolution seeks only Statehood restoration, not a revival of the 2000 autonomy demand or Article 370 itself.

- **Reorganisation status:** J&K has been a Union Territory with a legislature since the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 split the former State into J&K and Ladakh UTs.
- **Cross-party support:** Congress, CPI(M), PDP, AIP and JKPC backed the resolution; all 29 BJP MLAs opposed it, tore up copies, and stormed the Well of the House.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Constitutional hook:** Article 3 empowers Parliament to alter the boundaries, name or status of a State, including reducing a State to Union Territory status.
- **SC direction:** In its December 2023 verdict upholding the abrogation of Article 370's special status, the Supreme Court directed the Union to restore J&K's Statehood 'at the earliest'.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this to discuss asymmetric federalism, the scope of Parliament's Article 3 power versus a State's consent, and the pending Statehood-restoration timeline flagged by the Supreme Court.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Examine the constitutional provisions governing the reorganisation of States in India. To what extent do they safeguard federal principles when a State is converted into a Union Territory? (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** J&K: Jammu and Kashmir | UT: Union Territory | SC: Supreme Court

Govt. Yet to Decide How Open-Column Caste Data From 2027 Census Will Be Sorted

Why in news: More than a month after notifying the 2027 Census's second-phase questionnaire, officials say they have not yet decided how to sort, tabulate and rationalise caste data collected through an open-column method.

Key Details:

- **The method:** Respondents outside the Scheduled Castes/Tribes can write in their own caste name in an open column, unlike the pre-listed dropdown method used in Bihar's and Telangana's caste surveys.
- **Scale of the exercise:** The Population Enumeration phase carries 40 questions, 13 of them new, including caste, family particulars and COVID-vaccination fields; caste is being enumerated for the first time since Independence.
- **The 2011 precedent:** Critics point to the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), whose similar open-field method yielded over 46 lakh distinct caste names that successive governments never rationalised or released.
- **Process gap:** A government official said the sorting methodology file must still travel from the Registrar-General's office to the Union Home Secretary and then the Cabinet for a final call.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Timeline:** The Population Enumeration phase is scheduled to conclude on September 30, 2026.
- **Precedent:** Bihar's and Telangana's own caste surveys used a closed, pre-listed method rather than an open column, reducing (but not eliminating) classification ambiguity.

How caste-enumeration methods compare

Exercise	Method	Known Outcome
SECC, 2011	Open column	Over 46 lakh distinct caste names; never officially rationalised
Bihar/Telangana caste surveys	Closed, pre-listed list	Narrower, more usable categories
Census 2027 (Phase 2)	Open column	Sorting methodology still undecided

How to use in UPSC Mains: Connect this to the long-running national caste census debate, the Mandal Commission's data gap, and the OBC sub-categorisation exercise (Rohini Commission), which also hinges on reliable caste data.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Census of India, consider the following statements:

1. The 2027 Census will be the first Census since Independence to enumerate caste data for the general population through the household schedule.
 2. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011 was conducted as part of the regular decennial Census under the Census Act, 1948.
- 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: (a) 1 only

Explanation: The 2027 Census marks the first time caste (beyond SC/ST) is enumerated since Independence. The SECC 2011 was a separate exercise conducted outside the Census Act framework, not as part of the regular decennial Census.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** SECC: Socio-Economic and Caste Census | OBC: Other Backward Classes | PE: Population Enumeration

AFSPA Extended for Six More Months in Parts of Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh

Why in news: The Union Home Ministry extended the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act by six months in Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, even as Nagaland's 'disturbed area' tag was eased to fewer districts citing improved security.

Key Details:

- **Manipur:** AFSPA continues across the State except 13 police stations in five valley districts, given continuing ethnic violence since May 2023.
- **Nagaland:** The extension now covers select districts and police stations rather than the whole State, reflecting an 'improved security situation'.
- **Arunachal Pradesh:** Three districts and as many police stations bordering Assam remain declared 'disturbed areas'.
- **Legal effect:** AFSPA, 1958 empowers the armed forces to arrest and search without warrant and use force in a 'disturbed area', with protection from prosecution absent Union government sanction.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **History:** AFSPA has applied in Manipur since 1981; Manipur, once a Union Territory, attained Statehood only in 1972.
- **Reform debate:** The Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee (2005) recommended repealing AFSPA and folding its operational provisions into the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act instead.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Weigh AFSPA's security rationale against human-rights concerns using Supreme Court guidance (encounter-death guidelines) and the Jeevan Reddy Committee's repeal-and-replace recommendation.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Human rights activists constantly highlight that the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) is a draconian law leading to human rights abuses by security forces. Critically evaluate this claim with reference to the safeguards read into the Act by the Supreme Court. (150 words)

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2015, GS Paper 3: "Human right activists constantly highlight the fact that the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) is a draconian act leading to cases of human right abuses by security forces. What sections of AFSPA are opposed by the activists? Critically evaluate the requirement with reference to the view held by the Apex Court."

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** AFSPA: Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act | UAPA: Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act

GS PAPER 3: Economy, Environment & Security

Centre, Banks to Decide UPI Subsidy Quantum as Merchant Charge Kicks in From October 15

Why in news: The government will hold talks with banks on how much subsidy should continue once a Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) starts applying to UPI transactions from October 15, since officials admit the new MDR alone won't cover the platform's costs.

Key Details:

- **What is MDR:** It is the fee a merchant pays payment processors/banks for facilitating a digital transaction; UPI merchant transactions have carried zero MDR since 2020, offset by a government subsidy.
- **Budget outlay:** ₹2,000 crore is budgeted this year under the incentive scheme promoting RuPay debit cards and low-value UPI transactions.
- **Consumer safeguard:** The Finance Ministry will coordinate with the Indian Banks' Association and traders' body CAIT to ensure merchants do not pass the new MDR on to customers.
- **The GST wrinkle:** Whether GST applies to the MDR itself is a separate, unresolved issue; officials clarified only the GST Council, not the Centre alone, can decide the rate or an exemption.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Timeline:** The MDR goes live on UPI on October 15, 2026, with no proposal to delay it.
- **GST Council:** Its October 7 meeting is slated for procedural reforms, not a decision on the MDR-GST rate question.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Link this to digital financial inclusion, the sustainability of zero-MDR public digital infrastructure, and cooperative federalism as reflected in GST Council decision-making (Article 279A).

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), consider the following statements:

1. The Merchant Discount Rate on person-to-merchant UPI transactions has been zero since 2020.
2. Any levy of Goods and Services Tax on payment-processing charges can be decided unilaterally by the Union Government.

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: (a) 1 only

Explanation: MDR on UPI merchant transactions has indeed been zero since 2020. However, GST rate decisions, including on a service like MDR, fall to the GST Council under Article 279A, not the Union Government alone.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** MDR: Merchant Discount Rate | UPI: Unified Payments Interface | GST: Goods and Services Tax | CAIT: Confederation of All India Traders

RBI Bulletin Flags Economic Resilience Amid West Asia-Driven Downside Risks

Why in news: The Reserve Bank of India's September bulletin said the Indian economy stayed resilient in the face of a West Asia-driven crude oil price spike, even as inflation and global bond-yield pressures pose downside risks.

Key Details:

- **The shock:** Escalating West Asia conflict sharply raised crude oil prices in September, reviving concerns about global supply-chain disruption and inflation.
- **Inflation signal:** Headline CPI inflation picked up in August 2026, and core inflation (excluding precious metals) has also risen from recent lows.
- **Fiscal spillover:** Rising sovereign bond yields in advanced economies are straining government finances globally even as India's high-frequency indicators show resilient demand.

- **Reserve strength:** Record forex reserves and strong FCNR(B) deposit inflows are supporting system liquidity and credit growth despite the external turbulence.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Forex reserves:** India's forex reserves hit a record \$766 billion as of September 18, 2026.
- **Adequacy:** This covers 11.2 months of goods imports and more than 100% of external debt outstanding as of end-March 2026.

Forex reserve adequacy (as of September 18, 2026)

Metric	Coverage
Import cover	11.2 months of goods imports
External debt coverage	More than 100% of external debt outstanding (end-March 2026)
Minimum adequacy benchmark	3 months of import cover (widely used norm)

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this to discuss import-cover adequacy benchmarks, the transmission of global crude/bond-yield shocks to a domestic economy, and instruments (FCNR(B) schemes) used to defend the balance of payments.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to India's foreign exchange reserves, consider the following statements:

1. Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) or FCNR(B) deposits are a source of India's external liabilities, not its foreign exchange reserves.
 2. A country is generally considered to have a comfortable import cover if its reserves can finance more than three months of imports.
- 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) Both 1 and 2

Explanation: FCNR(B) deposits are bank liabilities owed to NRI depositors, distinct from reserve assets, though inflows can support systemic liquidity. Three months of import cover is the widely used minimum-adequacy benchmark; India's 11.2 months is well above it.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** RBI: Reserve Bank of India | CPI: Consumer Price Index | FCNR(B): Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits

Karnataka Assembly Unanimously Rejects Kasturirangan-Based Western Ghats ESA Framework

Why in news: The Karnataka Assembly unanimously rejected the Kasturirangan-based Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) framework for the Western Ghats, deepening a decade-long Centre-State impasse even as most other Western Ghats States near a settlement.

Key Details:

- **Two committees, two scales:** The 2011 Gadgil Committee (WGEEP) proposed treating the entire Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive; the 2013 Kasturirangan panel scaled this down to roughly 37% of the range after protests.
- **Karnataka's objections:** The State disputes the accuracy of 2012 satellite/remote-sensing data used to distinguish natural from human-dominated landscapes, and a rule that puts an entire revenue village under the ESA if just 20% of its area qualifies.
- **Other States:** Gujarat is reportedly close to an agreement, Tamil Nadu has no substantive disagreement, and Kerala and Maharashtra are negotiating smaller reductions – leaving Karnataka the main outlier.
- **Procedural shift:** Since 2024, the Centre allows States to notify their own portion of the Western Ghats ESA individually rather than through one uniform notification.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Karnataka's share:** The Western Ghats ESA in Karnataka, as per the Kasturirangan-based draft, covers 8,590.69 sq km – the figure Karnataka's Assembly resolution now rejects.
- **Livelihood stake:** Mining, and other activities restricted under both the Gadgil and Kasturirangan frameworks, underlie the bipartisan political resistance within Karnataka.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this to discuss the trade-off between biodiversity-hotspot conservation and livelihood/development concerns, and the limits of cooperative federalism when one State's inaction affects a shared ecological unit.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. 'Gadgil Committee Report' and 'Kasturirangan Committee Report', sometimes seen in the news, are related to

- (a) Constitutional reforms (b) Ganga Action Plan (c) Linking of rivers (d) Protection of Western Ghats

Answer: (d) Protection of Western Ghats

Explanation: Both committees were constituted to recommend measures for protecting the ecologically sensitive Western Ghats, differing chiefly in the extent of area they proposed as ecologically sensitive.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2016: "'Gadgil Committee Report' and 'Kasturirangan Committee Report', sometimes seen in the news, are related to" – Answer: Protection of Western Ghats.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** ESA: Ecologically Sensitive Area | WGEEP: Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel

Reviewing, Not Revising, India's Nuclear Doctrine Amid a Changed Strategic Landscape

Why in news: A growing debate argues that India's two-decade-old nuclear doctrine – built on credible minimum deterrence and No First Use – needs periodic review given deepening China-Pakistan strategic alignment and new military technologies, without abandoning its core principles.

Key Details:

- **Origins:** The doctrine traces to the Cabinet Committee on Security's January 4, 2003 decision, building on the 1999 Draft Nuclear Doctrine framed after the 1998 Pokhran-II tests and the 1999 Kargil conflict.
- **Built-in exception:** India's No First Use posture retains one express exception: the option of nuclear retaliation following a major biological or chemical attack on India or its forces.
- **Why review now:** Three shifts are cited – deepening China-Pakistan military alignment, new technologies (AI, cyber, hypersonics, missile defence) compressing decision timelines, and a more multipolar, contested geopolitical order.
- **The suggested focus:** Strengthening survivability, command-and-control resilience and second-strike capability, rather than diluting No First Use or credible minimum deterrence.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Doctrine's pillars:** Credible minimum deterrence, No First Use, and civilian control exercised through the Nuclear Command Authority are its three enduring pillars.
- **Regional context:** Pakistan's development of tactical nuclear weapons is seen as an attempt to offset India's conventional military advantage below the threshold of strategic nuclear exchange.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this for a GS3 internal/external security answer on the credibility of India's deterrence posture, distinguishing a doctrinal 'review' (assessing assumptions) from a 'revision' (changing the core commitment).

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to India's nuclear doctrine, consider the following statements:

1. India's declared doctrine of No First Use admits of no exception under any circumstance.
 2. Civilian control over India's nuclear arsenal is institutionally exercised through the Nuclear Command Authority.
- 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: (b) 2 only

Explanation: India's No First Use doctrine carries one express exception – retaliation to a major biological or chemical attack – so statement 1 is incorrect. The Nuclear Command Authority does institutionalise civilian control over nuclear release authority.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** NFU: No First Use | CCS: Cabinet Committee on Security | NCA: Nuclear Command Authority

GS PAPER 4: Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude

Haryana's 'Panchgama' Model: Community Policing as a Model of Dedication to Public Service

Why in news: Haryana DGP Sagar Preet Hooda has conceptualised the 'Panchgama' development model, a village-cluster, community-led social intervention against the State's spreading drug menace, set to launch in Jind on October 11.

Key Details:

- **The model:** Nearly 300 villages will be grouped into 60 clusters of five villages each, with local volunteers, government institutions and police working alongside residents rather than relying on enforcement alone.
- **Ground precedent:** It formalises grassroots efforts already under way, such as Rajthal village's round-the-clock 'thekri pehra' (community vigil), an institution rooted in the Punjab Village and Small Towns Patrol Act, 1918.
- **Enforcement track record:** Haryana's State Narcotics Control Bureau, formed in August 2020, has registered 2,353 FIRs and seized drug-linked assets worth ₹72.70 crore – even as officials concede supply cannot be fully curtailed while demand persists.
- **The values on display:** Proactively building trust-based, participatory governance for a vulnerable rural population – rather than waiting for enforcement outcomes – is a textbook illustration of 'dedication to public service' and 'empathy and compassion towards the weaker sections', both named among UPSC's own foundational values for civil servants.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Scale of the problem:** Haryana has the third-highest number of people needing help for opioid-related problems among States (5.9 lakh), per the Magnitude of Substance Use in India, 2019 report.
- **Rehabilitation gap:** The State has no rehabilitation centre run or supported entirely by its own government; existing private centres operate without government assistance, facing regulatory hurdles.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this as a positive exemplar rather than a dilemma – a GS4 answer can cite it to illustrate how empathy, foundational values and participative governance strengthen ethical public administration beyond routine law enforcement.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Discuss how participatory, community-based models of public service delivery strengthen the ethical foundations of governance, with reference to a recent initiative to combat substance abuse in rural India. (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** DGP: Director General of Police | FIR: First Information Report | NDPS: Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act