

THE DAILY UPSC BRIEF

HIGH-YIELD DAILY SOURCES & ANALYSIS | 27 SEPTEMBER 2026

TODAY'S COVERAGE

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HOW TO READ THIS BRIEF

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GS PAPER 1: Indian Geography & Climatology

A Tale of Two Monsoons: Maharashtra Declares Drought in 265 Taluks as U.P. Battles Record Floods

Why in news: Maharashtra declared drought in 265 of its 358 taluks after a prolonged rainfall deficit, even as a depression over north-east Madhya Pradesh dumped record rain on Uttar Pradesh, killing six and flooding 63 districts.

Key Details:

- **Two extremes, one system:** Both events trace to the same monsoon trough: deficient rain starved Marathwada and Vidarbha, while a depression crossing into U.P. brought Farrukhabad 200 times, and Kanpur Nagar 160 times, its normal rainfall in 24 hours.
- **Maharashtra relief:** The government resolution activates 12 measures – land revenue waiver, farm loan recovery stay, crop loan restructuring, an exam-fee waiver and a ban on power-pump disconnections.
- **Reservoir stress:** Marathwada's dams are at just 46% capacity against 81% a year ago; Vidarbha's Amravati division has fallen from 85% to 64%.
- **U.P. response:** Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ordered a 24-hour damage assessment; Bihar separately reported 50.49 lakh people affected by floods across 578 gram panchayats in 15 districts.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **IMD data:** 20 of Maharashtra's 36 districts recorded deficient rainfall this season, while 63 U.P. districts recorded rainfall above normal in the same spell – both outcomes of a shifting monsoon trough axis.
- **Trigger classification:** A 'Trigger 1' drought declaration (Maharashtra's relief framework) follows a continuous dry spell of at least 21 days, as applied this year.

Disaster Management Framework in India

- **Governing law:** The Disaster Management Act, 2005 set up disaster authorities at the national, state, and district levels.
- **National level:** The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is the top body, headed by the Prime Minister.
- **State level:** Each State has a State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA), headed by the Chief Minister.
- **District level:** Each district has a District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), headed by the District Collector.
- **Relief funding:** Immediate relief money comes from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) at the Centre and State Disaster Response Funds (SDRFs) in each State.
- **Prevention funding:** A separate fund, the National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF), pays for long-term risk-reduction work, not emergency relief.
- **Which disasters qualify:** 12 hazards are officially recognised for SDRF help: cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, cold wave/frost.
- **How a drought is declared:** Not from one number – States weigh rainfall shortfall, dry-spell length, soil moisture and reservoir levels together.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this as a live GS1 example of how a single monsoon trough/depression can simultaneously produce drought in one region and flooding in another, and link it to GS3 disaster-management frameworks (State Disaster Response Fund triggers, drought manuals).

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to drought classification in India, consider the following statements:

1. A 'Trigger 1' drought-like situation, as used by some State governments, is typically declared after a continuous dry spell of a specified minimum number of days.
2. A single monsoon depression cannot simultaneously be associated with both flood conditions in one region and drought conditions in another.

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: A 'Trigger 1' drought classification is indeed based on a minimum continuous dry-spell threshold. However, a monsoon trough/depression can produce sharply divergent rainfall outcomes across regions simultaneously, as seen with Maharashtra's drought and Uttar Pradesh's floods this week.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** IMD: India Meteorological Department | GR: Government Resolution | NDMA: National Disaster Management Authority | SDMA: State Disaster Management Authority | DDMA: District Disaster Management Authority | NDRF: National Disaster Response Fund – not the similarly-named National Disaster Response Force | SDRF: State Disaster Response Fund | NDMF: National Disaster Mitigation Fund

GS PAPER 2: Polity, Governance & Social Justice

EC Goes Into Damage-Control Mode: Special Enrolment Drive, Extended Deadlines Amid SIR Row

Why in news: Facing sustained criticism over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) and reports of internal dissent, the Election Commission announced a special enrolment drive and extended claims-and-objections deadlines, while a fresh explainer clarified exactly how a Chief Election Commissioner can be removed.

Key Details:

- **New measures:** A 'special drive' will help those left out during SIR get enrolled; claims/objections in Delhi now run till October 30, and in Maharashtra till October 12; a screening committee with an independent IIT/IIIT expert will audit the ECINet portal.
- **The dissent at the centre:** Reports say Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi formally objected to SIR-linked decisions repeatedly over 10 months, including centralisation of electoral-roll control and an allegedly unauthorised change to Form 6.
- **Removal is deliberately hard:** Under Article 324(5), the CEC can be removed only 'in like manner and on like grounds' as a Supreme Court judge – proved misbehaviour or incapacity, via a special-majority parliamentary motion under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.
- **A collegial body by design:** The T.N. Seshan case (1991) held that vast, unchecked discretionary powers should not rest with one person within a multi-member Commission; the CEC's vote carries no special veto over the other Election Commissioners.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Legal basis for arrest immunity debate:** Section 16 of the 2023 CEC Act protects a person who is/was CEC from civil or criminal proceedings only for acts done in discharge of official duty – it does not use the words 'arrest' or 'investigation', so it is not a blanket immunity.
- **Governing law:** The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 requires EC decisions to be unanimous where possible, or by majority opinion, with each Commissioner's vote carrying equal weight.

How a CEC can be removed vs. an Election Commissioner

Officeholder	Removal Safeguard
Chief Election Commissioner	Same process as a Supreme Court judge (Article 324(5); special parliamentary majority)
Other Election Commissioners	Can be removed only on the CEC's recommendation (Article 324(5))

Election Commission of India

- **What it is:** A constitutional body (Article 324) that conducts and supervises elections to Parliament, State assemblies, and the offices of President and Vice-President.
- **Who's on it:** One Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) plus other Election Commissioners – currently a 3-member body; the President can change this number.
- **How long they serve:** Each Commissioner serves for 6 years, or until age 65, whichever comes first.
- **Protection for the CEC:** The CEC can be removed only the same way a Supreme Court judge is – a very high bar, needing a special majority in Parliament.
- **Protection for other Commissioners:** An Election Commissioner (other than the CEC) can be removed only if the CEC recommends it – this shields them from pressure by the ruling government.
- **Who appoints them:** A Selection Committee – the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and a Union Cabinet Minister – recommends names, under a 2023 law.
- **Key court cases:** T.N. Seshan case (1995) confirmed the Commission works as an equal, multi-member body, not one where the CEC has extra power. Anoop Baranwal case (2023) examined how Commissioners get appointed.

How to use in UPSC Mains: A ready-made answer for GS2 questions on the independence and collegial functioning of constitutional bodies, using the Anoop Baranwal and T.N. Seshan judgments to discuss checks on unilateral authority.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

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

1. The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only in the same manner as a judge of the Supreme Court.
2. Any other Election Commissioner can be removed from office only on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.

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: Article 324(5) provides both safeguards exactly as stated: the CEC enjoys judge-equivalent removal protection, while other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the CEC's recommendation.

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

Delhi HC: A Muslim Personal-Law Marriage Cannot Shield an Accused From the POCSO Act

Why in news: The Delhi High Court held that a marriage recognised under Muslim personal law cannot confer immunity from prosecution under the POCSO Act when the wife was below 18 at the time of sexual intercourse, dismissing a plea to quash an FIR.

Key Details:

- **The facts:** The petitioner, then nearly 28, married a girl who was 16 years and three months old in December 2024; she later became pregnant, and her age came to light during a hospital visit.
- **The court's reasoning:** Justice Sanjeev Narula held personal law may determine whether a marriage was validly contracted, but cannot create an exception to a criminal statute where Parliament provided none.
- **The fixed threshold:** The judgment holds that the POCSO Act fixes 18 as the age below which consent to sexual activity has no legal efficacy, regardless of personal-law marriageable age.
- **What was rejected:** The petitioners' argument – that under Muslim personal law a girl who has attained puberty is competent to marry, immunising the subsequent relationship – was explicitly rejected as conflating civil validity with criminal liability.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **POCSO Act framework:** The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 defines a child as any person below 18 years, applying uniformly regardless of religion or personal law.
- **Doctrinal point:** A marriage's civil consequences – status, legitimacy, maintenance, succession – are distinct from and do not immunise criminal liability under a secular penal statute.

The POCSO Act, 2012

- **What it does:** Protects every child (any person below 18) from sexual assault, harassment and pornography – the law applies equally to boys and girls.
- **Special courts:** Cases are tried in Special Courts set up just for this law, meant to be faster and less traumatic for the child.
- **Child-friendly trial:** The child gives evidence in one sitting, the trial excludes media/public (in-camera), and the child's identity is legally protected.
- **Burden of proof reversed:** In certain offences, the accused – not the child – must prove their innocence, unlike ordinary criminal law.
- **2019 amendment:** Added the death penalty for the most serious offences and tougher punishment for child pornography.
- **Overrides personal/customary law:** Even if a personal law or custom allows marriage below 18, that can't be used as a defence – POCSO's 18-year line always applies.
- **Who monitors it:** The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) at the Centre, and similar State Commissions (SCPCR), watch over implementation.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this to discuss the relationship between personal laws and secular criminal law, the constitutional basis for a uniform age of consent, and the child-protection rationale behind POCSO overriding customary/religious marriage practices.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Examine the relationship between personal laws and secular criminal statutes in India, with reference to a recent judicial ruling on the applicability of the POCSO Act to a marriage recognised under personal law. (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** POCSO: Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 | HC: High Court | NCPCR: National Commission for Protection of Child Rights | SCPCR: State Commission for Protection of Child Rights

Andhra Pradesh Refuses to Defend Centre's Transgender Rights Law Amendments in Supreme Court

Why in news: The NDA-ruled Andhra Pradesh government told the Supreme Court it has no role in defending the Centre's 2026 amendments to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, even as Uttarakhand separately defended the changes.

Key Details:

- **What changed:** The Centre's amendments removed provisions guaranteeing a transgender person's right to 'self-perceived gender identity' and narrowed the definition of 'transgender person' to physiological characteristics.
- **AP's stance:** Andhra Pradesh's affidavit says enacting the Act is 'primarily a matter for the Union of India' and that it took no independent, discriminatory action against transgender persons – while providing data on 3,750 transgender ID applications, of which 3,233 were certified.
- **Uttarakhand's contrasting defence:** Uttarakhand told the court the amended law caused no 'denial, dilution, erosion or abridgement' of transgender rights, and that welfare/identification needs are shaped by social norms and existing systems.
- **The core challenge:** Petitioners argue the amendments attack the self-determination principle recognised in the Supreme Court's 2014 NALSA judgment and the 'Constitutional morality' and dignity of transgender persons.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Legislative history:** The original Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 codified the right to self-perceived gender identity, following the 2014 NALSA verdict that recognised transgender persons as a 'third gender'.
- **Scale:** At least a dozen petitions are currently before the Supreme Court challenging the 2026 amendments.

Transgender Rights & the NALSA Judgment

- **The NALSA judgment (2014):** The Supreme Court legally recognised transgender persons as a 'third gender', separate from male and female.
- **Self-identification, no proof needed:** NALSA said a person can declare their own gender identity – no surgery or medical test is required to prove it.
- **Reservations directed:** The Court told the government to treat transgender persons as a backward class, eligible for reservation in education and jobs.
- **Constitutional backing:** Based on equality (Article 14), non-discrimination (Articles 15 & 16), free expression (Article 19(1)(a)), and dignity/liberty (Article 21).
- **The follow-up law:** The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 bans discrimination and requires a District Magistrate (DM) to issue an identity certificate.
- **Where the disagreement lies:** Critics say a DM-issued certificate goes against NALSA's promise of pure self-identification – the same tension behind the 2026 amendments now in court.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Frame this around federalism in rights-implementation (a State declining to defend a central law it administers), and the tension between self-determination and physiological-criteria approaches to gender-identity law.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to transgender rights in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Supreme Court's NALSA judgment (2014) recognised transgender persons as a distinct 'third gender' and affirmed the principle of self-perceived gender identity.
2. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act was enacted before the NALSA judgment was delivered.

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 NALSA judgment (2014) did recognise a third gender and self-perceived identity. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act was enacted in 2019, five years after NALSA, not before it.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** NALSA: National Legal Services Authority | TDP: Telugu Desam Party | DM: District Magistrate

At Least 27 UPSC CSE Prelims Questions Challenged as 'Ambiguous' Before the Central Administrative Tribunal

Why in news: Civil Services Examination aspirants have challenged at least 27 questions across General Studies and CSAT papers in this year's Prelims, arguing the provisional answer key contains incorrect, unsupported, or multiple-correct-answer options.

Key Details:

- **Scale of the challenge:** Two groups of candidates have moved the Central Administrative Tribunal – one challenging 8 questions, another challenging 27 – with both cases now listed to be heard together on October 8.
- **What's disputed:** Flagged questions span a Grand Slam tennis ranking-threshold query, the 'Zero FIR' procedure under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (where Hindi and English versions allegedly diverge), and Rigvedic-era irrigation terminology.
- **Why it matters to candidates:** Aspirants say a single disputed question can be the margin between qualifying and not qualifying for Mains, costing a candidate an attempt, especially those in their final permissible attempt.
- **Timeline:** The Prelims was held on May 24, the provisional answer key released three days later, and Mains-qualification results announced in June; Mains itself was held in August.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Process:** UPSC's Civil Services Examination has three stages – Preliminary, Mains and Interview – and publishes a provisional answer key inviting representations before finalising results.
- **Language-version disputes:** One flagged question's Hindi version reportedly uses wording closer to 'investigation', while the English version says 'preliminary inquiry' – a translation-fidelity issue with direct bearing on the correct option.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Relevant for GS2 answers on transparency and accountability in public examination bodies, and the administrative-law principle that a statutory examining body's discretion is still subject to judicial review for patent error.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Discuss the mechanisms available to candidates for challenging errors in a public examination's provisional answer key in India, and evaluate their adequacy in ensuring fairness and accountability. (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** UPSC: Union Public Service Commission | CSE: Civil Services Examination | CAT: Central Administrative Tribunal

GS PAPER 3: Environment, Infrastructure & Disaster Management

Karnataka Legislature Unanimously Rejects Kasturirangan-Based Western Ghats ESA Draft, Seeks a Year for Physical Survey

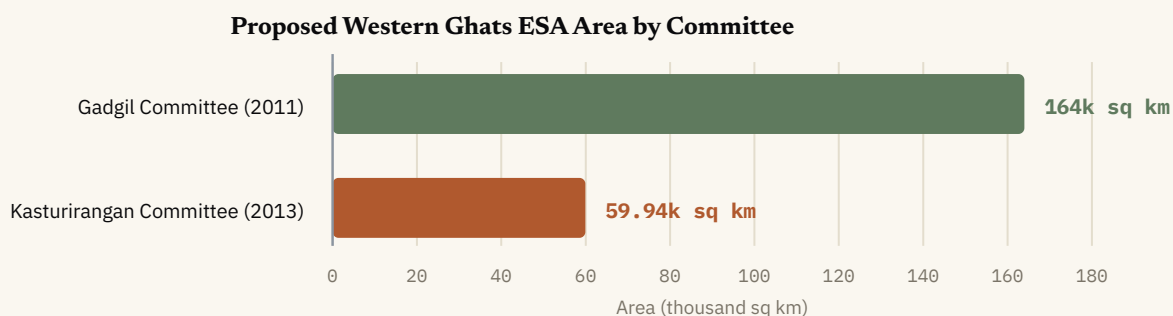
Why in news: Both Houses of the Karnataka Legislature unanimously rejected the seventh draft notification declaring parts of the Western Ghats an Ecologically Sensitive Area, demanding a year to conduct a physical, village-by-village survey before any area is finalised.

Key Details:

- **What's on the table:** The July 27 draft, based on the Kasturirangan Committee's report, proposes 56,825 sq km as ESA across 4,402 villages in six States – with Karnataka's share the largest, spanning 10 districts.
- **Karnataka's core objection:** The State argues the boundaries rely on 2012 satellite data without a joint physical survey, that revenue and forest land haven't been accurately bifurcated, and that an entire village is swept into the ESA if just 20% of its area qualifies.
- **A middle path proposed:** Karnataka has set up a high-level committee headed by a retired judge to review the Kasturirangan report's shortcomings, and legislators cited Kerala's approach – ground-truthing that cut its own ESA area from 13,108 sq km to 9,993 sq km – as a model.
- **What the report actually restricts:** The draft bans mining, quarrying, sand extraction, red-category industries, thermal power plants and buildings over 20,000 sq m within the ESA, while regulating (not banning) other development via environmental clearance.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Gadgil vs Kasturirangan:** The 2011 Gadgil Committee proposed the entire 1.64 lakh sq km Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive in three zones; the 2013 Kasturirangan panel scaled this to about 37%, or roughly 59,940 sq km, focused on the most biologically rich 'natural landscape'.
- **Karnataka's numbers:** Of the draft ESA's 4,402 villages, 1,576 spanning 20,668 sq km fall in Karnataka – the highest village count of any of the six States.



The Western Ghats – Ecology & Protection Framework

- **What it is:** A mountain range along India's west coast through 6 States, a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its exceptional biodiversity.
- **First expert opinion (2011):** The Gadgil Committee (also called WGEEP) said the entire Western Ghats should be protected as ecologically sensitive.
- **A smaller, adopted alternative (2013):** The Kasturirangan Committee suggested protecting only the most important ~37% of the area – the version governments have gone with.
- **What 'ESA' status means:** Harmful activities like mining are restricted inside an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA), and any project there needs special clearance.
- **Legal basis:** ESAs are notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986; the clearance requirement comes from the EIA Notification, 2006.
- **Why it keeps coming up:** States and local communities often push back, saying conservation rules hurt farming/development – a recurring ecology-vs-livelihood tension.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Contrast the precautionary, biodiversity-first Gadgil approach with Kasturirangan's development-accommodating compromise, and discuss cooperative federalism when a shared ecological unit spans States with divergent stances.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) notification for the Western Ghats, consider the following statements:

1. The Kasturirangan Committee recommended a smaller area as ecologically sensitive than the Gadgil Committee had proposed.
2. Under the current draft notification, activities such as mining and thermal power plants are banned across the entire Western Ghats range, not just the ESA.

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: Kasturirangan's proposed ESA (~59,940 sq km) is indeed smaller than Gadgil's entire-range proposal (~1.64 lakh sq km). However, the bans on mining and thermal plants apply only within the notified ESA, not the whole Western Ghats range.

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 | EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment

Vedanta Seeks to Reopen Niyamgiri Bauxite Mine, 13 Years After Gram Sabhas Rejected It

Why in news: Vedanta Group chairman Anil Agarwal asked Odisha to reopen the Niyamgiri bauxite reserves for mining, nearly 13 years after Gram Sabhas of the Dongria Kondh – a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group – rejected the project in India's first environmental referendum.

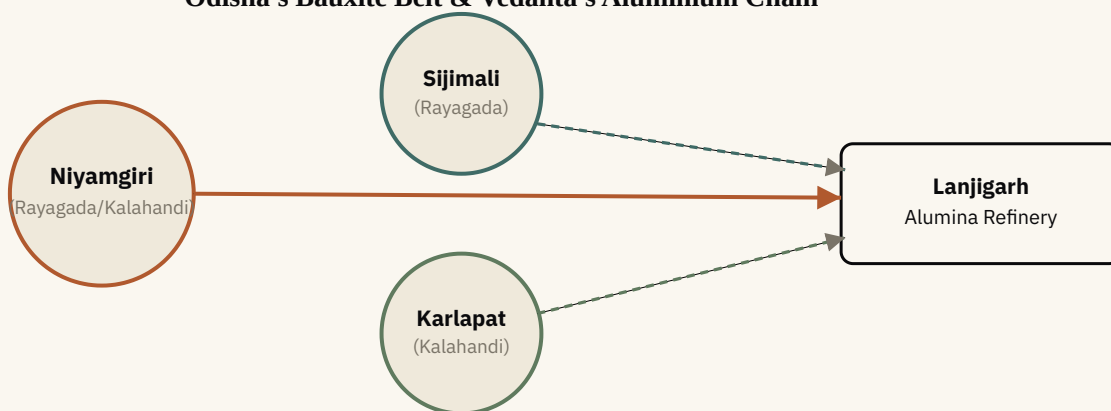
Key Details:

- **The ask:** Agarwal said Odisha has agreed 'all necessary permissions' will be granted immediately, alongside a wider ₹1 lakh crore investment commitment across aluminium smelters, refineries and power plants in the State.
- **The 2013 precedent:** Following a Supreme Court order, 12 Gram Sabhas exercised authority under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 to decide whether mining would infringe their religious, cultural and community rights – and rejected it, in what was widely called India's first environmental referendum.
- **Reserve size:** The Niyamgiri Hills hold an estimated 72-88 million tonnes of bauxite, a key raw material for alumina and aluminium that Vedanta's existing refinery at the hills' foothills currently imports instead.
- **Why now:** Vedanta already holds bids for the Sijimali (Rayagada) and Karlapat (Kalahandi) bauxite mines, and is seeking to secure a fully domestic bauxite supply chain as its Odisha aluminium operations expand.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Forest Rights Act, 2006:** It recognises individual and community forest rights of Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, including the Gram Sabha's authority to protect community forest resources from diversion.
- **PVTG status:** The Dongria Kondh are classified a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, a category marked by pre-agricultural technology, low literacy and declining/stagnant population, warranting heightened statutory protection.

Odisha's Bauxite Belt & Vedanta's Aluminium Chain



Solid line: bauxite reserve sought to be reopened for mining. Dashed lines: bids already held by Vedanta.

Schematic diagram, not to scale.

The Forest Rights Act, 2006

- **What it's for:** Gives legal rights over forest land to Scheduled Tribes and other communities who have traditionally lived in and depended on forests.
- **Who can claim rights:** A family must show it lived in/used that forest land for at least 3 generations (about 75 years) before December 2005.
- **Rights for individuals:** The right to live on and cultivate forest land the family was already using.
- **Rights for the community:** Grazing cattle, collecting minor forest produce like honey or bamboo, and protecting the forest and wildlife together.
- **The Gram Sabha's power:** The village assembly (Gram Sabha) decides who gets forest rights, and its consent is needed before forest land in tribal areas is used for mining or other purposes.
- **Linked law:** In Scheduled ('Fifth Schedule') areas, this Act works alongside PESA, 1996 – another law giving village councils a say over local resources.
- **A real example:** In 2013, Gram Sabhas in Niyamgiri (Odisha) used this power to reject a bauxite mining project – seen as India's first 'environmental referendum'.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this to weigh mineral resource development and Atmanirbhar Bharat goals in aluminium/critical minerals against Gram Sabha consent rights under the Forest Rights Act and PESA, 1996 – a recurring GS2/GS3 tribal-rights theme.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Discuss the significance of Gram Sabha consent under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 in balancing mineral resource development with the rights of forest-dwelling tribal communities, with reference to a recent case. (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** PVTG: Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group | FRA: Forest Rights Act, 2006 | PESA: Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996

Centre Notifies Kandla, JNPA, Mundra and Paradip as India's First 'Mega Ports'

Why in news: The Union government notified Deendayal (Kandla), Jawaharlal Nehru, Mundra and Paradip as 'mega ports' under the new Indian Ports Act, 2025, a fresh classification meant to channel priority infrastructure investment to India's highest-throughput gateways.

Key Details:

- **What changed:** The notification, issued September 25 and taking effect on Gazette publication, classifies these four ports as mega ports under Section 73(2)/73(3) of the Indian Ports Act, 2025, replacing the older 'major port' framework's exclusivity.
- **A private port included:** Mundra, operated by Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone, becomes the first non-major port to earn mega-port status, alongside three traditionally major ports – a first for a privately run Indian port.
- **The criteria:** The four ports were found to satisfy mega-port classification criteria notified on July 30, 2026, developed in consultation with State governments.
- **Why it matters:** Mega-port status is expected to unlock streamlined regulatory clearances and prioritised capital allocation, positioning these four as anchors for India's container and bulk-cargo growth.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Legal transition:** The Indian Ports Act, 2025 replaces the colonial-era Indian Ports Act, 1908, modernising port governance, safety and environmental-protection provisions.
- **Existing framework:** India's 12 Major Ports were earlier governed directly by the Centre under the Major Port Authorities Act, 2021, while minor/intermediate ports fall under State maritime boards.

Port Classification & Governance in India

- **Two kinds of ports (old system):** 12 'Major Ports' are run directly by the central government; all other, smaller ports are 'Minor/Intermediate Ports', run by State governments.
- **A new law, a new tag:** The Indian Ports Act, 2025 replaced an old 1908-era law, and created a new 'mega port' tag based on how much cargo a port handles.
- **Mega ports aren't only Major Ports:** Even a port that was never a 'Major Port' – like the privately-run Mundra port – can now be tagged a 'mega port' too.
- **Ports worth remembering:** Kamarajar Port (near Chennai) – India's first major port set up as a company; Mundra – India's largest privately-owned port; Visakhapatnam – among India's largest container ports.
- **The government's port push:** Sagarmala (launched 2015) is the flagship programme for port-led development, better connectivity, and coastal community welfare.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Link this to India's Sagarmala programme, port-led development strategy, and the shift from a Centre-State 'major/minor port' binary to a throughput-based mega-port classification under the new 2025 Act.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to port governance in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Indian Ports Act, 2025 replaces the Indian Ports Act, 1908.
2. A port that is not classified as a 'Major Port' cannot be notified as a 'mega port' under the Indian Ports Act, 2025.

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 2025 Act does replace the 1908 Act. However, Mundra – not a Major Port – has now been notified as a mega port, showing mega-port status is not restricted to Major Ports.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2023, GS Paper I: "Consider the following pairs: Port – Well known as: 1. Kamarajar Port – First major port in India registered as a company 2. Mundra Port – Largest privately owned port in India 3. Visakhapatnam – Largest container port in India. How many of the above pairs are correctly matched?" – only two of the three pairs are correct.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** JNPA: Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority | SEZ: Special Economic Zone

IIT-Madras Tool Flags That Standard Seismic Maps Misjudge Risk for Himalayan 'Megadams'

Why in news: An IIT-Madras team evaluated 6,545 dams under India's National Dam Safety Authority and found that standard seismic zone maps both under- and over-estimate earthquake risk for large Himalayan dams like Tehri and Bhakra, once site-specific modelling is applied.

Key Details:

- **The method:** Researchers built a tool to perform 'probabilistic seismic hazard analysis', drawing on a catalogue of over 68,000 earthquakes from 2600 BC to 2019 and maps of India's major faultlines.
- **The finding:** For Himalayan megadams, site-specific modelling showed the standard zone maps' projected ground accelerations were too conservative – understating the true seismic hazard at these specific sites.
- **Why it matters:** India's current seismic zonation (Zones II-V) is a broad, regional classification; a dam-specific model captures local fault geometry and soil conditions that a coarse zone map cannot.
- **Scale of the exercise:** The evaluation covered 6,545 dams registered under the National Dam Safety Authority, making it one of the most extensive dam-specific seismic hazard reviews conducted for India to date.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Governing law:** The Dam Safety Act, 2021 established the National Dam Safety Authority to oversee surveillance, inspection and safety of specified dams across India.
- **Earthquake catalogue depth:** The underlying dataset spans over 4,600 years of seismic history (2600 BC-2019 AD), combined with mapped major faultlines to model site-specific hazard.

Dam Safety & Seismic Zonation in India

- **The law:** The Dam Safety Act, 2021 created a National Dam Safety Authority to ensure India's large dams are regularly inspected and kept safe.
- **Which dams are covered:** Dams that are 15 metres or taller, and some shorter dams that meet certain risk criteria.
- **India's earthquake-risk map:** The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) divides India into Seismic Zones II-V, from lowest to highest risk.
- **Highest-risk areas:** The Himalayan belt, the north-east, and Kutch (Gujarat) mostly fall in the highest-risk zones (IV-V).
- **Why a general map isn't enough:** A country-wide map can miss local details – like a nearby fault line or soft soil – that matter for one specific, large dam.
- **A better method for critical dams:** Scientists do a detailed, site-specific study (Probabilistic Seismic Hazard Analysis, or PSHA) for high-risk structures like major dams.
- **How dams typically fail (common exam theme):** Water overflowing the dam (overtopping), water leaking through weak points (seepage/piping), poor design/construction, or the ground beneath giving way.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this for a GS3 disaster-management/S&T answer on strengthening critical infrastructure resilience, contrasting broad seismic zonation with site-specific probabilistic hazard modelling for large dams.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to seismic hazard assessment for dams in India, consider the following statements:

1. India's dams are regulated for safety purposes under a central law that established the National Dam Safety Authority.
2. A site-specific probabilistic seismic hazard analysis always projects lower ground acceleration values than a broad regional seismic zone map.

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 Dam Safety Act, 2021 did establish the National Dam Safety Authority. However, the IIT-Madras study found site-specific modelling for Himalayan megadams projected HIGHER hazard than standard zone maps in some cases, not uniformly lower.

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2023, GS Paper 3 (10 marks): "Dam failures are always catastrophic, especially on the downstream side, resulting in a colossal loss of life and property. Analyze the various causes of dam failures. Give two examples of large dam failures."

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** NDSA: National Dam Safety Authority | PSHA: Probabilistic Seismic Hazard Analysis | BIS: Bureau of Indian Standards

GS PAPER 4: Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude

Haryana's Tele-ECG Push: An ASHA Worker and a Rural Doctor's Three-Minute Diagnosis That Saved a Life

Why in news: A Haryana government-Sunfox Technologies tele-ECG partnership let a rural medical officer diagnose ASHA worker Raj Rani's blocked coronary artery in under three minutes at a Community Health Centre, stabilising her before a life-saving angioplasty – a model of proactive public service in a State with rural India's biggest cardiac-care gap.

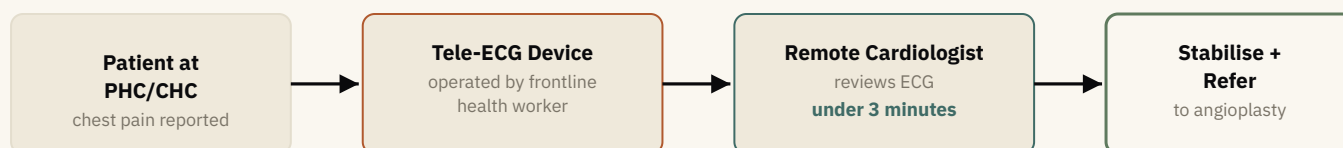
Key Details:

- **What happened:** Raj Rani, 52, went to Vyaspur CHC in Yamunagar with chest and arm pain; a tele-ECG device let a cardiologist two hours away confirm single-vessel disease within three minutes, and she received clot-busting medication before referral for angioplasty the next day.
- **The system behind it:** Under 'Spandan One', nearly 600 government facilities across Haryana got tele-ECG devices operable by frontline health workers, with clinician-reviewed results available in under three minutes.
- **Measured impact:** The Spandan dashboard recorded 33,854 ECG tests and 1,342 critical cases detected as of September 17; district hospitals are seeing a 20% reduction in emergency-department cardiac deaths as patients arrive pre-stabilised.
- **The values on display:** Frontline health workers and medical officers proactively building a diagnosis-to-referral pathway for rural patients who previously had no local cardiac-care access is a direct illustration of 'dedication to public service' and 'empathy towards the weaker sections' – both named among UPSC's own foundational values for civil servants.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Scale of the problem:** India records 31 lakh cardiovascular deaths a year, 60% among people aged 40-69, with Indians on average showing effects of heart disease a decade earlier than in the West.
- **Remaining gap:** Officials note that tele-ECG alone is not enough – transport and referral support to higher centres remains a missing link in completing the emergency-care pathway.

How a Rural Cardiac Emergency Gets Handled Under Spandan One



Nearly 600 Haryana facilities live on this pathway; 33,854 ECGs done and 1,342 critical cases caught as of Sept 17, 2026.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use this as a positive exemplar of empathy and dedication to public service in last-mile healthcare delivery – a GS4 answer can cite it alongside a GS2 point on strengthening India's primary healthcare infrastructure.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Discuss how technology-enabled, proactive public health interventions at the primary-care level embody the values of empathy and dedication to public service, with reference to a recent rural healthcare initiative in India. (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** ASHA: Accredited Social Health Activist | CHC: Community Health Centre