

THE DAILY UPSC BRIEF

HIGH-YIELD DAILY SOURCES & ANALYSIS | 21 OCTOBER 2026

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PRELIMS POINTERS — TODAY IN ONE LINE EACH

1. **MMX (Martian Moons eXploration)** — Japan's mission, launched on 20 October 2026 from Tanegashima, aims to be the first to bring back samples from a moon of Mars (Phobos).
2. **Abyei** — an oil-rich border region disputed between Sudan and South Sudan; a drone strike on a market there killed at least 153.
3. **Darbar Move** — the twice-yearly shift of J&K government offices between Srinagar (summer capital) and Jammu (winter capital); stopped after 2021, resumed in 2025.
4. **Transmissible cancers** — known in dogs, Tasmanian devils and bivalve molluscs; a *Nature* study adds melanoma in the brown bullhead catfish as a fourth instance.
5. **Risdiplam** — oral drug for spinal muscular atrophy; a generic version is priced about 97% below the patented one, and Keralam funds free SMA treatment for children.

HOW TO READ THIS BRIEF

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

GS PAPER 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Ladakh's Hill Councils Recast; Centre's Draft Gives L-G Final Say on UT Laws

Why in news: The President has promulgated the LAHDC (Amendment) Regulation, 2026, creating hill councils in all of Ladakh's districts, as an MHA draft proposes a UT-wide elected body.

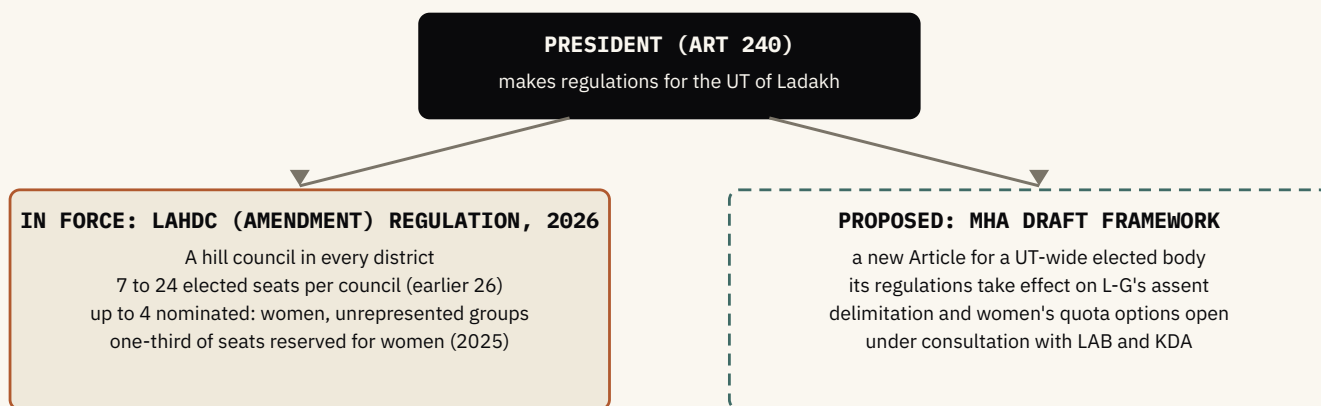
Story so far: The 18 Oct Brief covered the MHA's two-stage plan (a constitutional amendment plus an Art 240 regulation), rejected by Ladakh groups within hours. New today: the hill-council regulation is notified and the draft's details emerge.

Key Details:

- **In force:** Councils now cover every district (eight, per the L-G, including newly created Sankoo); elected seats are 7–24 each, down from 26 earlier.
- **Nomination:** Up to four members may be nominated from women and unrepresented communities, alongside the one-third reservation for women made in 2025.
- **Proposal:** The MHA draft proposes a new constitutional Article for a UT-level elected body whose regulations would take effect only on the L-G's assent.
- **Open questions:** Delimitation by an election authority or a Delimitation Commission; seat basis (population, area); one-third or up to 50% seats for women.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Demands:** The LAB and KDA seek Statehood and Sixth Schedule status; the KDA says council changes were made without consulting people mid-talks.
- **History:** Ladakh became a UT without a legislature in 2019; before that it had only two hill councils, Leh and Kargil.

Ladakh's Governance Layers: What Is in Force and What Is Proposed

Solid border = notified law; dashed border = proposal still under discussion

Schematic diagram

Ladakh's Autonomous Hill Development Councils

- **Origin:** LAHDC-Leh was set up in 1995 after a long agitation for autonomy; LAHDC-Kargil followed in 2003.
- **Law:** Councils run under the LAHDC Act, 1997, which the President can now modify for the UT by regulation.
- **Functions:** Local planning, land use within limits, and development schemes; they lack the legislative powers of Sixth Schedule councils.
- **Regulation route:** Ladakh has no legislature, so the President makes regulations for it under Art 240, as for the 2025 reservation and language regulations.
- **Not to confuse:** A hill council created by ordinary law with an Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule (only in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram).

Prelims angle: There are 10 Sixth Schedule Autonomous District Councils — three each in Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram, one in Tripura — under Art 244(2).

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on UT governance, decentralisation and tribal autonomy; contrasts statutory councils with constitutional (Sixth Schedule) protection.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	Since 2019, Ladakh is governed largely through Presidential regulations, without its own legislature.
BODY	Constitutional: Art 240 vs Sixth Schedule; democratic: elected body with L-G veto; ecological: fragile land, tribal majority; security: border region; federal: consultation deficit.
WAY FORWARD	Time-bound dialogue with LAB-KDA; protected land and job safeguards; elections to councils on schedule; clear subject list for any UT body.

Mains value-add: Art 240(2) lets a Presidential regulation 'repeal or amend any Act made by Parliament' for the UT — cite to show how executive law-making substitutes for a legislature in Ladakh.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE

Q. With reference to Ladakh, consider the following statements:

1. Article 240 empowers the President to make regulations for the peace, progress and good government of certain Union Territories.
2. Ladakh's tribal areas are at present administered under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
3. One-third of seats in Ladakh's Autonomous Hill Development Councils are reserved for women.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: Art 240 gives the President regulation-making power for listed UTs, used for Ladakh. Statement 2 is incorrect: Sixth Schedule status is a demand, not current law; it covers only Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Statement 3 is correct: a 2025 regulation reserved one-third of seats for women.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2015: "The provisions in Fifth Schedule and Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India are made in order to (a) protect the interests of Scheduled Tribes (b) determine the boundaries between States (c) determine the powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayats (d) protect the interests of all the border States" — Answer: (a).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** LAHDC: Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council | MHA: Ministry of Home Affairs | UT: Union Territory | L-G: Lieutenant-Governor | LAB: Leh Apex Body | KDA: Kargil Democratic Alliance | Art: Article

Kotia: An Unsettled Odisha–Andhra Boundary Returns to the Headlines

Why in news: Andhra Pradesh has notified panchayat polls on 28 November in three panchayats of Kotia, a cluster of villages that Odisha also claims, drawing protests in Odisha.

Key Details:

- **The area:** 21 villages in Odisha's Koraput district; most voters hold voter IDs of both States, and both run welfare schemes there.
- **Origin:** A 1942 demarcation by H.S. Gilby placed the villages in the Madras (later Andhra) area; disputes began in 1955 over rent collection.
- **Courts:** Odisha's 1968 suit was disposed of in 2006: the SC held that only Parliament can settle State boundaries. A fresh original suit is pending.
- **Politics:** Odisha's Opposition accuses the ruling BJP of 'silence' because the TDP supports the Union government.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Rival claims:** Both States held panchayat elections in the area in 2021 and 2022; Andhra has stepped up welfare there since 2015.
- **Odisha's response:** A ₹100-crore development package and a 2018 inter-departmental committee to monitor Andhra's activities.

Inter-State Boundary Disputes: The Legal Map

- **Parliament's power:** Under Art 3, Parliament may by law alter the area or boundaries of any State, after referring the Bill to the State Legislature for its views.
- **SC jurisdiction:** Art 131 gives the SC original jurisdiction over disputes between States involving a legal right.
- **Limits:** Courts have held that fixing boundaries is a political question for Parliament, as in the 2006 Kotia ruling.
- **Other disputes:** Assam–Mizoram, Assam–Meghalaya, Karnataka–Maharashtra (Belagavi) are other live boundary rows.
- **Tools:** Commissions (Mahajan Commission, 1966, on Belagavi), MoUs (Assam–Meghalaya, 2022) and Zonal Councils.
- **Not to confuse:** Art 131 original suits (between governments) with Art 262 water disputes, which Parliament may keep out of courts.

Prelims angle: Zonal Councils, set up under the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, are statutory bodies chaired by the Union Home Minister that discuss inter-State issues.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on inter-State disputes and cooperative federalism; shows how welfare competition replaces a settled boundary.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	India still has unresolved boundaries decades after the States were reorganised.
BODY	Constitutional: Art 3 vs Art 131; administrative: dual voter IDs and parallel schemes; tribal: identity and services; political: coalition dependence.
WAY FORWARD	Parliament-led settlement or a boundary commission; Zonal Council mediation; joint service delivery till settlement.

Mains value-add: The Mahajan Commission (1966) on the Karnataka–Maharashtra border shows a commission report can still fail if States do not accept it — cite to argue for consent-based settlement.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. Under Article 131, the Supreme Court has original jurisdiction in a dispute between two or more States.
2. In 2006, the Supreme Court decided the Kotia dispute in Odisha's favour.
3. Under Article 3, Parliament may by law alter the boundaries of any State.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: Art 131 covers inter-State legal disputes. Statement 2 is incorrect: in 2006 the SC said boundaries are for Parliament to settle and did not rule for either State. Statement 3 is correct: Art 3 lets Parliament alter State boundaries.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2014: "The power of the Supreme Court of India to decide disputes between the Centre and the States falls under its (a) advisory jurisdiction (b) appellate jurisdiction (c) original jurisdiction (d) writ jurisdiction" — Answer: (c).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** SC: Supreme Court | BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party | TDP: Telugu Desam Party | Art: Article

Overdue Panchayat Polls: Allahabad HC Orders U.P. to Vote Within Three Months

Why in news: The Allahabad HC has directed U.P. and its SEC to hold three-tier panchayat polls within three months under the existing 27% OBC quota, as terms expired in May 2026.

Story so far: The 15 Oct Brief noted the three-month deadline as a quick fact. New today: the political and legal fallout, and the State's plan to approach the SC.

Key Details:

- **Ruling:** Elections cannot be delayed past constitutional limits; OBC seats cannot be turned open merely because the commission's inquiry is pending.
- **Triple test:** The HC held the test governs restructuring OBC quotas; it is not a precondition that can stall every overdue election.
- **Interim rule:** Outgoing gram pradhans function as administrators; village heads say spending now needs district approval.
- **Next step:** A minister says the State is ready, but U.P. may move the SC, citing the triple-test requirement.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Commission:** U.P. set up its Dedicated Backward Classes Commission on 18 May 2026, after the terms had ended.
- **Separate rolls:** U.P. is among the few States that keep their own rolls for local polls rather than using the ECI's master list.

OBC Reservation in Local Bodies and the Triple Test

- **Enabling clause:** Art 243D(6) and 243T(6) let States reserve seats in panchayats and municipalities for backward classes.
- **Term:** Art 243E: a panchayat lasts five years, and elections must be completed before its term ends.
- **Krishna Murthy (2010):** A Constitution Bench held local-body quotas differ from jobs and education, and need empirical backwardness data.
- **Gawali (2021):** Triple test: a dedicated commission; local-body-wise proportions from its data; total SC/ST/OBC quota within 50%.
- **SEC:** Art 243K: a State Election Commission conducts panchayat polls; the Governor appoints the State Election Commissioner.
- **Not to confuse:** Political backwardness (local bodies, triple test) with social and educational backwardness (Art 15(4), 16(4)).

Prelims angle: Art 243E(3) also requires elections within six months if a panchayat is dissolved before its term ends.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on decentralisation and the SEC's independence; shows how quota litigation can delay local democracy.

Answer skeleton

INTRO The 73rd Amendment guarantees regular panchayat elections, yet delays recur.

BODY Constitutional: Art 243E timelines; judicial: triple test; administrative: rule by administrators; political: poll timing before Assembly elections.

WAY FORWARD Permanent dedicated commissions; data collected well before terms end; empowered SECs; SC timelines as in *Suresh Mahajan* (2022).

Mains value-add: In *Suresh Mahajan* (2022), the SC held that local-body elections cannot be postponed because the triple test is incomplete — cite on the primacy of timely polls.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE-HARD

Q. With reference to panchayats, consider the following statements:

1. Article 243E provides that every panchayat shall continue for five years from the date of its first meeting, unless dissolved sooner.
2. The 'triple test' for OBC reservation in local bodies was laid down in *Indra Sawhney* (1992).
3. Elections to panchayats are conducted by the State Election Commission.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: Art 243E sets a five-year term. Statement 2 is incorrect: the triple test comes from *Vikas Kishanrao Gawali* (2021), building on *K. Krishna Murthy* (2010); *Indra Sawhney* concerned job quotas. Statement 3 is correct: Art 243K vests panchayat polls in the SEC.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2017: "Local self-government can be best explained as an exercise in (a) Federalism (b) Democratic decentralisation (c) Administrative delegation (d) Direct democracy" — Answer: (b).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** HC: High Court | SEC: State Election Commission | OBC: Other Backward Classes | SC: Supreme Court | ECI: Election Commission of India | ST: Scheduled Tribes | Art: Article

India–New Zealand FTA Comes Into Force

Why in news: The India–New Zealand FTA, signed on 27 April, took effect on 20 October, giving duty-free access to Indian goods across New Zealand's tariff lines.

Story so far: The 1 Oct Brief marked the first year of the India–EFTA TEPA. New today: a seventh trade pact in five years enters into force.

Key Details:

- **Access:** All Indian exports, including labour-intensive textiles and leather, enter New Zealand duty-free; some items earlier faced tariffs up to 10%.
- **Investment:** New Zealand has committed to facilitate about \$20 billion of investment in India over 15 years.
- **Track record:** It is India's 17th operational FTA and the seventh to enter into force in five years.
- **History:** Talks launched in 2010 stalled in 2015 and were revived in March 2025 before quick conclusion.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Trade base:** Goods trade rose 49% to \$1.3 billion in 2024-25; Indian exports grew 32% to \$711 million.
- **Services:** Commitments cover IT and IT-enabled services, education, professional services and tourism.

Trade Pacts That Entered Into Force in the Last Five Years

Partner	Agreement	Type
Mauritius	CECPA	First pact with an African country
UAE	CEPA	Comprehensive goods and services
Australia	ECTA	Interim agreement
EFTA (4 nations)	TEPA	Investment-linked commitments
United Kingdom	CETA	Goods, services, mobility
Oman	CEPA	Gulf partner
New Zealand	FTA	Duty-free access for all Indian exports

India's Trade Agreements: Types and Terms

- **PTA:** A preferential trade agreement cuts tariffs on a limited list of goods.
- **FTA:** Removes tariffs on most trade between partners, while each keeps its own tariffs for others.
- **CEPA / CECA:** Go beyond goods to services, investment and often mobility.
- **Rules of origin:** Decide which goods qualify, to stop third-country goods being routed through a partner.
- **WTO cover:** GATT Art XXIV allows FTAs as an exception to most-favoured-nation treatment if they cover 'substantially all trade'.
- **Not to confuse:** An FTA with a customs union, whose members adopt a common external tariff (e.g., the EU).

Prelims angle: India withdrew from RCEP negotiations in November 2019; RCEP, which entered into force in 2022, links ASEAN with China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2/GS3 answers on India's trade strategy after RCEP and on export-led manufacturing.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	India has shifted from RCEP-scepticism to a rapid run of bilateral deals with developed economies.
BODY	Economic: labour-intensive exports, investment; strategic: Indo-Pacific partners; domestic: protecting dairy and farm interests; institutional: utilisation of preferences.
WAY FORWARD	Help MSMEs use FTAs; certify rules of origin digitally; monitor safeguards; link FTAs to mobility for skilled workers.

Mains value-add: The Foreign Trade Policy, 2023 targets US\$2 trillion of exports by 2030 — cite to show why market-access deals with developed economies matter.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ EASY-MODERATE

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. The India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement entered into force in October 2026.
2. The European Free Trade Association comprises Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.
3. India is a member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only one (b) Only two (c) All three (d) None

Answer: (b) Only two

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: the FTA took effect on 20 October 2026. Statement 2 is correct: EFTA has these four members. Statement 3 is incorrect: India left RCEP talks in 2019 and is not a member.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2016: "The term 'Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' often appears in the news in the context of the affairs of a group of countries known as (a) G20 (b) ASEAN (c) SCO (d) SAARC" — Answer: (b).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** FTA: Free Trade Agreement | EFTA: European Free Trade Association | TEPA: Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement | CECPA: Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement | CEPA: Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement | ECTA: Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement | CETA: Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement | UAE: United Arab Emirates | PTA: Preferential Trade Agreement | CECA: Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement | WTO: World Trade Organization | GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade | RCEP: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership | ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations | MSMEs: Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises | NITI: National Institution for Transforming India

SCO Heads of Government Meet in Dushanbe: India Presses on Terrorism

Why in news: At the 25th SCO Council of Heads of Government in Dushanbe, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh urged members to dismantle the 'entire ecosystem' of terrorism.

Key Details:

- **India's line:** No justification, no double standards and no safe havens for terrorism — said in the presence of Pakistan's Deputy PM.
- **New bodies:** India welcomed the Universal Centre (Tashkent) and the Anti-Drug Centre (Dushanbe) as permanent SCO bodies, urging no duplication.

- **Connectivity:** Backed INSTC and Chabahar, but said projects must respect sovereignty and territorial integrity — India's standard objection to the BRI.
- **Outcomes:** A joint communiqué, the SCO budget for 2027, and an action plan on trade and economic cooperation for 2026–2030.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **India's offer:** India will host the first SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum later this year.
- **Economic focus:** Resilient supply chains, trade facilitation and technology for food and energy security.

SCO: Key Bodies and Where They Sit

Body	Role	Seat
Heads of State Council	Highest decision-making body	Annual summit, rotating host
Heads of Government Council	Economic cooperation and budget	Rotating host (2026: Dushanbe)
Secretariat	Permanent administrative body	Beijing
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure	Tashkent
Universal Centre	Countering security threats (new)	Tashkent
Anti-Drug Centre	Countering drug trafficking (new)	Dushanbe

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

- **Origin:** Grew out of the 'Shanghai Five' (1996); founded in Shanghai on 15 June 2001.
- **Members:** Ten: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan, Iran and Belarus.
- **India:** An observer from 2005; became a full member with Pakistan at the Astana summit in 2017.
- **Expansion:** Iran joined in 2023 and Belarus in 2024.
- **Languages:** Russian and Chinese are the official working languages.
- **Not to confuse:** The SCO with the CSTO, a Russia-led military alliance of which India is not part.

Prelims angle: The INSTC is a multimodal route linking India, Iran, Russia and Central Asia; Chabahar port is in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on India's Eurasian diplomacy, counter-terrorism multilateralism and connectivity versus sovereignty.

Answer skeleton

INTRO The SCO is India's main platform with Central Asia, Russia and China in one room.

BODY Security: RATS and terror financing; economic: trade, energy; connectivity: INSTC vs BRI; strategic: balancing China, engaging Russia; friction: Pakistan.

WAY FORWARD Use SCO for counter-terror cooperation; push Chabahar–INSTC; resist BRI endorsements; deepen Central Asia ties.

Mains value-add: India has repeatedly declined to endorse the BRI in SCO declarations, citing CPEC's passage through PoK — cite to show principled limits on connectivity cooperation.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ EASY-MODERATE

Q. With reference to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, consider the following statements:

1. The headquarters of its Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure is in Tashkent.
2. India became a full member of the organisation in 2017.
3. The Council of Heads of Government is its highest decision-making body.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: RATS is based in Tashkent. Statement 2 is correct: India and Pakistan became full members at Astana in 2017. Statement 3 is incorrect: the Heads of State Council is the highest body; the Heads of Government Council deals mainly with economic matters and the budget.

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2021, GS2: "Critically examine the aims and objectives of SCO. What importance does it hold for India?" (250 words, 15 marks)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation | PM: Prime Minister | INSTC: International North-South Transport Corridor | BRI: Belt and Road Initiative | RATS: Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure | CSTO: Collective Security Treaty Organization | CPEC: China–Pakistan Economic Corridor | PoK: Pakistan-occupied Kashmir

QUICK FACTS & EXAMPLES — GS PAPER 2

Roll inclusions lag. In Delhi's special intensive revision, only 1,238 of about 4.5 lakh Form 6 applications for inclusion were disposed of in 42 days (about 0.27%), against 47.5 lakh names removed at the draft stage; claims close on 30 October and the final roll is due on 4 December.

How to use: GS2 (electoral rolls): evidence that correcting exclusions is as important as removing ineligible names.

UN experts on Delhi detentions. UN human rights experts said the detention of over 7,000 youths, journalists and rights defenders during recent Delhi protests violates India's core obligations on peaceful assembly, expression and liberty, and sought an impartial inquiry.

How to use: GS2 (rights, international obligations): use with Art 19(1)(b) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Assistive devices. A disability rights group wants communication aids and prostheses classed as 'essential' under the draft Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Amendment) Rules, 2026, which propose accessibility standards for assistive products under Section 40 of the 2016 Act.

How to use: GS2 (vulnerable sections): example of how classification affects insurance and public funding for disabled persons.

A State top-up to rural jobs. Tamil Nadu's 'Vetri 150' scheme will fund 25 extra days of work for rural households that complete the 125 days guaranteed under the central VB-G RAM G law.

How to use: GS2 (welfare federalism): example of a State building on a central guarantee.

China exits a Colombo project. China Merchants Port Holdings withdrew from a \$392 million logistics hub at Colombo port that it had pledged in 2023; Sri Lanka plans a competitive public–private partnership instead.

How to use: GS2 (India's neighbourhood): use on shifting Chinese investment in South Asia.

GS PAPER 3: ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT, S&T & DISASTER MANAGEMENT**Telecom Towers in the Path of Disasters: CDRI Maps Five States**

Why in news: A CDRI study with the DoT and NDMA mapped 48,416 telecom towers in five high-risk States and found many exposed to cyclones, floods and landslides.

Key Details:

- **Assam:** 83% of 18,388 towers lie in very high cyclonic-wind zones; all towers in Assam and Uttarakhand sit in seismic Zones IV and V.
- **Tamil Nadu:** 57% face high or very high cyclonic wind risk, 43% high flood exposure and 14% storm surges above six metres.
- **System risk:** Networks can fail without tower damage when floods cut power, fibre, backhaul, roads or generator fuel.
- **Fixes:** Raise generators, flood doors, waterproof cabling, stronger towers, battery backup, and deployable 'Cells on Wheels'.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Stakes:** Telecom enables early warning and relief; 5G is expected to add \$450 billion to India's economy from 2023 to 2040.
- **Caveat:** Exposure figures describe hazard at tower locations, not certain damage, per CDRI's Director General Amit Prothi.

Hazard Exposure of Telecom Towers (CDRI assessment)

State	Key exposure finding
Assam	83% in very high cyclonic-wind zones; all in seismic Zones IV–V
Tamil Nadu	57% high/very high wind risk; 43% high flood exposure
Odisha	57% high/very high wind; 14% surge above 6 m; 13% flood
Gujarat	28% very high winds; 12% flood; 12% in seismic Zones IV–V
Uttarakhand	25% very high winds; 10% high landslide susceptibility

Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

- **Launch:** Announced by India at the UN Climate Action Summit, New York, in September 2019.
- **Nature:** A partnership of national governments, UN agencies, banks, the private sector and academia.
- **Secretariat:** New Delhi.
- **IRIS:** 'Infrastructure for Resilient Island States', launched at COP26 (2021), supports small island developing states.
- **Tools:** Global Infrastructure Resilience reports and risk-assessment frameworks for sectors such as power, transport and telecom.
- **Not to confuse:** CDRI (infrastructure resilience) with the International Solar Alliance (solar energy), also India-led.

Prelims angle: SACHET, the NDMA's Common Alerting Protocol platform developed with C-DOT, sends location-based disaster alerts to mobile phones.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS3 disaster-management answers on critical infrastructure, early warning and the Sendai Framework.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	Connectivity is the lifeline of disaster response, yet it often fails first.
BODY	Technical: tower siting, power backup; institutional: DoT–NDMA coordination; economic: 5G growth; social: last-mile warnings in coastal and hill districts.
WAY FORWARD	Resilience standards in licences; hazard-based tower siting; shared backup power; mandatory disaster drills for operators.

Mains value-add: Sendai Framework target (d) calls for substantially reducing disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services by 2030 — cite to frame telecom resilience globally.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ EASY

Q. With reference to the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), consider the following statements:

1. It was launched by India at the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019.
2. Its secretariat is located in Geneva.
3. Its 'Infrastructure for Resilient Island States' initiative was launched at COP26.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: India launched CDRI in New York in 2019. Statement 2 is incorrect: the secretariat is in New Delhi. Statement 3 is correct: IRIS was launched at COP26 in Glasgow (2021).

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2024, GS3: "What is disaster resilience? How is it determined? Describe various elements of a resilience framework. Also mention the global targets of Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)."

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** CDRI: Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure | DoT: Department of Telecommunications | NDMA: National Disaster Management Authority | IRIS: Infrastructure for Resilient Island States | COP: Conference of the Parties | C-DOT: Centre for Development of Telematics | UN: United Nations

Two Power Suppliers in One Area: Haryana's First Parallel Discom Licence

Why in news: HERC has granted Eleven Power a 25-year parallel distribution licence for Gurugram and Nuh, prompting a three-day strike call by State power employees.

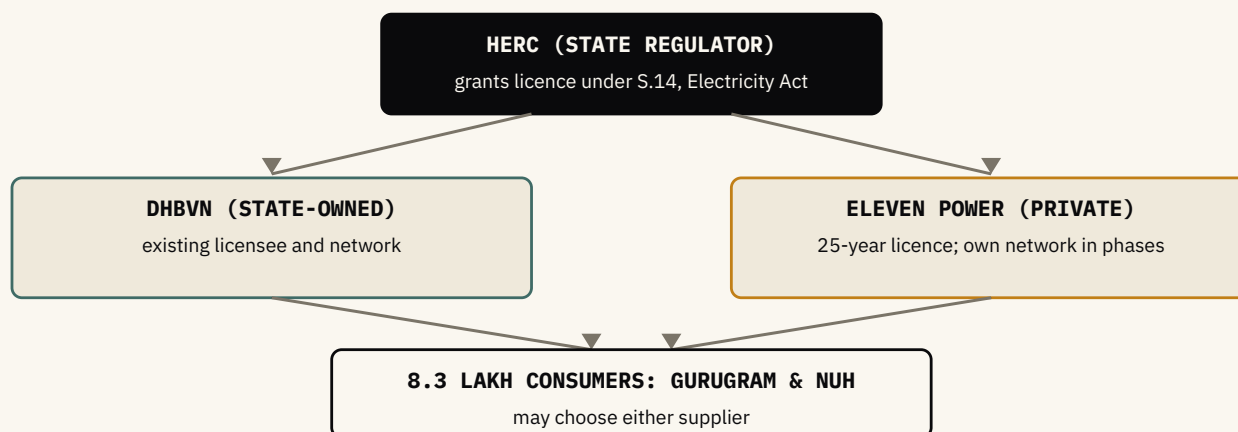
Key Details:

- **Choice:** Over 8.3 lakh consumers in Gurugram and Nuh may choose between the State-owned DHBVN and the private licensee.
- **Legal basis:** Licence granted under S.14 of the Electricity Act, 2003; the company will supply all categories on request under S.43.
- **Roll-out:** Its network will be built in phases over five years across five divisions, with Nuh in the first phase.
- **Objections:** Unions fear 'cherry-picking' of high-revenue areas; farmers worry about subsidies; the State will appeal to APTEL.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Precedent:** Mumbai already has more than one distribution licensee serving overlapping areas.
- **Why it matters:** Competition could improve service and reduce losses, but only if subsidies and universal supply are protected.

How a Parallel Distribution Licence Works



Electricity Distribution in India

- **Subject:** Electricity is in the Concurrent List (Entry 38, List III).
- **Licences:** SERCs grant distribution licences under the Electricity Act, 2003; CERC regulates inter-State matters.
- **Parallel licence:** A proviso to S.14 allows two or more distribution licensees in one area, each with its own network.
- **Duty to supply:** S.43 obliges a distribution licensee to supply electricity on request within set timelines.
- **Appeals:** Orders of the regulators can be appealed before APTEL.
- **Not to confuse:** A parallel licence (competition in networks) with open access (large users buying from any generator over the existing network).

Prelims angle: The Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020 set timelines for new connections and compensation for delays in service.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS3 answers on power-sector reforms, discom losses and the role of independent regulators.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	Discoms remain the weakest link in India's power chain.
BODY	Economic: losses, tariffs, cross-subsidy; legal: S.14 and S.43; social: farm and poor consumers; institutional: regulator independence; labour: employee concerns.
WAY FORWARD	Universal service rules for all licensees; direct subsidy transfer; performance benchmarks; transparent network-sharing terms.

Mains value-add: Under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (2021), the target is to cut AT&C losses to 12–15% nationally — cite as the benchmark for discom reform.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE

Q. Consider the following statements about electricity distribution in India:

1. The Electricity Act, 2003 permits two or more distribution licensees in the same area of supply.
2. Distribution licences are granted by the Central Electricity Authority.
3. A distribution licensee has a duty to supply electricity on request of an owner or occupier of premises.

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: (d) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: a proviso to S.14 allows parallel licensees. Statement 2 is incorrect: State Electricity Regulatory Commissions grant distribution licences; the CEA is a technical advisory body. Statement 3 is correct: S.43 imposes the duty to supply on request.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2016: "Which one of the following is a purpose of 'UDAY', a scheme of the Government? ... (d) Providing for financial turnaround and revival of power distribution companies" — Answer: (d).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** HERC: Haryana Electricity Regulatory Commission | DHBVN: Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam | APTEL: Appellate Tribunal for Electricity | S.: Section | SERCs: State Electricity Regulatory Commissions | CERC: Central Electricity Regulatory Commission | CEA: Central Electricity Authority | UDAY: Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana | AT&C: Aggregate Technical and Commercial

Keralam's Vanishing Paddy Fields: How a Conservation Law Is Being Diluted

Why in news: Keralam's paddy area has fallen about 80% since 1974-75, and changes to its 2008 paddy and wetland law are easing conversion rather than preventing it.

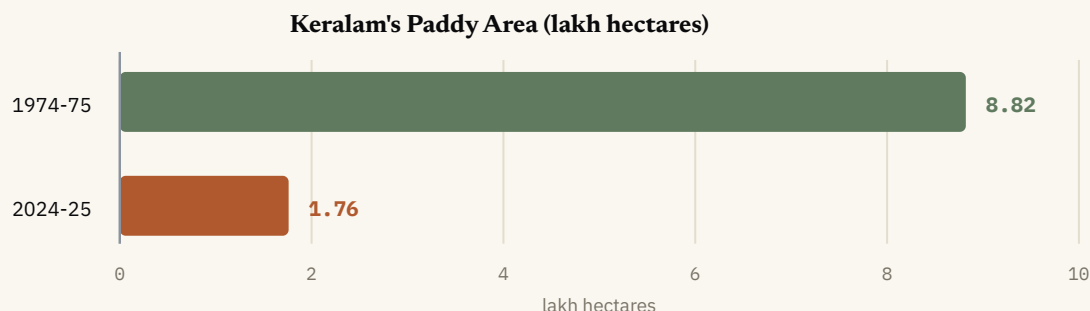
Key Details:

- **Scale:** Paddy land fell from 8.82 lakh ha in 1974-75 to 1.76 lakh ha in 2024-25, due to crop shifts, housing, commerce and land speculation.

- **Dilution:** S.3A (2015) let pre-2008 conversions be regularised for a fee; later circulars widened eligibility and fast-tracked applications.
- **Data gap:** The mandated databank of paddy fields is incomplete, so unnotified land can be converted with little check.
- **Conflict:** The Revenue Department both regulates conversion and earns from it — up to ₹1,606 crore from regularisation till 2024.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Audit:** The CAG's 2016 revenue report flagged undetected illegal conversions and non-reinstatement of reclaimed land.
- **Why it matters:** Paddy fields recharge groundwater, buffer floods and support biodiversity, beyond food production.



The Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act, 2008

- **Aim:** Bans conversion or reclamation of paddy land and wetlands, except as the Act permits, to protect food security and ecology.
- **Local monitoring:** Local Level Monitoring Committees in each panchayat recommend on proposals and watch for illegal filling.
- **Databank:** The Act requires a verified databank of paddy lands and wetlands, prepared locally.
- **Wetlands:** Reclamation of wetlands is barred outright.
- **Subject:** Land is a State subject (Entry 18, State List), so such laws are made by States.
- **Not to confuse:** This State law with the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, framed by the Centre under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Prelims angle: Keralam's Vembanad–Kol, Ashtamudi and Sasthamkotta wetlands are Ramsar sites; Kuttanad's below-sea-level farming is a FAO GIAHS site.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS3 answers on land-use change, wetlands and food security; and in GS2 answers on regulatory capture.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	Strong laws can be weakened by circulars, data gaps and revenue incentives.
BODY	Ecological: recharge, flood buffering; economic: food self-sufficiency vs housing demand; institutional: regulator earning from conversions; legal: retrospective regularisation.
WAY FORWARD	Finish the databank; separate regulator from revenue collector; restore illegally filled land; reward farmers for ecosystem services.

Mains value-add: The Ramsar Convention's principle of 'wise use' — maintaining ecological character through sustainable use — is the global benchmark for wetland laws like Keralam's.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. The Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act, 2008 restricts conversion of paddy land.
2. 'Land' is a subject in the Union List of the Seventh Schedule.
3. The Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 have been framed under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: the 2008 Act bars conversion except as permitted. Statement 2 is incorrect: land is in the State List (Entry 18). Statement 3 is correct: the 2017 Wetlands Rules were notified under the EP Act, 1986.

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2018, GS3: "What is wetland? Explain the Ramsar concept of 'wise use' in the context of wetland conservation. Cite two examples of Ramsar sites from India."

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** ha: hectares | S.: Section | CAG: Comptroller and Auditor General | EP Act: Environment (Protection) Act | FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization | GIAHS: Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System

Open-Weight AI: Why Big Tech Gives Away Models, and What India Gains

Why in news: In October, Meta, NVIDIA, Mistral and Reflection AI released or announced open-weight AI models, intensifying a race shaped by Chinese rivals such as DeepSeek.

Key Details:

- **What it is:** An open-weight model releases its trained parameters for download, so developers can run and adapt it on their own hardware.
- **Not open-source:** Weights may come without training code or data, and licences can still restrict some uses.
- **Business logic:** Firms earn from hosting, enterprise services, chips and ecosystems — a network effect around a widely used model.
- **Risks:** Once released, weights cannot be recalled; safeguards can be stripped out, making misuse harder to control.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Geopolitics:** OpenAI framed its 2025 open-weight release as helping partners build on 'U.S.-led rails'; DeepSeek-R1 came under an MIT licence.
- **India:** Sarvam AI, AI4Bharat (IIT Madras) and BharatGen have released Indian-language and domain models.

AI Models: Key Terms and India's Push

- **Weights:** Numerical values learned in training that decide how a model turns inputs into outputs.
- **Proprietary model:** Accessed only through an app or API controlled by the provider, which can monitor use.
- **Open-source:** In the full sense, shares code, weights and enough data detail for others to reproduce and modify the system.
- **IndiaAI Mission:** Approved in March 2024 with an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore for compute, datasets, foundation models and skills.
- **Sovereign AI:** Models trained on Indian data and languages, run on domestic infrastructure, to reduce dependence on foreign providers.
- **Not to confuse:** Open-weight (parameters shared) with open-source (code, data and weights shared under an open licence).

Prelims angle: Bhashini, under MeitY's National Language Translation Mission, provides AI-based translation across Indian languages.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS3 answers on AI governance, technological sovereignty and the digital economy.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	Open weights are becoming a strategic tool in the global AI race.
BODY	Economic: lower costs, ecosystems; strategic: US–China contest; security: misuse, irreversibility; linguistic: Indian-language adaptation; regulatory: licence limits.
WAY FORWARD	Use open models with safety testing; public compute under IndiaAI; Indian datasets; risk-based governance for frontier models.

Mains value-add: UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021), adopted by all member states, is the first global standard on AI ethics — cite for a rights-based approach to AI governance.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ EASY-MODERATE

Q. With reference to artificial intelligence models, consider the following statements:

1. An open-weight model makes its trained parameters available for download.
2. Releasing a model's weights always means its training data are also made public.
3. The IndiaAI Mission was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2024.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: open weights mean downloadable parameters. Statement 2 is incorrect: firms often release weights without training data or code. Statement 3 is correct: the Cabinet approved the IndiaAI Mission in March 2024.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2020: "With the present state of development, Artificial Intelligence can effectively do which of the following? 1. Bring down electricity consumption in industrial units 2. Create meaningful short stories and songs 3. Disease diagnosis 4. Text-to-Speech Conversion 5. Wireless transmission of electrical energy" — Answer (UPSC key): (b) 1, 3 and 4 only.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** AI: Artificial Intelligence | API: Application Programming Interface | MIT: Massachusetts Institute of Technology (licence) | IIT: Indian Institute of Technology | MeitY: Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology | UNESCO: UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

QUICK FACTS & EXAMPLES — GS PAPER 3

China curbs tunnel-boring exports. From 18 November, China will require licences to export tunnel-boring machines and heavy machinery for terrain above 3,000 metres to 'sensitive countries and regions in dispute with China', citing dual-use concerns; India has faced delays in clearing such imports for metro and border tunnels.

How to use: GS3 (infrastructure, security): example of supply-chain risk for border infrastructure and the case for domestic capability.

Sugar price vs cane price. Karnataka's CM noted that the minimum selling price of sugar has stayed at ₹31/kg since 14 February 2019, while the cane FRP rose from ₹2,750 to ₹3,650 a tonne, squeezing mills' ability to pay farmers; he also sought a rethink on excluding cane-based ethanol.

How to use: GS3 (agricultural pricing): use on the sugar sector's price mismatch and cane arrears.

Defining junk food. Kerala will seek clear criteria from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India on foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS). A draft of 7 August 2026 proposes that solid food with over 4.2 g fat, 3 g sugar or 0.625 g salt per 100 g be treated as high.

How to use: GS3/GS2 (food safety, child health): example of regulating unhealthy food near schools; note the thresholds are still a draft.

'Heat storms'. A Reuters analysis of hourly temperatures since 1960 proposes naming giant, long-lasting heat waves 'heat storms'; the largest, 'Vera', lasted 367 days in 2023-24 and covered nearly 85% of the globe.

How to use: GS1/GS3 (climate change): illustrates how heat waves have grown in size and duration.

GS PAPER 4: ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE

When Parents Hand Over the Keys: Karnataka HC on Responsibility

Why in news: The Karnataka HC refused to drop a culpable-homicide charge against a father whose 14-year-old son drove a car and caused an accident that killed three members of a family.

Key Details:

- **Holding:** Justice M. Nagaprasanna dismissed the plea to quash the S.304 Part II IPC charge, which carries up to 10 years' imprisonment.
- **Reasoning:** A parent who knowingly gives a child the wheel 'cannot always retreat behind the minority of that child' when it ends in catastrophe.
- **Value:** 'Parenthood carries not merely affection and authority, but responsibility'; roads are 'shared public spaces, not training grounds'.
- **GS4 link:** Illustrates responsibility, foresight of consequences and the family's role in shaping attitudes to rules.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Law:** S.199A of the Motor Vehicles Act (added 2019) holds a guardian or owner liable when a juvenile commits a traffic offence.
- **Penalty:** It provides up to three years' jail and a ₹25,000 fine, and the juvenile cannot get a licence until 25.

Family, Responsibility and Ethics

- **Family as teacher:** The family is the first institution that shapes values and attitudes, often unconsciously.
- **Role responsibility:** Holding a role, such as parent or official, brings duties towards those affected by one's choices.
- **Consequentialism:** Judges an act by its outcomes; a foreseeable harm makes the act wrong even without intent.
- **Duty ethics:** Kant: act only on rules you could will everyone to follow — no one could will that minors drive.
- **Not to confuse:** Legal liability (what courts punish) with moral responsibility, which can be wider.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS4 answers on the role of family in inculcating values, responsibility and the ethics of consequences.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	Values are first learned at home, and so is disregard for rules.
BODY	Ethical: role responsibility, foresight; social: indulgence vs discipline; legal: MV Act S.199A, culpable homicide; public: roads as shared spaces.
CONCLUSION	Responsible parenting, backed by law and awareness, prevents tragedies that punishment only follows.

Mains value-add: A.P.J. Abdul Kalam named 'the father, the mother and the teacher' as the three key members of society who can make a nation corruption-free — cite on the family's role in values.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. 'Parenthood carries not merely affection and authority, but responsibility.' Discuss the role of the family in inculcating respect for rules and responsibility for consequences, with reference to a recent court ruling. (150 words)

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2016, GS4: a question on how "our attitudes towards life, work, other people and society are generally shaped unconsciously by the family and the social surroundings in which we grow up", asking which such values are undesirable among educated Indians and how they can be changed.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** HC: High Court | IPC: Indian Penal Code | S.: Section | MV Act: Motor Vehicles Act