SAMATA IAS ACADEMY

WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

UPSC Civil Services Examination

19–25 OCTOBER 2026

Subject-wise analysis • Prelims facts • Practice MCQs • Mains questions

A syllabus-oriented weekly study resource for UPSC Prelims and Mains. Verify time-sensitive developments against the latest official releases before relying on them for examination purposes.

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Introduction

Current affairs preparation requires more than memorising headlines. Aspirants must understand the background of an issue, the institutions involved, the relevant legal or policy framework, its economic and social implications, and its significance for public policy.

This weekly compilation covers selected developments reported for 19–25 October 2026. It is organised around the UPSC General Studies syllabus and includes analytical perspectives, Prelims facts and practice questions.

Editorial note: Confirm all dates, figures, programme details and the legal status of recently announced initiatives against the linked primary sources before final publication or exam use.

1. International Relations

1.1 India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement

The India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was reported as scheduled to enter into force on 20 October 2026. The agreement was signed on 27 April 2026 following negotiations launched in March 2025. Government material describes an investment facilitation commitment and a roadmap to expand bilateral trade.

Potential benefits

- Market access: preferential or duty-free access can improve the competitiveness of eligible Indian exports.
- MSMEs and artisans: smaller enterprises may gain opportunities through better market access and links with overseas buyers.
- Agriculture and food products: export opportunities may expand, subject to product-specific provisions and standards.
- Geographical indications: cooperation can strengthen the commercial prospects of region-specific products and traditional industries.
- Trade facilitation: electronic origin-data exchange and more efficient customs procedures can reduce administrative friction.

Significance and challenges

An FTA can support export diversification, economies of scale and integration into international value chains. However, preferential access does not automatically generate exports. Firms must meet quality standards, maintain reliable supply, improve logistics and understand overseas demand. Domestic producers may also face greater competition.

Rules of origin, safeguards, tariff schedules and implementation arrangements determine how benefits and adjustment costs are distributed.

Source / further reading: PIB, India–New Zealand FTA: https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2325235□=1®=3

UPSC linkage: GS II — bilateral relations; GS III — trade, investment and growth.

Mains practice: Examine the role of FTAs in India's export-diversification strategy. What domestic reforms are needed to convert market access into sustained export growth?

1.2 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and regional security

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) provides a platform for Eurasian states to discuss security, political cooperation and economic engagement. It is relevant to India's engagement with Central Asia and wider continental diplomacy.

- Potential areas of cooperation include counter-terrorism, transnational crime, regional stability and economic engagement.
- Divergent strategic interests, regional rivalries and differences over security priorities can constrain collective action.
- Geography and political constraints affect India's continental connectivity.

Source / further reading: PIB, Ministry of Defence releases: https://www.pib.gov.in/AllRelease.aspx?lang=1®=22

UPSC linkage: GS II — international groupings, India's neighbourhood and regional security.

Mains practice: Discuss the opportunities and limitations of the SCO in advancing India's strategic interests in Eurasia.

1.3 India's maritime and defence partnerships

Official announcements during the week included maritime and military engagements such as SIMBEX, INDRA, IBSAMAR and AUSTRAHIND. Joint exercises can improve interoperability, operational coordination, maritime-domain awareness and mutual understanding.

- SIMBEX: Singapore–India Maritime Bilateral Exercise.
- INDRA: India–Russia military exercise series.
- IBSAMAR: maritime exercise involving India, Brazil and South Africa.
- AUSTRAHIND: India–Australia joint military exercise.

Exercises should not be confused with binding collective-defence arrangements. Their scope depends on the objectives and terms of each engagement.

Source / further reading: PIB, Ministry of Defence: https://www.pib.gov.in/AllRelease.aspx?lang=1®=22

2. Indian Economy

2.1 Financial Stability and Development Council

The Union Finance Minister chaired the 30th meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) on 23 October 2026. Government material describes discussion of macro-financial stability amid geopolitical uncertainty, global bond yields and rapid developments in artificial intelligence. Topics included cybersecurity, fintech, tokenisation and domestic investment markets.

What is the FSDC?

Established by the Government of India in 2010, the FSDC is an apex-level coordination body that considers financial stability, financial-sector development and inter-regulatory cooperation. It does not replace sectoral regulators.

Key policy dimensions

- Macro-financial stability: global interest rates, bond yields, exchange rates and capital flows can influence domestic borrowing costs and investment.
- Cybersecurity: attacks can disrupt payments, compromise information and undermine confidence in financial institutions.
- Fintech and tokenisation: innovation can reduce transaction costs but requires appropriate legal, regulatory and consumer-protection safeguards.
- Digital public infrastructure: frameworks such as the Account Aggregator ecosystem and Unified Lending Interface can support information-sharing and credit access.
- Unclaimed financial assets: improved processes can help return deposits, dividends, shares and insurance proceeds to rightful owners.

Effective regulation must balance innovation with consumer protection, operational resilience and systemic stability.

Source / further reading: PIB, 30th FSDC meeting: https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2327596□=2®=48

UPSC linkage: GS III — banking, financial markets and investment.

Mains practice: Explain the significance of inter-regulatory coordination in maintaining stability in a digital and interconnected financial system.

2.2 Electronic exchange of origin data

India and New Zealand signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on electronic origin-data exchange on 21 October 2026. Such exchanges can support trade administration under an FTA by improving the verification of a product's origin.

Rules of origin establish whether a product qualifies for preferential treatment. Criteria can include wholly obtained goods, substantial transformation, tariff-classification changes, minimum value addition or product-specific processing requirements. Mere transit through a country does not automatically confer origin.

Electronic verification can reduce paperwork and improve customs efficiency, but requires secure systems, interoperability and accurate records.

2.3 Financial inclusion

A financial-inclusion saturation campaign was announced for 21 October to 31 December 2026. Financial inclusion means access to useful and affordable savings, payments, credit, insurance and pension services.

- It can support household resilience, formal savings, institutional credit and Direct Benefit Transfer.
- It can strengthen women's economic participation and small-enterprise development.
- Opening an account is only the first step: meaningful inclusion requires active usage, financial literacy, reliable access, grievance redressal and protection against digital fraud.

Source / further reading: PIB, Ministry of Finance releases: https://www.pib.gov.in/AllRelease.aspx?lang=1®=23

Mains practice: Why should financial inclusion be assessed through effective usage and financial security rather than account numbers alone?

3. Agriculture and Rural Development

3.1 Digital Farmer IDs

On 24 October 2026, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare announced that the target of 11 crore Farmer IDs had been achieved five months ahead of the stated deadline of 31 March 2027. The initiative is part of the Digital Agriculture Mission, approved by the Union Cabinet in September 2024.

A Farmer ID is intended to connect farmers with verified agricultural records and services. It may support delivery of government assistance, institutional credit, crop insurance, procurement and disaster relief.

Potential benefits

- More accurate targeting of eligible beneficiaries and reduced duplication.
- Reduced documentation burdens in agricultural credit processes.
- Potentially more efficient verification of crop-insurance claims and disaster relief.
- Better agricultural data for planning, monitoring and policy design.

Concerns and safeguards

Digital identification cannot substitute for accurate land records or fair administrative procedures. Tenant farmers, sharecroppers and cultivators without formal land titles may be excluded if eligibility relies too heavily on land ownership. Inaccurate records, privacy risks, connectivity barriers and weak grievance mechanisms can also undermine the initiative.

Assisted registration, transparent eligibility rules, interoperable records and effective appeals are therefore essential.

Source / further reading: PIB, 11 crore Farmer IDs: https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2327905□=1®=3

UPSC linkage: GS II — governance and e-governance; GS III — agriculture and technology.

Mains practice: Examine how digital public infrastructure can improve agricultural service delivery while preventing the exclusion of vulnerable cultivators.

3.2 Agri-voltaics

Agri-voltaics, also called agrivoltaics, combines solar photovoltaic electricity generation with agricultural production on the same land. Panel height and spacing are designed around crop needs, sunlight, water, machinery access and local conditions.

- Dual land use: electricity generation and farming can coexist.
- Supplementary income: farmers may benefit from electricity sales or leasing arrangements.
- Climate resilience: partial shade can reduce heat stress or water loss for selected crops.
- Renewable energy: distributed solar generation can contribute to the clean-energy transition.

It is not suitable for every crop or region. Excessive shade can reduce yields for light-demanding crops, while capital costs, grid connectivity, maintenance and land-use arrangements affect viability.

Source / further reading: PIB, Ministry of Agriculture releases: https://www.pib.gov.in/AllRelease.aspx?lang=1®=1

Mains practice: Can agri-voltaics reconcile food security, farmer income and renewable-energy expansion? Discuss the conditions required for adoption.

3.3 Khet Bachao Abhiyan — Rabi 2026

The Ministry of Agriculture announced the Khet Bachao Abhiyan for the Rabi 2026 season, with the campaign reported to run from 22 October to 30 November 2026. The wider policy issue is the protection of crops and farm livelihoods during the growing season.

Implementation requires coordination among agricultural departments, local administrations, farmers' organisations and community institutions.

Prelims focus: Rabi crops are generally sown in the cooler months and harvested in spring. Wheat, gram and mustard are common examples, although calendars vary by region.

3.4 The larger agricultural policy perspective

Digital Farmer IDs seek to improve information and service-delivery infrastructure, while agri-voltaics seeks to diversify land use and rural income. Both depend on affordability, inclusion, farmer participation and careful implementation. Agricultural transformation must combine productivity, sustainable resource use, risk management, market access and secure livelihoods.

4. Rural Employment and Social Justice

4.1 VB-G RAM G

A government factsheet published on 24 October 2026 reviewed the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin), commonly referred to as VB-G RAM G. The factsheet states that the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025 came into force on 1 July 2026 and provides a statutory guarantee of 125 days of wage employment per financial year to eligible rural households whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work.

The factsheet reports 10.88 crore active workers in 2026–27, more than 31.69 crore person-days generated as of 24 September 2026, and women's participation of 61.65 per cent for the period covered. These are government-reported figures and should be interpreted according to their stated dates and definitions.

Significance

- Employment security can support rural households during periods of limited agricultural work.
- Wage employment can support consumption and reduce distress migration.
- Well-designed public works can create productive rural infrastructure.
- Local employment opportunities can strengthen women's earnings and economic agency.
- Village-level planning can align works with local needs when Gram Panchayats and communities participate effectively.

Critical evaluation

The programme should be assessed through the availability of work on demand, timely wage payments, asset quality, social audits, transparency and access for vulnerable households. Digital attendance and payment systems must not exclude workers facing authentication or connectivity problems. Transitions between statutory frameworks require continuity of entitlements and clear public communication.

Source / further reading: PIB, VB-G RAM G factsheet: https://www.pib.gov.in/FactsheetDetails.aspx?ModuleId=16&NoteId;=151136&id;=151136□=1®=6

UPSC linkage: GS II — welfare schemes; GS III — employment and inclusive growth.

Mains practice: Discuss the role of statutory wage-employment programmes in rural livelihood security and durable asset creation.

5. Energy and Environment

5.1 Pumped-storage hydropower

Pumped-storage hydropower is a grid-scale energy-storage technology using two reservoirs at different elevations. When electricity is abundant, water is pumped uphill. When demand rises, water is released through turbines to generate electricity.

> Surplus electricity → Pump water uphill → Store gravitational potential energy → Release water downhill → Generate electricity

Solar and wind output may not coincide with demand. Pumped storage can shift electricity availability across time, balance supply and demand, support grid stability and provide flexibility.

- Advantages: large-scale storage, support for variable renewables and balancing services.
- Challenges: high capital costs, long development periods, land acquisition, ecological effects, water availability and geographical constraints.

Pumped storage is not a primary energy source. It stores electricity generated elsewhere and returns only part of that energy because pumping and generation involve losses.

UPSC linkage: GS III — infrastructure, energy security and environmental impact assessment.

Mains practice: Explain the role of pumped-storage hydropower in integrating renewables into India's grid. Discuss environmental and economic constraints.

5.2 Wastewater treatment and circular economy

Wastewater treatment supports urban sustainability, public health and the circular economy. Advanced systems can enable the recovery of water, nutrients and energy, in addition to reducing pollutants.

- Public health: treatment reduces exposure to pathogens and harmful pollutants.
- Water security: treated wastewater can be reused for suitable industrial, landscaping and other non-potable purposes.
- Resource recovery: some systems can recover biogas, nutrients and other useful materials.
- Urban resilience: reuse can reduce pressure on freshwater sources in water-stressed cities.

Treatment must be supported by sewerage networks, operational funding, monitoring and enforcement. Safety requirements depend on the intended reuse; not all treated wastewater is suitable for every purpose.

Mains practice: How can wastewater management become an instrument of water security and circular economic development?

5.3 Climate resilience and sustainable resource management

Energy storage, wastewater reuse and climate-resilient agriculture share a policy objective: reducing pressure on natural resources while maintaining access to essential services. This requires integrated planning across electricity, water, agriculture and urban development, with attention to economic viability, social inclusion and ecological impacts.

6. Science and Technology

6.1 Aditya-L1

ISRO announced the fourth Announcement of Opportunity for observations by the Aditya-L1 mission on 16 October 2026. ISRO reported that more than 37 terabytes of mission data had been placed in the public domain, supporting wider scientific use.

Source / further reading: ISRO, Aditya-L1 fourth observation cycle: https://www.isro.gov.in/ISRO_EN/Aditya_L1_Mission_soliciting_proposals_for_the_fourth_AO_cycle_observations.html

Mission objectives

- Study the solar corona and its heating processes.
- Investigate solar flares and coronal mass ejections.
- Observe the solar wind and related phenomena.
- Improve understanding of the Sun's magnetic field and atmospheric dynamics.
- Support research and monitoring related to space weather.

Aditya-L1 is India's dedicated solar-observation mission. It operates around the Sun–Earth L1 region, approximately 1.5 million kilometres from Earth in the direction of the Sun. The location offers a useful vantage point for solar observations with limited interruption by Earth.

Space weather refers to changing conditions in space driven primarily by solar activity. Solar eruptions can disturb Earth's magnetosphere and affect satellites, radio communications, navigation systems and, in severe cases, electricity infrastructure.

Public data allow researchers beyond the mission team to analyse observations and develop independent scientific results.

UPSC linkage: GS III — space technology, scientific research and applications.

Mains practice: Explain the significance of India's solar-observation programme for research, space-weather monitoring and technological infrastructure.

7. Defence and Internal Security

7.1 Low-level lightweight radars

The Ministry of Defence announced a contract worth ₹770 crore for improved low-level lightweight radars for the Indian Army during the week. Depending on design and deployment, such radars can help detect and track aerial threats operating at relatively low altitudes.

- Strengthen surveillance and detection capabilities.
- Improve situational awareness and support air-defence networks.
- Support military modernisation and, depending on procurement arrangements, domestic manufacturing.

Procurement should be assessed in terms of operational performance, integration with existing networks, lifecycle costs, maintenance, training and technological adaptability. Equipment acquisition alone does not guarantee effective capability.

Source / further reading: PIB, Ministry of Defence releases: https://www.pib.gov.in/AllRelease.aspx?lang=1®=22

Mains practice: Discuss the role of surveillance technologies in addressing emerging aerial threats and explain why integration and training matter.

7.2 Maritime security

Maritime security includes protection of sea lanes, counter-piracy, maritime-domain awareness, disaster response and the security of critical maritime infrastructure. A substantial share of India's external trade moves by sea, making secure maritime routes important for economic resilience and national security.

Naval exercises can improve coordination and familiarity, but they must be supported by surveillance, logistics, maintenance, trained personnel and effective information-sharing.

8. Governance and Public Administration

8.1 Special Campaign 6.0

Government departments continued activities under Special Campaign 6.0 during the week, with emphasis on cleanliness, disposal of pending matters, records management and electronic waste.

Better records management, timely disposal of grievances and systematic review of pending files can reduce administrative delays. Electronic-waste management has environmental significance because discarded equipment can contain hazardous materials and recoverable resources.

Campaign-based interventions are most effective when converted into durable practices through measurable targets, clear responsibility, regular monitoring and transparent reporting.

Source / further reading: PIB, government releases: https://www.pib.gov.in/AllRelease.aspx?lang=1®=22

UPSC linkage: GS II — transparency, accountability and e-governance; GS IV — public service values and administrative efficiency.

Mains practice: Campaign-based administrative reforms may produce short-term improvements, but their long-term value depends on institutionalisation. Discuss.

9. Important Facts for Prelims

Topic	Key fact
India–New Zealand FTA	Reported as scheduled to enter into force on 20 October 2026; signed on 27 April 2026.
FSDC	Apex-level coordination body for financial stability and financial-sector development.
Farmer IDs	Government announced achievement of 11 crore IDs on 24 October 2026.
Digital Agriculture Mission	Approved by the Union Cabinet in September 2024.
VB-G RAM G	Government factsheet reports a 125-day statutory wage-employment guarantee per financial year.
Agri-voltaics	Combines solar electricity generation with agricultural activity.
Pumped-storage hydropower	Stores energy by pumping water to a higher reservoir.
Aditya-L1	India's dedicated solar-observation mission.
L1	Sun–Earth Lagrange Point 1 region.
SIMBEX	Singapore–India Maritime Bilateral Exercise.
INDRA	India–Russia military exercise series.
IBSAMAR	Maritime exercise involving India, Brazil and South Africa.
AUSTRAHIND	India–Australia joint military exercise.

Revision advice: Treat time-sensitive figures and programme details as date-specific. Cross-check subsequent changes against the relevant ministry or official organisation.

10. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1

With reference to free trade agreements, consider the following statements: (1) Rules of origin help determine whether goods qualify for preferential tariff treatment. (2) Goods shipped through a

country automatically qualify as originating in that country. (3) An FTA may include safeguards against import surges or circumvention. Which are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Question 2

Consider the following statements about the FSDC: (1) It promotes coordination among financial-sector regulators. (2) It considers financial stability and financial-sector development. (3) It replaces all sectoral financial regulators with a single regulator. Which are correct? (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Question 3

With reference to agri-voltaics: (1) It combines agriculture with solar-energy generation. (2) It is necessarily suitable for every crop and region. (3) Performance depends partly on panel configuration and crop requirements. Which are correct? (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Question 4

Pumped-storage hydropower primarily: (a) produces electricity without energy input; (b) stores energy by moving water between reservoirs at different elevations; (c) converts seawater directly into electricity through desalination; (d) generates electricity exclusively from natural river flow.

Question 5

With reference to Aditya-L1: (1) It is designed to study the Sun. (2) It operates around the Sun–Earth L1 region. (3) Its observations can contribute to understanding space weather. Which are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Question 6

Digital Farmer IDs may support: (1) verification of eligibility for agricultural schemes; (2) facilitation of agricultural credit processes; (3) elimination of every form of agricultural risk. Which are correct? (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Question 7

With reference to wastewater reuse: (1) Appropriate treatment can enable reuse for certain purposes. (2) Reuse can reduce pressure on freshwater. (3) All treated wastewater is automatically safe for every use. Which are correct? (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Question 8

The most appropriate objective of military exercises between partner countries is to: (a) establish automatic collective-defence obligations in every case; (b) improve interoperability and operational coordination; (c) replace diplomacy; (d) eliminate the need for domestic defence preparedness.

Question 9

Which may be used to determine whether a product qualifies as originating under a trade agreement? (1) Whether it is wholly obtained in a country. (2) Whether substantial transformation has occurred. (3) Whether it merely passed through the country. (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Question 10

Which best describes pumped-storage hydropower? (a) A primary energy source independent of electricity input. (b) A means of balancing variable renewable generation by storing and releasing energy. (c) A technology that eliminates transmission infrastructure. (d) A technology operationally identical to a coal-fired power station.

11. Answer Key with Explanations

1. (b)

Rules of origin establish eligibility for preferential treatment, and FTAs may include safeguards. Mere transit or shipment through a country does not automatically confer origin.

2. (b)

The FSDC supports coordination and financial-sector development. It does not replace the RBI, SEBI, IRDAI or other sectoral regulators.

3. (c)

Agri-voltaics combines solar generation and agriculture, but suitability depends on crop shade tolerance, panel design, water and local conditions.

4. (b)

Water is pumped uphill when electricity is available and released through turbines when required. Energy is stored, not created without input.

5. (d)

Aditya-L1 studies the Sun from the Sun–Earth L1 region. Its observations contribute to research on solar activity and space weather.

6. (b)

Digital Farmer IDs may facilitate verification and service delivery, but cannot eliminate drought, pests, price volatility or crop failure.

7. (b)

Reuse is possible when treatment quality is appropriate to the intended purpose. Not all treated water is suitable for every use.

8. (b)

Military exercises improve coordination and interoperability; they do not automatically create collective-defence obligations.

9. (b)

Origin can be determined by wholly obtained criteria or substantial transformation and other agreement-specific requirements. Mere transit is insufficient.

10. (b)

Pumped storage shifts electricity across time and supports grid balancing, but requires energy input and does not eliminate transmission needs.

12. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS Paper II

- Examine the role of FTAs in India's external economic engagement. What measures can help small enterprises benefit from export opportunities?
- Discuss the significance of digital public infrastructure in welfare delivery. What safeguards are needed to prevent exclusion and protect personal data?
- Explain the importance of regional organisations such as the SCO for India's foreign-policy objectives.

GS Paper III

- Evaluate digital agriculture's potential to improve productivity, credit access and welfare delivery. Identify risks in data-driven agricultural governance.
- Discuss how agri-voltaics can support energy security and supplementary rural incomes. What factors determine suitability?
- Explain the role of pumped-storage hydropower in India's energy transition.
- Assess the contribution of solar-observation missions to scientific research and the protection of technological infrastructure.
- Examine the importance of wastewater treatment and reuse for urban water security.

GS Paper IV

- How should administrators balance technological efficiency with inclusion, privacy and accountability when implementing digital welfare systems?
- Campaign-based administrative reforms often produce short-term improvements. Discuss how these initiatives can become lasting institutional practices.

Conclusion

The developments covered in this issue highlight the interconnections among economic diplomacy, agricultural transformation, rural employment, financial stability, clean energy and technological development.

For UPSC aspirants, the central task is to move from factual awareness to conceptual understanding. Study FTAs through trade policy and competitiveness; digital agriculture through inclusion and governance; pumped storage through energy-system flexibility; and solar observation through scientific capability and infrastructure resilience.

SAMATA IAS ACADEMY — Building conceptual clarity for the Civil Services Examination.

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