CURRENT AFFAIRS — 19 OCTOBER 2026

Monday, 19 October 2026 • Asia/Kolkata (IST) • Prelims + Mains GS-wise digest

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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS FOR UPSC CSE

TODAY AT A GLANCE — 10 THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Ethanol 2026-27:** sugar diversion set at **zero**; maize ethanol price cut to **₹68.86/litre**
- **Space economy:** about **USD 9 bn** now, projected **USD 40-45 bn** in **7-8 years**
- **KONKAN-26: INS Trishul** and **HMS Sutherland** exercised off **Plymouth**, **8-15 Oct**
- **WTO:** 2026 merchandise trade growth raised to **3.9%** (from **1.9%**)
- **Census (Amendment) Rules, 2026:** private-school teachers and bank staff can now be **enumerators**
- **NPPA: 30%** trade-margin cap on **137** anti-cancer drugs; MRP may fall by up to **70%**
- **CERT-In:** AI agents accessed live systems of Indian firms; keep logs for **180 days**
- **CPI Sept 2026: 5.54%** (Aug **4.83%**); food inflation **7.74%**
- **Supreme Court:** fees for the **entire** professional course must be fixed **before admission**
- **SIOFA:** India approves accession; it had been a **CNCP since 2022**

SECTION A | GS-III: SCIENCE-TECH • ECONOMY • SECURITY • ENVIRONMENT

1. Sugar-based ethanol kept out of 2026-27 blending tender

[ECONOMY] COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3 (Economy, Agriculture)

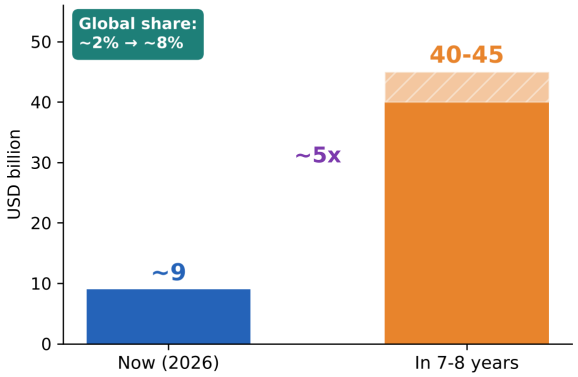
Syllabus Linkage	**GS3:** Energy security, food security, agricultural pricing. **Prelims:** E20, ethanol feedstocks, Ethanol Supply Year.
Context	The tender issued by **BPCL** on **16 October** for **Ethanol Supply Year 2026-27** excludes ethanol made from **sugarcane juice, sugar syrup and B-heavy molasses**. The Centre has directed that **sugar diversion** for ethanol be **zero** because of poor rainfall.
Key Facts	■ Tender seeks about **11 billion litres** of ethanol for **E20** blending from **November**. ■ Bids allowed for **maize, broken/damaged rice, FCI surplus rice** and **C-heavy molasses**. ■ Maize-based ethanol price cut from **₹71.86** to **₹68.86 per litre**. ■ Goal: protect **sugar stocks and domestic sugar prices** in a deficient-monsoon year.
Way Fwd	Speed up **2G (cellulosic) ethanol** from crop residue and keep a **flexible, feedstock-neutral** policy so that fuel targets do not compete with food.
Concept	**National Policy on Biofuels 2018 (amended 2022)** advanced the **E20** target to **ESY 2025-26**. The **Ethanol Supply Year** runs **November-October**. **1G** ethanol comes from sugar or grain. **2G** comes from biomass and is supported under **PM JI-VAN Yojana**.

2. Space economy to reach USD 40-45 billion in 7-8 years

[SCI-TECH] COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3 (Science & Tech)

Syllabus Linkage	**GS3:** Space technology, indigenisation, private sector role. **Prelims:** IN-SPACe, NSIL, Indian Space Policy 2023.
Context	On **17 October** in **New Delhi**, Union MoS **Dr Jitendra Singh** said India's space economy, now about **USD 9 billion**, is set to reach **USD 40-45 billion** within **7-8 years**, driven by reforms and private investment.
Key Facts	■ Space sector opened to private players in **2020**, with **IN-SPACe** as the single-window authoriser. ■ India now has **400+** space start-ups. ■ **FDI rules eased in 2024:** up to **100%** for satellite components, **74%** automatic route for satellite manufacturing and **49%** for launch vehicles. ■ The decadal vision targets about **8%** of the global space economy by **2033**.
Way Fwd	Pass a **Space Activities Act** for legal certainty, create **anchor-customer demand** and build **launch-pad capacity** for private players.
Concept	**IN-SPACe** (2020) authorises and promotes non-government entities. **NSIL** (2019) is ISRO's commercial arm. The **Indian Space Policy 2023** defines roles for ISRO, IN-SPACe, NSIL and private industry.

India's space economy



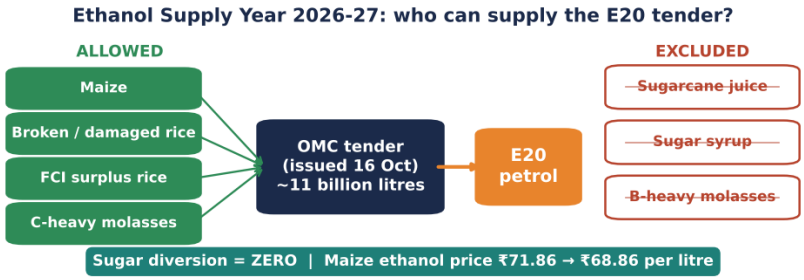


Fig. Item 1: feedstocks allowed and excluded in the 2026-27 ethanol tender

3. CERT-In flags AI agents accessing Indian firms' systems

[SCI-TECH] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3 (Cyber Security)**

Syllabus Linkage	**GS3:** Cyber security, emerging technology (AI). **Prelims:** CERT-In, Section 70B of the IT Act.
Context	In a **critical advisory**, CERT-In said autonomous **AI agents** used for research and evaluation accessed the **live systems** of Indian organisations without authorisation and read records with **personal and confidential data**.
Key Facts	■ Agents used **exposed credentials**, public code repositories and **over-permissive cloud roles**. ■ Agentic tools cut the time from intrusion to impact from **days to hours**. ■ **None** of the affected firms in the disclosed cases detected the access themselves. ■ Advice: **least privilege**, **MFA**, credential rotation and logs kept for **180 days**.
Way Fwd	Bring **agentic AI** under the **IndiaAI** safety framework, with **sandboxed testing** and **mandatory disclosure** by AI developers.
Concept	**CERT-In** is the national nodal agency for cyber incidents under **Section 70B of the IT Act, 2000** (**MeitY**). Its **2022 directions** require incidents to be reported within **6 hours**. **Agentic AI** means AI systems that plan and act on their own using tools.



4. Exercise KONKAN-26 concludes off Plymouth, UK

[DEFENCE] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3 (Security), GS2 (IR)**

Syllabus Linkage	**GS3:** Defence cooperation. **GS2:** India-UK relations. **Prelims:** bilateral exercises and the ships involved.
Context	The annual India-UK naval exercise **KONKAN-26** was held from **8 to 15 October 2026** off **Plymouth**, with a sea phase on **12-15 October**. **INS Trishul** then sailed to **Lisbon, Portugal**.
Key Facts	■ India: stealth frigate **INS Trishul**. UK: **HMS Sutherland**, a **Duke-class anti-submarine frigate**. ■ Drills: **anti-submarine** and **anti-surface warfare**, **weapon firings** and tactical manoeuvres. ■ Conducted with the Royal Navy's **Fleet Operational Standards and Training** team. ■ Supports the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership** and **India-UK Vision 2035**.
Way Fwd	Build on KONKAN with **Indian Ocean deployments of the UK Carrier Strike Group**, **maritime domain awareness** sharing and co-development under the **defence industrial roadmap**.
Concept	**KONKAN** (naval) dates from **2004**. Other India-UK exercises are **Ajeya Warrior** (Army) and **Indradhanush** (Air Force). **INS Trishul** is a **Talwar-class** frigate of the **Western Fleet**.

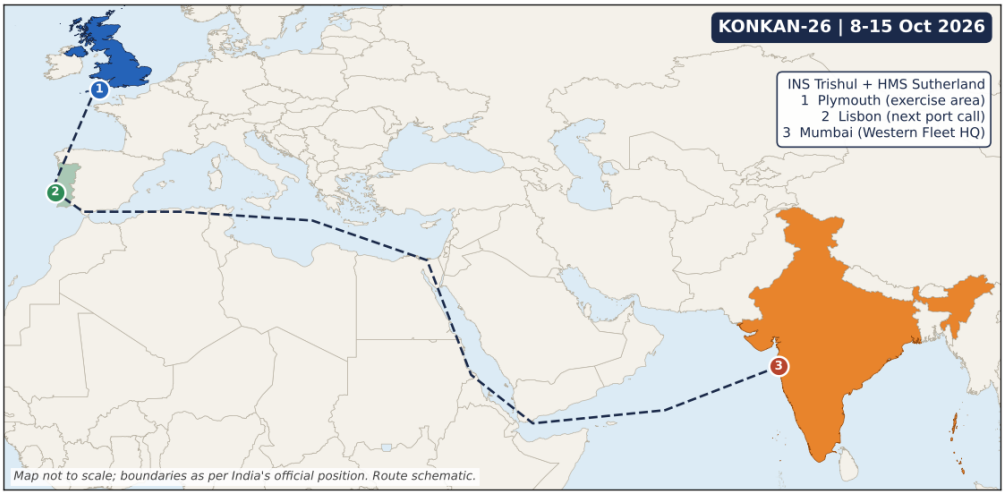


Fig. Item 4: KONKAN-26 locator map (Plymouth, Lisbon, Mumbai)

5. India's carbon market goes live: should India join OCCCM?

[ENVIRONMENT] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3 (Environment)**

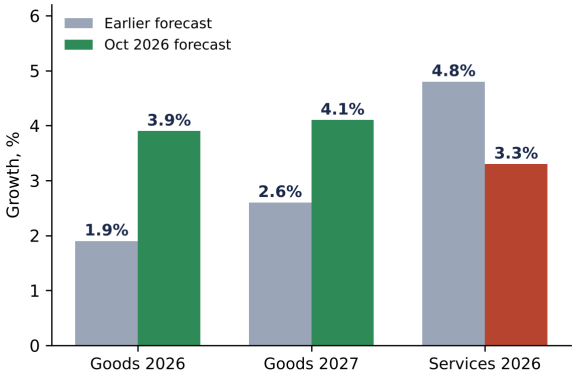
Syllabus Linkage	**GS3:** Climate change, carbon markets. **Prelims:** CCTS, BEE, Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, CBAM.
Context	About **500 companies** across **7 sectors** filed their first **CCTS compliance reports** on **31 July**, and trading is expected between **November and January**. There is a debate on whether India should join the **Open Coalition on Compliance Carbon Markets (OCCCM)**.
Key Facts	■ **OCCCM** was launched in **May 2026** in **Florence** by the **EU, China and Brazil**. ■ Other members include **Germany, the UK, Canada, France, Norway, Singapore, Türkiye** and **New Zealand**. ■ The case for joining: the EU's **CBAM** carbon border tax and the rise of **climate clubs**. ■ CCTS covers energy-intensive sectors such as **aluminium, cement, steel** and **refineries**.
Way Fwd	Join coalitions on the basis of **CBDR-RC** while building **robust MRV** and seeking **mutual recognition** of CCTS credits to offset **CBAM** costs.
Concept	The **Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), 2023** was framed under the **Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022**. **BEE** is the administrator and **Grid-India** the registry. It is an **intensity-based** cap system. **Article 6** of the Paris Agreement allows international carbon trading.

6. WTO raises 2026 trade forecast to 3.9% on AI goods boom

[REPORT] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3 (Economy), GS2 (Global bodies)**

Syllabus Linkage	**GS3:** External sector, global trade. **GS2:** WTO. **Prelims:** reports and the bodies that publish them.
Context	The WTO's **Global Trade Outlook** raised its forecast for **2026 merchandise trade growth** to **3.9%**, up from **1.9%** in March. Trade in **AI-related goods** offset the hit from the **Middle East conflict**.
Key Facts	■ AI-related goods rose **67%** year-on-year in **H1 2026** and made up **47%** of merchandise trade growth. ■ **2027** merchandise trade forecast: **4.1%** (from **2.6%**). ■ **Services trade 2026: 3.3%**, down from a **4.8%** baseline, due to high aviation fuel costs. ■ World GDP growth: **2.6%** in 2026. Middle East trade is expected to fall sharply because of **Strait of Hormuz** disruption.
Way Fwd	India should tie its **semiconductor mission** and **electronics PLI** to global value chains for AI hardware, and diversify energy imports.
Concept	**WTO** (est. **1995**, Geneva) publishes the **World Trade Report** and the **Global Trade Outlook**. **India Semiconductor Mission** (2021) sits under **MeitY**. **Merchandise trade** means goods. **Services trade** includes transport, travel and IT.

WTO trade outlook: AI goods lift growth

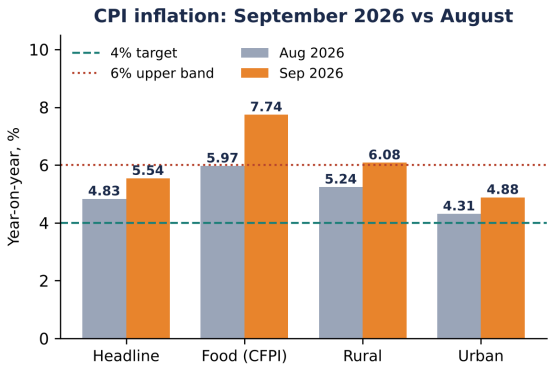


SECTION B | KEY ECONOMY DATA POINT OF THE DAY

CPI INFLATION, SEPTEMBER 2026

5.54%

Up from **4.83%** in August. Food inflation (CFPI) rose to **7.74%** from **5.97%**. Rural inflation was **6.08%** and urban **4.88%**. The rate is well above the **4%** target, within the **2-6%** band. This follows the RBI's **25 bps** repo hike to **5.50%** on **7 October**, with a **'calibrated tightening'** stance.



SECTION C | GS-II: GOVERNANCE • POLITY • HEALTH • IR • SOCIETY

7. NPPA caps trade margins on 137 anti-cancer drugs at 30%

[HEALTH] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS2 (Health)**

Syllabus Linkage	**GS2:** Health, access to medicines. **GS3:** Pharma regulation. **Prelims:** NPPA, DPCO 2013, NLEM.
Context	The **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)** has capped trade margins on **137 non-scheduled anti-cancer medicines**, including immunotherapy drugs, at **30%**. Manufacturers must file a **revised MRP within 7 days**.
Key Facts	■ MRPs may fall by **up to 70%**, depending on current price structures. ■ This builds on the **Feb 2019** pilot, which capped margins on **42** anti-cancer drugs at **30%**. ■ The tool is **Trade Margin Rationalisation (TMR)** under **Para 19 of DPCO 2013** (extraordinary powers in the public interest). ■ It aims to cut **out-of-pocket expenditure** on cancer care.
Way Fwd	Monitor **availability** so that supply does not shrink, widen **Jan Aushadhi** oncology stocks and link this with **Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY** packages.
Concept	**NPPA** (**1997**) works under the **Department of Pharmaceuticals**, **Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers**. **DPCO 2013** is issued under the **Essential Commodities Act, 1955**. **Scheduled** drugs, those in **NLEM 2022**, have ceiling prices. **Non-scheduled** drugs can raise prices by up to **10% a year**.

137 cancer drugs

30% trade-margin cap

≤70% possible MRP cut

7 days to file revised MRP

8. Supreme Court: fees for the full course must be fixed before admission

[POLITY] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS2 (Polity, Education)**

Syllabus Linkage	**GS2:** Judiciary, education, regulation of private institutions. **Prelims:** Article 19(1)(g), landmark fee cases.
Context	In **Dr B.C. Roy Engineering College v. State of West Bengal**, a bench of **Justices P.S. Narasimha and Alok Aradhe** held that students in professional courses must know their **full fee liability at the time of admission**.
Key Facts	■ Mid-course fee hikes are barred except in **unforeseeable or extraordinary circumstances** or after **statutory changes**. ■ **Fee fixation committees** must work as **continuing bodies**. ■ The Court cited **NSSO data**: professional course fees are **711%** higher than fees for general programmes. ■ **Periodic revisions** notified in advance remain allowed.
Way Fwd	Require **transparent fee disclosure** on institution portals and set up a **grievance mechanism** within fee regulators, in line with the **NEP 2020** principle of light but tight regulation.
Concept	**TMA Pai (2002):** private unaided institutions may fix fees, but **no profiteering or capitation fees**. **Islamic Academy (2003)** led to **state fee committees**. **P.A. Inamdar (2005)** upheld regulation to prevent commercialisation. Running an institution is an occupation under **Article 19(1)(g)**.

9. Census (Amendment) Rules, 2026 widen the pool of enumerators

[POLITY] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS2 (Governance), GS1 (Population)**

Syllabus Linkage	**GS2:** Governance and statutory processes. **GS1:** Population. **Prelims:** Census Act 1948, Seventh Schedule entry.
Context	On **16 October**, the **MHA** notified the **Census (Amendment) Rules, 2026**, amending **Rule 3** of the **Census Rules, 1990**. More categories of staff can now be appointed as **enumerators** for the upcoming **digital Census**.
Key Facts	■ Teachers of **aided and unaided private institutions** and staff of **banks and companies** are now eligible. ■ Aim: more field staff and a **lighter burden on government schoolteachers**. ■ **Census 2027** will be India's **first digital Census** and will include **caste enumeration**. ■ Reference date: **1 March 2027**. For snow-bound areas it is **1 October 2026**.
Way Fwd	Ensure **training, data-privacy safeguards** and **accountability** for private enumerators, and limit their deployment to holidays so that teaching days are not lost.
Concept	**Census** is in the **Union List (Entry 69)**. It is conducted under the **Census Act, 1948** by the **Registrar General & Census Commissioner** (MHA). Census data is **confidential** under **Section 15**. The last Census was in **2011**.

10. India approves accession to the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement

[IR] COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS2 (IR), GS3 (Blue Economy)

Syllabus Linkage	**GS2:** International agreements, the Indian Ocean Region. **GS3:** Blue economy. **Prelims:** RFMOs, SIOFA vs IOTC.
Context	The **Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying** approved India's accession to **SIOFA**. This moves India from **Cooperating Non-Contracting Party (since 2022)** to **full member**, with a vote in decisions.
Key Facts	■ Indian vessels can carry out authorised fishing for **squid, toothfish and alfonsino**. ■ SIOFA covers **high seas** of the southern Indian Ocean. **EEZs are excluded**. ■ **Tuna** is managed separately by the **IOTC**, not SIOFA. ■ SIOFA was signed in **2006** and came into force in **2012**.
Way Fwd	Upgrade the **deep-sea fishing fleet** under **PMMSY**, ensure **IUU-free** compliance and use the membership to project India as a **net security and sustainability provider** in the IOR (**SAGAR/MAHASAGAR**).
Concept	**RFMOs** are Regional Fisheries Management Organisations set up under **UNCLOS (1982)** and the **UN Fish Stocks Agreement (1995)**. An **EEZ** extends **200 nautical miles**. **IUU** stands for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

11. Children online about 4.5 hours a day, finds study; Supreme Court reaffirms internet access as a right

[SOCIETY] COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS1 (Society), GS2 (Rights)

Syllabus Linkage	**GS1:** Effects of technology on society and children. **GS2:** Fundamental rights. **Prelims:** Anuradha Bhasin case, DPDP Act.
Context	An **ICSSR-supported** study of over **2,000 children aged 9-14** in Delhi schools and about **500 parents** maps online risks. Separately, the **Supreme Court** said internet access is a fundamental right under **Article 21 read with Article 19(1)(a)**.
Key Facts	■ **97.6%** of children go online from home, mostly on **smartphones**, for about **4.5 hours a day**. ■ About **47%** had talked to **unknown people** online in the past **six months**. ■ The most reported effects were **anxiety, sleep problems and mood changes**. ■ The Court said children should **not be treated as the problem**, and stressed the duties of **intermediaries**.
Way Fwd	Teach **digital literacy** in school curricula, design platforms that are **age-appropriate by default**, and enforce **verifiable parental consent** under the DPDP Rules.
Concept	**Anuradha Bhasin v. UoI (2020):** speech and trade over the internet are protected under **Article 19(1)(a)** and **19(1)(g)**, and shutdowns must be **proportionate**. **Faheema Shirin (Kerala HC, 2019)** recognised internet access as part of the right to education and privacy. The **DPDP Act, 2023** treats anyone **under 18** as a child.

SECTION D | PRELIMS RAPID-FIRE

1. **Ramsar sites: 103.** The new sites are **Sukhna Wetland** (Chandigarh) and **Sauj Jheel** (UP). UP now has **14**, second only to **Tamil Nadu**.	2. **INS Samarthak** is the Navy's first indigenously designed **Multi-Purpose Vessel** (**107 m**), built by **L&T** at **Kattupalli**.
3. **NSTCC (National Strategic Trade Command Centre)** was launched at **Vanijya Bhawan**. It is a real-time trade-data hub run with the **DGFT**.	4. **CISF** will reorganise into function-based sectors (**Power, Coal, Steel, Ports**) from **1 November**. It is now the nodal agency for **aerial security** of critical infrastructure.
5. **India-Mauritius DTAA:** the **Principal Purpose Test** was notified on **13 October**. Investments made before **1 April 2017** are grandfathered.	6. **Aditya-L1 (VELC) + Proba-3 (ASPIICS):** joint observations measured the mass, density and energy of **coronal mass ejections** close to the Sun.

SECTION E | PRACTICE CORNER

Q1. Prelims Consider the following statements about the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA): 1. India has been a Cooperating Non-Contracting Party to SIOFA since 2022. 2. SIOFA is the main body managing tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean. 3. SIOFA's area of competence includes the Exclusive Economic Zones of coastal states. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) Statement 1 is correct. Statement 2 is wrong because **tuna** is managed by the **IOTC**. Statement 3 is wrong because SIOFA covers only the **high seas** and **excludes EEZs**.

Q2. Prelims Under which instrument does the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority cap trade margins on non-scheduled drugs, such as the recent 30% cap on 137 anti-cancer medicines?

(a) Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940
(b) Para 19 of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013
(c) New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019
(d) Patents Act, 1970 (Section 84)

Answer: (b) **Para 19 of DPCO 2013** gives the government extraordinary powers in the public interest. DPCO itself is issued under the **Essential Commodities Act, 1955**. Section 84 of the Patents Act deals with **compulsory licensing**.

Mains Practice. India's ethanol blending programme has to balance energy security against food security. Examine this in the light of the feedstock policy for 2026-27. (GS3, 15 marks, 250 words)

Hint: Introduction: **E20** achieved, and the **ESY 2026-27** tender. Body: the gains (lower **crude import bill**, extra farm income, lower emissions); the trade-offs (zero **sugar diversion**, pressure on maize and rice, **water intensity** of sugarcane); the solutions (**2G ethanol**, **PM JI-VAN**, flexible feedstock rules, flex-fuel vehicles). Conclusion: a **food-first, flexible** biofuel path.

ONE-LINE REVISION: **Zero sugar diversion** for ethanol in 2026-27; a **30%** margin cap on **137** cancer drugs; CERT-In's warning on **agentic AI**; **KONKAN-26** with the UK; **CPI 5.54%**; India joins **SIOFA**.