



UPSC & STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Current Affairs Today – January 19, 2026

19 January 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED

ENVIRONMENT

POLITY

ECONOMY

SCIENCE & TECH

IR

SOCIAL ISSUES

CURATED & WRITTEN BY**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator •

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

Free UPSC & State PCS Resources

ujjyari.com

Current Affairs Today — January 19, 2026

19 January 2026

WHY IN NEWS

PM Modi laid the foundation stone for the Kaziranga Elevated Corridor, scientists published a 4,500-year climate reconstruction from Tamil Nadu, the ESIC-EPFO SPREE campaign crossed one crore enrolments, and China announced its steepest-ever annual population decline.

KAZIRANGA ELEVATED CORRIDOR — FOUNDATION STONE LAID

Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the **Kaziranga Elevated Corridor** on January 19, 2026, at a ceremony in Assam attended by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. The corridor will be built over **National Highway 715** (formerly NH 37), which bisects the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, and will allow wildlife — especially the one-horned rhinoceros, elephants, and tigers — to cross the highway without risk of being struck by vehicles. The traditional **Bagurumba Dwhou** (Bodo tribal welcome ceremony) was performed to mark the occasion.

The highway kills dozens of animals annually, particularly during monsoon floods when rising Brahmaputra waters push wildlife southward across the road to higher ground outside the park.

Key Facts:

Kaziranga is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** (inscribed 1985) and a **Tiger Reserve** (since 2006)

Harbours ~**2,613 one-horned rhinoceroses** (2022 census) — approximately 70% of the world population

Home to Big Five wildlife: rhino, elephant, tiger, wild water buffalo, swamp deer (barasingha)

NH 715 runs along the southern boundary of the park

Bagurumba Dwhou: traditional auspicious ceremony of the Bodo people of Assam

UPSC RELEVANCE

Kaziranga location, UNESCO inscription year, Big Five, rhino population.

MAINS GS-3:

Linear infrastructure and wildlife corridors; habitat fragmentation; Project Rhinoceros; balancing development and biodiversity.

KONDAGAI LAKE — 4,500-YEAR CLIMATE RECORD FROM TAMIL NADU

Scientists from the **Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP), Lucknow**, and collaborating institutions published a study reconstructing **4,500 years of monsoon variability** in peninsular India using sediment cores from **Kondagai Lake** in **Sivaganga district, Tamil Nadu**. The study used pollen analysis, sediment geochemistry, and radiocarbon dating to identify multi-centennial wet and dry phases.

Key findings included evidence of a prolonged drought coinciding with the **4.2 Kiloyear Event** (~2,200–1,900 BCE) — a global dry spell linked to the decline of the Indus Valley Civilisation — and multiple phases of enhanced Southwest Monsoon during the Common Era. The research has implications for modelling future monsoon behaviour under climate change.

Key Facts:

Kondagai Lake: freshwater lake in Sivaganga district, Tamil Nadu; in the Eastern Ghats rain shadow region

Palaeoclimatology: uses proxy records (pollen, diatoms, oxygen isotopes, tree rings) to reconstruct past climate

BSIP, Lucknow: premier institute under the Department of Science and Technology (DST)

4.2 Kiloyear Event (~2,200 BCE): global mega-drought; evidence found across Africa, Middle East, and South Asia

Indus Valley Civilisation decline (~1,900 BCE) partially attributed to this prolonged drought

UPSC RELEVANCE

BSIP, palaeoclimate proxies, 4.2 ka event, Indus Valley decline.

MAINS GS-1:

Monsoon variability; climate change and ancient civilisations; GS-3: climate science.

ESIC-EPFO SPREE CAMPAIGN CROSSES 1.03 CRORE ENROLMENTS

The **Social Security Registration and Enrolment of Employees (SPREE)** campaign, jointly run by the **Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC)** and the **Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)**, crossed **1.03 crore new worker enrolments** as of January 19, 2026.

SPREE was launched to bring unregistered workers and establishments into the formal social-security framework. The campaign offered a limited-time waiver on penalty damages for employers who voluntarily registered their eligible workers. This is part of the broader effort to formalise India's labour market, where an estimated 90% of the workforce remains in the informal sector.

Key Facts:

ESIC provides medical, sickness, maternity, and disablement benefits; governed by the **ESI Act, 1948**

EPFO manages provident fund and pension; governed by the **EPF and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952**

Both bodies are under the **Ministry of Labour and Employment**

ESIC applicability threshold: establishments with **10 or more workers** (in scheduled industries)

EPFO applicability threshold: establishments with **20 or more workers**

SPREE incentive: waiver of Section 14B (EPF Act) and Section 85 (ESI Act) penalty damages

UPSC RELEVANCE

ESIC vs EPFO thresholds, ESI Act year, EPF Act year, contribution percentages.

MAINS GS-2/GS-3:

Social security for informal workers; Labour Code consolidation; formalisation of labour markets.

INDIA SKIPS BRICS "WILL FOR PEACE 2026" NAVAL EXERCISE

India declined to participate in the **"Will for Peace 2026"** multilateral naval exercise proposed under the BRICS framework, to be held in South African waters in early 2026. The exercise was championed by Russia and supported by China. India's abstention is consistent with its **strategic autonomy** doctrine — India does not join military alliances and avoids multilateral exercises that carry a bloc-alignment signal.

Key Facts:

BRICS original five: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (formalised 2009)

BRICS+ from January 2024: + Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE (Saudi Arabia yet to formally join)

India's bilateral exercises include: MALABAR (with US, Japan, Australia), VAJRA PRAHAR (with US), SHAKTI (with France)

QUAD (India, US, Japan, Australia) is a strategic grouping, NOT a military alliance; has no mutual defence clause

India has never been part of a military bloc; it was a founding member of the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** in 1961

UPSC RELEVANCE

BRICS+ membership, NAM founding.

MAINS GS-2:

India's strategic autonomy; BRICS geopolitics; India-Russia-China dynamics; India's approach to multilateral military groupings.

SUPREME COURT REVISITS PASSIVE EUTHANASIA — HARISH RANA CASE

The Supreme Court heard arguments in the **Harish Rana** matter on January 19, 2026, revisiting the implementation of its 2018 landmark ruling in **Common Cause v. Union of India**, which recognised passive euthanasia and the right to die with dignity under **Article 21**. The Court was examining whether the **advance directive** (living will) procedure needed simplification, as the 2018 guidelines — requiring two medical boards and a judicial magistrate's countersignature — have rarely been implemented in practice.

Key Facts:

Passive euthanasia: withdrawal or withholding of life-sustaining treatment for terminally ill patients — legal in India

Active euthanasia: administering a lethal substance — illegal in India

Constitutional basis: Article 21 (Right to Life) — extended to include the right to die with dignity

Common Cause v. Union of India (2018): 5-judge constitutional bench led by CJ Dipak Misra

An **advance directive** is a written document by a competent adult stating their wishes regarding life-sustaining treatment if they become incapacitated

2018 procedure: two doctor medical boards + judicial magistrate — criticised as too cumbersome

UPSC RELEVANCE

Article 21, passive vs active euthanasia, Common Cause case year.

MAINS GS-2/GS-4:

Right to die with dignity; advance directives; ethics of euthanasia; judicial activism and personal liberty.

CHINA POPULATION DECLINES BY 3.39 MILLION IN 2025

China's National Bureau of Statistics reported that the country's population fell by **3.39 million** in 2025 to **1.408 billion** — the steepest decline since modern records began, surpassing the 1.39 million fall in 2024. China's birth rate dropped to a record low of **6.8 per 1,000 people** in 2025. The fertility rate is approximately **1.0** — well below the replacement level of 2.1.

India, which surpassed China to become the world's most populous nation in April 2023 (~1.43 billion), continues to benefit from its demographic dividend, with a median age of approximately 29 years versus China's 39 years.

Key Facts:

China's first population decline since 1961: in 2022 (fell by 850,000)

Subsequent declines: 2.08 million (2023), 1.39 million (2024), 3.39 million (2025)

One-child policy (1980–2015) → Two-child (2016) → Three-child (2021)

4-2-1 problem: one working-age adult supporting two parents and four grandparents

India overtook China: April 2023; India's TFR ~2.0 (near replacement); China's TFR ~1.0

India's demographic dividend window: estimated to close by ~2050

UPSC RELEVANCE

China population data, one-child policy timeline, India as most populous (2023).

MAINS GS-1:

Demographic dividend vs demographic burden; ageing population; India-China demographic comparison.

POWER DISTRIBUTION UTILITIES TURN PROFITABLE FOR FIRST TIME

India's power distribution companies (DISCOMs) recorded a collective **net profit of Rs 2,701 crore** in FY 2024-25 — the first time the sector has been collectively profitable since liberalisation of the power sector. This turnaround was driven by debt restructuring under **UDAY (Ujjwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana)** and operational improvements under the **Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS)**. Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses fell to **15.4%** nationally in FY25.

Key Facts:

AT&C losses: combined transmission and distribution losses plus collection inefficiency

UDAY (2015): state governments took over 75% of DISCOM debt; linked to performance benchmarks

RDSS (2021): Rs 3,03,758 crore scheme for smart prepaid meters, feeder separation, infrastructure upgrades

Global benchmark AT&C losses: 8–10% (India still above, but improving)

Ministry of Power oversees DISCOMs; data published by the **Central Electricity Authority (CEA)**

UPSC RELEVANCE

UDAY vs RDSS, AT&C losses, CEA.

MAINS GS-3:

Power sector reforms; DISCOM financial health; energy access; electricity distribution challenges.

PERSONS IN NEWS

Praveen Vashista — Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC): CVC Praveen Vashista chaired the annual conference of Chief Vigilance Officers (CVOs) on January 19, 2026, with emphasis on AI tools for public procurement monitoring. The **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)** is a statutory multi-member body established under the **CVC Act, 2003** to exercise superintendence over vigilance administration in central government organisations.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA
KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK:

Location: Brahmaputra floodplain, Golaghat and Biswanath districts, Assam

UNESCO World Heritage Site: 1985

Tiger Reserve: 2006; National Park: 1974

One-horned rhino: ~2,613 (2022 census), ~70% of global population

Big Five: one-horned rhino, elephant, tiger, wild water buffalo, swamp deer

Highway: NH 715 (formerly NH 37) runs along southern boundary

PALAEOCLIMATE — KONDAGAI STUDY:

Kondagai Lake location: Sivaganga district, Tamil Nadu

Study institution: BSIP, Lucknow (under DST)

Time span: 4,500 years

Method: sediment cores (pollen, geochemistry, radiocarbon dating)

Key finding: 4.2 kiloyear event evidence; multiple monsoon fluctuation phases

4.2 ka Event (~2,200 BCE): global mega-drought linked to Indus Valley decline

ESIC VS EPFO:

ESIC: ESI Act 1948; 10+ workers; medical/sickness/maternity benefits

EPFO: EPF Act 1952; 20+ workers; provident fund and pension

Both under: Ministry of Labour and Employment

ESIC contribution: Employer 3.25% + Employee 0.75%

EPFO contribution: Employer 12% + Employee 12% of basic wages

SPREE penalty waiver: Section 14B (EPF), Section 85 (ESI)

CHINA DEMOGRAPHICS:

2025 population: 1.408 billion (decline: 3.39 million — steepest on record)

First decline since 1961: 2022 (850,000 fall)

TFR: ~1.0 (vs replacement level 2.1)

Birth rate: 6.8/1,000 (2025, record low)

India became most populous: April 2023 (~1.43 billion)

PASSIVE EUTHANASIA:

Article 21: Right to life and personal liberty (includes right to die with dignity)

Common Cause v. UoI (2018): 5-judge bench; CJ Dipak Misra

Passive = withdrawal of treatment (legal); Active = lethal injection (illegal)

Advance directive = written document by competent adult on end-of-life medical wishes

POWER SECTOR:

DISCOMs net profit FY25: Rs 2,701 crore — first-ever collective profit

AT&C losses FY25: 15.4% (down from 22%+ a decade ago)

UDAY: 2015 (debt restructuring); RDSS: 2021 (Rs 3.04 lakh crore)

CEA: Central Electricity Authority — nodal data body for power sector

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Bagurumba Dwhou: traditional Bodo tribal auspicious ceremony, Assam

NAM founding: 1961, Belgrade; India a founding member

QUAD has no mutual defence clause — not a military alliance

CVC Act: 2003; CVC is a statutory multi-member body

MALABAR exercise: India + US + Japan + Australia (Quad navies)

Sources: PIB, The Hindu, Indian Express

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

Published on ujjari.com · Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs