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Cell Broadcast System: Disaster Alerts on the Phone, 132 Pre-Approved Lists

Disaster management / technology | News context: parliamentary answer on the Cell Broadcast System for disaster alerts | Published: 19 October 2026

Background and Context

Cell broadcast pushes an alert to every phone in a defined geographic cell area at once, without needing phone numbers and without depending on network congestion the way SMS does. It is the standard technology for last-mile disaster warning: a message appears on the handset with a distinct tone.

Why in the News

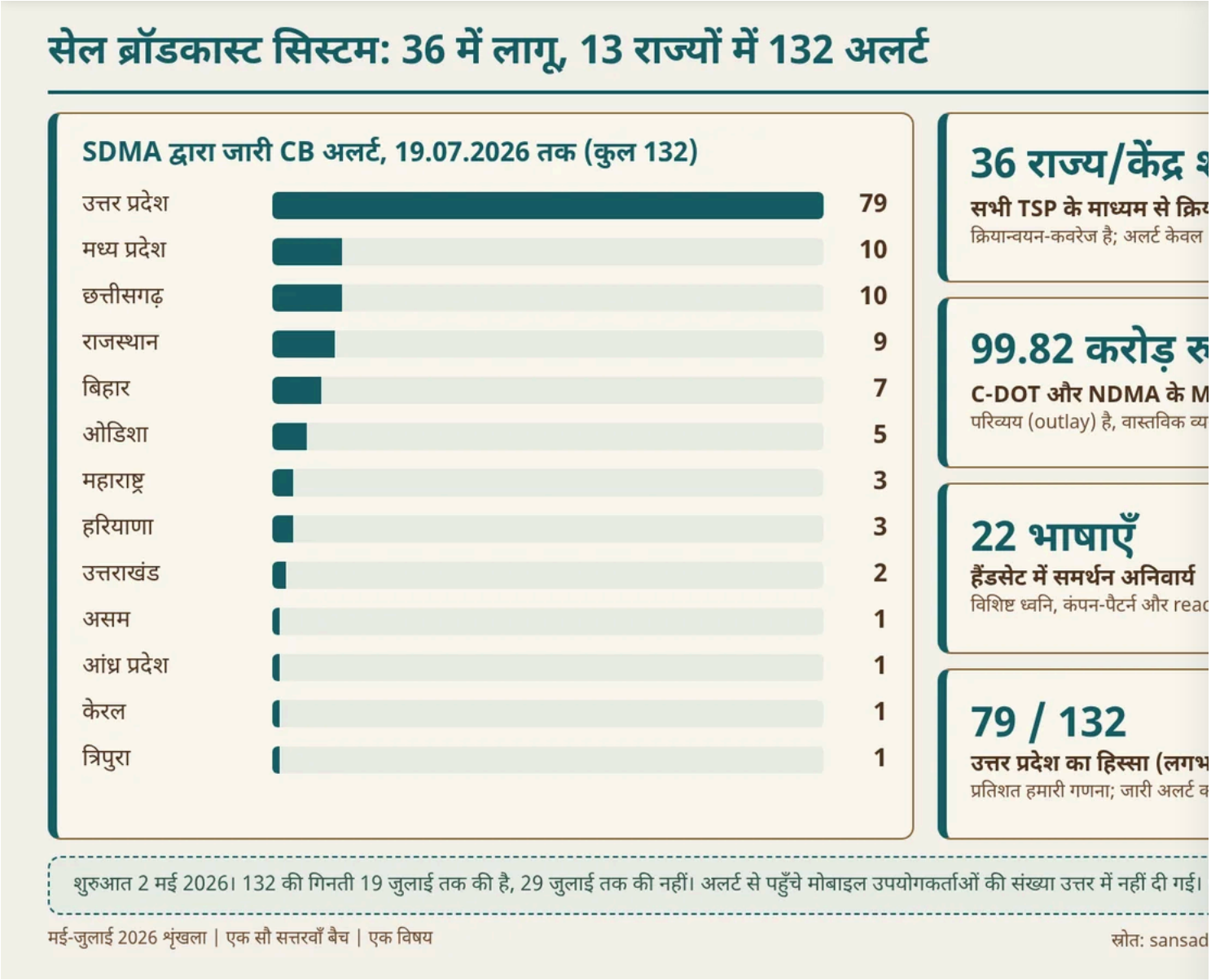
A parliamentary answer described the deployment of the Cell Broadcast System (CBS) for disaster alerts in India, including the number of pre-approved alert message templates and the agencies authorised to send them.

Core Concept: Common Alerting Protocol and Pre-Approved Templates

Alerts follow the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP), so one alert can flow across sirens, TV, radio, apps and cell broadcast. Pre-approved message templates ("lists") let a disaster authority send a standardised alert in seconds without drafting under pressure. The count of approved lists is a measure of preparedness, not of alerts actually sent.

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If the letters of the image look small, touch the image to open it larger and zoom. Diagram: pcsmantra.com's original diagram based on the parliamentary answer.

Key Facts and Figures

Pre-approved lists	132 pre-approved alert message lists are in place, per the answer (figure as printed in the source).
System	Cell Broadcast System for location-targeted disaster alerts integrated with the national early-warning setup; alerts originate from authorised disaster-management agencies and are broadcast through telecom networks to phones in the target area.

How to Read the Number

Readiness vs use: 132 lists is the library of ready alerts; it does not say how often alerts were sent, to how many phones, or whether they arrived in time. Effectiveness evidence is separate.

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Challenges and What We Have Not Read

We read the parliamentary answer as reported. Test-alert reports, handset-compatibility data and independent assessments of alert latency we have not read.

The Road Ahead

Watch test alerts and post-disaster reviews; those are the evidence of whether the system works at the last mile.

Distinction of Concepts

(1) Cell broadcast vs SMS; (2) pre-approved template count vs alerts actually sent; (3) system capability vs last-mile receipt; (4) readiness vs effectiveness.

Mains View

GS-III: disaster management, science and technology applications. In answers, note both the technology's strength (congestion-free area targeting) and its dependence on handset support and drills.

UPSC CSE Mains Style: Core Practice Question

Cell broadcast is now part of India's disaster early-warning chain. Discuss its advantages over SMS-based alerting and the conditions on which its last-mile effectiveness depends.

(Answer in 150 words) | 10 marks

Outline of the Answer

Introduction: the CBS deployment and 132 pre-approved lists. Main body: area targeting without numbers; congestion independence; CAP integration; handset and drill dependence; readiness vs effectiveness. Conclusion: templates prepare, tests prove.

Also read: Mission Mausam: 50 Radars and a Plan for 86 New Radars.

Sources

- https://sansad.in/getFile/lsapps/loksabhaquestions/annex/188/AU1838_Wd4AG2.pdf - Lok Sabha unstarred question 1838, answered 29.07.2026 (two pages)
- https://trai.gov.in/sites/default/files/2024-09/CP_03112021.pdf - TRAI consultation paper: SMS and cell broadcast alerts (CAP platform)
- https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Emergency-Telecommunications/Pages/EW4ALL/cell-broadcast.aspx - ITU: Cell broadcast early warning system (CB features)

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