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PART II · ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER

Thursday, 30 July 2026

Supreme Court: Post-Facto Environmental Clearances Only Via Statutory Notification, Quashes 2021 OM

Why in News: A three-judge bench led by CJI Surya Kant, with Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M. Pancholi, ruled on July 29, 2026 that the Centre can grant retrospective environmental clearances only through a statutory notification under Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 — not through an administrative Office Memorandum — and quashed the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's 2021 OM permitting such clearances.

Background: The 2021 OM had let industries operating without prior environmental clearance seek ex-post-facto regularisation, long criticised by environmentalists as rewarding violations; the Court held that since an EC restricts rights and regulates activity, it must flow from a statutory notification with consultation safeguards, not a mere circular.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Bench: CJI Surya Kant, Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M. Pancholi; ruling dated July 29, 2026.
- Post-facto/retrospective ECs may still be granted, but only via a statutory notification under Section 3, EPA 1986 — not an Office Memorandum.
- The 2021 OM permitting such regularisation stands quashed; the ruling operates prospectively.
- The Court invoked Articles 14 and 21, holding that bypassing notification-and-consultation safeguards via an OM would be arbitrary and violate the right to a healthy environment.

💡 LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Trick: remember "an OM opens the door, only a notification can build the wall" — an executive Office Memorandum can guide administration but cannot substitute for a statutory notification wherever rights-restricting regulation, like environmental clearance, is involved.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 (recurring): "Environmental Impact Assessment, post-facto clearances, and the EPA 1986's statutory framework."

🎯 PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Q. The Supreme Court's July 2026 ruling held that post-facto environmental clearances require a statutory notification under which Act? (a) Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (b) Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 (c) Forest Conservation Act, 1980 (d) Air Act, 1981. **Answer: (b).**

ENV

GS3

Environmental Clearance

EPA 1986

Species in News: The Wild Water Buffalo, India's Endangered "Arna"

Why in News: The Wild Water Buffalo (*Bubalus arnee*) — India's largest wild bovine and the wild ancestor of the domestic buffalo — remains one of the species prioritised under National CAMPA's ongoing conservation initiatives, alongside river dolphins, the Indian Rhinoceros and Snow Leopards.

Background: Once ranging across the Indo-Gangetic plains, its population has collapsed due to habitat loss, hybridisation with domestic/feral buffaloes, and disease transmission, leaving India's only viable wild population confined to Chhattisgarh's Indravati National Park and parts of Assam.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- IUCN status: Endangered; listed under CITES Appendix III and Schedule I of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- India's only viable wild population survives in Chhattisgarh's Indravati National Park and Assam's Kaziranga and Manas National Parks.
- Chhattisgarh has declared the Wild Water Buffalo its State Animal.
- Major threats: genetic dilution from interbreeding with domestic/feral buffaloes, habitat fragmentation, and disease spillover from domestic cattle.

💡 LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Trick: remember "Arna is Assam and Chhattisgarh's animal, not the farmyard one" — the Wild Water Buffalo is genetically distinct from India's common domestic buffalo, and Chhattisgarh's Indravati National Park holds its last stronghold outside Assam.

📖 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 (recurring): "Endangered species of India and their conservation status — Wild Water Buffalo, Rhino, River Dolphins."

🎯 PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Q. The Wild Water Buffalo's last viable population outside Assam survives in which national park? (a) Kanha (b) Indravati (c) Simlipal (d) Bandhavgarh. **Answer: (b).**

ENV

Wild Water Buffalo

IUCN Endangered

National CAMPA

§2 · PLACES IN NEWS — 30 JULY 2026

📍 PLACES IN NEWS — 30 JULY 2026 | ANTIM ASSURED 100+



- ① Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh (India's 45th UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- ② New Delhi (SC rulings, Parliament's Gaganyaan update, forex reserves data)
- ③ Mumbai (NCSC/Mumbai Port Authority case)
- ④ Beijing, China (FS Vikram Misri's border-peace talks)
- ⑤ Kulasekharapatnam, Tamil Nadu (DRDO-ISRO spaceport alliance)
- ⑥ Busan, South Korea (48th World Heritage Committee session)
- ⑦ Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh (Vibrant Village Programme border-belt)

① Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh

Site of the Buddha's first sermon, inscribed as India's 45th UNESCO World Heritage Site on July 25, 2026.

② New Delhi, India

Supreme Court hears the EWS ceiling and NCSC matters; government briefs Parliament on Gaganyaan; RBI reports record forex reserves.

③ Mumbai, Maharashtra

Site of the Mumbai Port Authority service dispute at the centre of the SC's ruling on NCSC's advisory-only powers.

④ Beijing, China

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri held talks reaffirming India-China border peace and tranquility, July 28, 2026.

⑤ Kulasekharapatnam, Tamil Nadu

Site of ISRO's upcoming second spaceport, now central to a new DRDO strategic alliance for defence-space convergence.

⑥ Busan, South Korea

Hosted the 48th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee that inscribed Sarnath.

⑦ Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh

Representative border-belt location for the Vibrant Village Programme, whose participants the PM interacted with on July 26.

§3 · ETHICS & INTEGRITY CASE STUDIES

Case 1 · Executive Convenience vs Statutory Rigour

An environment ministry official tempted to regularise a violating industry through a quick administrative circular must instead route the decision through a full statutory notification with public consultation, even if slower. **GS4 Values:** Rule of law, procedural integrity, resisting shortcuts.

Case 2 · Staying Within One's Constitutional Mandate

A member of an advisory constitutional body, under pressure from an aggrieved employee to "just decide" a service dispute, must resist overstepping into adjudication that the Constitution never granted the body. **GS4 Values:** Institutional integrity, separation of powers, honesty about the limits of one's authority.

Case 3 · Heritage Stewardship vs Tourism Pressure

An ASI conservator managing a newly UNESCO-listed site must balance the economic pull of rapidly scaling up tourist infrastructure against the physical fragility of ancient monuments. **GS4 Values:** Intergenerational equity, stewardship, resisting short-term commercial pressure.

Case 4 · Diplomatic Tact vs Domestic Political Pressure

A foreign service officer negotiating border confidence-building measures faces domestic pressure for tougher public rhetoric, while quiet diplomacy is delivering real de-escalation. **GS4 Values:** Patience, long-term national interest over short-term optics.

Case 5 · Reservation Design vs Perceived Fairness

A policymaker reviewing the EWS income ceiling must weigh administrative simplicity of a uniform national limit against regional cost-of-living realities that make the same rupee figure unequal in effect. **GS4 Values:** Equity, empathy, objectivity in policy design.

Case 6 · Border Development vs Genuine Community Needs

An official implementing the Vibrant Village Programme must ensure funds build infrastructure residents actually need to stay, rather than symbolic projects that look good in reports but fail to check migration. **GS4 Values:** Accountability, empathy, outcome-orientation over output-orientation.

§4 · PRELIMS MCQS — 30 JULY 2026 (20 QUESTIONS)

Q1. Sarnath was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site at which session of the World Heritage Committee? (a) 46th (b) 47th (c) 48th (d) 49th

✔ Answer: (c) — held in Busan, South Korea.

Q2. Sarnath's inscription makes it India's: (a) 40th UNESCO WHS (b) 42nd UNESCO WHS (c) 45th UNESCO WHS (d) 48th UNESCO WHS

✔ Answer: (c).

Q3. The ₹8 lakh EWS income ceiling was examined by the Supreme Court in the context of: (a) UPSC Civil Services Exam (b) NEET All India Quota (c) IIT-JEE (d) State PSC exams

✔ Answer: (b).

Q4. EWS reservation was introduced through which Constitutional Amendment? (a) 101st (b) 102nd (c) 103rd (d) 104th

✔ Answer: (c).

Q5. The Supreme Court's Janhit Abhiyan (2022) ruling upholding the EWS ceiling was decided by what majority? (a) 5:0 (b) 4:1 (c) 3:2 (d) 2:3

✔ Answer: (c).

Q6. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes derives its mandate from which Article? (a) 330 (b) 335 (c) 338 (d) 340

✔ Answer: (c).

Q7. NCSC and NCST were split into separate constitutional bodies by which Amendment? (a) 86th (b) 89th (c) 93rd (d) 97th

✔ Answer: (b) — 89th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003.

Q8. The Vibrant Village Programme was approved as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme in: (a) 2020 (b) 2021 (c) 2023 (d) 2025

✔ Answer: (c) — February 2023.

Q9. VVP covers border villages in all of the following EXCEPT: (a) Ladakh (b) Sikkim (c) Kerala (d) Arunachal Pradesh

✔ Answer: (c).

Q10. India-China's October 2024 disengagement agreement was reached ahead of which summit? (a) G20 (b) SCO (c) BRICS (Kazan) (d) ASEAN

✔ Answer: (c).

Q11. The 2020 clash that froze India-China relations occurred in: (a) Doklam (b) Galwan Valley (c) Pangong Tso (d) Demchok

✔ Answer: (b).

Q12. DRDO's recently showcased indigenous defence technologies span how many broad domains? (a) 3 (b) 4 (c) 5 (d) 6

✔ Answer: (c) — land warfare, aerospace, missile defence, underwater propulsion, space security.

Q13. The Positive Indigenisation Lists for defence equipment are administered by: (a) DRDO (b) Department of Defence Production (c) DGQA (d) Defence Acquisition Council

✔ Answer: (b).

Q14. Gaganyaan's Human Rated Launch Vehicle is designated: (a) GSLV Mk III (b) HLV-M3 (c) PSLV-XL (d) SSLV

✔ Answer: (b).

Q15. The humanoid robot to fly on Gaganyaan's uncrewed test missions is named: (a) Pragyan (b) Vyommitra (c) Rohini (d) Aryabhata

✔ Answer: (b).

Q16. India's second spaceport, developed mainly for SSLV missions, is located at: (a) Sriharikota (b) Kulasekharapatnam (c) Thumba (d) Chandipur

✔ Answer: (b).

Q17. India's forex reserves hit a fresh record high of approximately: (a) \$650 billion (b) \$660 billion (c) \$676 billion (d) \$700 billion

✓ Answer: (c) — \$676.24 billion, week ended July 17, 2026.

Q18. The largest component of India's forex reserves is usually: (a) Gold (b) SDRs (c) Foreign Currency Assets (d) Reserve Tranche Position

✓ Answer: (c).

Q19. The Supreme Court's July 2026 ruling held that post-facto environmental clearances require a statutory notification under which Act? (a) Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (b) Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 (c) Forest Conservation Act, 1980 (d) Air Act, 1981

✓ Answer: (b).

Q20. The Wild Water Buffalo's last viable population outside Assam survives in which national park? (a) Kanha (b) Indravati (c) Simlipal (d) Bandhavgarh

✓ Answer: (b).

§5 · MAINS QUESTIONS — 30 JULY 2026

GS1 Culture Q1. "UNESCO World Heritage recognition serves both cultural preservation and India's soft-power diplomacy." Discuss with reference to Sarnath's recent inscription. (250 words)

Hints: Buddhist circuit tourism; Act East policy's soft-power dimension; conservation-vs-tourism-infrastructure tension; comparison with Bodh Gaya's 2002 inscription.

GS2 Social Justice Q2. "Reservation policy in India must continually balance social justice with perceived arbitrariness in eligibility criteria." Examine with reference to the EWS income ceiling debate. (250 words)

Hints: 103rd Amendment; Janhit Abhiyan (2022); creamy-layer analogy criticism; region-specific cost-of-living concerns; periodic-revision mechanism.

GS2 Polity Q3. Discuss the distinction between advisory/recommendatory constitutional bodies and adjudicatory tribunals, with reference to the Supreme Court's recent ruling on the National Commission for Scheduled Castes. (250 words)

Hints: Article 338 vs 338A; civil-court powers for inquiry only; separation of powers; comparison with NHRC's similar limitations.

GS2 Border Development Q4. Assess the effectiveness of border-area development schemes such as the Vibrant Village Programme in achieving strategic and developmental objectives simultaneously. (250 words)

Hints: "last village to first village" philosophy; dual-use infrastructure; migration/depopulation concerns; convergence with BADP.

GS2 IR Q5. "India-China relations illustrate that border peace is both a precondition for, and a product of, deepening bilateral engagement." Examine. (250 words)

Hints: Galwan (2020) to Kazan disengagement (2024) to 2026 diplomatic visits; trade/connectivity linkage; trust-deficit management.

GS3 Defence Q6. Evaluate India's progress toward defence self-reliance, with reference to DRDO's indigenous technology programmes. (250 words)

Hints: Aatmanirbhar Bharat in defence; Positive Indigenisation Lists; private-sector participation; balancing indigenisation speed with quality assurance.

GS3 Space Technology Q7. Discuss the significance of the Gaganyaan Mission for India's human spaceflight capability, and the technological challenges it must overcome before a crewed launch. (250 words)

Hints: HLV3; ECLSS; Crew/Service Module qualification; uncrewed-to-crewed safety ladder; comparative international human-spaceflight programmes.

GS3 External Sector Q8. Discuss the significance of foreign exchange reserves as a macroeconomic stability indicator, and the factors currently driving India's reserve accumulation. (250 words)

Hints: composition (FCA, Gold, SDR, RTP); import-cover benchmark; currency stability role; opportunity cost of excess reserves.

GS3 Environment Q9. "Environmental clearance procedures must balance ease of doing business with the constitutional right to a healthy environment." Discuss in light of the Supreme Court's ruling on post-facto environmental clearances. (250 words)
Hints: 2021 OM vs statutory notification; EPA 1986 Section 3; Articles 14/21; precautionary principle; public-consultation safeguards in the EIA process.

§6 · ANSWER WRITING VALUE ADDITION

DATA — SARNATH UNESCO

India's 45th UNESCO World Heritage Site, inscribed July 25, 2026 at the 48th World Heritage Committee session, Busan. Use in: GS1/Culture answers.

DATA — EWS CEILING

₹8 lakh annual income ceiling; introduced via the 103rd Amendment (2019); upheld 3:2 in Janhit Abhiyan (2022). Use in: GS2 social-justice answers.

DATA — VIBRANT VILLAGE PROGRAMME

Covers border regions of Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Sikkim and Uttarakhand; approved February 2023. Use in: GS2/GS3 border-development answers.

QUOTE — ON INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS

"Peace and tranquility along the India-China border areas remain important to advance bilateral cooperation" — MEA readout, FS Vikram Misri's Beijing visit, July 28, 2026. Use in: GS2 IR answers.

DATA — FOREX RESERVES

\$676.24 billion, a fresh record high (week ended July 17, 2026); +\$1.08 billion weekly rise, led by Foreign Currency Assets. Use in: GS3 external-sector answers.

DATA — GAGANYAAN

HLVM3 propulsion fully ground-tested; ECLSS under qualification; G1 (uncrewed) may extend to Q3 2027, crewed flight to 2028 or later. Use in: GS3 space-technology answers.

DATA — SC ON POST-FACTO EC

2021 OM quashed; post-facto environmental clearances now require a Section 3, EPA 1986 statutory notification, not an OM. Use in: GS3/ENV answers.

§7 · AKADEMIA DIRECT HIT TRACKER — 30 JULY 2026

#	TOPIC	GS	PRIORITY	ONE-LINE RECALL
1	Sarnath — 45th UNESCO WHS	GS1	HIGH	Inscribed July 25, 48th WHC session, Busan
2	SC — EWS ₹8L Income Ceiling	GS2	HIGH	"Prima facie reasonable"; NEET AIQ context
3	SC — NCSC Advisory-Only Role	GS2	MEDIUM	Article 338; Mumbai Port Authority case
4	Vibrant Village Programme	GS2	MEDIUM	5 border regions; "last village to first village"
5	India-China Border Peace Talks	GS2	HIGH	FS Misri's Beijing visit, July 28
6	DRDO's 7 Indigenous Technologies	GS3	MEDIUM	Land-Aerospace-Missile-Underwater-Space
7	Gaganyaan Parliament Update	GS3	HIGH	HLVM3 tested; G1 may slip to Q3 2027

8	DRDO-ISRO Spaceport Alliance	GS3	 MEDIUM	Kulasekharapatnam; defence-space convergence
9	Forex Reserves Record High	GS3	 HIGH	\$676.24bn, week ended July 17
10	SC Quashes 2021 OM (Post-Facto EC)	ENV	 HIGH	Statutory notification required, EPA 1986 S.3
11	Wild Water Buffalo Species Profile	ENV	 MEDIUM	Indravati NP; Chhattisgarh's State Animal
12	103rd Constitutional Amendment	GS2	 LOW	Inserted Articles 15(6)/16(6) for EWS
13	Janhit Abhiyan v. Union of India (2022)	GS2	 LOW	3:2 majority upheld EWS ceiling
14	89th Amendment — Article 338/338A	GS2	 LOW	Split NCSC and NCST into separate bodies
15	BRICS Kazan Disengagement (2024)	GS2	 LOW	Restored patrolling at Depsang, Demchok
16	HLVM3 & ECLSS	GS3	 LOW	Human Rated Launch Vehicle; life-support tech
17	Positive Indigenisation Lists	GS3	 LOW	Administered by Dept. of Defence Production
18	Buddhist Circuit — Four Sacred Sites	GS1	 LOW	Lumbini-Bodh Gaya-Sarnath-Kushinagar

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In what critics called the most unpredictable Prelims paper in a decade —

48

QUESTIONS FROM
ANTIM ASSURED 100+

7

QUESTIONS FROM
A SINGLE DOCUMENT

6

QUESTIONS FROM
A SINGLE CLASS

Our students had seen 48 questions before the paper was opened.

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