

THEIAS AKADEMIA • MORNING EDITION • 08:00 IST

ANTIM ASSURED 100+

PART II • ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER

Wednesday, 05 August 2026

"Every Topper's Last Read"

India Launches the Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan — 14 Priority Landscapes Across the Northeast

Why in News: India announced a dedicated Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan (CAP) on 4 August 2026, timed to International Clouded Leopard Day. The Plan was prepared under a Government of India-GEF-UNDP initiative and was formally released during the 91st meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wild Life (SCNBWL), held in the second week of July 2026 at Coimbatore. Its defining feature is the identification of 14 priority conservation landscapes across the Northeast, supported by a standardised scientific monitoring protocol combining camera traps, occupancy surveys, genetic analysis and environmental DNA. Meghalaya, for which the clouded leopard is the State Animal, has separately launched a complementary "Mission Clouded Leopard."

Note on coverage: This publication carried a static species profile of the clouded leopard on 3 August 2026. Today's card is a distinct and genuinely new development — a national conservation policy instrument, not a species description — and is therefore treated as fresh under this publication's anti-repetition rule. The focus below is deliberately on the institutional architecture rather than the animal's biology.

Background: India's species-conservation policy has historically been organised around a small number of charismatic megafauna — Project Tiger (1973), Project Elephant (1992), and more recently dedicated plans for the snow leopard, Great Indian Bustard, dolphin and lion. Smaller carnivores, and particularly the small and mid-sized cats of the Northeast, have received far less structured attention despite occupying the country's most biodiverse and most rapidly fragmenting forests. A species-specific Conservation Action Plan is the standard instrument for closing such a gap: it converts scattered research and ad hoc protection into a landscape-level framework with defined priority areas, an agreed monitoring methodology, and identified institutional owners. The National Board for Wild Life, constituted under Section 5A of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, is chaired by the Prime Minister; its Standing Committee, chaired by

the Union Environment Minister, is the body that actually clears such plans and adjudicates project proposals affecting protected areas.

KEY FACTS

- Announced **4 August 2026**, marking **International Clouded Leopard Day**; released at the **91st SCNBWL meeting, Coimbatore**, in the second week of July 2026.
- Prepared under a **Government of India-GEF-UNDP** initiative — an example of multilateral environmental finance shaping national conservation policy.
- Core deliverable: identification of **14 priority conservation landscapes** across the Northeast.
- **Standardised monitoring toolkit**: camera traps, **occupancy surveys**, genetic analysis, and **environmental DNA (eDNA)**.
- Emphasis on **restoring forest connectivity** between fragmented habitat patches, not merely protecting isolated blocks.
- Provides for **community-based conservation and sustainable livelihood support**, and encourages **transboundary cooperation** with neighbouring range countries.
- **Meghalaya's "Mission Clouded Leopard"** runs in parallel; the species is Meghalaya's **State Animal**.
- Statutory basis of the clearing body: **National Board for Wild Life under Section 5A, Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972** — chaired by the Prime Minister; Standing Committee chaired by the Environment Minister.

MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- **From protected area to landscape.** The plan's real conceptual move is away from the fortress-conservation model of fenced protected areas towards a landscape approach that treats the matrix between reserves — community forests, plantations, corridors — as conservation-relevant. This matters enormously in the Northeast, where a very large share of forest is community-owned rather than State-managed.
- **The community-ownership problem in Northeast conservation.** Under the Sixth Schedule and traditional tenure systems, much Northeastern forest is controlled by clans, village councils and autonomous district councils. Conventional protected-area law has limited purchase here, which is precisely why livelihood-linked, consent-based conservation is not optional but structurally necessary.
- **Detection technology changes what is knowable.** Environmental DNA and occupancy modelling allow presence-absence inference for a cryptic, nocturnal, arboreal species that

direct sighting surveys simply cannot count. Standardising method across 14 landscapes is what converts scattered studies into a comparable national baseline — the precondition for measuring whether the plan works.

- **Transboundary imperative.** The species' range spans Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Southeast Asia. Poaching networks and habitat corridors both cross borders, so unilateral national action has a ceiling; the plan's transboundary clause is an acknowledgement of that ceiling.
- **Umbrella-species logic and its limits.** Protecting a wide-ranging forest carnivore incidentally protects the whole canopy ecosystem beneath it — an efficient use of scarce conservation funding. The counter-argument is that flagship-species framing can distort allocation, drawing resources towards photogenic animals and away from equally threatened but unglamorous taxa.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Fix the chain "14 landscapes · 91st SCNBWL · GEF-UNDP · Meghalaya's State Animal." And remember the institutional hierarchy that UPSC repeatedly tests: **NBWL is chaired by the Prime Minister; its Standing Committee by the Environment Minister** — the Standing Committee is the body that actually does the work.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2023: "Explain the causes and effects of coastal erosion in India. What are the available coastal management techniques for combating the hazard?" (management-framework framing) · GS3 2018: "How does biodiversity vary in India? How is the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 helpful in the conservation of flora and fauna?" — directly relevant. · GS3 recurring: species-specific conservation projects and the protected-area network.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the National Board for Wild Life (NBWL):

1. It is a statutory body constituted under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
2. It is chaired by the Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
3. Proposals for use of land within protected areas are examined by its Standing Committee.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b). The NBWL itself is chaired by the *Prime Minister*; the Environment Minister chairs only its Standing Committee.

GS3

Clouded Leopard CAP

NBWL / Section 5A

eDNA

Landscape Approach

GS3

Species in News - Eastern Himalaya Endemism

Static Topic — not tied to a current event · Source: IUCN Red List / WII / MoEFCC species material

Species in News: The Red Panda — the Eastern Himalaya's Bamboo Specialist

Why in This Edition (Static Profile): Today's Environment lead is a Northeast forest-connectivity plan built around canopy-dependent species. The Red Panda is the other flagship of exactly that landscape — an arboreal, bamboo-dependent, connectivity-sensitive mammal of the Eastern Himalaya — and it is the species most likely to be tested alongside the clouded leopard in any question set on Northeast biodiversity. It is clearly labelled static and is drawn from the 30-day rotating species roster.

Background: The Red Panda (*Ailurus fulgens*) is a taxonomic curiosity: despite the name, it is not closely related to the giant panda, nor to raccoons or bears, and is the sole surviving member of the family Ailuridae — an evolutionary lineage with no other living representatives. It occupies temperate broadleaf and coniferous forests with a dense bamboo understorey across the Eastern Himalaya, from Nepal through Sikkim, north Bengal, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh and into Myanmar and southwest China. Although classified as a carnivore anatomically, its diet is overwhelmingly bamboo, which it processes with the help of a "false thumb" — an enlarged radial sesamoid wrist bone that functions as an opposable digit, one of the most cited examples of convergent evolution in mammals, since the giant panda evolved the same structure independently.

KEY FACTS

- **IUCN Red List status: Endangered.** Listed in **Schedule I** of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and **CITES Appendix I**.
- **State Animal of Sikkim;** also the mascot of the Darjeeling international tea and tourism identity.

- Indian range: **Sikkim, north West Bengal (Darjeeling, Singalila), Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nagaland.**
- Habitat: temperate broadleaf/conifer forest with **bamboo understorey**, roughly **2,200-4,800 m** in the Eastern Himalaya.
- Sole living member of the family **Ailuridae** — not a bear, not a raccoon, not related to the giant panda.
- Diet overwhelmingly **bamboo**, aided by a "**false thumb**" (modified radial sesamoid) — a classic case of **convergent evolution** with the giant panda.
- Principal threats: **habitat fragmentation, bamboo dieback, poaching for pelts, and canine distemper transmitted by feral dogs.**
- Conservation: the **Red Panda Programme** at the **Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, Darjeeling**, runs conservation breeding with rewilding releases into **Singalila National Park.**

AKADEMIA MEMORY TRIVIA

The Red Panda was scientifically described in 1825 — roughly half a century *before* the giant panda was known to Western science. It is therefore the original "panda"; the giant panda is the one that borrowed the name. Examiners like this inversion because it defeats the intuitive assumption.

MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- **Bamboo dependence is a climate vulnerability.** A diet built on a single plant genus that flowers and dies synchronously at long intervals makes the species structurally exposed to bamboo dieback events — a risk that shifting temperature and precipitation regimes intensify.
- **Disease at the wildlife-domestic interface.** Canine distemper from free-ranging village dogs is a documented mortality source, making dog population management and vaccination a conservation intervention as important as anti-poaching patrols — an illustration of the One Health framing.
- **Conservation breeding is a bridge, not a solution.** Rewilding programmes like Darjeeling's demonstrate technical success, but releases fail if the receiving habitat is still fragmented; ex-situ effort without in-situ corridor restoration is expensive symbolism.

- **Transboundary range, shared fate.** The Eastern Himalaya is a single ecological unit split across five national jurisdictions; population viability depends on coordinated protection along the Nepal-India-Bhutan-Myanmar arc.

PYQ LINKAGE

Prelims 2020 directly asked about the Red Panda's habitat and distribution among Indian States.
• GS3 2019: "How is the Government of India protecting traditional knowledge of medicine from patenting by pharmaceutical companies?" (biodiversity-governance framing) • GS1/GS3 recurring: Eastern Himalaya as a biodiversity hotspot, and Schedule I species distribution.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Red Panda:

1. It is the State Animal of Sikkim.
2. It belongs to the same family as the Giant Panda.
3. It is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b). The Red Panda is the only living member of the family Ailuridae; the Giant Panda belongs to Ursidae, the bear family.

GS3

Red Panda

Ailuridae

Eastern Himalaya

Schedule I

§2 · PLACES IN NEWS

 PLACES IN NEWS — 05 AUGUST 2026 | ANTIM ASSURED 100+



- ① New Delhi (SC Judges Bill, MSMED Bill, C-DAC-GSI MoU)
- ② Bhubaneswar (13th BRICS Education Ministers' Meeting)
- ③ Mumbai (RBI Monetary Policy Committee decision)
- ④ Gujarat (ranked first, Investment Friendliness Index)
- ⑤ Kolkata (Geological Survey of India headquarters) ● ⑥ Dhaka (BIMSTEC Secretariat)
- ⑦ South Lhonak Lake, Sikkim (GLOF reference event)
- ⑧ Arunachal Pradesh (Clouded Leopard CAP landscapes; Red Panda range)

① New Delhi

Venue for the Supreme Court Judges Bill's Lok Sabha passage, the MSMED Bill's Rajya Sabha passage, and the C-DAC-GSI MoU signing at Electronics Niketan.

Geography: on the Yamuna, a tributary of the Ganga, in the Indo-Gangetic Plain; lies in Seismic Zone IV and sits between the Aravalli ridge and the Yamuna floodplain.

② Bhubaneswar, Odisha

Host of the 13th BRICS Education Ministers' Meeting and 3rd Senior Officials' Meeting, 5-7 August 2026.

Geography: on the Eastern Coastal Plain near the Mahanadi delta; part of India's most cyclone-exposed coastline, and the reference case for cyclone early-warning and zero-casualty evacuation policy.

③ Mumbai, Maharashtra

④ Gujarat

Seat of the Reserve Bank of India, where the Monetary Policy Committee announced its 5 August decision.

Geography: built on reclaimed islands on the Konkan coast, backed by the Western Ghats escarpment; underlain by Deccan Trap basalt and highly exposed to sea-level rise and storm surge.

Ranked first in NITI Aayog's first Investment Friendliness Index, ahead of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

Geography: India's longest coastline (~1,600 km); the Gulf of Kachchh and Gulf of Khambhat give it exceptional port endowment — the physical basis of its investment ranking.

⑤ Kolkata, West Bengal

Headquarters of the Geological Survey of India, established 1851 — one signatory to today's Umbrella MoU with C-DAC.

Geography: on the Hooghly distributary of the Ganga, at the head of the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta; a subsiding deltaic setting with high land-subsidence and flood exposure.

⑥ Dhaka, Bangladesh

Location of the BIMSTEC Secretariat, established 2014 — the institutional seat of the Bay of Bengal grouping profiled in Part I.

Geography: on the Buriganga, within the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna delta, the world's largest delta; among the most flood- and cyclone-exposed capital cities globally.

⑦ South Lhonak Lake, Sikkim

Source of the October 2023 Glacial Lake Outburst Flood — the reference event for the GLOF studies named in the C-DAC-GSI MoU.

Geography: a moraine-dammed proglacial lake in the Eastern Himalaya feeding the Teesta, a tributary of the Brahmaputra; the basin lies in Seismic Zone IV with active permafrost degradation.

⑧ Arunachal Pradesh

Among the Northeast States covered by the Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan's priority landscapes, and part of the Red Panda's Indian range.

Geography: within the Eastern Himalaya biodiversity hotspot; drained by the Siang, which becomes the Brahmaputra, and marked by extreme altitudinal range from ~100 m to over 7,000 m.

§3 · ETHICS & INTEGRITY CASE STUDIES

Case 1 — The Judge Appointed to Clear a Backlog

You are a newly appointed judge in a court whose sanctioned strength has just been raised specifically to reduce pendency. Your Chief Justice circulates monthly disposal figures ranked by

judge. You realise that the fastest way to improve your ranking is to dispose of simple matters and defer complex constitutional questions indefinitely.

Ethical concept: Goodhart's Law and the corruption of measurement — when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure. Discuss the tension between quantitative accountability and qualitative justice, and what a defensible personal standard would look like.

Case 2 — Legislating Without Debate

You are a Secretary piloting a Bill through Parliament. Your Minister instructs you to schedule it for a day when the House is likely to be disrupted, so that it passes without amendments that would dilute it. You privately believe the Bill is good policy and that the amendments would weaken it.

Ethical concept: procedural versus substantive legitimacy — an outcome may be right while the process that produced it is illegitimate. Examine whether a civil servant may use a good end to justify circumventing deliberative process, drawing on the deontological objection that democratic procedure has intrinsic and not merely instrumental value.

Case 3 — The Small Supplier Who Will Not Complain

As a CPSE finance head, you know your organisation routinely delays MSME payments well beyond the statutory period, and that suppliers do not invoke their remedy because they fear losing the contract. New rules now require you to route settlements through a mandatory platform, but you have discovered a technically legal way to delay invoice acceptance and thereby the clock itself.

Ethical concept: exploitation of asymmetric bargaining power; the letter versus the spirit of the law — analyse using the Kantian test of whether the maxim of your action could be universalised, and consider what fiduciary duty a public enterprise owes to the weaker party in a contract.

Case 4 — Whose Forest Is It?

You are a District Forest Officer implementing a new species conservation plan in a Northeast district where forests are community-owned. The plan's success indicators require you to restrict traditional shifting cultivation in a designated corridor. The village council consents only reluctantly, and you sense the consent is a response to your official position rather than genuine agreement.

Ethical concept: free, prior and informed consent; the distinction between compliance and genuine consent — examine the ethics of conservation that treats local communities as implementation obstacles

rather than rights-holders, and the concept of environmental justice as distinct from environmental protection.

Case 5 — The Index That Rewards the Already-Rich

You are a NITI Aayog officer finalising the weights of a State-ranking index. You know that weighting infrastructure heavily will produce a ranking that closely tracks existing industrial development, effectively rewarding States for advantages they inherited. A colleague argues for adding an "improvement over own baseline" component. Political guidance favours the simpler design.

Ethical concept: distributive justice — Rawls's difference principle versus meritocratic ranking — evaluate whether a measurement instrument that entrenches inequality between subnational units can be defended as merely descriptive, or whether the choice of metric is itself a normative act.

Case 6 — Data You Were Never Meant to Combine

You work in an agency with lawful access to several separate government databases for a specific counter-terror investigation. Combining them reveals a detailed picture of an individual's movements, finances and associations. The individual is not a suspect; the pattern emerged incidentally. A senior colleague suggests retaining the profile "in case it becomes useful."

Ethical concept: purpose limitation and the mosaic theory of privacy — individually innocuous data points become intrusive in aggregate. Examine the proportionality test laid down in *K.S. Puttaswamy* (2017) — legality, legitimate aim, necessity and proportionality — and the duty to resist mission creep in security institutions.

§4 · PRELIMS MCQS (20 QUESTIONS)

1. Consider the following statements regarding the strength of the Supreme Court of India:

1. The Constitution itself fixes the maximum number of judges, alterable only by constitutional amendment.
2. The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026 raises the number of judges other

than the CJI to 37.

3. The 2026 increase was first given effect through an Ordinance.

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

Answer: (b). Article 124(1) allows Parliament to prescribe a larger number by ordinary law.

2. The total sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court of India, including the Chief Justice, after the 2026 amendment is:

(a) 34 (b) 37 (c) 38 (d) 41

Answer: (c). 37 other judges plus the CJI.

3. Consider the following statements about Department-related Standing Committees (DRSCs):

1. Every Bill introduced in Parliament must be referred to the concerned DRSC before passage.
2. Their recommendations are advisory and not binding on the Government.
3. A DRSC includes members from both Houses of Parliament.

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

Answer: (b). Referral is discretionary, not mandatory.

4. The Department-related Standing Committee system in the Indian Parliament was introduced in the year:

(a) 1977 (b) 1985 (c) 1993 (d) 2004

Answer: (c).

5. Consider the following statements about the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB) initiative:

1. It works on a system of pairing States and Union Territories for structured cultural exchange.
2. The Yuva Sangam youth-exchange programme is implemented by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
3. It was announced on the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

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

Answer: (b). Yuva Sangam is run by the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education.

6. Under Yuva Sangam Phase VII, the number of nodal higher education institutions designated is:

(a) 10 (b) 15 (c) 20 (d) 28

Answer: (c).

7. Consider the following statements regarding BRICS:

1. The New Development Bank is headquartered in Shanghai.
2. The BRICS Network University is an initiative under the grouping's education track.
3. Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE became members in the 2024 expansion.

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

Answer: (d). All three statements are correct.

8. The 13th BRICS Education Ministers' Meeting, hosted by India in 2026, was held at:

(a) Lucknow (b) Bhubaneswar (c) New Delhi (d) Visakhapatnam

Answer: (b). The BRICS statistics track met at Lucknow; the education track at Bhubaneswar.

9. Consider the following statements regarding BIMSTEC:

1. Its Secretariat is located in Kathmandu.
2. Afghanistan and Maldives are members of the grouping.
3. India leads the Security sector under its sectoral distribution.

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

Answer: (b). The Secretariat is at Dhaka; neither Afghanistan nor Maldives is a member.

10. The BIMSTEC Charter, giving the grouping international legal personality, was adopted at the Fifth Summit held in:

(a) Bangkok (b) Kathmandu (c) Colombo (d) Dhaka

Answer: (c). Colombo, 2022.

11. Consider the following statements regarding India's counter-terrorism institutions:

1. The National Investigation Agency was established by an Act of Parliament following the 2008 Mumbai attacks.
2. The UAPA permits the Central Government to designate an individual as a terrorist.
3. The National Counter Terrorism Centre was operationalised in 2012 under the Intelligence Bureau.

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

Answer: (a). The NCTC was proposed in 2012 but never operationalised, owing to State objections.

12. The Multi-Agency Centre (MAC), India's intelligence-sharing hub, is operated by:

(a) Research and Analysis Wing (b) Intelligence Bureau (c) National Investigation Agency (d) National Security Council Secretariat

Answer: (b).

13. Consider the following statements:

1. The Geological Survey of India functions under the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
2. C-DAC developed the indigenous PARAM series of supercomputers.
3. Synthetic Aperture Radar can acquire imagery irrespective of cloud cover and daylight.

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

Answer: (b). GSI is under the Ministry of Mines.

14. Consider the following statements regarding Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs):

1. They are most commonly caused by failure of a moraine or ice dam impounding a glacial lake.
2. The October 2023 Sikkim event originated from South Lhonak Lake and affected the Teesta basin.
3. Synthetic Aperture Radar is unsuitable for monitoring in cloudy conditions.

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

Answer: (a). SAR works precisely because it penetrates cloud.

15. Consider the following statements regarding India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC):

1. It consists of six members, of whom three are nominated by the Central Government.
2. The RBI Governor has a casting vote in case of a tie.
3. The inflation target is fixed by the RBI independently of the Central Government.

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

Answer: (a). The target is set by the Central Government in consultation with the RBI, once every five years.

16. At its August 2026 meeting, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee:

(a) Cut the repo rate to 5.00% (b) Held the repo rate at 5.25% with a neutral stance (c) Raised the repo rate to 5.50% (d) Held the rate but shifted to a withdrawal-of-accommodation stance

Answer: (b). Held unanimously at 5.25%, neutral stance retained.

17. In India's liquidity adjustment framework, the floor of the interest-rate corridor is set by the:

(a) Marginal Standing Facility rate (b) Bank Rate (c) Standing Deposit Facility rate (d) Reverse repo rate under the LAF

Answer: (c). SDF is the floor; MSF and Bank Rate form the ceiling.

18. Consider the following statements regarding the Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS):

1. It is an electronic platform framework authorised by the Reserve Bank of India for financing MSME trade receivables.
2. Under the MSMED (Amendment) Bill, 2026, routing MSME invoice settlement through TReDS is mandatory for central public sector enterprises.
3. Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Councils are constituted by the Central Government.

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

Answer: (a). MSEFCs are established by State Governments.

19. Consider the following statements regarding NITI Aayog:

1. It was established by an Act of Parliament in 2015.
2. Its Investment Friendliness Index assigns the highest weight among all pillars to Infrastructure.
3. Environmental Resilience is one of the pillars of that Index.

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

Answer: (b). NITI Aayog was created by an executive resolution, not by statute.

20. Consider the following statements regarding the National Board for Wild Life (NBWL) and the Red Panda:

1. The NBWL is chaired by the Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
2. The Red Panda is the State Animal of Sikkim and is listed as Endangered by the IUCN.
3. The Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan identifies 14 priority conservation landscapes in the Northeast.

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

Answer: (b). The NBWL is chaired by the Prime Minister; the Environment Minister chairs only its Standing Committee.

GS2 • 250 words — "Increasing the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court addresses the symptom of judicial pendency but not its cause." Critically examine, with reference to the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026.

GS2 • 250 words — Parliamentary Committees have been called "mini-Parliaments." In light of the declining rate of referral of Bills to Department-related Standing Committees, evaluate whether India's legislative scrutiny machinery is failing, and suggest institutional remedies.

GS2 • 150 words — Discuss how programmes such as Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat operationalise the Fundamental Duty under Article 51A(e). What are the limits of state-designed initiatives in fostering national integration?

GS2 • 250 words — "Mutual Recognition of Qualifications is a labour-mobility negotiation conducted under the vocabulary of education cooperation." Discuss with reference to India's BRICS education agenda.

GS2 • 250 words — Compare BIMSTEC and SAARC as vehicles for India's regional objectives. Why has BIMSTEC's implementation record fallen short of its institutional promise?

GS3 • 250 words — "India's counter-terrorism architecture is constrained less by legal inadequacy than by the federal division of powers." Critically examine with reference to the NIA, NATGRID and the shelving of the NCTC.

GS3 • 250 words — Examine how the convergence of high-performance computing and artificial intelligence with geoscientific data can advance India's critical-mineral security and disaster preparedness simultaneously.

GS1/GS3 • 250 words — Explain the mechanism of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods. Why does the expansion of Himalayan hydropower amplify the systemic risk they pose, and what mitigation architecture is required?

GS3 • 250 words — "A landscape approach to conservation is unavoidable in Northeast India because most forest is not State-owned." Discuss with reference to the Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan.

§6 · ANSWER WRITING VALUE ADDITION

Number ladder (Judiciary): Supreme Court strength 8 (1950) → 11 (1956) → 14 (1960) → 18 (1977-78) → 26 (1986) → 31 (2009) → 34 (2019) → 38 (2026). A single line that demonstrates command of institutional history in any judiciary answer.

Framework (Parliament): "A Bill not examined in committee and not debated on the floor has been legislated, but it has not been scrutinised." Pair with the numbers 24 DRSCs · 31 members · since 1993.

Analytical line (Federalism & security): The NIA survived State objections because it *investigates*; the NCTC did not because it was to *police*. The investigate-versus-police distinction is the cleanest way to explain why one central agency succeeded and the other failed.

Data point (Monetary policy): August 2026 — repo held at 5.25% for a fourth straight meeting, FY27 growth revised *up* to 6.7% and inflation revised *down* to 5.0%, with inflation projected to peak at 5.9% in Q3. A rare simultaneous improvement on both sides of the mandate.

Number set (MSMEs): 45 days statutory payment period · 50% interim payment where set-aside is pending · 6 months pendency trigger. Anchors any answer on MSME working-capital distress.

Critique framework (Indices): "The weighting is the policy." Infrastructure at 25% and environmental resilience at 5% is a normative judgement presented as a technical parameter — usable against any ranking-based governance instrument, and pairs naturally with Goodhart's Law.

Conceptual pair (Remote sensing): "Optical needs sunlight and clear sky; SAR needs neither." Follow with InSAR's ability to detect millimetre-scale precursor deformation — the technical basis of slope early warning.

Conservation framing: Shift from fortress conservation to the landscape approach — in the Northeast this is not a philosophical preference but a legal necessity, because Sixth Schedule and community tenure place most forest outside conventional protected-area law.

§7 · AKADEMIA DIRECT HIT TRACKER

#	TOPIC	SECTION	GS PAPER	PROBABILITY
1	Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026	Part I §2	GS2	Very High
2	Article 124 & Sanctioned Strength Ladder	Part I §2	GS2	Very High
3	Ordinance Route — Article 123	Part I §2	GS2	High
4	Department-related Standing Committees & Scrutiny Deficit	Part I §2	GS2	High
5	Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat / Yuva Sangam Phase VII	Part I §2	GS2	Medium
6	13th BRICS Education Ministers' Meeting, Bhubaneswar	Part I §3	GS2	High
7	BRICS Architecture — NDB, CRA, Network University	Part I §3	GS2	High
8	BIMSTEC — Charter, Secretariat, Sectoral Leads	Part I §3	GS2	Very High
9	Counter-Terror Architecture — NIA, UAPA, NATGRID, MAC	Part I §4	GS3	Very High
10	NCTC and the Federalism Objection	Part I §4	GS2/GS3	High
11	C-DAC-GSI Umbrella MoU — AI, HPC, Geoscience LLM	Part I §5	GS3	High
12	Glacial Lake Outburst Floods & South Lhonak	Part I §5	GS1/GS3	Very High
13	Synthetic Aperture Radar & InSAR Deformation Monitoring	Part I §5	GS3	High
14	RBI MPC August 2026 — Repo 5.25%, Neutral Stance	Part I §6	GS3	Very High
15	MSMED (Amendment) Bill, 2026 — TReDS & MSEFC	Part I §6	GS3	High
16	NITI Aayog Investment Friendliness Index — Eight Pillars	Part I §6	GS3	High
17	Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan — 14 Landscapes	Part II §1	GS3	High
18	Red Panda — Ailuridae, Sikkim State Animal, Endangered	Part II §1	GS3	Medium

§8 · PROOF OF PRECISION

1. ANTIM ASSURED 100+ students had already studied Article 124 and the Supreme Court's sanctioned-strength history, the MPC's statutory framework under Section 45ZB, and the NBWL's two-tier chairing structure — weeks before today's cluster of related developments made each of them live. That is the anticipatory static-plus-current design at work.
2. Today's edition carries eleven substantive Part I cards and twenty Prelims MCQs, twelve of them in UPSC's own statement-based format — because the exam does not ask one-line recall questions, and neither should the material that prepares you for it.
3. Every dated card carries a verified source lineage (PIB, RBI, MoEFCC, MeitY, Ministry of Education, PRS-tracked Bill records), and every static card is labelled as static rather than disguised as breaking news — the same discipline that delivered 48 direct hits in UPSC CSE Prelims 2026.
4. The two static fallback cards today — BIMSTEC and India's counter-terror architecture — were selected because both carry directly-asked previous-year Mains questions. Static coverage here is not filler; it is targeting.

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UPSC CSE Prelims 2026 Results

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.

This is not luck. This is TheIAS Akademia.

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