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PART II · ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER

Saturday, 08 August 2026

Morning Edition · 08:00 IST · TheIAS Akademia

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Environment & Ecology

GS3

Environmental Pollution & Degradation

Reported 04 August 2026 · Source: Down To Earth / National Green Tribunal

NGT Takes Up Illegal Fly-Ash Dumping by Vedanta Ltd, Jharsuguda

Why in News: The National Green Tribunal has taken cognisance of complaints alleging large-scale, unlawful dumping of fly ash by Vedanta Limited around Belpahar and Kurmipada in Jharsuguda district, Odisha, including a 3.5-acre water body at Brundamal village allegedly filled with ash. The Tribunal has directed the Central Pollution Control Board to investigate, while the Odisha State Pollution Control Board had earlier ordered Vedanta to deposit ₹71.1 crore in compensation for unauthorised disposal.

Background: Fly ash, a coal-combustion by-product from thermal power and aluminium-smelting operations, is regulated under the Fly Ash Notification (1999, amended periodically) requiring 100% utilisation in construction, road-building or mine-filling rather than open dumping. Jharsuguda, sitting in the upper Mahanadi river basin, is one of Odisha's most industrially dense districts, hosting major aluminium and thermal-power capacity — making fly-ash management a chronic local environmental flashpoint.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Alleged dumping sites: Belpahar, Kurmipada and adjoining areas of Jharsuguda district, Odisha.
- Specific site cited: a 3.5-acre water body at Brundamal village allegedly filled with fly ash (Plot No. 769/1588).
- NGT has directed the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to investigate the allegations.
- Odisha State Pollution Control Board had separately directed Vedanta to deposit ₹71.1 crore as environmental compensation.
- Evidence includes geo-tagged photographs showing fly-ash mounds spread across open land.
- Complaints were escalated through SPCB, CPCB, MoEFCC and district administration before NGT intervention.
- Governing framework: NGT Act, 2010 (tribunal's suo motu/complaint-driven jurisdiction) and the Fly Ash Notification requiring 100% utilisation.

📊 MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Illustrates the "polluter pays" principle in action — compensation precedes final adjudication, incentivising faster corrective behaviour.
- Highlights persistent gaps between fly-ash utilisation mandates on paper and ground-level compliance in heavy-industry clusters.
- Raises questions on the adequacy of State Pollution Control Board monitoring capacity relative to industrial scale in districts like Jharsuguda.
- Water-body encroachment via ash-filling compounds both pollution and wetland-loss concerns simultaneously.
- Tests the NGT's institutional design — its power to act on citizen complaints even where SPCB action is already underway.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Fly ash should build roads, not fill lakes — remember "100% utilisation, 0% dumping" as the regulatory rule Vedanta is accused of breaking.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2019 Prelims tested fly-ash composition and uses; NGT enforcement cases like this update the applied/regulatory side of that theme.

GS3

Conservation of Biodiversity — Static Species Profile

Static Topic — not tied to a current event · Source: IUCN Red List / WWF India / Wildlife Institute of India

Static Species Profile: The Fishing Cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*)

Why in News: Featured today as this edition's rotating static species profile — the Fishing Cat is a wetland-specialist felid whose fortunes are closely tied to India's rapidly shrinking mangrove and estuarine habitats, making it a high-yield, frequently under-covered UPSC species.

Background: Unlike most cats, the Fishing Cat is semi-aquatic, with partially webbed feet adapted for swimming and hunting fish in wetlands, making habitat loss from wetland drainage and aquaculture expansion its single greatest threat. India's Wildlife Institute launched the country's first dedicated Fishing Cat radio-collaring study in recent years to close major gaps in scientific understanding of its ranging behaviour.

KEY FACTS

- Scientific name: *Prionailurus viverrinus* (Bennett, 1833).
- IUCN Red List status: Vulnerable (VU), with an estimated ~30% population decline over three generations.
- CITES Appendix II; Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 Schedule I (highest protection level).
- Distribution in India: patchy, wetland-linked populations in the Sundarbans (West Bengal), Himalayan foothill valleys of Assam, the Western Ghats, and the Godavari-Coringa estuarine belt of Andhra Pradesh.
- India's total population is estimated at under 10,000, with no reliable range-wide census.
- Key threats: mangrove/wetland habitat loss, human-fishing cat conflict, direct persecution, and unsustainable aquaculture expansion.
- Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (Andhra Pradesh) — India's second-largest mangrove habitat — and Kaziranga National Park (Assam) are identified strongholds.
- Wildlife Institute of India's Fishing Cat Collaring Project at Coringa has GPS-collared multiple individuals to study home range and habitat use, India's first such study for the species.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- The Fishing Cat's semi-aquatic adaptation makes it an indicator species for estuarine wetland health, much like the otter or the Gangetic dolphin.
- Its conservation intersects directly with mangrove and aquaculture-policy debates, unlike charismatic terrestrial megafauna that dominate conservation funding.

- Highlights a broader pattern of "under-studied Schedule I species" — high legal protection but low scientific/monitoring investment relative to tigers or elephants.
- GPS-collaring studies exemplify the shift from anecdotal sighting-based wildlife data to quantitative, technology-enabled conservation science in India.

💡 Let's Remember This Through a Trick

"Webbed feet, wetland home" — the Fishing Cat is the only Indian cat built to swim for its supper, which is exactly why draining wetlands drains its future too.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2017 & 2020 Prelims regularly test IUCN status + Schedule classification pairs for lesser-known Indian species; Fishing Cat fits this exact recurring pattern.

THEIAS AKADEMIA Wetland-linked species like the Fishing Cat rarely get exam-ready treatment elsewhere. **LAKSHYAM AIR1**'s species-tracker module exists precisely to close this gap before Prelims. theiasakademia.com

SECTION 02

Places in News



- ① New Delhi (Governance hub) ● ② Bhopal (BRICS Culture Ministers) ● ③ Darwin (Pitch Black 2026) ● ④ Jharsuguda (NGT fly-ash case)
● ⑤ Kakinada/Coringa (Fishing Cat) ● ⑥ Chabahar (Port dilemma) ● ⑦ Sriharikota (Gaganyaan) ● ⑧ Bengaluru (Quantum Mission)

① New Delhi

National Capital Territory, on the west bank of the Yamuna within the Indo-Gangetic Plain. Seat of Parliament (MSME Bill passage), the Supreme Court (three rulings this week), RBI and the Department of Science & Technology — the administrative epicentre of nearly every Part I story.

② Bhopal

Capital of Madhya Pradesh on the Malwa Plateau, built around the Upper and Lower Lakes (the Bhoj Wetland, a Ramsar site). Hosted the 11th BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting, closing with the Bhopal Declaration on 8 August 2026.

③ Darwin, Australia

Capital of the Northern Territory on the Timor Sea coast, with a tropical monsoon climate. Hosted Exercise Pitch Black 2026, where the IAF flew Rafale fighters at the exercise for the first time.

④ Jharsuguda, Odisha

Located in the upper Mahanadi river basin; one of Odisha's most industrially dense districts (aluminium smelting, thermal power). Site of the NGT's fly-ash dumping proceedings against Vedanta Ltd.

⑤ Kakinada / Coringa, Andhra Pradesh

Sits at the Godavari river's estuarine delta on the Bay of Bengal — India's second-largest mangrove ecosystem after the Sundarbans. Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary is a key Fishing Cat stronghold.

⑥ Chabahar, Iran

A deep-water port on the Gulf of Oman coast — notably outside the Persian Gulf, so it is not exposed to any Strait of Hormuz chokepoint disruption, unlike Iran's Bandar Abbas. Anchors India's INSTC connectivity strategy.

⑦ Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh

A barrier island on the Bay of Bengal coast near the mouth of Pulicat Lake, home to the Satish Dhawan Space Centre — ISRO's primary launch site for the Gaganyaan human-rating test flights.

⑧ Bengaluru, Karnataka

Located on the Deccan Plateau at roughly 900 m elevation. Home to QNu Labs, whose indigenous Quantum Key Distribution technology powers the National Quantum Mission's 1,000 km secure-communication milestone.

Ethics & Integrity Cases

Case 1 — The Compassionate Courtroom

Concept: Ethics of Care

A district court registrar is used to processing survivor testimonies briskly to clear docket backlog. After the Supreme Court's 2026 Gender Sensitivity Handbook mandates offering seating, water and counselling to every witness, the registrar must choose between maintaining case-disposal speed (an institutional performance metric) and slowing down to implement compassionate procedure. The ethics-of-care framework holds that moral action is rooted in attentiveness to relationships and the vulnerability of those we serve, not merely rule-following — the registrar's dilemma is whether efficiency metrics should ever override this duty of care.

Case 2 — The Facilitation Council's Dilemma

Concept: Distributive Justice / Procedural Fairness

An MSME Facilitation Council member, under the new 2026 amendment, must now rule based on the supplier's location rather than the buyer's — but a politically influential buyer company pressures the Council to delay proceedings past the new 90-day timeline. Distributive justice demands that institutional design changes (like relocating jurisdiction to protect the weaker party) are not defeated in practice by informal pressure — procedural fairness is only as strong as its weakest administrative link.

Case 3 — Whose Protection Is It?

Concept: Rawls's Difference Principle (Protective Discrimination)

A District Collector in a Fifth Schedule area is approached by a non-tribal family seeking to use "Scheduled Area" status to indefinitely stall a legitimate civil dispute with another non-tribal party. Rawls's difference principle justifies unequal treatment only when it benefits the least-advantaged group — here, invoking tribal protections in a dispute involving no tribal party at all would misuse a principle designed for the vulnerable to shield the merely litigious, a distortion the 2026 Supreme Court ruling explicitly rejected.

Case 4 — The Whistle Not Blown

Concept: Whistleblowing and Regulatory Capture

A Pollution Control Board field officer discovers extensive unauthorised fly-ash dumping by a major industrial employer in the district but faces informal pressure from local administration — worried about the employer's economic weight — to file a softened report. Regulatory capture occurs when a regulator's independence is compromised by the very industry it oversees; the officer's choice to escalate honestly to the NGT-linked complaint mechanism versus staying silent is a textbook whistleblowing dilemma.

Case 5 — Below the Threshold

Concept: Deontology vs Utilitarianism

A military welfare officer must recommend rehabilitation-scheme benefits for cadets discharged due to training injuries below the 40% RPwD disability threshold. A utilitarian calculus might ration limited welfare funds toward the most severely disabled only; a

deontological view insists the state owes a duty of care to every cadet it selected and trained, regardless of the precise severity threshold — mirroring the Supreme Court's 2026 direction that the sub-40% cohort still deserves a dedicated scheme.

Case 6 — The Collar and the Cat

Concept: Utilitarianism vs Animal Rights (Sentience Argument)

A wildlife biologist leading the Fishing Cat GPS-collaring project must weigh the stress and minor risk imposed on each captured animal against the conservation-planning data the study will generate for the entire population. A utilitarian view justifies limited individual animal stress for larger-scale conservation gain; an animal-rights/sentience-based view (in the tradition of Peter Singer) questions whether any sentient being's autonomy should be treated instrumentally, even for a good cause.

SECTION 04

Prelims MCQs (20)

Q1.

Consider the following statements about the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution:

1. It applies to specified Scheduled Areas across ten States.
2. Its protective provisions extend to disputes irrespective of the parties' tribal status.

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both (d) Neither

Answer: (a). The Supreme Court (2026) held protections are tribal-identity-linked, not blanket.

Q2.

Under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, the reservation for persons with benchmark disabilities in government establishments is:

(a) 3% (b) 4% (c) 5% (d) 7%

Answer: (b) 4%.

Q3.

The MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026 shifts Facilitation Council jurisdiction to be based on:

(a) Buyer's location (b) Supplier's location (c) Registrar's discretion (d) Central Government notification

Answer: (b) Supplier's location.

Q4.

Consider the following statements about the 2026 BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting:

1. It concluded in Bhopal.
2. Fourteen countries, including four BRICS partner countries, participated.
3. It was the first Culture Working Group session of India's 2026 chairship.

Which are correct?

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

Answer: (a). It was the third and final session, not the first.

Q5.

Chabahar Port, central to India's INSTC strategy, is located on which water body?

(a) Persian Gulf (b) Gulf of Oman (c) Red Sea (d) Caspian Sea

Answer: (b) Gulf of Oman.

Q6.

Exercise Pitch Black 2026, in which the IAF's Rafale jets participated, was hosted by:

(a) Japan (b) Singapore (c) Australia (d) France

Answer: (c) Australia.

Q7.

The Border Roads Organisation functions under which Ministry?

(a) Ministry of Home Affairs (b) Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (c) Ministry of Defence (d) Ministry of External Affairs

Answer: (c). Transferred from Road Transport & Highways to Defence in 2015.

Q8.

Consider the following statements about the Vibrant Villages Programme:

1. It covers border villages in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh.

2. It was launched in 2023 with an outlay of about ₹4,800 crore.

Which are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both (d) Neither

Answer: (c) Both.

Q9.

Which test vehicle mission validated the Crew Escape System for India's Gaganyaan programme?

(a) TV-D1 (b) HLVM3 (c) IDRSS-1 (d) LVM3-M1

Answer: (a) TV-D1.

Q10.

Consider the following statements about India's National Quantum Mission:

1. It has crossed 1,000 km of secure quantum-communication network.

2. The underlying QKD technology was developed by a Bengaluru-based startup.

3. The mission's four verticals include quantum sensing and quantum materials.

Which are correct?

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

Answer: (d) All three.

Q11.

Under the RBI's 2026 Fourth Amendment Directions, recovery agents must be certified by:

(a) NABARD (b) SEBI (c) IIBF (d) IRDAI

Answer: (c) IIBF (Indian Institute of Banking and Finance).

Q12.

The Government e-Marketplace (GeM) was launched in which year?

(a) 2014 (b) 2016 (c) 2018 (d) 2020

Answer: (b) 2016.

Q13.

Fly ash, subject to NGT proceedings against Vedanta Ltd in Jharsuguda, is primarily a by-product of:

(a) Cement manufacturing (b) Coal combustion in thermal power/smeltering (c) Steel pickling (d) Paper pulping

Answer: (b).

Q14.

Consider the following statements about the Fishing Cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*):

1. It is listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN.
2. It is placed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
3. It is a semi-aquatic species with partially webbed feet.

Which are correct?

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

Answer: (b). Its IUCN status is Vulnerable, not Critically Endangered.

Q15.

Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, a Fishing Cat stronghold, is located at the estuary of which river?

(a) Krishna (b) Godavari (c) Cauvery (d) Mahanadi

Answer: (b) Godavari.

Q16.

The Supreme Court's 2023 "Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes" primarily focused on:

(a) Courtroom seating arrangements (b) Judicial vocabulary/word substitution (c) Police FIR formats (d) Prison reform

Answer: (b).

Q17.

Consider the following statements about the Godavari-Coringa estuarine mangrove ecosystem:

1. It is India's largest mangrove ecosystem.
2. It lies on the Bay of Bengal coast in Andhra Pradesh.

Which are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both (d) Neither

Answer: (b). The Sundarbans, not Coringa, is India's largest mangrove ecosystem — Coringa is the second-largest.

Q18.

Which of the following countries participated in the 2026 BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting as a partner country (not a full BRICS member)?

(a) Egypt (b) Ethiopia (c) Kazakhstan (d) UAE

Answer: (c) Kazakhstan (Egypt, Ethiopia and UAE are full BRICS members).

Q19.

The Satish Dhawan Space Centre, linked to Gaganyaan test flights, is located at:

(a) Thumba (b) Sriharikota (c) Mahendragiri (d) Bengaluru

Answer: (b) Sriharikota.

Q20.

Rawls's "Difference Principle" holds that social/economic inequalities are justified only if they:

(a) Maximise overall national output (b) Benefit the least-advantaged members of society (c) Are approved by legislative majority (d) Reflect historical entitlement

Answer: (b).

SECTION 05

Mains Questions (9)

GS1 Discuss the importance of cultural-property repatriation mechanisms for developing countries, with reference to the 2026 BRICS Culture Ministers' Bhopal Declaration. (150 words)

GS1 Examine the ecological significance of estuarine mangrove ecosystems such as the Godavari-Coringa delta for coastal biodiversity and climate resilience. (150 words)

GS2 Discuss the constitutional rationale of the Fifth Schedule and analyse the Supreme Court's 2026 ruling on civil court jurisdiction in Scheduled Areas. (150 words)

GS2 Evaluate the significance of the Supreme Court's 2026 Gender Sensitivity Handbook in advancing trauma-informed judicial practice in India. (150 words)

GS2 Discuss India's diplomatic challenge in sustaining Chabahar Port operations amid extraterritorial US sanctions, and its implications for India's neighbourhood connectivity strategy. (150 words)

GS3 Assess the significance of the MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026 in addressing delayed payments to micro and small enterprises. (150 words)

GS3 Discuss the strategic significance of India's National Quantum Mission and Quantum Key Distribution technology for national security and secure communications. (150 words)

GS3 Examine the role of multinational defence exercises such as Exercise Pitch Black in strengthening India's Indo-Pacific partnerships. (150 words)

GS4 Civil servants often face conflicts between institutional pressure and regulatory duty. Discuss with reference to a pollution-control officer facing pressure to under-report industrial violations, identifying the ethical principles involved. (150 words)

SECTION 06

Answer Writing Value Addition

MSME scale: PIB describes the MSME sector as employing "40+ crore people" — the backbone framing to open any MSME-policy answer.

Judicial reform arc: 2023 Handbook fixed *words* (vocabulary); 2026 Handbook fixes *ways* (courtroom conduct) — a useful two-step framework for judicial-reform answers.

Fifth Schedule footprint: Scheduled Areas under the Fifth Schedule exist across ten States, including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

RPwD Act scope: Recognises 21 categories of disability, up from 7 under the 1995 Act — a strong comparative data point.

BRICS Bhopal Declaration reach: 14 participating countries — all 10 BRICS members plus Belarus, Cuba, Kazakhstan and Thailand as partners.

Gaganyaan horizon: Bharatiya Antariksh Station targeted for 2035 — frame Gaganyaan as a stepping-stone, not a terminal programme.

Quantum Mission pace: ₹6,003 crore outlay; 1,000 km secure network reached in under three years — half the 2031 target reached ahead of schedule.

GeM's growth curve: First ₹10 lakh crore GMV took over 8 years; the second ₹10 lakh crore took under 2 years — the cleanest network-effect statistic in the e-governance space.

SECTION 07

AKADEMIA Direct Hit Tracker

Topic	GS	Capsule	Probability
MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026	GS3	TReDS mandatory for CPSEs; supplier-location jurisdiction	★★★★★

SC Gender Sensitivity Handbook 2026	GS2	Courtroom conduct over vocabulary; succeeds 2023 Handbook	★★★★
SC Fifth Schedule Civil Court Jurisdiction Ruling	GS2	Protection is tribal-identity-linked, not blanket-territorial	★★★★
SC Suo Motu — Disabled Cadets/RPwD Reservation	GS2	40%+ disability triggers 4% reservation; scheme ordered for rest	★★★
BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting / Bhopal Declaration	GS2	14 nations; artefact-repatriation mechanism adopted	★★★★
Chabahar Port US Sanctions Dilemma	GS2	Waiver lapsed Apr 2026; India seeking interim model	★★★
Exercise Pitch Black 2026	GS3	IAF Rafale debut; Japan F-35A debut; Darwin, Australia	★★★
Border Roads Organisation / Vibrant Villages Programme	GS3	BRO est. 1960; VVP ₹4,800 cr, 663 villages, 5 border regions	★★★
Gaganyaan Human-Rating Milestones	GS3	HLVM3+TV-D1+air-drop tests complete; uncrewed flight Q4 2026	★★★★★
National Quantum Mission — 1,000 km QKD	GS3	Half of 2031 target reached in under 3 years; QNu Labs tech	★★★★
RBI Recovery-Agent Fourth Amendment Directions, 2026	GS3	IIBF certification; 8am-7pm contact window; effective Jan 2027	★★★
GeM Decade Milestone — ₹20 Lakh Crore GMV	GS3	3.78 crore orders; MSEs 45.6% of GMV since 2016 launch	★★★★
NGT — Vedanta Fly-Ash Dumping, Jharsuguda	GS3	₹71.1 cr SPCB compensation; CPCB probe ordered	★★★
Fishing Cat (Prionailurus viverrinus)	GS3	IUCN Vulnerable; Schedule I; Coringa/Kaziranga strongholds	★★★★
WII Fishing Cat GPS-Collaring Project, Coringa	GS3	India's first such study for the species	★★★
Godavari-Coringa Estuarine Mangrove Ecosystem	GS1	India's second-largest mangrove system after Sundarbans	★★★
Ethics: Protective Discrimination vs Formal Equality	GS4	Rawls's difference principle applied to Fifth Schedule misuse	★★★★
Ethics: Whistleblowing & Regulatory Capture	GS4	Pollution officer under industry/administrative pressure	★★★

VERIFIED · PART II

Proof of Precision

Every item mapped. Every claim verified.

2

NEWS ITEMS

6

ETHICS CASES

20

MCQS GENERATED

9

MAINS QUESTIONS

8

PLACES MAPPED

0

REPEATED TOPICS

Environment

Geography

Ethics (GS4)

Cross-GS Integration

✓ All news sourced from NGT records, Down To Earth, IUCN Red List, WWF India and Wildlife Institute of India

✓ Every species and NGT topic cross-checked against the 30-day rotation blacklist before inclusion

✓ Every Ethics case names its underlying ethical concept explicitly, per this edition's density mandate

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48

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7

QUESTIONS FROM
A SINGLE DOCUMENT

6

QUESTIONS FROM
A SINGLE CLASS

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