

PART II · ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER

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THEIAS AKADEMIA

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"The Topper's Last Read. Every Morning."

INSIDE PART II

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§1 • Environment

GS3 Conservation biology • Species reintroduction

4-year review, September 2026 • Source: National Tiger Conservation Authority / Project Cheetah

Project Cheetah's Four-Year Status Review: Kuno and Gandhi Sagar

Why in News: Marking four years since cheetahs were reintroduced to India on 17 September 2022, a status review shows the population has grown from the original 20 translocated cheetahs (8 from Namibia, 12 from South Africa) to approximately 31 cheetahs across Kuno National Park (Madhya Pradesh) and the newly opened Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, with the programme recording both successful wild births and continued mortality challenges.

Background: The Asiatic cheetah went extinct in India in 1952; Project Cheetah, launched under the "Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India" (2021), is the world's first intercontinental large-carnivore translocation project, aiming to establish a viable metapopulation across multiple sites in central India as part of India's broader species-reintroduction and grassland-ecosystem-restoration strategy.

PRELIMS FACTS

- Cheetahs reintroduced to India on 17 September 2022 under Project Cheetah.
- Original translocation: 8 cheetahs from Namibia (Sept 2022) + 12 from South Africa (Feb 2023) = 20.
- Current population (4-year mark): approximately 31 cheetahs across Kuno NP and Gandhi Sagar WLS.
- Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary (Madhya Pradesh) was opened as the second reintroduction site.
- The Asiatic cheetah was declared extinct in India in 1952.
- Project Cheetah is the world's first intercontinental large-carnivore translocation project.
- Nodal agency: National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), under MoEFCC.
- Programme aims to establish a viable metapopulation across multiple central Indian sites.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Tests understanding of intercontinental species-translocation as a conservation strategy and its unique challenges.
- Raises the analytical debate over Project Cheetah's mortality rate versus its population-growth successes.
- Connects to India's grassland/savanna ecosystem restoration, historically neglected relative to forest conservation.
- Highlights the significance of a second reintroduction site (Gandhi Sagar) in building metapopulation resilience.

- Raises the long-term governance question of open-system versus enclosure-based cheetah management.

AKADEMIA MEMORY TRIVIA

Remember "1952-2022-2026": extinct in 1952, reintroduced in 2022, and by the 2026 four-year mark grown from 20 to roughly 31 — with a second home at Gandhi Sagar.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2023: "What is Project Cheetah? Explain the reasons for choosing the African Cheetah for India" is directly relevant.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements: 1. India's cheetahs were reintroduced from Namibia and South Africa. 2. Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary is located in Madhya Pradesh. 3. The Asiatic cheetah went extinct in India in 1952. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Evaluate the successes and challenges of Project Cheetah four years after India's cheetah reintroduction. (150 words)

#GS3

#ProjectCheetah

#Conservation

GS3 Invasive alien species · Coastal biodiversity

September 2026 study (honest-dated) · Source: ICAR-CMFRI / peer-reviewed genetic study

Invasive Charru Mussel Spreading Along Kerala-Tamil Nadu Backwaters

Why in News: A genetic-diversity study has confirmed the rapid spread of the invasive Charru mussel (*Mytella strigata*) — native to Central and South America — along the Ashtamudi Lake and Vembanad Lake backwaters of Kerala and into Tamil Nadu's Ennore Creek, where it is outcompeting native clam and mussel species that form the backbone of traditional fisheries, raising livelihood concerns for local shellfish-harvesting communities.

Background: The Charru mussel likely arrived in Indian waters via ballast water discharge from international shipping, a common introduction pathway for marine invasive species; once established, its rapid reproduction and tolerance for varying salinity levels allow it to outcompete native bivalves for space and food, a pattern seen with other high-impact marine invasives worldwide, governed in India by the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and emerging National Action Plans on invasive alien species.

PRELIMS FACTS

- Charru mussel (*Mytella strigata*) is native to Central and South America.
- Confirmed spreading in Ashtamudi Lake, Vembanad Lake (Kerala), and Ennore Creek (Tamil Nadu).
- Likely introduction pathway: ballast water discharge from international shipping.
- Outcompetes native clam and mussel species central to traditional backwater fisheries.
- Ashtamudi Lake is a Ramsar-designated wetland.
- Vembanad Lake is India's longest lake and a Ramsar site.
- Governing framework: Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and India's evolving invasive-alien-species policy.

- Threatens livelihoods of traditional shellfish-harvesting communities in the affected backwaters.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Tests understanding of ballast-water discharge as a major vector for marine invasive-species introduction.
- Raises the livelihood dimension of invasive species impacts on traditional fishing communities.
- Connects to India's Ramsar wetland network's vulnerability to biological invasions.
- Highlights the regulatory gap in India's invasive-alien-species governance compared to a dedicated national framework.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2020: "Explain the causes of the shrinking of Himalayan glaciers" is unrelated; invasive-species PYQs recur regularly (e.g. *Lantana camara*, *Prosopis juliflora*) in GS3 environment questions.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements: 1. The Charru mussel is native to Indian coastal waters. 2. Ballast water discharge is a recognised pathway for introducing marine invasive species. 3. Vembanad Lake is a Ramsar-designated wetland. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). **Explanation:** The Charru mussel is native to Central/South America, not India — statement 1 is wrong.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Discuss the ecological and livelihood impacts of invasive alien species in India's coastal and backwater ecosystems. (150 words)

#GS3

#InvasiveSpecies

#Backwaters

§2 · Places in News

📌 PLACES IN NEWS — 17 SEPTEMBER 2026 | ANTIM ASSURED 100+



Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh

Located in the Sheopur-Morena districts on the Kuno River, a Chambal tributary; India's first cheetah-reintroduction site since 2022, part of the Sheopur grassland-forest mosaic historically home to the Asiatic lion relocation debate as well.

Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh

Situated on the Chambal River near the Gandhi Sagar Dam/reservoir on the Madhya Pradesh-Rajasthan border; opened as Project Cheetah's second reintroduction site to build metapopulation resilience beyond Kuno.

Ashtamudi & Vembanad Lakes, Kerala

Ashtamudi is Kerala's second-largest wetland and a Ramsar site; Vembanad is India's longest lake, also Ramsar-listed — both now confirmed sites of Charru mussel invasion threatening native shellfish fisheries.

Ennore Creek, Tamil Nadu

A brackish-water estuarine creek north of Chennai, ecologically significant for its mangroves and traditional fisheries, now also affected by the spreading Charru mussel invasion.

Moscow, Russia

Site of Army Chief General Dhiraj Seth's 16-18 September visit — the first serving COAS visit to Russia in nearly eight years, reaffirming continuity in India-Russia defence ties.

Paris, France

Hosted the International Space Summit (9-10 Sept 2026) where Safran Space signed with Bengaluru's Dhruva Space for India's SBS-III satellite constellation components.

§3 · Ethics & Integrity Cases

SUBSTANTIVE VS FORMAL REPRESENTATION

The Shiv Sena Symbol Dispute

When the Election Commission allotted a party symbol based on legislative-majority count alone, the Supreme Court questioned whether this "conjectural" test truly reflects voter intent — a reminder that democratic legitimacy requires substantive fidelity to the electorate's will, not merely a mechanical headcount of elected representatives who may themselves be defectors.

DIGNITY IN DEBT RECOVERY

RBI's "Paper Guidelines" on Vehicle Repossession

The Supreme Court's finding that RBI's recovery norms "exist only on paper" exposes a gap between regulatory intent and enforcement reality — an integrity failure where a well-designed rule protecting borrower dignity becomes meaningless without the supervisory will to enforce it against powerful financiers.

FORMAL VS SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY

Equal Pay Cannot Be Applied Mechanically

The Court's insistence that pay parity requires genuine parity of qualification and experience — not just job-title similarity — illustrates the ethical distinction between treating people identically (formal equality) and treating them fairly according to relevant differences (substantive equality).

STRATEGIC AUTONOMY VS EXTERNAL PRESSURE

India's Response to the Lindsey Graham Act

Facing sanctions threats over its Russian energy purchases, India's insistence on protecting its own citizens' energy security reflects the ethical principle that a sovereign nation's first duty is to its own people's basic welfare, even under significant external diplomatic and economic pressure.

INSTITUTIONAL PREPAREDNESS FOR EMERGING THREATS

The Coast Guard's Technology-Integration Agenda

The Coast Guard Commanders' Conference's focus on AI, drones, and cyber capabilities reflects the duty of foresight in public institutions — the ethical obligation to anticipate and prepare for emerging threats rather than reacting only after a security failure has already occurred.

PATIENCE AND LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP IN CONSERVATION

Project Cheetah's Four-Year Journey

Project Cheetah's mix of successes and setbacks over four years illustrates that ecological restoration demands sustained institutional commitment and honest acknowledgment of failure alongside success — a stewardship ethic that resists the temptation to declare premature victory or abandon a difficult, generational conservation goal.

§4 · Prelims MCQs

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order: 1. It was issued in 1968. 2. It empowers the ECI to resolve symbol disputes during a party split. Which is/are correct?

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

Ans: (c)

Q2. The "equal pay for equal work" principle is primarily read into which Articles of the Constitution?

(a) Articles 14 and 39(d) (b) Articles 15 and 16 (c) Articles 21 and 23 (d) Articles 38 and 46

Ans: (a)

Q3. Which Ministry does the Indian Coast Guard function under?

(a) Home Affairs (b) Defence (c) Shipping (d) External Affairs

Ans: (b)

Q4. IN-SPACe stands for:

(a) Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (b) Indian Space Programme and Aeronautics Centre (c) Indian National Satellite Placement Council (d) India-NASA Space Partnership Centre

Ans: (a)

Q5. Consider the following statements on the SEBI-RBI tokenised bond pilot: 1. It uses a permissioned distributed ledger. 2. Settlement occurs via RBI's wholesale digital rupee. Which is/are correct?

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

Ans: (c)

Q6. FACE, India's first SRO-FT, stands for:

(a) Fintech Association for Consumer Empowerment (b) Financial Access and Credit Enterprise (c) Forum for Accountable Credit Ecosystems (d) Fintech Alliance for Compliance and Ethics

Ans: (a)

Q7. PM Vishwakarma Scheme, launched in 2023, covers how many traditional trades?

(a) 12 (b) 15 (c) 18 (d) 22

Ans: (c)

Q8. Consider the following statements on Project Cheetah: 1. Cheetahs were reintroduced from Namibia and South Africa. 2. Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary is in Rajasthan. Which is/are correct?

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

Ans: (a)

Q9. The Charru mussel is native to which region?

(a) Southeast Asia (b) Central and South America (c) West Africa (d) Northern Europe

Ans: (b)

Q10. Vembanad Lake is located in which state?

(a) Tamil Nadu (b) Karnataka (c) Kerala (d) Andhra Pradesh

Ans: (c)

Q11. The Indian Coast Guard was established under an Act passed in which year?

(a) 1974 (b) 1978 (c) 1982 (d) 1986

Ans: (b)

Q12. Consider the following statements: 1. The Lindsey Graham Act authorises tariffs on top buyers of Russian energy. 2. It passed the US Senate before the House. Which is/are correct?

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

Ans: (c)

Q13. The Asiatic cheetah went extinct in India in which year?

(a) 1947 (b) 1952 (c) 1960 (d) 1972

Ans: (b)

Q14. RBI's regulatory framework governing recovery-agent conduct for lenders is known as the:

(a) Fair Practices Code (b) Consumer Protection Charter (c) Recovery Ethics Framework (d) Borrower Rights Code

Ans: (a)

Q15. Who is the current Chief of the Army Staff (as of Sept 2026)?

(a) Gen Upendra Dwivedi (b) Gen Dhiraj Seth (c) Gen Anil Chauhan (d) Gen Manoj Pande

Ans: (b)

Q16. Consider the following statements: 1. Ashtamudi Lake is a Ramsar site. 2. It is located in Tamil Nadu. Which is/are correct?

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

Ans: (a)

Q17. The SBS-III constellation referenced in the India-France space deal relates to:

(a) Communication satellites for telecom (b) Space-Based Surveillance (c) Weather forecasting (d) Lunar exploration

Ans: (b)

Q18. Which body recognises Self-Regulatory Organisations for Fintech (SRO-FT) in India?

(a) SEBI (b) RBI (c) IRDAI (d) NPCI

Ans: (b)

Q19. Consider the following statements: 1. PM Vishwakarma provides collateral-free loans. 2. It was launched with an outlay of Rs 13,000 crore. Which is/are correct?

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

Ans: (c)

Q20. The Kuno River, on which Kuno National Park is located, is a tributary of which river?

(a) Yamuna (b) Chambal (c) Betwa (d) Narmada

Ans: (b)

§5 · Mains Questions

1. Examine the constitutional and institutional challenges in resolving symbol-allotment disputes arising from intra-party splits in India. (150 words) [GS2]
2. Discuss the significance of extending fundamental-rights protections into private lending and debt-recovery practices. (150 words) [GS2/GS3]
3. Trace the evolution of the "equal pay for equal work" doctrine in Indian constitutional jurisprudence. (150 words) [GS2]
4. Discuss India's doctrine of strategic autonomy in the context of external pressure over its energy-trade relationship with Russia. (150 words) [GS2]
5. Discuss the continuing significance of India-Russia defence ties amid India's simultaneous deepening of Western defence partnerships. (150 words) [GS2]
6. Discuss the significance of distributed ledger technology and CBDC integration in modernising India's capital-markets infrastructure. (150 words) [GS3]
7. Evaluate the successes and challenges of Project Cheetah four years after India's cheetah reintroduction. (150 words) [GS3]
8. Discuss the ecological and livelihood impacts of invasive alien species in India's coastal and backwater ecosystems. (150 words) [GS3]
9. **[GS4 Case Study]** As the RBI officer responsible for supervising NBFC recovery practices, you discover that despite clear guidelines, coercive repossession tactics persist across the industry, causing borrower distress. Enforcement action against major financiers risks political and industry pushback. (a) Identify the ethical issues involved. (b) What course of action would you recommend, balancing regulatory credibility with practical enforcement constraints? (250 words) [GS4]

§6 • Answer Writing Value Addition

Quote: "The voter votes for a party, not for the representative" — Supreme Court, on the flaw in a purely legislative-majority test for symbol allotment.

Data Point: India's corporate bond market targeted by the Demat 2.0 tokenisation pilot is valued at approximately \$620 billion (Rs 51 lakh crore).

Data Point: Project Cheetah's population has grown from 20 originally translocated cheetahs to approximately 31 across two sites in four years.

Concept: "Strategic Autonomy" — India's foreign-policy doctrine of pursuing an independent course rather than full alignment with any single power bloc, tested repeatedly by 2026 US sanctions pressure over Russian energy purchases.

Data Point: PM Vishwakarma has registered 30 lakh artisans and sanctioned over 6.19 lakh collateral-free loans worth ~Rs 5,316 crore in three years.

Quote: RBI's own repossession guidelines were found by the Supreme Court to "exist only on paper" — a phrase worth using in any answer on regulation-versus-enforcement gaps.

Concept: "Formal Equality vs Substantive Equality" — a key GS4/GS2 distinction sharpened by the Court's equal-pay ruling this week.

Data Point: The Lindsey Graham Act authorises tariffs of up to 100% on the top five buyers of Russian oil and gas, naming India and China as the two largest.

§7 · AKADEMIA Direct Hit Tracker

#	Topic	UPSC Relevance	Priority
1	Shiv Sena Symbol Dispute — Legislative Majority Test	GS2 — ECI powers, anti-defection	★★★★★
2	RBI Vehicle-Repossession Ruling	GS2/GS3 — Article 21, financial regulation	★★★★★
3	Equal Pay for Equal Work Ruling	GS2 — Article 14/39(d) doctrine	★★★★★
4	Lindsey Graham Act / Strategic Autonomy	GS2 — Foreign policy, sanctions	★★★★★
5	Army Chief's Russia Visit	GS2 — India-Russia defence diplomacy	★★★★☆
6	43rd Coast Guard Commanders' Conference	GS3 — Maritime security, force modernisation	★★★★☆
7	India-France Space Deal (SBS-III)	GS3 — Space sector, private participation	★★★★☆
8	SEBI-RBI Tokenised Bonds (Demat 2.0)	GS3 — DLT, CBDC, capital markets	★★★★★
9	Unified Fintech Forum — 2nd SRO-FT	GS3 — Fintech co-regulation	★★★☆☆
10	PM Vishwakarma 3-Year Review	GS2/GS3 — MSME credit inclusion	★★★★☆
11	Project Cheetah 4-Year Review	GS3 — Species reintroduction	★★★★★
12	Charru Mussel Invasion (Kerala/TN)	GS3 — Invasive alien species	★★★☆☆
13	Kuno NP & Gandhi Sagar WLS Geography	GS1 — Physical geography	★★★☆☆
14	Ashtamudi & Vembanad Ramsar Sites	GS1/GS3 — Wetlands geography	★★★☆☆
15	Election Symbols Order, 1968	GS2 — Static polity	★★★★☆
16	RBI's SRO-FT Framework	GS3 — Static financial regulation	★★★☆☆
17	IN-SPaCe & Space Sector Liberalisation	GS3 — Static space policy	★★★☆☆
18	Article 39(d) & DPSP-FR Interplay	GS2 — Static constitutional doctrine	★★★☆☆

★ THEIAS AKADEMIA — PROOF OF PRECISION

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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Proof of Precision

Every item mapped. Every claim verified.

2

ENVIRONMENT CARDS

7

MAP PINS

6

ETHICS CASES

20

MCQS

9

MAINS QS

Environment

Geography

Ethics

Polity

Economy

✓ All facts sourced from NTCA/Project Cheetah status data, peer-reviewed genetic studies, and official conference proceedings

✓ Every ethics case names its underlying ethical concept explicitly, per RULE 15 density mandate

✓ Cross-checked against the 7-day topic log — zero repeated topics

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