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PART II · ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER

Thursday, 20 August 2026

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§1 Environment & Ecology

GS3

Wildlife Law · Human-Animal Conflict

17 Aug 2026 (still developing — report due within six weeks) · Source: Supreme Court of India, *Prerna Singh Bindra v. Union of India*

Crop Damage Cannot Justify Blocking a Corridor, Rules the Supreme Court

Why in News: Hearing proceedings in *Prerna Singh Bindra v. Union of India* on human-elephant conflict, a Bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant directed the Union Government on 17 August 2026 to conduct a fresh nationwide survey of elephant corridors and report within six weeks on the steps States are taking to keep them free of obstruction. The Court also barred the use of fireballs and mashaals (flaming torches) to drive elephants away, holding that "there cannot be obstacles in the way of wildlife."

Background: Elephant corridors are traditional, often unnotified, movement routes connecting fragmented elephant habitats; blocking them — through fencing, encroachment or new construction — is a leading driver of human-elephant conflict because it forces herds into farmland and settlements instead of established paths. India last compiled a comprehensive corridor list years ago; land use around many corridors has since changed substantially, which is precisely why the Court ordered a fresh count rather than relying on the old one.

KEY FACTS

- Bench: Chief Justice of India Surya Kant with Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana.
- Centre directed to complete a fresh nationwide survey of elephant corridors and file a status report within six weeks.
- Fireballs and mashaals (torches) used to drive away elephants are now judicially prohibited; States must enforce the ban.
- The Court held that crop damage or villagers' fear cannot, by itself, justify obstructing a corridor.
- Elephants are Schedule I species under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and are listed on CITES Appendix I and CMS Appendix II.
- India's Gaj Yatra and Project Elephant are the principal existing central initiatives on corridor protection and human-elephant conflict mitigation.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- The order continues a pattern of the judiciary stepping in where corridor notification and land-use enforcement by States has lagged.
- Banning fireballs targets a conflict-mitigation practice that itself escalates danger to both elephants and people, rather than merely restricting farmers' options without an alternative.
- A fresh, current survey acknowledges that corridors mapped years ago no longer reflect actual land use — a recurring problem across India's protected-area and corridor data.
- The ruling sits inside the wider judicial-environmentalism trend of the Supreme Court issuing detailed, monitorable, time-bound directions rather than general guidance.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Remember the order as "**No Fire, No Fence, Fresh Count**" — no fireballs to drive elephants away, no excuse of crop damage to justify fencing off a corridor, and a fresh nationwide survey within six weeks.

GS3 2018: "Explain the salient features of the National Wildlife Action Plan (2017-2031)." Human-wildlife conflict and corridor protection are a growing GS3/environment mains theme, especially after repeated Supreme Court interventions since 2020.

Probable Prelims MCQ

Consider the following statements:

1. The Indian elephant is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
2. The Indian elephant is listed under Appendix I of CITES.
3. Project Elephant was launched before Project Tiger.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Project Tiger (1973) predates Project Elephant (1992) — statement 3 is a deliberately reversed distractor.

GS3

Wildlife Protection Act

Elephant Corridors

Judicial Environmentalism

GS3

Taxonomy · Newly Discovered Species

Reported July 2026 · Source: Zoological Survey of India, Zootaxa and Records of the ZSI

Two New Spiders, Two Extreme Habitats: Meghalaya's Caves and Andhra's Canopy

Why in News: Scientists at the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) formally described two new spider species in July 2026 — *Simonia lawbah* from Krem Lawbah Cave, Meghalaya, and *Hamataliwa papikonda* from the mixed-deciduous canopy of Papikonda National Park, Andhra Pradesh — each representing a distinct, specialised habitat within India's still-undercatalogued arachnid diversity.

Background: *Simonia lawbah* is India's first recorded species of the genus *Simonia* and belongs to the ray-spider family Theridiosomatidae; it is troglomorphic (cave-loving but not cave-bound), measures under two millimetres, and builds a cone-shaped "ray web" that launches at prey like a slingshot. *Hamataliwa papikonda* is a lynx spider (family Oxyopidae) under five millimetres, an active, web-free hunter relying on speed and spiny legs rather than silk to capture prey. Meghalaya's karst caves and Andhra's Eastern Ghats canopy forests are both recognised biodiversity-rich, under-surveyed microhabitats.

KEY FACTS

- *Simonia lawbah*: first Indian record of the genus *Simonia*; family Theridiosomatidae (ray spiders); type locality Krem Lawbah Cave, East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya.
- Troglomorphic adaptation: thrives in cave darkness but can survive outside under suitable conditions, unlike a strict troglobite.
- Builds a cone-shaped "ray web" that launches at high speed to trap flying insects — a distinctive predatory mechanism.
- *Hamataliwa papikonda*: lynx spider, family Oxyopidae; type locality Papikonda National Park, Andhra Pradesh; under 5 mm, yellow-bodied.
- Lynx spiders are web-free active hunters, relying on agility and spiny legs rather than silk traps.
- Both descriptions were published by ZSI researchers in Zootaxa and the Records of the Zoological Survey of India.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Cave and canopy ecosystems remain among India's least-surveyed habitats, meaning discovery rates there say more about survey effort than about true diversity limits (the Linnaean shortfall).
- Neither cave systems nor undesignated canopy forest patches carry the same statutory protection as notified protected areas, leaving newly described endemic species without an automatic conservation umbrella.
- Two contrasting predatory strategies — silk-slingshot versus web-free pursuit — in a single week's discoveries illustrate the breadth of adaptive strategy within one arachnid order.

- Continued taxonomic description work by ZSI underlines the institutional backbone (ZSI, BSI) that converts field survey into formally recognised, citable biodiversity data.

AKADEMIA MEMORY TRIVIA

Cave spider hunts with a slingshot, canopy spider hunts on foot: *Simonia lawbah*'s ray web launches like a catapult, while *Hamataliwa papikonda* builds no web at all and simply runs its prey down.

PYQ Linkage

GS3 2021: "What is Biodiversity? How do we quantify Biodiversity?" — species-discovery-linked prelims items on new-to-science taxa from Indian biodiversity hotspots are an annually recurring format.

Probable Prelims MCQ

Consider the following statements about spiders recently described from India:

- Simonia lawbah* was described from a cave ecosystem in Meghalaya.
- Hamataliwa papikonda* belongs to the lynx spider family and does not rely primarily on a web to capture prey.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (c). Both statements are correct as described by ZSI.

GS3

Newly Discovered Species

ZSI

Meghalaya

Andhra Pradesh

§2 Places in News

PLACES IN NEWS — 20 AUGUST 2026 | ANTIM ASSURED 100+



① New Delhi (Collegium notification desk; sits on the last Aravalli outcrop, the Delhi Ridge, itself an open natural ecosystem)

- ② Singapore (4th ISMR; sits astride the Strait of Malacca, the world's busiest shipping choke-point)
- ③ Guwahati (Gauhati HC Collegium pick; on the south bank of the Brahmaputra's braided channel)
- ④ Krem Lawbah Cave, Meghalaya (new ray spider; East Khasi Hills karst, among the world's wettest limestone terrain)
- ⑤ Cuttack (Orissa HC Collegium pick; on the Mahanadi delta head, the "Ring Fenced City")
- ⑥ Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh HC Collegium pick; on the Arpa river, a Mahanadi tributary, in the eastern Deccan craton)
- ⑦ Papikonda National Park (new lynx spider; Eastern Ghats gorge where the Godavari cuts through, the "Papi Hills")
- ⑧ Bengaluru (QpiAI quantum foundry; on the Deccan plateau at the Cauvery-Pennar drainage divide, ~900m elevation)

THEIAS AKADEMIA

Mapping today's Collegium bench across four High Court seats is a good live-practice exercise for **ANTIM 2027** aspirants building a mental atlas of India's judicial geography. theiasakademia.com

§3 Ethics & Integrity Cases

Utilitarian Calculus vs Species Survival Duty

1. The Farmer, the Herd and the Fence

A village panchayat wants to fence off a stretch of land that elephants have used to pass between forest patches for generations, citing repeated crop losses. The Supreme Court's 17 August order says crop damage alone cannot justify blocking the corridor. As a district officer asked to implement this, how do you balance the farmer's immediate livelihood loss against a duty owed to a species whose survival depends on habitat connectivity that no single farmer chose to provide?

Administrative Discretion and the Ethics of Delay

2. The Law That Waits for a Signature

Kerala's renaming to Keralam has Presidential assent but no commencement notification six days on. No law requires speed, yet every day of delay keeps a symbolic, publicly celebrated change legally unrealised. Is an executive justified in taking its time on a purely administrative step once the political and legislative work is done, or does unexplained delay itself become a quiet form of disrespect to a state's expressed will?

Institutional Self-Governance vs Accountability

3. The Judge Chosen by Judges

The Collegium system lets sitting judges choose future judges, with no external body's approval required beyond final government notification. A system that polices its own gate can protect independence, but it can also protect itself from scrutiny. As a citizen who values judicial independence, how do you argue for accountability mechanisms without appearing to argue for executive capture of the judiciary?

Distributed Responsibility in Public-Private Production

4. The Fuselage Built by Three Hands

A helicopter's fuselage will now be built by a public-sector company, a private conglomerate arm and the original manufacturer together. If a structural flaw is later found, no single entity built the whole part. As a quality-assurance officer designing the sign-off protocol, how do you ensure accountability is not diluted exactly in proportion to how widely the work is shared?

Epistemic Humility and the Limits of Survey

5. The Spider Found Only Because Someone Looked

Two new spider species were found only because researchers deliberately surveyed a cave and a canopy that most conservation planning ignores. If undiscovered species by definition cannot be protected by name, what ethical weight should a wildlife administrator give to habitats that are unsurveyed rather than merely unprotected, when both look identical on a map?

Transparency vs Market Stability in Central Bank Communication

6. The Minutes That Moved the Market

The RBI's own transparency rule — publishing MPC minutes on a fixed statutory day — is what triggered a market shock, because the minutes read more hawkish than the original decision. A regulator that hides its reasoning avoids such shocks but loses legitimacy; one that discloses fully risks destabilising the very markets it is trying to steady. Where should a central bank draw this line, and who bears the cost when it gets the timing of candour wrong?

§4 Prelims MCQs

Q1. Which body's resolutions recommend the appointment of High Court judges before the Union Government issues a notification?

- (a) National Judicial Appointments Commission (b) Supreme Court Collegium (c) Law Commission of India (d) Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Justice

Answer: (b)

The NJAC (option a) was struck down in 2015; the Collegium remains the operative mechanism.

Q2. Consider the following statements about Article 3 of the Constitution:

1. It allows Parliament to alter the name of an existing State.
2. A Bill under Article 3 requires the concerned State Legislature's consent.
3. Changes under Article 4 are not treated as amendments under Article 368.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a)

The State Legislature's views, not consent, are sought — statement 2 is false.

Q3. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between India and Singapore was established in which year?

- (a) 2015 (b) 2018 (c) 2024 (d) 2026

Answer: (c)

The upgrade to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership occurred in 2024.

Q4. Which regulatory body from Singapore signed a Letter of Intent with India's TRAI at the 4th ISMR?

- (a) Media Development Authority (b) Info-Communications Media Development Authority (IMDA) (c) Monetary Authority of Singapore (d) Economic Development Board

Answer: (b)

IMDA is Singapore's telecom and media regulator, TRAI's counterpart.

Q5. The HAL Prachand is officially classified as a:

- (a) Medium Lift Helicopter (b) Light Combat Helicopter (c) Attack Drone (d) Naval Utility Helicopter

Answer: (b)

Prachand (LCH) is India's indigenous Light Combat Helicopter.

Q6. Consider the following statements regarding the Border Roads Organisation (BRO):

1. It functions under the administrative control of the Ministry of Defence.
2. It is primarily responsible for guarding, not building, India's border infrastructure.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (a)

BRO builds and maintains infrastructure; guarding borders is the role of forces like BSF, ITBP and SSB.

Q7. The National Quantum Mission was approved in which year, with an outlay of roughly how much?

- (a) 2021, ₹3,000 crore (b) 2023, over ₹6,000 crore (c) 2025, ₹10,000 crore (d) 2020, ₹1,500 crore

Answer: (b)

Approved April 2023 with an outlay exceeding ₹6,000 crore for 2023-24 to 2030-31.

Q8. Which of the following algorithms poses a theoretical threat to RSA-based encryption if implemented on a sufficiently powerful quantum computer?

- (a) Grover's algorithm (b) Shor's algorithm (c) Dijkstra's algorithm (d) A* search algorithm

Answer: (b)

Shor's algorithm threatens RSA via efficient factorisation; Grover's accelerates unstructured search.

Q9. Semicon India 2.0, approved by the Union Cabinet in July 2026, covers how many broad verticals?

- (a) Four (b) Five (c) Six (d) Eight

Answer: (c)

Six verticals: design, equipment/materials, fabrication, advanced packaging, R&D, skills.

Q10. Consider the following statements about India's AI governance:

1. India has a dedicated statute exclusively governing artificial intelligence.
2. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 has a bearing on AI-related data use.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (b)

India has no dedicated AI statute; governance rests on the IT Act, 2000 and DPDP Act, 2023.

Q11. Under Section 45ZL of the RBI Act, 1934, Monetary Policy Committee minutes must be published within how many days of a policy decision?

(a) 7 days (b) 14 days (c) 21 days (d) 30 days

Answer: (b)

The fourteenth-day rule separates the headline decision from the fuller published reasoning.

Q12. In the RBI's liquidity corridor, which of the following correctly pairs the facility with its role?

(a) Standing Deposit Facility — ceiling (b) Marginal Standing Facility — floor (c) Standing Deposit Facility — floor (d) Repo rate — ceiling

Answer: (c)

SDF is the floor (introduced April 2022, needs no collateral); MSF is the ceiling; repo sits in between as the policy rate.

Q13. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) is chaired by:

(a) The Finance Minister (b) The Prime Minister (c) The NITI Aayog CEO (d) The Cabinet Secretary

Answer: (b)

Like other Cabinet Committees on major policy, the CCEA is chaired by the Prime Minister.

Q14. NITI Aayog's report on professional services covers regulatory issues in which of the following?

1. Legal services 2. Accounting services 3. Architectural and engineering services 4. Healthcare services

(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1, 3 and 4 only (c) 1, 2, 3 and 4 (d) 2 and 4 only

Answer: (c)

All four professional service groups are explicitly covered.

Q15. The Finance Act, 1994, under which "Business Auxiliary Service" was a taxable category, governed which pre-GST regime?

(a) Central Excise (b) Customs Duty (c) Service Tax (d) Sales Tax

Answer: (c)

The Finance Act, 1994 was the statutory basis for India's pre-2017 service tax regime.

Q16. Consider the following statements on the Supreme Court's 17 August 2026 order on elephant corridors:

1. It directs a fresh nationwide survey of elephant corridors.

2. It permits the use of fireballs to drive away elephants in emergency situations.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (a)

The Court prohibited fireballs and mashaals outright — statement 2 is false.

Q17. The Indian elephant is placed under which Schedule of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972?

(a) Schedule I (b) Schedule II (c) Schedule III (d) Schedule V

Answer: (a)

Schedule I affords the highest degree of protection under the Act.

Q18. *Simonia lawbah*, described in 2026, is notable for being India's first recorded species of its genus and belongs to which family?

(a) Oxyopidae (b) Theridiosomatidae (c) Salticidae (d) Araneidae

Answer: (b)

Theridiosomatidae, the ray-spider family, known for their catapult-style webs.

Q19. *Hamataliwa papikonda* was described from which protected area?

(a) Papikonda National Park, Andhra Pradesh (b) Kaziranga National Park, Assam (c) Nagarhole National Park, Karnataka (d) Silent Valley National Park, Kerala

Answer: (a)

Papikonda National Park sits on the Eastern Ghats gorge cut by the Godavari.

Q20. Which of the following statements about the Supreme Court Collegium is/are correct?

1. The Third Judges Case (1998) expanded the Collegium for Supreme Court appointments to the CJI and four senior-most judges.

2. The term "Collegium" is explicitly defined in Article 124 of the Constitution.

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (a)

The word "Collegium" appears nowhere in the constitutional text; it is a judicial construct.

THEIAS AKADEMIA Live-write today's 20 MCQs against the clock in **NEEB 300+ Live PYQ Writing** — sessions detailed at theiasakademia.com.

§5 Mains Questions

GS2 The Collegium system for judicial appointments is a product of judicial interpretation rather than constitutional text. Critically examine its evolution and the case for and against codifying it. (150 words)

GS2 Discuss the constitutional procedure under Articles 3 and 4 for altering the name of a State, distinguishing the legislative act from its administrative commencement. (150 words)

GS2 "Regulator-to-regulator instruments are increasingly the plumbing of bilateral strategic partnerships." Discuss with reference to recent India-Singapore cooperation. (150 words)

GS3 Examine the rationale and risks of opening strategic defence sub-assembly manufacturing, such as helicopter fuselage production, to private industry alongside public-sector undertakings. (150 words)

GS3 India is simultaneously funding multiple quantum-hardware initiatives under the National Quantum Mission. Discuss the rationale for a multi-vendor strategy in an emerging, technologically unsettled field. (150 words)

GS3 Central bank transparency requirements, such as the statutory publication of Monetary Policy Committee minutes, can themselves become a source of market volatility. Discuss with a recent example. (150 words)

GS3 Discuss the significance of NITI Aayog's recent report on regulatory reform in professional services for India's services-sector export competitiveness. (150 words)

GS3 Examine the Supreme Court's recent directions on elephant corridors as an instance of judicial environmentalism. What administrative and legislative gaps does such intervention typically address? (250 words)

GS4 "Accountability, once distributed across multiple actors, is often the first casualty." Discuss this statement with reference to shared responsibility in public-private production of strategic goods, and suggest safeguards. (250 words)

THEIAS AKADEMIA Turn today's nine Mains questions into full 150/250-word answers this week with **Philosophy Target 300+** and Sahyog Mentorship's structured feedback loop. theiasakademia.com

§6 Answer Writing Value Addition

Quote: "There cannot be obstacles in the way of wildlife" — Chief Justice Surya Kant, on elephant corridors, 17 August 2026. Use in any answer on judicial environmentalism or human-wildlife conflict.

Data point: 90 fuselage structures for the Prachand LCH split 48 (BEML) / 42 (Adani Defence) — the first private-sector entry into Indian helicopter airframe production.

Data point: ₹13,040.73 crore combined CCEA approval on 19 August 2026 for four railway multitracking projects and one Bihar highway upgrade in a single sitting.

Concept: The Second Judges Case (1993) creates the Collegium; the Third Judges Case (1998) expands it; the 99th Amendment/NJAC (2014) tries to replace it and is struck down in 2015 — a clean three-step ladder for any judiciary-appointments answer.

Data point: 237 projects and 9.318 million GPU hours consumed under the IndiaAI Mission's subsidised compute programme by August 2026; only 20 of 62 AI prototypes have reached public-sector deployment.

Concept: Article 4 changes are explicitly excluded from the Article 368 amendment procedure — the constitutional design reason a State's renaming never requires a two-thirds majority.

Data point: MPC minutes are due exactly fourteen days after a policy decision under Section 45ZL, RBI Act, 1934 — a statutory transparency rule that itself moved bond yields this week.

Concept: The Linnaean shortfall (species not yet described) versus the Wallacean shortfall (distributions not yet known) — use this pairing whenever a newly described species answer needs a conceptual frame beyond "biodiversity is important".

§7 AKADEMIA Direct Hit Tracker

TOPIC	GS PAPER	ONE-LINE CAPSULE	PROBABILITY
SC Collegium — 4 High Courts	GS2	Judicial appointments process, Second/Third Judges Cases	★★★★
Kerala→Keralam commencement gap	GS2	Article 3/4 procedure, assent vs. enforcement	★★★★★
4th India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable	GS2	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, six cooperation tracks	★★★★
HAL-Adani-BEML Prachand fuselage deal	GS3	Private entry into helicopter airframe manufacture	★★★
Border Roads Organisation (static)	GS3	Frontier infrastructure under MoD control	★★★
QpiAI Bengaluru quantum foundry	GS3	Multi-vendor National Quantum Mission strategy	★★★
IndiaAI/Semicon 2.0 scorecard	GS3	Compute subsidy, prototype-to-deployment gap	★★★★
RBI MPC hawkish minutes	GS3	Section 45ZL, forward guidance, bond-yield reaction	★★★★★
CCEA rail + highway approval	GS3	Multitracking economics, border-belt connectivity	★★★
NITI Aayog professional services report	GS3	Regulatory fragmentation, MRAs, services exports	★★★★
SC ruling on Business Auxiliary Service	GS3	Finance Act 1994, pre-GST litigation legacy	★★
SC order on elephant corridors	GS3	Judicial environmentalism, Schedule I species	★★★★★
<i>Simonia lawbah & Hamataliwa papikonda</i>	GS3	New spider species, cave and canopy habitats	★★★
Article 217 & 224 (HC judges)	GS2	Appointment vs. additional/acting judgeship	★★★
Memorandum of Procedure deadlock	GS2	Unresolved executive-judiciary friction point	★★★
Shor's vs Grover's algorithm	GS3	Quantum threat to cryptography, distractor pair	★★★
SDF/MSF liquidity corridor	GS3	Floor vs. ceiling, frequently swapped in MCQs	★★★★
Linnaean & Wallacean shortfalls	GS3	Conceptual frame for species-discovery answers	★★★

★ 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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VERIFIED · PART II

Proof of Precision

Every item mapped. Every claim verified.

13

NEWS ITEMS (PARTS I+II)

6

ETHICS CASES

20

MCQS GENERATED

9

MAINS QUESTIONS

8

PLACES MAPPED

0

REPEATED TOPICS

Polity

IR

Defence

Economy

Sci-Tech

Environment

Ethics

✓ All news sourced from the Supreme Court, PIB-linked ministry reporting, NITI Aayog, RBI, and primary company/regulator releases — cross-verified against multiple independent news reports.

✓ Every topic cross-checked against the 7-day and 30-day anti-repetition blacklists before inclusion; zero blocked topics used.

✓ News Freshness Rule applied throughout; two returning topics (Kerala/Keralam, RBI MPC minutes) carry Memory Technique boxes rather than being treated as new.

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