

PART II · ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER

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INSIDE PART II

1. Environment
2. Places in News
3. Ethics & Integrity Cases
4. Prelims MCQs (20)
5. Mains Questions (9)
6. Answer Writing Value Addition
7. AKADEMIA Direct Hit Tracker
8. Proof of Precision

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GS3

Environmental Governance · Global Indices

Released ~31 Jul 2026 · Source: Yale EPI 2026 / Down To Earth / MoEFCC response

India Ranks 176th of 177 in Yale's 2026 Environmental Performance Index; Government Disputes Methodology

Why in News: India ranked 176th out of 177 countries — second-lowest, ahead only of Laos — in the 2026 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), published by Yale University's Centre for Environmental Law and Policy, with an overall score of 22.46 out of 100 against table-topper Estonia's 74.79. India scored particularly poorly on environmental health (174th) and ecosystem vitality (171st), while ranking comparatively better on climate-policy objectives (130th). The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has again disputed the index's methodology, echoing its rejection of the 2022 edition (where India ranked last, 180th of 180).

Background: The EPI, published biennially since 2002, ranks countries on 47 indicators across 12 issue categories spanning environmental public health, ecosystem vitality and climate change. India's EPI rank has slid over the past decade — from 141st in 2016 to 177th in 2018, 168th in 2020, and 180th (last) in 2022 — with government agencies repeatedly contesting the underlying methodology even as domestic environmental indicators show a more mixed picture.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- India's 2026 EPI rank: 176th of 177 countries; score 22.46/100 (Estonia tops the list at 74.79).
- India ranked 174th in environmental health, 171st in ecosystem vitality, and a comparatively better 130th in climate-change policy objectives.
- EPI 2026 assessed 177 countries across 47 indicators grouped into 12 issue categories.
- India's EPI trajectory: 141st (2016) → 177th (2018) → 168th (2020) → 180th/last (2022) → 176th (2026).
- India's key methodology objection: the projected-2050-emissions indicator uses a simple ten-year average rather than a model accounting for renewables, carbon sinks and efficiency gains.
- India also argues the EPI ignores its forest/wetland carbon-sink capacity and historically low per-capita emissions.

Mains Dimensions:

- Index-methodology disputes are common across global rankings (Ease of Doing Business, Global Hunger Index, EPI) — a recurring GS2/GS3 theme on how India should engage with contested international

indices.

- Genuine underlying weaknesses (air quality, water stress, waste management) coexist with legitimate methodological critiques — the two should not be conflated in exam answers.
- Historical responsibility vs current-state performance: EPI measures present conditions, not per-capita historical emissions — a recurring equity argument in India's climate diplomacy (also relevant to COP/UNFCCC negotiating positions).
- Way forward: parallel investment in India's own robust environmental-data infrastructure (real-time air/water monitoring) would strengthen India's position when contesting external indices.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Remember the slide as a countdown gone wrong: 141 → 177 → 168 → 180 → 176 — India's EPI rank has stayed in the bottom quintile for a decade, regardless of methodology objections raised each time.

PYQ Linkage

GS3, thematic linkage: Global environmental indices and India's methodological objections (recurring UPSC Prelims/Mains theme on environmental governance).

#EPI2026

#YaleIndex

#MoEFCC

#EnvironmentalGovernance

#GS3-PYQ

GS3

Wetland Conservation • Judicial Environmentalism

4 Aug 2026 • Source: Supreme Court of India / India Legal

SC's 10-km Mining Buffer Now Applies Nationwide to All Notified Wetland Conservation Reserves

Why in News: The Supreme Court, on 4 August 2026, orally clarified that its February 2024 direction restricting mining within a 10-km radius of the Asan Conservation Reserve (Uttarakhand) is not confined to Asan alone but applies to all notified wetland and community conservation reserves across India. Mining within this buffer now requires prior permission from the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) and/or the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, establishing a uniform national standard rather than a site-specific exception.

Background: The Asan Conservation Reserve, India's first conservation reserve notified primarily for bird conservation, sits on the Asan barrage in Dehradun district, Uttarakhand, and became a flashpoint after mining and construction pressure threatened its wetland ecology; the Supreme Court's original February 2024 order carved out special protection for it under the broader Eco-Sensitive Zone jurisprudence built up since the T.N. Godavarman forest-bench litigation.

KEY FACTS

- Original direction: February 2024, restricting mining within 10 km of the Asan Conservation Reserve, Dehradun district, Uttarakhand.
- 4 August 2026 clarification: the 10-km buffer standard now applies to all notified wetland/community conservation reserves nationally, not just Asan.
- Mining within the buffer zone requires prior clearance from the NBWL Standing Committee and/or MoEFCC.
- The Supreme Court has separately directed the Centre and NBWL to verify wetland conservation reserves in Himachal Pradesh before the buffer is enforced there.
- Conservation Reserves are notified under Section 36A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 — a lighter-touch protection category than Wildlife Sanctuaries or National Parks, often on community/government land.

Mains Dimensions:

- Judicial environmentalism: the Supreme Court continuing to actively shape site-specific protections into generally applicable national standards, building on its long history of forest/wildlife jurisprudence.
- The precautionary principle in action — a uniform buffer standard removes the burden of proving harm case-by-case before mining permission can be denied.
- Conservation Reserves (lighter protection, often community-inclusive) versus Sanctuaries/National Parks (stricter protection) — a frequently tested distinction in Environment MCQs.
- Implementation challenge: verifying exactly which sites qualify as "notified wetland conservation reserves" nationwide, as seen in the Himachal Pradesh verification direction, shows uniform rules still need site-level administrative follow-through.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Remember "Asan to All": one river-barrage wetland's 10-km shield just became the template for every notified wetland conservation reserve in India.

PYQ Linkage

GS3, thematic linkage: Wildlife (Protection) Act categories and judicial protection of wetlands (recurring UPSC Prelims theme on protected-area classification).

#AsanWetland

#NBWL

#MiningBuffer

#ConservationReserve

#GS3-PYQ

2

Places in News

PLACES IN NEWS — 26 AUGUST 2026 | ANTIM ASSURED 100+



- ① New Delhi (SC rulings; India-UK DCG; MoEFCC's EPI response)
- ② Ghaziabad, UP (Abhishek Upadhyay FIR)
- ③ Beijing, China (25th India-China SR talks)
- ④ Jalandhar, Punjab (Baaz drone battalion, 11 Corps)
- ⑤ Bengaluru, Karnataka (CSIR-NAL, NJ-05/50/100 engines)
- ⑥ Dehradun, Uttarakhand (Asan Wetland mining-buffer ruling)
- ⑦ Tallinn, Estonia (EPI 2026 table-topper, for contrast)

Map note: no map_22Aug2026.jpg through map_26Aug2026.jpg exists in the workspace; map_21Aug2026.jpg (most recent available, and the file explicitly requested for reuse today) has been reused again, with 7 freshly calibrated pins using the standard equirectangular formula. New Delhi/Ghaziabad/Jalandhar/Dehradun form a tight north-India cluster and are label-offset vertically to stay legible.

① New Delhi (28.61°N, 77.21°E)

National capital; hosted the India-UK 25th Defence Consultative Group Meeting (21 Aug) and is the seat of the Supreme Court, which delivered two of today's three Polity rulings and MoEFCC's EPI 2026 methodology response.

② Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh (28.67°N, 77.43°E)

NCR city adjoining Delhi; site of the 18 August FIR against journalist Abhishek Upadhyay, whose arrest the Supreme Court stayed on 25 August.

③ Beijing, China (39.90°N, 116.41°E)

China's capital; hosted the 25th round of India-China Special Representatives talks between NSA Ajit Doval and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on 25 August, focused on a "political settlement" of the boundary question.

④ Jalandhar, Punjab (31.33°N, 75.58°E)

Headquarters of 11 Corps ("Vajra Corps"), which oversees the Punjab stretch of the India-Pakistan border and now hosts the Indian Army's first 'Baaz' drone battalion.

⑤ Bengaluru, Karnataka (12.97°N, 77.59°E)

Home to CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (CSIR-NAL), which developed the NJ-05, NJ-50 and NJ-100 indigenous gas-turbine engines unveiled this week in New Delhi.

⑥ Dehradun district, Uttarakhand (~30.32°N, 77.95°E)

Location of the Asan Conservation Reserve, whose Supreme Court-ordered 10-km mining buffer (Feb 2024) was clarified on 4 August 2026 to apply nationwide to all notified wetland conservation reserves.

⑦ Tallinn, Estonia (59.44°N, 24.75°E)

Capital of Estonia, which topped the 2026 Environmental Performance Index with a score of 74.79 — the benchmark against which India's 176th-place, 22.46 score is being read.

3

Ethics & Integrity Cases

1

Judicial Continuity and the Ethics of Precedent

Concept: Stare Decisis vs Contextual Evolution

The nine-judge Bench's choice to "modify application" of BWSSB rather than overrule it reflects an ethical commitment to institutional continuity — respecting settled expectations built on a 48-year-old precedent — while

still allowing the law to evolve for a genuinely new statutory context (the IR Code, 2020). The relevant value is judicial restraint balanced with responsiveness: change the law's reach without erasing its history.

2 Proportionality in Gatekeeping the Judiciary

Concept: Proportionality in Professional Entry Barriers

Reducing the judicial-service practice requirement from three years to one, offset by mandatory training, raises a proportionality question central to public administration ethics: does an entry barrier serve its stated purpose (courtroom readiness), or does it merely exclude capable candidates who cannot afford unpaid practice years? The ethical resolution favours barriers calibrated to demonstrated competence, not privilege-dependent duration.

3 The Chilling Effect and the Ethics of Protecting Dissent

Concept: Chilling Effect Doctrine

A single retaliatory FIR against a journalist can deter an entire community of reporters from pursuing similar investigations — this is the essence of the "chilling effect" doctrine. The Supreme Court's prospective protection (covering future FIRs too) reflects an ethical recognition that harassment litigation harms not just the individual, but the public's right to know, which is the deeper value at stake.

4 Patient Statecraft and the Ethics of Trust-Building with a Rival

Concept: Patient Statecraft / Trust-but-Verify

Pursuing a "political settlement" through the 25th round of India-China SR talks, even amid unresolved LAC tensions, embodies an ethic of patient statecraft: engaging a strategic rival in good faith without naively assuming resolved intentions. The applicable value is prudence — sustained diplomatic engagement as a moral and strategic good in itself, distinct from either appeasement or confrontation.

5 Institutional Humility and the Ethics of Accepting Uncomfortable Data

Concept: Intellectual Honesty vs Institutional Defensiveness

India's repeated rejection of EPI rankings, even where some methodological critique is fair, raises a governance-ethics question: at what point does legitimate methodological pushback shade into institutional defensiveness that avoids confronting real underlying problems (air quality, waste management)? The ethical stance is to separate the two — contest the index honestly, but do not let the contestation substitute for addressing the substance.

6 The Precautionary Principle as Ecological Guardianship

Concept: Precautionary Principle

Extending the Asan Wetland's 10-km mining buffer nationwide, without waiting for harm to be proven site-by-site, is a direct application of the precautionary principle in environmental ethics — the burden of proof shifts to those

proposing potentially harmful activity, not those seeking to protect an ecosystem. This models intergenerational guardianship: protecting an asset future generations cannot bargain for today.

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4

Prelims MCQs

1. The "triple test" for determining whether an establishment is an "industry" was laid down by the Supreme Court in which case?

- (a) Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (b) Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board v. A. Rajappa (c) Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (d) Minerva Mills v. Union of India

Answer: (b)

BWSSB v. A. Rajappa (1978) laid down the triple test for "industry".

2. Consider the following statements regarding the Supreme Court's August 2026 ruling on "industry" under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020: (1) BWSSB (1978) was overruled in its entirety. (2) BWSSB continues to govern pending disputes under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. 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)

BWSSB was not overruled; it remains applicable to disputes under the older Industrial Disputes Act.

3. Nine-judge Constitution Benches of the Supreme Court are typically constituted under which constitutional provision?

- (a) Article 141 (b) Article 143 (c) Article 145(3) (d) Article 137

Answer: (c)

Article 145(3) mandates a minimum of five judges for cases involving substantial constitutional interpretation; larger Benches like nine-judge panels are constituted for especially significant questions.

4. As per the Supreme Court's August 2026 order on judicial service recruitment, what is the revised minimum legal-practice requirement for the entry-level judicial service exam?

(a) No practice required (b) 1 year (c) 2 years (d) 3 years

Answer: (b)

The requirement was cut from 3 years to 1 year, with 2 years of post-selection training/clerkship added.

5. Recruitment to the subordinate judiciary (District Judges and below) is primarily governed by which constitutional articles?

(a) Articles 233 and 234 (b) Articles 124 and 217 (c) Articles 323A and 323B (d) Articles 315 and 316

Answer: (a)

Articles 233 (District Judges) and 234 (other subordinate judiciary posts) govern this recruitment.

6. Consider the following statements: (1) The FIR against journalist Abhishek Upadhyay invoked the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. (2) The Supreme Court's interim protection applied only to the specific FIR already registered, not to any future FIR. 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 FIR did invoke the SC/ST Act; but the Court's protection was extended prospectively to future FIRs too.

7. The India-China Special Representatives (SR) mechanism for the boundary question was established in which year?

(a) 1998 (b) 2003 (c) 2005 (d) 2013

Answer: (b)

The SR mechanism was established in 2003 as the political-level channel for the boundary dispute.

8. Who represented India in the 25th round of India-China Special Representatives talks held in Beijing in August 2026?

(a) External Affairs Minister (b) National Security Advisor (c) Chief of Defence Staff (d) Foreign Secretary

Answer: (b)

NSA Ajit Doval is India's Special Representative for the boundary talks.

9. The Indian Army's newly raised 'Baaz' drone battalion is placed under which Corps?

(a) 9 Corps (b) 11 Corps (c) 14 Corps (d) 15 Corps

Answer: (b)

The Baaz Battalion is raised under the Jalandhar-based 11 Corps ("Vajra Corps").

10. Consider the following statements regarding the 'Baaz' drone battalion: (1) It is designed to operate the MQ-9B, Heron and Hermes UAV platforms. (2) It is India's first dedicated battalion-level drone command structure. 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 accurately describe the Baaz Battalion's platforms and its status as a first-of-its-kind unit.

11. The India-UK Defence Consultative Group Meeting held in August 2026 was anchored around which framework?

(a) India-UK Vision 2035 and the Ten-Year Defence Industrial Roadmap (b) The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue (c) The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership 2021 (d) AUKUS

Answer: (a)

The 25th DCG meeting reviewed progress under India-UK Vision 2035 and its Ten-Year Defence Industrial Roadmap.

12. The Regional Maritime Security Centre of Excellence (RMSCE) referenced in India-UK defence talks was established under which initiative?

(a) SAGAR (b) Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) (c) MAHASAGAR (d) Blue Economy Policy

Answer: (b)

RMSCE was established under the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.

13. The NJ-05, NJ-50 and NJ-100 gas turbine engines unveiled in August 2026 were developed by which institution?

(a) DRDO-DRDL (b) HAL (c) CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (d) ISRO-LPSC

Answer: (c)

CSIR-NAL, Bengaluru, developed the three engines.

14. What do the numerals in NJ-05, NJ-50 and NJ-100 represent?

(a) Year of development (b) Thrust in kilograms (c) Engine diameter in centimetres (d) Number of prototypes built

Answer: (b)

The numerals denote each engine's thrust capacity in kilograms (5, 50 and 100 kg respectively).

15. As per ICMR, the ongoing H1N1 surge in India in 2026 has been assessed as:

(a) A new, more virulent strain (b) A seasonal pattern with no new strain detected (c) Linked to avian influenza spillover (d) Vaccine-resistant

Answer: (b)

ICMR's genomic surveillance found the surge to be seasonal, not a new strain.

16. India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) series was revised in 2026 to which new base year?

(a) 2011=100 (b) 2012=100 (c) 2018=100 (d) 2024=100

Answer: (d)

The revised CPI series uses 2024 as the new base year.

17. Consider the following statements regarding the Index of Core Industries (ICI): (1) It comprises eight sectors. (2) It carries approximately 40% weight in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). 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; the ICI's eight sectors carry roughly 40% weight in the IIP.

18. Which of the following core industries recorded the highest year-on-year growth in July 2026?

- (a) Cement (b) Electricity (c) Iron ore (d) Coal

Answer: (c)

Iron ore grew 29.5% YoY in July 2026, the highest among the eight core industries.

19. In the 2026 Environmental Performance Index, India ranked lowest (i.e., worst) in which sub-category?

- (a) Climate change policy (b) Ecosystem vitality (c) Environmental health (d) Air quality alone

Answer: (c)

India ranked 174th in environmental health, its weakest sub-category among the three listed.

20. Conservation Reserves in India, such as the Asan Conservation Reserve, are notified under which provision?

- (a) Section 18 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (b) Section 36A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (c) Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 (d) Section 4 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980

Answer: (b)

Conservation Reserves are notified under Section 36A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

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GS2 · 150 WORDS

1. The Supreme Court's nine-judge Bench ruling delinking "industry" under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 from the 1978 BWSSB precedent illustrates a technique of "modifying application without overruling." Discuss its significance for India's labour-law codification.

GS2 · 150 WORDS

2. Examine the trade-off between courtroom-readiness and access to justice in the Supreme Court's revision of the entry-level judicial service practice requirement.

GS2 · 150 WORDS

3. Discuss the "chilling effect" doctrine with reference to the Supreme Court's protection of journalist Abhishek Upadhyay, and its implications for press freedom under Article 19(1)(a).

GS2 · 150 WORDS

4. Distinguish between the political-level Special Representatives mechanism and military-level Corps Commander talks in the India-China boundary dispute, and assess the significance of the 25th SR round.

GS3 · 150 WORDS

5. Analyse the doctrinal shift represented by the Indian Army's 'Baaz' drone battalion, and its implications for India's border-security architecture.

GS3 · 150 WORDS

6. India's miniaturised gas-turbine engines (NJ-05/50/100) mark a step toward propulsion self-reliance. Discuss the challenges in scaling indigenous defence-technology prototypes to full production.

GS3 · 150 WORDS

7. "Index disputes should not become a substitute for addressing underlying environmental weaknesses." Critically examine this statement with reference to India's response to the 2026 Environmental Performance Index.

GS3 · 150 WORDS

8. Discuss the precautionary principle with reference to the Supreme Court's nationwide extension of the 10-km mining buffer around notified wetland conservation reserves.

GS4 · CASE STUDY · 250 WORDS

9. A Deputy Commissioner is asked by senior political functionaries to expedite mining clearances near a newly notified wetland conservation reserve, citing local employment benefits, while environmental officials

warn this may violate the Supreme Court's buffer-zone direction. Identify the ethical values in conflict and discuss the course of action the officer should adopt.

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6 Answer Writing Value Addition

"BWSSB has not been overruled — it continues to govern disputes pending under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947."

— *Supreme Court, 9-judge Bench, 20 Aug 2026*

"Two years of judicial-academy training and clerkship is treated as equivalent to two years of independent legal practice."

— *Supreme Court order, 21 Aug 2026*

"The Special Representatives mechanism was established in 2003 and has now completed its 25th round."

— *MEA/Xinhua record, Aug 2026*

"The Baaz Battalion is designed to be a centralised nerve centre for flight operations, data exploitation, maintenance and coordination with ground troops."

— *Indian Army statement via The Tribune, Aug 2026*

"NJ-05, NJ-50 and NJ-100 — thrust of 5, 50 and 100 kg respectively — target UAVs, drone interceptors and compact missile systems."

— *CSIR-NAL, 25 Aug 2026*

"India's EPI rank has fallen from 141st (2016) to 176th (2026), touching a low of 180th/last in 2022."

— *Yale EPI, cited via Down To Earth, 2026*

"CPI inflation rose to 4.45% in July 2026, the highest since December 2024, on the new 2024=100 base-year series."

— *MoSPI CPI Press Release, Aug 2026*

"The Index of Core Industries carries roughly 40% weight in the IIP; it grew 5.4% YoY in July 2026, led by iron ore's 29.5% expansion."

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A memorised statistic dropped at the right moment is what separates an average GS3 answer from a Topper's answer — **LAKSHYAM AIR1** trains exactly this kind of precision recall. theiasakademia.com

7 AKADEMIA Direct Hit Tracker

TOPIC	GS PAPER	ONE-LINE CAPSULE	PROBABILITY
SC 9-judge Bench: "Industry"/BWSSB/IR Code	GS2	Modifies application without overruling BWSSB 1978	★★★★★
SC judicial service practice-requirement cut	GS2	3 years → 1 year + 2-year training/clerkship	★★★★★
SC stay on Abhishek Upadhyay's arrest	GS2	Press-freedom protection; SC/ST Act misuse concern	★★★★★
India-China 25th SR talks	GS2	Doval-Wang Yi, Beijing; "political settlement" pursuit	★★★★★
'Baaz' drone battalion	GS3	First dedicated drone unit, 11 Corps, Jalandhar	★★★★★
India-UK 25th DCG Meeting	GS2	Vision 2035 + Ten-Year Defence Industrial Roadmap	★★★★★
CSIR-NAL NJ-05/50/100 engines	GS3	Indigenous micro gas-turbine propulsion for UAVs	★★★★★
ICMR H1N1 seasonal-surge reassurance	GS3	73-VRDL genomic surveillance network confirms no new strain	★★★★★
CPI inflation, new 2024=100 base	GS3	4.45% in July 2026, highest since Dec 2024	★★★★★
Index of Core Industries, July 2026	GS3	5.4% growth; iron ore leads at 29.5%	★★★★★
EPI 2026 — India 176th of 177	GS3	Score 22.46; MoEFCC disputes methodology	★★★★★
SC 10-km wetland mining buffer — nationwide	GS3	Asan precedent extended to all conservation reserves	★★★★★
Article 145(3) — Constitution Benches	GS2	Basis for 5+/9-judge Bench constitution	★★★★★

Articles 233/234 — subordinate judiciary	GS2	Constitutional basis for judicial-service recruitment	★★
SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989	GS2	Misuse-vs-protection debate resurfaces	★★★
Wildlife Protection Act, Section 36A	GS3	Conservation Reserves — lighter-touch protection category	★★★
Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative / RMSCE	GS2	Maritime-domain-awareness cooperation with UK	★★
MQ-9B/Heron/Hermes UAV mix	GS3	Multi-source drone platforms under one battalion	★★★

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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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