

# ANTIM ASSURED 100+

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

PART II · ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER

Tuesday, 18 August 2026

*"The Topper's Last Read"*

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# Environment & Ecology

GS3

GS1

17 AUG

Ecosystems &amp; Land Classification

17 August 2026 · Launched at a UNCCD COP17 side event, Ulaanbaatar · published by ATREE with IUCN, CoE-SLM, ICFRE and SAC-ISRO, under MoEFCC guidance

## The Land We Called Waste: India Publishes Its First Guide to Open Natural Ecosystems

**Why in News:** On **17 August 2026**, at a side event of UNCCD COP17 in Ulaanbaatar, India launched its first-ever **Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems of India**. It was published by the **Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment** in collaboration with **IUCN**, the **Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Land Management**, the **Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education** and the **Space Applications Centre of ISRO**, under the guidance of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The Environment Minister launched it by video message, arguing that grasslands, scrublands and ravines "have often been viewed simply as areas lacking trees."

**Background:** The phrase that matters here is **Open Natural Ecosystem** — a deliberate replacement for "wasteland". India's revenue and land-use records, inherited from colonial classification, treat land without tree cover and without cultivation as unproductive land awaiting improvement. The consequence is not semantic. Land categorised as wasteland is the default site for compensatory afforestation, plantation drives, solar parks and industrial allocation, because it appears in the record as land nobody is using. That single classificatory decision is the largest driver of grassland loss in India, and it explains why the country's grassland species — the Great Indian Bustard, the lesser florican, the Indian wolf, the caracal, the blackbuck — are in far worse condition than its forest species.

### ⚡ KEY FACTS

- **Publisher:** the **Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE)**, with **IUCN**, the **Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Land Management (CoE-SLM)**, **ICFRE** and the **Space Applications Centre (SAC)**, **ISRO**, under MoEFCC guidance. *It is not a Wildlife Institute of India publication — a distinction worth getting right.*
- **Ecosystem types covered:** Himalayan grasslands, Terai grasslands, the **Thar** landscape, the **Banni** landscape, **Deccan savannas**, rocky plateaus, ravines, scrublands, coastal ecosystems and desert landscapes.
- **Thematic sections** on **pastoralism**, **fire ecology** and **carbon sequestration**, alongside geography, ecological character, biodiversity and the communities and tribes associated with each ecosystem.
- **Open Natural Ecosystems store most of their carbon in soil rather than in above-ground biomass** — which is why converting them to plantations can reduce net carbon storage while appearing to increase it.
- Two traditional institutions named: **Oran**, the sacred grove-pasture of Rajasthan protected by community sanction, and **gauchar**, village common grazing land.
- **Banni**, in Kutch, Gujarat, is among Asia's largest tropical grasslands and is grazed by the pastoralist **Maldhari** community; it is also the site of long-running conflict with the invasive *Prosopis juliflora*.
- The discussion tied restoration explicitly to India's **Land Degradation Neutrality** targets and to improved assessment of land degradation.
- *No page count, area figure or formal number of ecosystem categories has been reported. We give the types named and no total, because inventing an area figure would be worse than omitting one.*

#### MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- **This is fundamentally a document about classification, and classification is power.** A guide that names ten ecosystem types where the revenue record sees one undifferentiated category of waste creates the vocabulary in which a grassland can be defended. Nothing can be protected that the State has no word for.
- The carbon point is the most policy-consequential and the least understood. Because ONEs store carbon below ground, planting trees on them can release soil carbon while creating an apparent gain in green cover — so afforestation targets measured in canopy can be actively counterproductive when met on grassland. Any answer on compensatory afforestation should include this.
- Pastoralism is treated in the guide as an ecological process rather than a threat, which reverses decades of policy assumption. Moderate grazing maintains grassland structure and prevents woody encroachment; the exclusion of pastoralists from protected grasslands has repeatedly degraded the ecosystems it was meant to protect.
- Fire ecology carries the same reversal. In savanna systems fire is a natural process that suppresses woody invasion, and blanket fire suppression converts open ecosystems into scrub. Distinguishing beneficial cool-season burning from destructive wildfire is the operational challenge.
- The forward question is whether a guide translates into a legal category. Until "Open Natural Ecosystem" appears in land-use classification, in the Forest Conservation regime and in State revenue codes, the protective effect is limited to persuasion — and the solar park will still be sited on the grassland.

#### MEMORY TECHNIQUE — CONNECTED TOPIC

Yesterday's bustard card ended on exactly this problem: open ecosystems are legally classified as "wasteland", which is why they lose. Today India published the document that names them properly. Hold the pair together — **the science identified the habitat, the classification destroys it, and a guide is the first step to changing the classification.** Remember the two community institutions: *Oran* and *gauchar*.

#### Probable Prelims MCQ (Statement-Based)

Consider the following statements about Open Natural Ecosystems in India:

1. They store the greater part of their carbon in soil rather than in above-ground biomass.
2. *Oran* refers to community-protected sacred grove and pasture land in Rajasthan.
3. Banni, one of Asia's largest tropical grasslands, lies in Rajasthan.

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) All three

**Answer:** (a) 1 and 2 only. Banni is in **Kutch, Gujarat**.

#### PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2020 and 2023 on conservation, ecosystem services and afforestation policy; GS1 2019 on the distribution of natural vegetation in India.

GS3

17 AUG

Biodiversity — New Species

17 August 2026 · Published in ZooKeys 1289: 185–202 · traced from a video posted online in 2024

## Blind, Colourless and Four Centimetres Long: A New Genus of Fish from a Bihar Borewell

**Why in News:** On **17 August 2026**, the journal *ZooKeys* published the description of ***Gangaichthys indonepalicus*** — a **new genus and a new species** of miniature **stygobitic earthworm eel**, collected from borewells in **Bihar** near the India-Nepal border. It is the **first subterranean fish ever recorded from the Gangetic basin**, and the first stygobitic member of its family anywhere. The trail began with a video posted online in 2024 showing an unfamiliar fish emerging from a handpump.

**Background:** A **stygobite** is an organism adapted to live permanently in groundwater. Such animals converge on a recognisable suite of traits — loss of eyes, loss of pigment, elongated sensory structures — because in permanent darkness vision and colouration are metabolically expensive and useless. The Indo-Gangetic plain's **alluvial aquifers** are among the most heavily exploited groundwater systems on Earth, supporting hundreds of millions of people, yet their biology is almost entirely undescribed. That is the significance here: a new *genus* of vertebrate, not merely a new species, found in an aquifer that India has been pumping intensively for half a century without knowing what lived in it.

#### ⚡ KEY FACTS

- ***Gangaichthys indonepalicus*** — a **new genus and new species**. *Gangaichthys* means "fish of the Ganga"; *indonepalicus* refers to its distribution along the India-Nepal border.
- Published in ***ZooKeys* 1289: 185–202**, on 17 August 2026.
- **Order Synbranchiformes; Family Chaudhuriidae**, the earthworm eels. This is the **first stygobitic member of the family**.
- **Type locality:** borewells in Bihar, drawing from the **alluvial aquifers of the Indo-Gangetic Plain** — the **first subterranean fish recorded from the Gangetic basin**.
- **Stygobitic adaptations:** **reduced eyes covered by skin, complete absence of body pigmentation** (translucent), and **apparent absence of ribs**.
- **Size:** about **4 centimetres**; the holotype measures **40.6 mm standard length**.
- **Method:** confirmed as a distinct genus using **micro-CT scanning** and genetic analysis, with synchrotron facilities used for imaging. Institutions involved include the **Zoological Survey of India** at Gopalpur-on-Sea and Shivaji University, Kolhapur.
- **Collection method:** researchers manually pumped roughly **2,000 litres** from a handpump to obtain the first, damaged specimen, and about **500 litres more** for the intact holotype.

#### 📷 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- The discovery names a category of ecosystem that Indian conservation law does not recognise at all. **Groundwater is regulated as a resource, never as a habitat**. No aquifer is a protected area, no groundwater species appears on a schedule of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, and abstraction limits are set by hydrological yield with no biological consideration whatever.
- The lead researcher's framing is worth borrowing: India suffers from both the **Linnaean shortfall** — most species remain undescribed — and the **Wallacean shortfall** — the distributions of even described species are poorly known. Subterranean habitats are where both are most severe, and you cannot conserve what has not been named.
- The conservation implication is immediate and uncomfortable. The Indo-Gangetic aquifer is among the most over-extracted in the world; falling water tables, saline ingress and contamination by arsenic, fluoride and nitrate are all documented. A stygobitic species in that system is, by definition, exposed to every one of those pressures with nowhere to move.
- The citizen-science route deserves emphasis. A video posted by a member of the public led to a new vertebrate genus. That is an argument for structured public reporting platforms, and a reminder that professional survey effort in India is far too thin to find such things unaided.
- For an integrated answer, note the parallel with the grasslands guide in the card above: in both cases the binding constraint on conservation is not enforcement but **recognition** — an ecosystem that is unnamed, or a habitat that is only a resource, has no standing to be protected.

 **Let's Remember This Through a Trick**

**Stygobite** = **permanent groundwater dweller**; the giveaway traits are always the same three — *no eyes, no pigment, no need for either*. And the two gaps to name in any biodiversity answer: **Linnaean** (species undescribed) and **Wallacean** (distributions unknown).

 **Probable Prelims MCQ (Statement-Based)**

Consider the following statements:

1. A stygobite is an organism adapted to live permanently in groundwater.
2. Loss of pigmentation and reduction of eyes are characteristic adaptations of such organisms.
3. *Gangaichthys indonepalicus* was described from the Western Ghats.

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) All three

**Answer:** (a) 1 and 2 only. It was described from borewells in **Bihar**, in the Indo-Gangetic plain.

 **PYQ LINKAGE**

GS3 2021 and 2023 on biodiversity conservation and species discovery; GS1 2020 on groundwater depletion in the Indo-Gangetic plain.

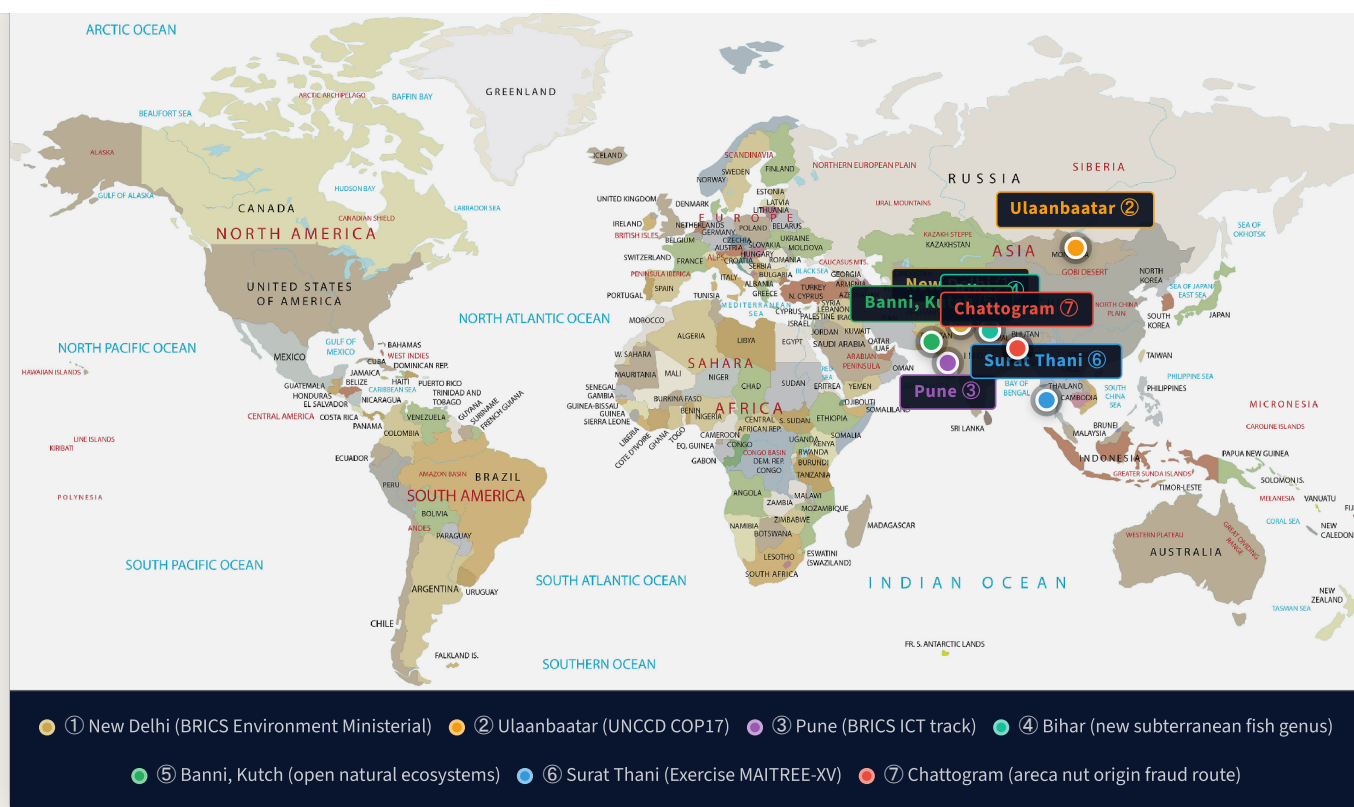
**THEIAS AKADEMIA**

Both Environment cards are from 17 August — one an official publication, one a peer-reviewed taxonomic paper. Seventh consecutive edition with zero static species filler. And note how they rhyme: one names an ecosystem, the other names a genus. [theiasakademia.com](http://theiasakademia.com)

**SECTION 02**

## Places in News

 **PLACES IN NEWS — 18 AUGUST 2026 | ANTIM ASSURED 100+**



## ① New Delhi — Bharat Mandapam

Host today of the 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting, following yesterday's senior officials' meeting which set out India's four Chairship priorities.

*On the Indo-Gangetic plain on the west bank of the Yamuna, in the corridor between the Delhi ridge — the last northward outcrop of the Aravallis — and the river. The ridge is also Delhi's largest surviving tract of the dry deciduous scrub that the new grasslands guide would classify as an open natural ecosystem.*

## ② Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

UNCCD COP17 opened here on 17 August with the global drought protocol unresolved and the agenda adopted only in part.

*The world's coldest national capital, on the Tuul river in a valley of the Khentii mountains at about 1,300 metres. Mongolia is doubly landlocked, and its steppe and Gobi rangelands are the textbook case of desertification driven by drought interacting with grazing pressure — 77% of the country's land is already affected.*

## ③ Pune, Maharashtra

Venue of the BRICS ICT track, 17–21 August, including the Council of the BRICS Institute of Future Networks and, today, the Focus Group on Digital Public Infrastructure.

*On the Deccan plateau at about 560 metres, at the confluence of the Mula and Mutha rivers, just east of the Western Ghats crest. Its position in the Ghats' rain shadow gives it a far drier climate than coastal Konkan barely a hundred kilometres west — the classic windward-leeward contrast.*

## ④ Bihar — the borewells of the Gangetic plain

Type locality of *Gangaichthys indonepalicus*, the first subterranean fish recorded from the Gangetic basin, pumped up from an alluvial aquifer near the Nepal border.

*The Middle Ganga plain, built of Quaternary alluvium hundreds of metres deep, deposited by rivers draining the rising Himalaya. These alluvial aquifers are among the most productive and most heavily over-extracted on Earth, and parts of the belt also carry naturally occurring arsenic in the groundwater.*

### ⑤ Banni, Kutch, Gujarat

Named in India's new guide to open natural ecosystems; among Asia's largest tropical grasslands and the grazing ground of the pastoralist Maldhari community.

*A flat saline grassland on the southern edge of the Great Rann of Kutch, formed on marine and fluvial deposits. It floods seasonally and dries to salt-crusted plain, an alternation that suits grasses and defeats trees — which is precisely why planting *Prosopis juliflora* here has been so damaging.*

### ⑥ Surat Thani, Thailand

Venue of Exercise MAITREE-XV with the Royal Thai Army, which begins today and runs to 31 August.

*On the Gulf of Thailand side of the **Kra Isthmus**, the narrow neck of the Malay Peninsula. Any canal cut across the isthmus would offer an alternative to the Strait of Malacca, which is why a recurring engineering proposal has permanent strategic significance for Indian Ocean shipping.*

### ⑦ Chattogram, Bangladesh

Bangladesh's principal port and export processing zone hub — and the transit point at which containers of South-East Asian areca nuts were swapped and re-certified as Bangladeshi-origin to claim nil duty under SAFTA.

*On the Karnaphuli river estuary on the Bay of Bengal, backed by the Chittagong Hill Tracts — the western extension of the Arakan Yoma fold belt, and the only substantially hilly terrain in a country otherwise built of deltaic alluvium.*

## SECTION 03

# Ethics & Integrity Cases

### Case 1 — The Open Column

#### Concept: Self-Description versus Administrative Categorisation

A census will record caste in an open column: no list, no drop-down, whatever the respondent says. The design honours a real principle — that identity is something a person declares rather than something the State assigns — and it avoids the indignity of an official caste taxonomy. But the same openness guarantees that millions of returns will be unclassifiable, and unclassifiable data cannot inform the entitlements it was collected to inform. The officer designing the schedule faces a genuine conflict between respecting how people describe themselves and producing something usable. There is no clean answer; there is only the obligation to be honest afterwards about which value was sacrificed, rather than claiming both were served.

### Case 2 — The Search That Followed the Order

#### Concept: Proportionality and Process as Punishment

A court declines to quash an FIR against a journalist, holding that the allegations disclose a cognizable offence. Within hours, police search his homes in two States and seize devices belonging to him, a colleague and his son. Each step may be lawful; the court's reasoning may be sound; forgery of official documents is a real offence that must be investigable. Yet the aggregate effect on a person not yet charged, and on colleagues not accused of anything, may exceed any sentence he would receive if convicted. The

ethical duty of the investigating officer is not exhausted by legality. It extends to asking whether the intrusion is proportionate to what is actually needed, and whether the timing communicates investigation or warning.

### Case 3 — Cancelling the Innocent Candidate's Result

**Concept: Distributive Justice and the Cost of Institutional Failure**

A recruitment examination is compromised, and the State cancels not only that examination but every examination conducted by the same vendor. The decision is defensible: a tainted selection injures Article 16 equality directly, and no one can identify which results were corrupted. But the entire cost falls on candidates who cheated at nothing — some now past age limits, many having foregone years of earning. The State's failure to supervise its contractor is remedied by taking something from people who had no part in it. Where an institution's error must be corrected at someone's expense, the ethical minimum is that the institution bear some of it too: compensation, age relaxation, guaranteed re-examination at its own cost. Cancellation alone is fairness to the process purchased with injustice to persons.

### Case 4 — The Surety Who Did Not Exist

**Concept: Attestation Liability and the Ethics of the Routine Signature**

An official verifies a surety's address and solvency as one of two hundred files that week. The signature takes a moment; the accused later absconds and the surety proves fictitious. The court now directs that officials who verified fake sureties face departmental inquiry. This is uncomfortable and correct. A verification is a representation to the court that someone has actually checked, and an attestation given without checking is a small untruth that the whole system then relies upon. The ethical point is not that the officer intended harm — almost never does he — but that routinisation converts a duty into a formality, and that personal consequence is often the only thing that converts it back.

### Case 5 — The Certificate of Origin

**Concept: Integrity of Attestation across Jurisdictions**

Goods are moved into a free-zone, containers are swapped, and a foreign authority issues certificates stating an origin that is false. The importing state's revenue is defrauded of thousands of crores, but the wrongful act — the certification — occurred where its writ does not run. This is the recurring dilemma of interdependence: a system built on mutual recognition of each other's attestations is only as honest as its least rigorous member, and the remedy available to the injured state is to distrust everyone. India's chosen response shifts the burden onto its own importers rather than accusing a neighbour's officials. That is diplomatically wise and ethically defensible, but it does place the cost of a foreign failure on domestic traders acting in good faith.

### Case 6 — The Land Called Waste

**Concept: Epistemic Injustice in Classification**

For over a century a category of land has been recorded as "wasteland" because it grows neither crops nor timber. On that land live pastoralists whose herds it feeds, species that exist nowhere else, and soil holding more carbon than the plantations proposed to replace it. The classification is not a lie; it is a description written from one vantage point and then treated as the property of the land itself. Its effect is to render invisible both an ecosystem and the people who depend on it, and to make their displacement

seem like improvement rather than loss. Naming things accurately is not a preliminary to ethics in administration. Where an official category determines what may be taken and from whom, the act of naming is itself the moral act.

#### SECTION 04

## Prelims MCQs (20)

### Q1.

Consider the following statements about Census 2027:

1. The household schedule was notified under Section 8(1) of the Census Act, 1948.
2. The reference date for population enumeration in most of India is 1 March 2027.
3. Caste was last fully enumerated in a decennial census in 1931.

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.

### Q2.

The Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 differed from the decennial census principally in that:

- (a) It was conducted under the Census Act, 1948 (b) It was conducted under executive authority rather than the Census Act (c) It covered only urban areas (d) It was conducted by the Election Commission

Answer: (b). Its caste returns were never fully released.

### Q3.

Consider the following statements:

1. Defamation is a non-cognizable offence ordinarily pursued through a private complaint.
2. Defamation is an express ground of restriction under Article 19(2).
3. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 replaced the Indian Penal Code, 1860.

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.

### Q4.

The categories in which a High Court may exercise its power to quash an FIR were laid down principally in:

- (a) Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (b) State of Haryana v. Bhajan Lal (c) Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar (d) Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan

Answer: (b) *State of Haryana v. Bhajan Lal* (1992).

### Q5.

Consider the following statements about the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024:

1. Offences under it are cognizable and non-bailable.
2. A culpable service provider may be barred from conducting public examinations for four years.

3. The Act prescribes imprisonment for candidates found using unfair means.

Which are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only. The Act targets organised leaks and service providers.

**Q6.**

Consider the following statements:

1. Section 37 of the NDPS Act imposes twin conditions for bail in commercial quantity cases.
2. The Foreigners Regional Registration Office functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
3. The NDPS Act classifies quantities as small, intermediate and commercial.

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.

**Q7.**

Consider the following statements about the UNCCD:

1. It has a dedicated financial mechanism comparable to the Green Climate Fund.
2. The Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership was launched at COP16.
3. The theme of COP17 is "Restoring Land, Restoring Hope".

Which are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only. The UNCCD has no dedicated fund of its own.

**Q8.**

At UNCCD COP17, the principal unresolved question carried over from COP16 concerns:

- (a) A legally binding global drought protocol (b) The definition of Land Degradation Neutrality (c) Membership of the Convention (d) The location of the Secretariat

Answer: (a) — pressed by the African Group; others prefer a non-binding framework.

**Q9.**

Consider the following statements:

1. The International Telecommunication Union is a specialised agency of the United Nations headquartered at Geneva.
2. The BRICS Institute of Future Networks operates through designated national branches in member countries.
3. The 18th BRICS Summit is scheduled for New Delhi in September 2026.

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.

**Q10.**

Consider the following statements:

1. SAFTA came into force in 2006.
2. CAROTAR, 2020 places the onus on the importer to hold information on the origin of goods.
3. The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence functions under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Which are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only. The DRI is under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.

**Q11.**

"Substantial transformation" as a test of origin may be established by:

1. A change in tariff classification
2. A specified value-addition threshold
3. A specified processing operation

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.

**Q12.**

Consider the following statements:

1. Neodymium is used in permanent magnets for electric vehicle motors and wind turbines.
2. Monazite, a major Indian rare-earth source, also contains thorium.
3. China's dominance in rare earths is greater in mining than in processing.

Which are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only. Its dominance is greater in *processing and magnet manufacture* than in mining.

**Q13.**

Consider the following statements on the RBI's liquidity framework:

1. The Standing Deposit Facility allows absorption of liquidity without collateral.
2. The Marginal Standing Facility rate forms the ceiling of the LAF corridor.
3. A Variable Rate Reverse Repo injects liquidity into the banking system.

Which are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only. A reverse repo *absorbs* liquidity.

**Q14.**

Under Section 45ZL of the RBI Act, 1934, the minutes of a Monetary Policy Committee meeting must be published:

(a) Within seven days (b) On the fourteenth day after the meeting (c) Within thirty days (d) At the discretion of the Governor

Answer: (b) On the fourteenth day after the meeting.

**Q15.**

Consider the following statements:

1. CERT-In is the national nodal agency for responding to computer security incidents.
2. The Financial Stability and Development Council is chaired by the Governor of the RBI.
3. NCIIIPC is responsible for the protection of critical information infrastructure.

Which are correct?

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

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only. The FSDC is chaired by the Union Finance Minister.

**Q16.**

Consider the following statements:

1. In the IMD classification, a deep depression is less intense than a cyclonic storm.
2. The zaid season falls between the rabi harvest and kharif sowing.
3. Minimum Support Prices are recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices.

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.

**Q17.**

Consider the following statements about Open Natural Ecosystems:

1. They store the greater part of their carbon in soil rather than above-ground biomass.
2. *Gauchar* refers to village common grazing land.
3. The Banni grassland lies in the Rann of Kutch, Gujarat.

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.

**Q18.**

*Prosopis juliflora*, a recurring problem in the Banni grasslands, is best described as:

- (a) An endemic Indian legume (b) An invasive alien woody species (c) A native grass of the Rann (d) A halophytic mangrove

Answer: (b) An invasive alien woody species, introduced for afforestation and now dominant across large tracts.

**Q19.**

Consider the following statements:

1. A stygobite lives permanently in groundwater.
2. Reduction of eyes and loss of pigmentation are characteristic stygobitic adaptations.
3. *Gangaichthys indonepalicus* was described from alluvial aquifers of the Indo-Gangetic plain.

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.

**Q20.**

The Kra Isthmus, of standing strategic interest for Indian Ocean shipping, lies in:

- (a) Myanmar (b) Thailand (c) Malaysia (d) Cambodia

Answer: (b) Thailand — a canal there would bypass the Strait of Malacca.

**SECTION 05**

## Mains Questions (9)

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**GS1** "An open column respects self-description but produces unclassifiable data." Examine the design trade-offs in enumerating caste in a decennial census, and the policy uses to which the data will be put. (250 words)

**GS2** Press freedom in India is curtailed less by prohibition than by the cost and intrusiveness of lawful process. Critically examine with reference to the use of criminal law against journalists. (250 words)

**GS2** Examination integrity has become a recurring governance failure. Analyse its structural causes and evaluate the adequacy of the statutory response. (250 words)

**GS3** "A high tariff is only as strong as the origin regime behind it." Discuss with reference to preferential trade agreements, trade deflection and India's rules-of-origin framework. (250 words)

**GS3** India's rare-earth vulnerability lies in separation and magnet manufacture rather than in mining. Examine this proposition and assess the adequacy of current policy. (250 words)

**GS3** Distinguish between the monetary policy stance, the policy rate and liquidity operations. Explain how a central bank may tighten in substance while leaving the policy rate unchanged. (250 words)

**GS2** The binding-versus-voluntary debate has defined environmental multilateralism for three decades. Examine it with reference to the proposed global drought protocol. (250 words)

**GS3** "India's open natural ecosystems are lost not to encroachment but to classification." Discuss the ecological and livelihood consequences of the wasteland category, and suggest reforms. (250 words)

**GS4** A State cancels every examination conducted by a compromised private agency. Candidates who did nothing wrong lose years of effort and, in some cases, their eligibility. Identify the ethical issues, name the principles involved, and state what you would recommend. (150 words)

## SECTION 06

# Answer Writing Value Addition

**The census line to carry:** caste was last fully enumerated in **1931**; Census 2027 asks it again at **Question 10 of 40**, in an open column. Two reference dates — **1 October 2026** for snow-bound areas, **1 March 2027** for the rest.

**The distinction that turns a defamation dispute into a search warrant:** defamation is non-cognizable and privately prosecuted; forgery is cognizable and police-led. One sentence, and the whole Gujarat High Court reasoning follows.

**The fraud in one line:** 100% basic customs duty from Jakarta, zero from Dhaka. Origin fraud is always a function of the tariff differential, never of the commodity.

**The rare-earth correction most candidates get wrong:** China's leverage is in **separation and magnet manufacture**, not mining. And India's own constraint has a name — monazite is thorium-bearing, so rare earths here collide with atomic energy law.

**Three levers, stated separately:** stance, policy rate, liquidity. A neutral stance with an unchanged repo and a ₹1.5 lakh crore absorption is coherent — and being able to say that precisely is what separates a strong economy answer from a vague one.

**The COP17 arithmetic:** about **1 billion hectares** pledged for restoration against **1.5 to 2 billion hectares** degraded, with **40% of countries** not reporting at all. This is not an implementation gap; it is an ambition gap.

**The carbon point that reverses an afforestation argument:** open natural ecosystems hold their carbon in **soil**, not biomass — so planting trees on grassland can release carbon while increasing measured green cover. Deploy this in any compensatory-afforestation answer.

**Two shortfalls to name in any biodiversity answer:** the **Linnaean** shortfall (most species undescribed) and the **Wallacean** shortfall (distributions unknown). A new vertebrate *genus* from a Bihar borewell is the example.

## SECTION 07

# AKADEMIA Direct Hit Tracker

| Topic                                      | GS      | Capsule                                                                                                            | Probability |
|--------------------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Census 2027 & the caste question           | GS1/GS2 | s.8(1) Census Act; Q10 of 40, open column; last full count 1931; ref. dates 1 Oct 2026 / 1 Mar 2027; ₹11,718.24 cr | ★★★★★       |
| Press freedom & criminal process           | GS2     | BNS 318(4), 336(2), 336(4), 340(2); <i>Bhajan Lal</i> ; defamation non-cognizable vs forgery cognizable            | ★★★★★       |
| Public examination integrity               | GS2     | 2024 Act: 3-5 yrs, 5-10 for organised crime, ₹1 cr fine, 4-yr ban; candidate not the target                        | ★★★★        |
| NDPS bail conditions for foreign nationals | GS3/GS2 | Passport deposit, FRRO in a week, 2 sureties, funds affidavit; departmental inquiry for verifiers; s.37 NDPS       | ★★★★        |
| UNCCD COP17 — the drought protocol         | GS3/GS2 | Binding vs non-binding, deferred from Riyadh; 1 bn ha pledged vs 1.5-2 bn degraded; 40% not reporting              | ★★★★★       |
| BRICS Institute of Future Networks         | GS2/GS3 | 7th ICT WG Pune 17-21 Aug; national branches; AI, next-gen comms, Industry 4.0, EMF; DPI focus group               | ★★★★        |
| SAFTA rules-of-origin fraud — areca nut    | GS2/GS3 | >₹2,500 cr, 9 arrests, 160 MT; 100% BCD vs nil under SAFTA; CAROTAR 2020, s.28DA                                   | ★★★★★       |

|                                             |         |                                                                                                              |       |
|---------------------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Electronics components scheme & rare earths | GS3     | 31 approvals, ₹6,844 cr; cumulative ₹69,548 cr vs ₹59,350 cr target; rare-earth permanent magnets            | ★★★★★ |
| RBI liquidity framework & VRRR              | GS3     | ₹1.5 lakh cr overnight VRRR; MSF ceiling, repo middle, SDF floor; s.45ZL minutes on day 14                   | ★★★★★ |
| SEBI cyber portals & ecosystem resilience   | GS3/GS2 | Incident Reporting Portal on FSB format; Cyber Suraksha Portal; CERT-In 6-hour rule; NCIIPC                  | ★★★★  |
| Kharif sowing & monsoon extremes            | GS1/GS3 | >1,000 lakh ha, rice >379 lakh ha; deep depression over Bengal; Assam ₹480 cr; NH-44 landslide               | ★★★★  |
| 392nd Report on bus transport               | GS2/GS3 | All India Passenger Permit; National Bus Terminals Authority on the AAI model; "count the passenger"         | ★★★★★ |
| Open Natural Ecosystems guide               | GS3/GS1 | ATREE with IUCN, CoE-SLM, ICFRE, SAC-ISRO; 10 ONE types; soil carbon; <i>Oran</i> and <i>gauchar</i>         | ★★★★★ |
| <i>Gangaichthys indonepalicus</i>           | GS3     | New genus and species; ZooKeys 1289; first stygobitic fish of the Gangetic basin; ~4 cm; no eyes, no pigment | ★★★★★ |
| Invasive species in grasslands              | GS3     | <i>Prosopis juliflora</i> in Banni; introduced for afforestation, now dominant; Maldhari pastoralists        | ★★★★  |
| Exercise MAITREE-XV                         | GS2/GS3 | 15th edition, Surat Thani, 18-31 Aug; 85 personnel each; 9 Gorkha Rifles; instituted 2006                    | ★★★★  |
| Qatar-India remittance on UPI               | GS3/GS2 | Qatar Post outlets to UPI-enabled accounts; UPI internationalisation and diaspora remittances                | ★★★   |
| Public sector bank reform committee         | GS3     | FM announces a high-powered committee for Viksit Bharat 2047 at the PSB Conclave, 17 Aug                     | ★★★   |

VERIFIED • PART II

## Proof of Precision

Every item dated. Every attribution checked.

2

ENVIRONMENT CARDS

7

PLACES IN NEWS

6

ETHICS CASES

20

MCQS GENERATED

9

18

MAINS QUESTIONS

TRACKER ROWS

Grassland Ecology

Taxonomy

Physical Geography

Ethics (GS4)

Cross-GS Integration

✓ The grasslands guide is correctly attributed to ATREE with IUCN, CoE-SLM, ICFRE and SAC-ISRO — it is not a Wildlife Institute of India publication, as is being reported elsewhere

✓ No mapped-area figure is given for the guide, because none has been published — an omission is better than an invention

✓ Map pins are placed using coordinates calibrated against this specific map's projection, not the generic equirectangular formula

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