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The Topper's Last Read. Every Morning.

PART II · ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER

Monday, 17 August 2026

"The Topper's Last Read"

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INSIDE PART II

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Environment & Ecology

GS3

GS1

16 AUG

Conservation & Grassland Ecology

Study published 14 August 2026 in PLOS One; reported 16 August 2026 · Authors: Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun

Only 6.6% of the Deccan Will Do: A New Map for the Great Indian Bustard

Why in News: A study by researchers at the **Wildlife Institute of India**, published in **PLOS One** on **14 August 2026** and reported on 16 August, has mapped where the **Great Indian Bustard** could still survive in the Deccan. Of a landscape of **7,20,000 square kilometres** examined, only **48,000 sq km — 6.6% — is suitable habitat**. The researchers identify **16 priority conservation areas** totalling about **18,000 sq km**. The central and most policy-relevant finding is counter-intuitive: habitat suitability is *higher* where traditional low-intensity cropping systems persist.

Background: The Great Indian Bustard, *Ardeotis nigriceps*, is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world and a flagship species of India's arid and semi-arid grasslands. It is listed as **Critically Endangered** on the IUCN Red List. Historically found across **eleven Indian states** and parts of what is now Pakistan, its decline began at the end of the nineteenth century and accelerated sharply after independence as grasslands were converted, irrigated and planted. The national population is now estimated at only **100 to 150 individuals**, the great majority in Rajasthan. The Deccan population fell from an estimated 200–390 birds in 1989 to 66–75 by 2008 and is now at high risk of local extinction.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- ***Ardeotis nigriceps* — IUCN Critically Endangered; Schedule I** of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972; **Appendix I** of the Convention on Migratory Species; **State bird of Rajasthan**.
- Study numbers: Deccan landscape examined **7,20,000 sq km**; suitable habitat **48,000 sq km (6.6%)**; **16 priority conservation areas** totalling **18,000 sq km**, ranging individually from **144 to 8,496 sq km**.
- Suitable areas fall across **35 districts — 22 in Maharashtra**, 6 each in Karnataka and Telangana, 1 in Andhra Pradesh.
- Land cover within the priority areas: **fallow land 28.6%, kharif crops 24.3%, mixed crops 18.8%, grasslands 11.6%** — note that grassland is the *smallest* component, which is the point.
- National population **100–150 individuals**; the largest remaining population is in and around **Desert National Park, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan**; Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh hold roughly 10–15 each.
- Drivers of decline identified: expansion of **irrigation networks**; the shift from traditional pulses and oilseeds to **cash crops such as sugarcane and cotton**; excessive pesticide use; overgrazing; urbanisation; **feral dog populations**; **powerline expansion**; and plantation drives on grasslands.
- Genetics: extremely low variability and a strong **population bottleneck**, with isolated pockets raising the risk of **inbreeding depression**.
- Conservation architecture in place: **Project Great Indian Bustard**; a conservation breeding centre at **Sam, Jaisalmer**, run with the Rajasthan Forest Department; and the Supreme Court's directions in **M.K. Ranjitsinh v. Union of India** on undergrounding and bird-diverters for powerlines in bustard habitat.

- The finding that traditional agriculture *sustains* bustard habitat overturns the standard conservation model. This is not a species that needs land fenced off from people; it needs a particular **mosaic** of cultivated and fallow land that a specific kind of farming produces. Protection here means protecting a livelihood pattern, not excluding one.
- That reframes the policy instrument entirely. If low-intensity mixed cropping with fallows is the habitat, then the correct tool is **incentive-based conservation** — payments for ecosystem services, procurement support for millets and pulses, crop-insurance design that does not penalise fallowing — rather than protected-area notification, which would displace the very farmers maintaining the habitat.
- The deeper structural problem is classificatory. India's revenue records treat open natural ecosystems as "**wasteland**", which makes grasslands the default target for compensatory afforestation, solar parks and plantation drives. A species cannot be saved while its habitat is legally categorised as land awaiting improvement.
- The powerline question illustrates a genuine trade-off between two environmental goods. Renewable-energy transmission in Rajasthan and Gujarat runs directly through bustard habitat, and bustards — with poor frontal vision and low manoeuvrability — collide with lines. Undergrounding is extremely expensive. Climate mitigation and biodiversity conservation are here in direct conflict, and answers should say so rather than assuming they align.
- On reintroduction, the honest position is cautious. The Deccan being *less degraded* than other parts of the range makes it a candidate for recovery, but with 100–150 birds nationally and a severe bottleneck, the binding constraint is the number of birds available, not the number of hectares.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

7,20,000 examined, 48,000 suitable, 18,000 prioritised — three numbers, each shrinking by roughly an order of magnitude. And the paradox in one line: *the bustard needs the farmer, not the fence*.

Probable Prelims MCQ (Statement-Based)

Consider the following statements about the Great Indian Bustard:

1. It is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.
2. It is placed in Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
3. It is the State bird of Gujarat.

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 is the State bird of Rajasthan.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2020 and 2023 on conservation of species and habitats; Prelims 2019 tested the Great Indian Bustard's habitat and 2021 tested Schedule I species.

GS3

16 AUG

Forest Fire & Climate Change

Study in *Global Change Biology*; reported 16 August 2026 · University of Sheffield

Protection Is Not Immunity: Four Million Hectares of Protected Tropical Forest Have Burned

Why in News: The first detailed global assessment of wildfire loss inside protected tropical forests, published in *Global Change Biology* and reported on **16 August 2026**, finds that **over four million hectares** of protected tropical forest have

been lost to wildfire since 2001 — roughly twice the area of Wales. The annual burned area inside protected areas has been about **nine times higher since 2016** than before, and **nearly one-third of the entire 24-year loss occurred in 2024 alone**. The study's central conclusion is uncomfortable: protected areas do reduce fire risk, but they do not insulate forests from a worsening regional fire regime.

Background: Tropical forests were historically too moist to burn readily; fire in these systems is overwhelmingly human-ignited and becomes destructive only when drought, fragmentation and edge effects dry the understorey enough to carry flame. Protected-area designation has been the principal global instrument of forest conservation, and its effectiveness is normally measured against deforestation rather than fire. The methodological contribution here is a **matched-plot counterfactual design**: each protected plot is compared with unprotected plots of similar temperature, rainfall, population density and surrounding forest cover, so that the protection effect can be isolated from the confounding fact that protected areas tend to be remote to begin with.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- **Over 4 million hectares** of protected tropical forest lost to wildfire since **2001** — approximately twice the area of Wales.
- Method: satellite wildfire data combined with maps of **more than 9,700 protected areas** across the tropics, for **2001–2024**, at **30-metre resolution**.
- **Annual burned area inside protected areas is about nine times higher since 2016** than in the preceding period.
- **Nearly one-third of all losses across the 24 years occurred in 2024 alone.**
- Geography: about **89% of the destruction was in the tropical Americas**, with **Brazil alone accounting for roughly two-thirds** of global losses; Bolivia and Indonesia were also substantial.
- The protection effect: protected areas were *less likely* to burn than matched unprotected forest in about **50% of American plots** and about **70% of African plots** — but protected and unprotected forests followed **almost identical trends over time**.
- The authors describe their figures as a **conservative estimate**, and note that most tropical fires are human-caused, which makes community collaboration rather than enforcement the operative lever.
- Indian context: the **Forest Survey of India** runs the **Forest Fire Alert System** and the **Van Agni** geoportal, using MODIS and SNPP-VIIRS satellite detections; the **National Action Plan on Forest Fires** dates from 2018; and the **Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme** is the funding vehicle.
- India's own vulnerability: FSI assessments have consistently found that a very large share of the recorded forest area is fire-prone to some degree, with the highest incidence in the central Indian dry deciduous belt and the North-East.

📊 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- The finding that protection reduces risk but not the *trend* is the analytically important one. It means protected-area designation is a spatial instrument being asked to solve a climatic problem. Drawing a boundary changes who may enter; it does not change the moisture deficit that makes the forest combustible.
- The 2024 concentration — a third of 24 years of loss in a single year — is what a threshold effect looks like in data. Fire regimes do not degrade linearly; they shift when drought crosses the point at which fires that would previously have self-extinguished begin to spread. This is precisely the behaviour that makes climate risk hard to plan for.
- Because ignition is overwhelmingly human, the policy conclusion runs towards **community-based fire management** rather than exclusion — controlled early-season burning, fire lines maintained with local labour, alternatives to agricultural residue burning, and incentive alignment with forest-fringe communities. Fencing people out does not remove the ignition source; it removes the people who could suppress the fire.
- For India the immediate connection is to today's other headline: **forest fire management is Priority II of India's BRICS Environment Working Group agenda**. That is a genuine convergence of an international agenda with a domestic vulnerability, and it gives India a technical subject on which it can plausibly lead.

- There is a carbon-accounting dimension worth flagging. Forest fire emissions are large, episodic and poorly captured in national inventories, and a protected forest that burns can flip from sink to source. Any answer treating forest cover as equivalent to carbon storage should account for this.

💡 Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Nine times worse since 2016, one-third of it in 2024, eighty-nine per cent in the Americas. Three numbers that between them tell the whole story. And the one-line verdict: *protection lowers the risk but not the trend.*

🔗 Probable Prelims MCQ (Statement-Based)

Consider the following statements:

1. The Forest Survey of India operates a Forest Fire Alert System using satellite detections.
2. Fires in tropical moist forests are predominantly caused by lightning rather than human activity.
3. A forest that burns can become a net source of carbon rather than a sink.

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: (c) 1 and 3 only. Tropical forest fires are overwhelmingly human-ignited.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

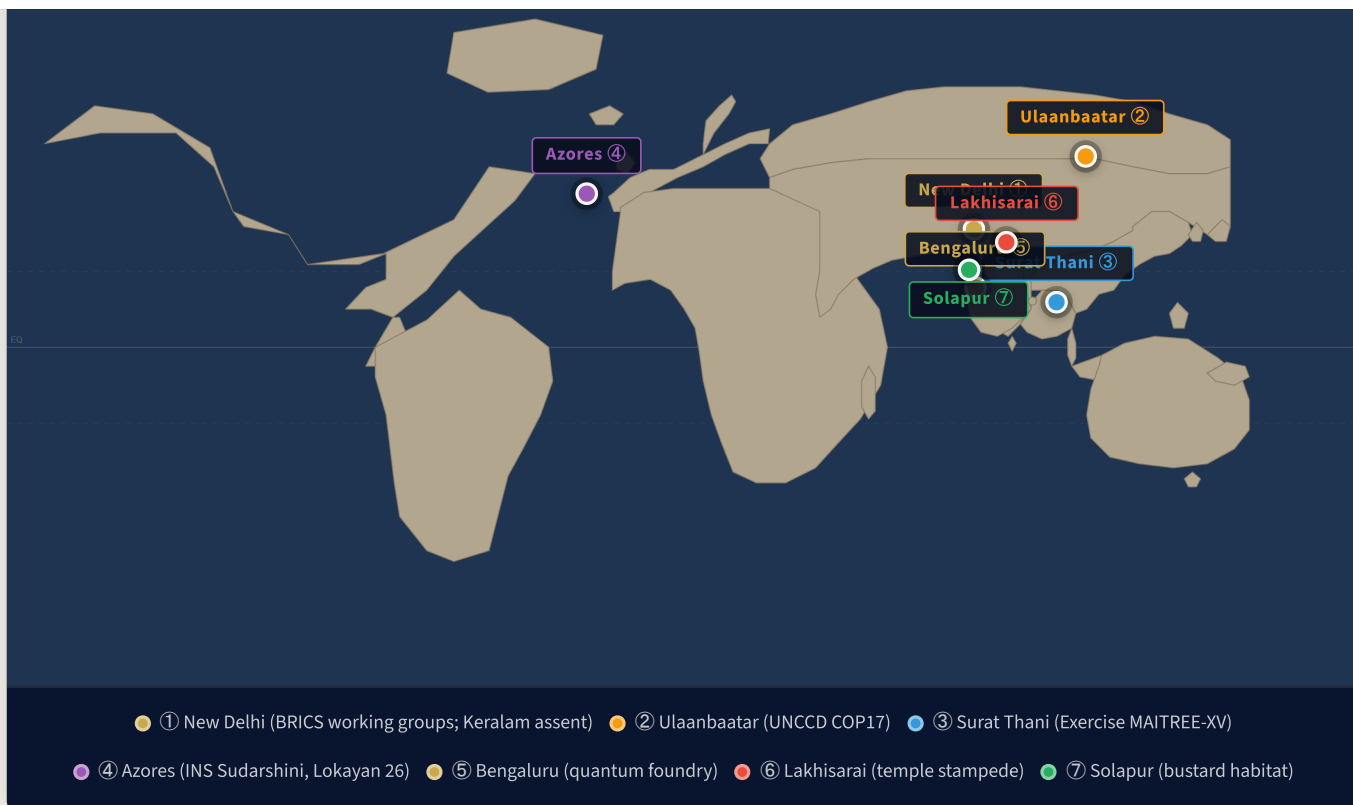
GS3 2021 and 2023 on forest fires, disaster management and climate change impacts; GS1 2019 on the relationship between forests and climate.

THEIAS AKADEMIA Both Environment cards are fresh peer-reviewed research from 14–16 August, not press releases. Sixth consecutive edition with zero static species filler. theiasakademia.com

SECTION 02

Places in News

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



① New Delhi — Bharat Mandapam

Venue of the BRICS Environment Working Group Senior Officials' Meeting today and the 12th Environment Ministers' Meeting tomorrow; also the seat from which Presidential assent to the Keralam Bill issued.

On the Indo-Gangetic plain on the west bank of the Yamuna, in the narrow corridor between the Aravalli ridge — among the oldest fold systems on Earth — and the river. The Delhi ridge is the Aravallis' last northward outcrop.

② Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Host of UNCCD COP17, 17–28 August, under the theme "Restoring Land, Restoring Hope." Nearly 77% of Mongolia's land is already degraded.

The world's coldest national capital, on the Tuul river in a valley of the Khentii mountains at about 1,300 m. Mongolia is doubly landlocked, and its steppe and Gobi rangelands are the classic case of desertification driven by the interaction of drought with grazing pressure — which is why it was chosen for a COP in the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.

③ Surat Thani, Thailand

Venue of Exercise MAITREE-XV with the Royal Thai Army, 18–31 August, focused on counter-insurgency in jungle and semi-urban terrain.

*On the Gulf of Thailand side of the **Kra Isthmus**, the narrow neck of the Malay Peninsula. The isthmus is strategically significant to India because any canal cut across it would offer an alternative to the Strait of Malacca — a recurring proposal with direct implications for Indian Ocean shipping.*

④ Ponta Delgada, Azores, Portugal

INS Sudarshini concluded its port call here and has sailed for Lisbon, on the ten-month Lokayan 26 voyage advancing the MAHASAGAR vision.

A mid-Atlantic archipelago on the **Azores Triple Junction**, where the North American, Eurasian and African plates meet along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. The islands are volcanic in origin and sit near the Azores High, the semi-permanent subtropical anticyclone that shapes European weather.

⑤ Jakkur, Bengaluru, Karnataka

Site of the newly inaugurated Phase 2 quantum chip foundry, an eight-inch line producing superconducting processors of up to 128 qubits.

On the Mysore plateau at around 900 m, along the watershed dividing the Cauvery and Pennar basins. The elevation-moderated climate that once recommended it as a cantonment now supports the stable-temperature, low-vibration environments that both semiconductor and quantum fabrication require.

⑥ Lakhisarai, Bihar

At least seven devotees died in a stampede at the Ashok Dham temple during the Shravan month rush, triggered by a rumour that a live wire had fallen. Reports vary between six and seven.

In the south Bihar plain between the Ganga and the northern edge of the Chotanagpur plateau, in the Kiul river basin. The district lies in the seismically active Ganga alluvial belt and is part of the Gangetic flood-prone zone.

⑦ Solapur and the old Osmanabad district, Maharashtra

Named in the new Wildlife Institute of India study as retaining the highest habitat suitability for the Great Indian Bustard, precisely because farmers there maintain a mosaic of cultivated and fallow land.

On the Deccan plateau's rain-shadow belt east of the Western Ghats, on black cotton soil (regur) weathered from Deccan Trap basalt. Annual rainfall is low and unreliable, which historically produced exactly the low-intensity mixed cropping with long fallows that the bustard depends on.

SECTION 03

Ethics & Integrity Cases

Case 1 — The Regulator Chosen by the Regulated

Concept: Structural Conflict of Interest and the Appearance of Independence

A statute provides that members of a safety regulator shall be appointed on the recommendation of a panel constituted by the body that operates the installations being regulated. Every appointee may be technically excellent and personally scrupulous, and in practice the regulator may function well for years. The ethical defect is nonetheless structural rather than personal: a regulator cannot demonstrate independence from an entity that selects it, and independence which cannot be demonstrated cannot be relied upon by the public whose safety depends on it. This is why the appearance of independence is not a lesser standard than actual independence — in regulation, appearance is part of the function.

Case 2 — Verifying What Cannot Be Verified

Concept: Dignity, Autonomy and the Ethics of Administrative Proof

You administer a system that must record a person's gender for purposes carrying real legal consequence. A declaration-based process respects autonomy but gives you nothing to verify. A medical process gives you a record but requires an examination no other citizen undergoes to establish who they are. The administrator's instinct is to prefer the verifiable, and that instinct is not corrupt — it comes from accountability for error. But where the interest at stake is dignity, the method of verification is itself part of the harm, and an officer must ask whether the certainty gained is proportionate to the indignity imposed. A separate and simpler wrong occurred alongside this one: an existing document was altered without notice or hearing, which no amount of policy justification reaches.

Case 3 — The Rumour and the Crowd

Concept: Foreseeable Risk and the Duty of Anticipation

A temple draws very large crowds every year in a known month. This year a rumour spreads that a live wire has fallen, and in the resulting panic people die. No official caused the rumour, and no one intended harm. But crowd crush in a confined approach is among the most predictable of all administrative failures, guidance for managing mass gatherings has existed for over a decade, and the trigger — a fear of electrocution — points to visible wiring that itself invited the belief. The ethical question is not who is to blame for the rumour. It is whether an administration that knew the date, the numbers and the geometry of the site discharged its duty of anticipation, and whether the ex-gratia payment made afterwards is being allowed to substitute for the prevention that was owed beforehand.

Case 4 — Flagged, Not Yet Deleted

Concept: Burden of Proof and the Asymmetry of Error

A roll revision flags a very large share of urban names as absent, shifted, dead or duplicated. Officers are told the flag is only a trigger for enquiry, not a deletion, and that is true. But an elector who does not learn of the flag, or cannot produce documents, or is away for work when the officer calls, may be removed without ever knowing a question was asked. Two errors are possible and they are not equivalent: a wrongly retained name dilutes the franchise a little, while a wrongly removed name extinguishes it entirely. Where errors are asymmetric in their consequences, the burden belongs on the side better able to bear it — which is the administration, not the citizen. An officer who understands this designs notice generously rather than sufficiently.

Case 5 — Renting the Capability

Concept: Intergenerational Stewardship of Public Resources

You must close an urgent surveillance gap. Leasing delivers the capability in months and is easier to sanction; purchasing takes years but leaves the state owning an asset, and possibly some transferred technology. The lease costs a substantial sum and at the end of it the state owns nothing. Neither choice is wrong, and urgency is a legitimate reason to rent. The ethical duty is honesty about what is being traded: expenditure that leaves no asset is a transfer from future capability to present readiness, and it is defensible only if declared as such and time-limited. The failure mode is not the first lease; it is the fourth, by which point renting has quietly become the policy nobody chose.

Case 6 — Conservation That Depends on the Farmer

Concept: Distributive Justice in Conservation

Research shows that a critically endangered bird survives best on land farmed in a traditional, low-yield, fallow-heavy way. The conventional response is to notify the area as protected. But protection would restrict the very practice sustaining the habitat, and would impose the cost of a national conservation good on some of the poorest cultivators in the region, who receive nothing for the

service they have unknowingly provided. Justice here points away from prohibition and towards payment — recognising the farmer as a producer of habitat rather than an obstacle to it. The wider principle is that when conservation costs fall on people who did not cause the loss and cannot afford the remedy, the arrangement is not merely inefficient; it is unjust.

SECTION 04

Prelims MCQs (20)

Q1.

Consider the following statements about altering the name of a State:

1. The Bill requires prior recommendation of the President.
2. The views of the State Legislature must be obtained and are binding.
3. Article 4(2) provides that such a law is not an amendment under Article 368.

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 views must be sought but do not bind Parliament.

Q2.

A law made under Article 3 may make consequential changes to which Schedules?

- (a) First and Fourth (b) First and Seventh (c) Fourth and Ninth (d) Seventh and Eighth

Answer: (a) First (names and territories) and Fourth (Rajya Sabha seat allocation), under Article 4(1).

Q3.

Consider the following statements:

1. *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) recognised transgender persons as a third gender.
2. The Transgender Persons Act, 2019 provided for a certificate of identity issued by the District Magistrate.
3. The National Council for Transgender Persons is chaired by the Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment.

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.

Consider the following statements:

1. Electoral rolls are prepared under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
2. Form 7 is used to object to the inclusion of a name or to seek deletion.
3. Article 371F contains special provisions with respect to Sikkim.

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.

Q5.

Under Article 329(b) of the Constitution, an election to Parliament or a State Legislature may be called in question:

- (a) By a writ petition at any stage
- (b) Only by an election petition presented as provided by law
- (c) Only by the Election Commission
- (d) Only after Presidential reference

Answer: (b).

Q6.

Consider the following statements:

- 1. The UAPA was amended in 2019 to permit designation of individuals as terrorists.
- 2. The Multi-Agency Centre functions under the Intelligence Bureau.
- 3. Police and public order are entries in the State List.

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 is one of the three Rio Conventions of 1992.
- 2. Its Secretariat is at Bonn, Germany.
- 3. Land Degradation Neutrality is embedded in Sustainable Development Goal 15.

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.

Q8.

India hosted the 14th Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD in 2019, at which it raised its land restoration commitment to:

- (a) 21 million hectares by 2030
- (b) 26 million hectares by 2030
- (c) 35 million hectares by 2030
- (d) 50 million hectares by 2040

Answer: (b) 26 million hectares by 2030, up from an earlier 21 million.

Q9.

Consider the following statements:

- 1. The BRICS Environment Working Group was established in 2015 at Moscow.
- 2. The Contact Group on Climate Change and Sustainable Development was added in 2024.
- 3. India assumed the BRICS Chairship for 2026 on 1 January 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 pairs of exercises and partners:

- 1. MAITREE — Thailand
- 2. MITRA SHAKTI — Sri Lanka
- 3. SAMPRITI — Bangladesh

Which pairs are correctly matched?

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

Answer: (d) All three.

Q11.

Consider the following statements:

1. Leasing became a distinct acquisition category in the Defence Acquisition Procedure of 2020.
2. BECA relates to geospatial intelligence sharing between India and the United States.
3. The Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region is at Gurugram.

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. The National Quantum Mission was approved in 2023 with four thematic hubs.
2. A logical qubit is typically built from many physical qubits using error correction.
3. Grover's algorithm would, on a capable quantum computer, threaten RSA-based public-key cryptography.

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. It is Shor's algorithm that threatens RSA; Grover's speeds up unstructured search.

Q13.

Consider the following statements:

1. The doctrine of absolute liability was laid down in the Oleum gas leak case.
2. Absolute liability admits no exceptions, unlike strict liability.
3. India is a party to the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage.

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.

Q14.

Consider the following statements about the PLFS:

1. It is conducted by the National Statistical Office under MoSPI.
2. The unemployment rate is expressed as a share of the labour force.
3. Under Current Weekly Status, one hour of economic activity on any day of the reference week counts as employment.

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.

Q15.

Consider the following statements:

1. An FCNR(B) deposit is denominated in foreign currency, with the bank bearing exchange risk.
2. An NRE account is rupee-denominated and fully repatriable.
3. NRI deposits are recorded in the current account of the balance of payments.

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. NRI deposits are capital account items.

Q16.

Consider the following statements:

1. Merchant Discount Rate is a charge borne by the merchant, not the customer.
2. Zero MDR on UPI and RuPay debit cards was mandated from 2020.
3. NPCI is a not-for-profit company incorporated under Section 8 of the Companies Act.

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.

Ardeotis nigriceps is the scientific name of the:

- (a) Lesser Florican (b) Great Indian Bustard (c) Bengal Florican (d) Sarus Crane

Answer: (b) Great Indian Bustard — Critically Endangered, Schedule I, CMS Appendix I, State bird of Rajasthan.

Q18.

Consider the following statements:

1. Fires in tropical moist forests are predominantly human-ignited.
2. The Forest Survey of India operates a satellite-based Forest Fire Alert System.
3. A burnt forest can become a net carbon source rather than a sink.

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.

Q19.

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

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

Answer: (b) Thailand — a canal across it would offer an alternative to the Strait of Malacca.

Q20.

The Azores archipelago is significant in physical geography because it lies at:

- (a) A hotspot over a continental craton (b) The junction of the North American, Eurasian and African plates on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge
(c) A subduction trench off the African coast (d) The centre of the Atlantic gyre with no tectonic significance

Answer: (b) — the Azores Triple Junction, which explains the islands' volcanic origin.

SECTION 05

Mains Questions (9)

GS2 "Article 3 makes India an indestructible Union of destructible States." Examine the provision, its procedural safeguards, and whether those safeguards adequately protect State interests. (250 words)

GS2 Can Parliament withdraw by statute a right that the Supreme Court has located in Article 21? Discuss with reference to the legislative treatment of self-perceived gender identity. (250 words)

GS2 "Wrongful inclusion dilutes the franchise; wrongful exclusion extinguishes it." Discuss the design principles that should govern an intensive revision of electoral rolls. (250 words)

GS3 Examine whether a statutory cap on operator liability for nuclear damage is reconcilable with the doctrine of absolute liability developed by Indian courts. (250 words)

GS2 "A regulator selected by a panel constituted by the entity it regulates fails the appearance-of-independence test even if every appointee is impeccable." Discuss with Indian examples across sectors. (250 words)

GS3 The UNCCD is the weakest of the three Rio Conventions, yet land degradation is where climate, biodiversity and food security converge. Account for this mismatch and suggest remedies. (250 words)

GS3 "Protected areas lower the risk of forest fire but not the trend." Discuss the implications of this finding for India's forest fire management strategy. (250 words)

GS3 India's female labour force participation has followed a U-shaped path with development. Examine the causes, and assess whether recent monthly increases represent opportunity or distress. (250 words)

GS4 A critically endangered species survives best on land farmed traditionally by some of the region's poorest cultivators. Notification as a protected area would restrict that farming. Identify the ethical issues, name the principles involved, and state your course of action. (150 words)

SECTION 06

Answer Writing Value Addition

The Article 3 chain in one sentence: State resolution advises, President recommends, State Legislature is consulted but not obeyed, Parliament passes by simple majority, Article 4(2) says it is not an amendment, and the First Schedule changes anyway. Write that and the examiner knows you understand the provision.

The Court's own formulation on liability caps: "even if Parliament has capped the liability of operators, it does not preclude the court from granting fair and just compensation." A single sentence that resolves an apparent conflict between statute and Article 21.

The conservation paradox worth quoting: the bustard needs the farmer, not the fence. Within the priority areas, grassland is only 11.6% of land cover while fallow is 28.6% — the habitat *is* the farming system.

The forest-fire verdict in one line: protection lowers the risk but not the trend — nine times more burned area since 2016, and a third of 24 years of loss in 2024 alone.

The employment threshold that flatters every Indian figure: under Current Weekly Status, one hour of work on any day in the reference week counts as employment. Cite this whenever you use an unemployment rate.

India's four BRICS environment priorities, by initial: L-A-C-A — Lifestyles, Afforestation and fire management, Circular economy, Adaptation. Chairships universalise national frameworks; this one universalises LiFE and the EPR rules.

The three Rio Conventions by subject: UNFCCC air, CBD life, UNCCD land. And the one number for India: 26 million hectares of restoration by 2030, pledged at the COP India itself hosted.

The cross-cutting question in today's edition: who appoints the nuclear regulator, who sets the UPI merchant fee, and who decides an elector's status — three sectors, one test of whether the decider is independent of the interest decided. Use it as an integrating thesis.

SECTION 07

AKADEMIA Direct Hit Tracker

Topic	GS	Capsule	Probability
Kerala → Keralam: Article 3 completed	GS2	Assent 17 Aug; proviso referral; simple majority; Art 4(2); First and Fourth Schedules	★★★★★
Transgender Amendment 2026 before the SC	GS2/GS1	NALSA 2014 → s.4(2) of 2019 Act → 2026 deletion; medical scrutiny mandatory	★★★★★
SIR base year — Sikkim ruling	GS2	2002 upheld 17 Aug; Art 371F; Karnataka draft roll 24 Aug; ASDDO 1.08 cr	★★★★★
Counter-terror architecture	GS3	Op 12 Aug, 14 states, 253 detained; MAC, NATGRID, NIA; UAPA 2019 amendment	★★★★
UNCCD COP17, Ulaanbaatar	GS3/GS2	17-28 Aug; 197 Parties; LDN and SDG 15.3; India's 26 mn ha; COP14 Delhi 2019	★★★★★
BRICS Chairship — four environment priorities	GS2	EWG 2015 Moscow; Contact Group 2024; L-A-C-A; ICT track Pune 17-21 Aug	★★★★★
MQ-9B Sea Guardian lease	GS3	2 aircraft, Navy, 30 months, ~₹1,943 cr; DAP 2020 leasing; MDA; 31-aircraft buy 2024	★★★★
Defence diplomacy instruments	GS2	MAITREE-XV Thailand 18-31 Aug; Nepal honorary rank since 1950; Lokayan 26, MAHASAGAR	★★★★★
Quantum foundry & National Quantum Mission	GS3	128 qubits now, 10,000 by 2027; NQM Apr 2023, ₹6,003.65 cr, 4 hubs; transmon vs fluxonium	★★★★★

SHANTI Act constitutional challenge	GS3/GS2	₹3,000 cr cap; s.17(4) AERB conflict; absolute liability, M.C. Mehta 1987; CSC 2016	★★★★★
PLFS July 2026	GS3	UR 5.1%; rural fell, urban rose to 6.7%; LFPR 55.4%; female LFPR 32.7→34.4%; CWS one hour	★★★★★
FCNR(B) swap window closed early	GS3	USD 56.85 bn by 13 Aug; deposits to 31 Aug, swaps to 11 Sept; 2013 precedent	★★★★★
MDR on UPI	GS3/GS2	PSS Act amended 4 Aug; zero MDR since 2020; subsidies covered 11-14% of cost; NPCI committee decides	★★★★★
Great Indian Bustard in the Deccan	GS3	<i>Ardeotis nigriceps</i> ; 6.6% suitable; 16 areas, 18,000 sq km; 100-150 birds; traditional farming	★★★★★
Wildfire in protected tropical forests	GS3	4 mn ha since 2001; 9× since 2016; a third in 2024; 89% tropical Americas	★★★★★
Crowd management at mass gatherings	GS3/GS4	Lakhisarai stampede, rumour trigger; NDMA mass-gathering guidance; Birbhum fire, 8 dead	★★★★★
Census 2027 — caste enumeration	GS1/GS2	Reported 16 Aug; a first in independent India; the 1931 baseline problem	★★★★★
Rules of origin abuse under SAFTA	GS2/GS3	DRI action on areca imports, 17 Aug; substantial transformation; CAROTAR 2020	★★★★★

VERIFIED · PART II

Proof of Precision

Every item dated. Every gap disclosed.

2

ENVIRONMENT CARDS

7

PLACES IN NEWS

6

ETHICS CASES

20

MCQS GENERATED

9

MAINS QUESTIONS

18

TRACKER ROWS

Conservation Biology

Forest Fire & Climate

Physical Geography

Ethics (GS4)

Cross-GS Integration

✓ Both Environment cards are peer-reviewed research from 14–16 August, not press releases — sixth consecutive edition with no static species filler

✓ The Lakhisarai toll is given as "at least seven, reports vary between six and seven" rather than fixing on a contested number

✓ Every place card carries tectonic, hydrological or soil context — the Kra Isthmus, the Azores Triple Junction, regur on Deccan Trap basalt

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