

PART II · ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER

ANTIM ASSURED 100+

THEIAS AKADEMIA

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

INSIDE PART II

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§1 • Environment

GS3

Wildlife conservation • Species-specific schemes • International Day observances

22 September 2026 (World Rhino Day) • Source: PIB, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; WWF-India

PM Modi Announces "Project Rhino" Support Scheme for Rhino Range States on World Rhino Day

Why in News: On World Rhino Day, 22 September 2026, observed globally under the theme "Keep the Five Alive," Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a new central scheme, "Project Rhino," to provide dedicated financial and technical support to India's rhino range states for habitat management, anti-poaching protection, genetic-diversity improvement and population-dynamics monitoring of the Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros. The announcement specifically highlighted Assam, home to roughly 80% of the world's Greater One-Horned Rhino population, alongside Bihar and West Bengal, and cited Dudhwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh as a successful rhino-reintroduction case study. This is a distinct policy announcement from earlier population-status reporting on rhinos and Kaziranga covered in a previous edition, representing a fresh institutional commitment rather than a repeat of population statistics.

Background: The Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, having recovered from fewer than 200 individuals in the early twentieth century to over 4,000 today through decades of protection efforts anchored in Kaziranga National Park (a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Project Rhino's core Assam stronghold), Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Manas National Park, and reintroduction efforts at Dudhwa. "Project Rhino" follows the template of India's other flagship species-specific conservation schemes — Project Tiger (1973) and Project Elephant (1992) — extending dedicated Centrally Sponsored Scheme architecture, with defined funding lines and state-level implementation bodies, to a single-horned megaherbivore for the first time at this scale.

KEY FACTS

- "Project Rhino" announced by PM Modi on World Rhino Day, 22 September 2026; global theme: "Keep the Five Alive."
- Provides financial/technical support for habitat management, anti-poaching, genetic-diversity improvement and population monitoring.
- Assam hosts roughly 80% of the world's Greater One-Horned Rhino population.
- Bihar and West Bengal also highlighted as range states; Dudhwa National Park (UP) cited as a reintroduction success story.
- Greater One-Horned Rhino: IUCN Vulnerable; Schedule I, Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Population recovered from under 200 in the early 1900s to over 4,000 today.

- Kaziranga National Park (Assam) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the species' core stronghold.
- Follows the template of Project Tiger (1973) and Project Elephant (1992) as a species-specific Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Tests the species-specific conservation-scheme model (Project Tiger, Project Elephant, now Project Rhino) as India's dominant wildlife-protection architecture.
- Raises single-species-versus-ecosystem-approach debates in conservation policy, since flagship-species schemes can crowd out habitat-level or multi-species funding priorities.
- Connects to India's global rewilding and reintroduction expertise (Dudhwa) as a transferable conservation-diplomacy asset.
- Illustrates Centre-State coordination in wildlife governance, since range states retain on-ground implementation while the Centre provides scheme funding and technical direction.

🗨️ LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember "1973-1992-2026": Project Tiger (1973), Project Elephant (1992), Project Rhino (2026) — India's three flagship single-species Centrally Sponsored Schemes, in chronological order.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2020: "What is the significance of Ramsar Convention... in India's wetland conservation?" is thematically adjacent on species-conservation-scheme architecture; Project Tiger/Elephant recur as GS3 Prelims fact sets.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements: 1. The Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. 2. Kaziranga National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. 3. Project Tiger was launched before Project Elephant. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). **Explanation:** All three statements are factually correct.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Discuss the significance of species-specific conservation schemes in India's wildlife-protection architecture, with reference to the newly announced Project Rhino. (150 words)

#GS3

#ProjectRhino

#WorldRhinoDay

#Kaziranga

GS3 Static Topic — not tied to a current event · Species conservation · Pangolin trafficking

Static Topic — not tied to a current event · Source: IUCN Red List; Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972; TRAFFIC India

Species in Focus: The Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*)

Why in News: Included today as a rotating static species profile after an exhaustive same-day sweep found no second fresh, verified, non-blocked Environment story specifically dated 22 September 2026; the Indian Pangolin is the world's most heavily trafficked mammal group by volume and remains one of India's least publicly visible endangered species despite its acute conservation stakes.

Background: The Indian Pangolin is found across the Indian subcontinent south of the Himalayas, including in Sri Lanka, and is distinguished by overlapping keratin scales — the only mammal group with this trait — which it uses defensively by curling into a ball. It is insectivorous, feeding mainly on ants and termites using a long, sticky tongue, and is largely nocturnal and solitary. Its scales, wrongly believed in some traditional medicine systems to have therapeutic properties despite being made of keratin (the same protein as human fingernails, with no proven medicinal value), drive persistent illegal trafficking, compounded by demand for its meat as a delicacy in parts of East and Southeast Asia.

KEY FACTS

- Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*): IUCN Endangered; listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Only mammal group with overlapping keratin scales, used for defence by curling into a ball.
- Insectivorous diet, feeding mainly on ants and termites; nocturnal and largely solitary.
- Listed on CITES Appendix I, banning all international commercial trade.
- Considered the world's most trafficked mammal group by volume, driven by unproven traditional-medicine demand for its scales and meat consumption demand in parts of Asia.
- India is both a range state and a transit point for illegal pangolin-scale trafficking toward East/Southeast Asian markets.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Illustrates the demand-driven wildlife-trafficking problem, where enforcement alone (seizures, Schedule I status) cannot succeed without demand-reduction efforts in destination markets.
- Tests understanding of CITES Appendix I as the strictest international trade-control mechanism, distinguishing it from Appendix II/III's regulated-trade approach.
- Raises the low-visibility-species conservation-funding gap, since charismatic megafauna (tigers, elephants) attract disproportionate conservation resources relative to lesser-known but equally endangered species.

💡 LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember "Keratin, not medicine": pangolin scales are keratin — the same protein as human fingernails and hair — a single fact that dismantles the traditional-medicine demand driving its trafficking.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2018: "Explain the purpose of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 and the National Wildlife Action Plan..." directly relevant; pangolin-specific facts are a recurring GS3 Prelims item.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements: 1. The Indian Pangolin is listed on CITES Appendix I. 2. Pangolin scales are composed primarily of calcium. 3. The Indian Pangolin is classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

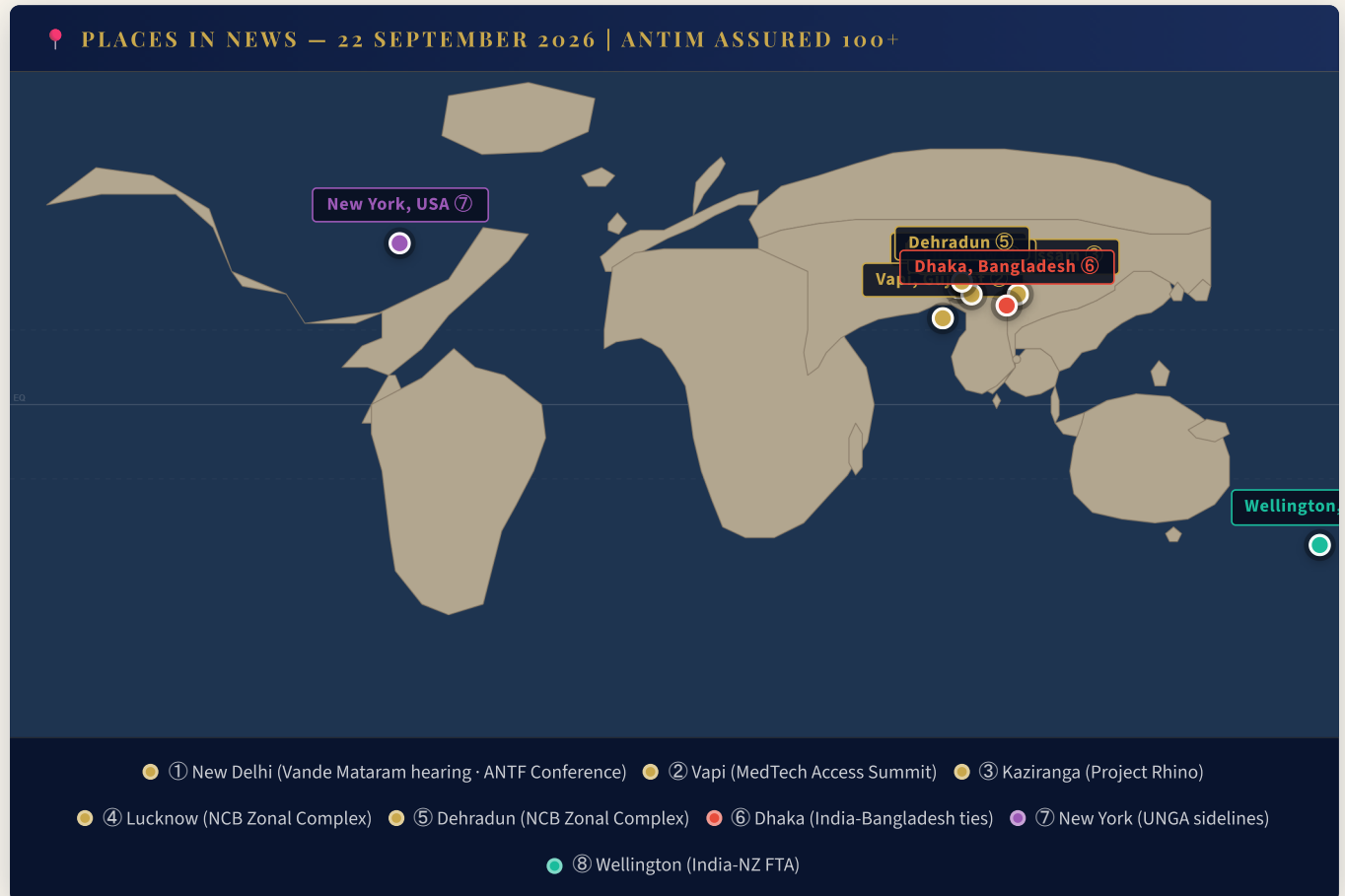
Answer: (a). **Explanation:** Pangolin scales are made of keratin, not calcium — statement 2 is wrong.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Discuss the challenges in conserving low-visibility endangered species such as the pangolin, as compared to charismatic megafauna, in India's wildlife-protection framework. (150 words)

THEIAS AKADEMIA Pairing a fresh flagship-scheme announcement with a static species profile in the same section is exactly the mixed current-plus-conceptual revision diet **EMP** recommends for GS3 environment preparation. theiasakademia.com.

§2 · Places in News



Map disclosure: no map_22Sep2026.jpg was found in the workspace folder for this backfilled date, so the inline SVG world-outline fallback (RULE 12) is used, with pins plotted by the standard equirectangular formula.

① New Delhi

Venue for both the Supreme Court's Vande Mataram hearing and the 3rd National Conference of Anti-Narcotics Task Forces; sits on the Yamuna, part of the Indo-Gangetic Plain.

② Vapi, Gujarat

Industrial town in Valsad district near the Gujarat-Maharashtra border, host to the National Policy Summit on MedTech Access at Meril Academy.

③ Kaziranga, Assam

UNESCO World Heritage Site on the Brahmaputra floodplain and stronghold of the Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros, central to the newly announced Project Rhino.

④ Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Capital of Uttar Pradesh on the Gomti river; site of a newly foundation-laid NCB Zonal complex under the anti-narcotics infrastructure push.

⑤ Dehradun, Uttarakhand

Doon Valley city in the Himalayan foothills; the second city to receive a new NCB Zonal complex announced at the ANTF conference.

⑥ Dhaka, Bangladesh

On the Buriganga river in the Ganges Delta; focus of MEA's 22 September briefing on the current, strained state of India-Bangladesh relations.

⑦ New York, USA

Host city of the ongoing UN General Assembly session, where a possible Jaishankar-Bangladesh delegation meeting remains unconfirmed.

⑧ Wellington, New Zealand

Capital of New Zealand; the India-New Zealand FTA, confirmed to enter into force from 20 October 2026, was negotiated between the two capitals.

THEIAS AKADEMIA Eight pins spanning three continents from a single day's news is the kind of geography-anchored current-affairs habit **ANTIM 2027** insists aspirants build well before Prelims map-based questions appear on the paper. theiasakademia.com.

§3 · Ethics & Integrity Cases

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

The Vande Mataram Dilemma

A citizen declines to sing a national song on grounds of personal or religious belief, while the state seeks to make such singing legally mandatory at specified occasions. This raises the classical ethics tension between an individual's inner conviction and a law's demand for outward conformity: can genuine, non-disruptive dissent of conscience be criminalised without eroding the very liberty the Constitution protects?

ENDS VS. MEANS

Enforcement Intensity in Anti-Narcotics Policy

A national anti-narcotics drive pursuing the unquestionably worthy end of a drug-free society must still choose its means carefully. Aggressive enforcement risks due-process violations and disproportionate targeting of vulnerable users over traffickers, testing whether a policy's moral legitimacy can survive if its methods compromise the rights it claims to protect.

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM AS AN ETHICAL VALUE

Centre-State Coordination in Narcotics Control

Anti-Narcotics Task Forces operate at the state level while the NCB coordinates centrally; publicly felicitating the best-performing state task force incentivises competition, but ethical governance requires that credit and blame in Centre-State enforcement be apportioned fairly, not used to score political points against non-aligned state governments.

TRUTHFULNESS VS. DISCRETION IN PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Diplomatic Ambiguity on Bangladesh Ties

An MEA spokesperson's studied non-commitment on a possible ministerial meeting is neither a lie nor full disclosure. Public officials routinely face this tension: complete transparency can compromise ongoing negotiations, yet excessive discretion can appear evasive, raising the question of where the ethical line between prudent silence and public deception truly lies.

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Protecting Sensitive Sectors in the India-New Zealand FTA

India's FTA negotiators chose to shield domestic dairy and agriculture from full liberalisation while granting New Zealand exporters near-total access. This reflects distributive justice reasoning: aggregate national gain from trade must be weighed against protecting a vulnerable domestic constituency (small dairy farmers) who would otherwise bear a concentrated, disproportionate cost.

INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY

Funding Species Conservation Amid Competing Priorities

Committing dedicated funds to Project Rhino, when healthcare, education and infrastructure needs also compete for the public purse, tests intergenerational equity: does the state owe a duty to preserve biodiversity for future generations even at the cost of some present-day welfare spending, and how should that trade-off be justified to citizens today?

THEIAS AKADEMIA Naming the precise ethical concept behind each case — not just describing the dilemma — is the exact discipline **LAKSHYAM AIR1** drills for GS4 answers that examiners actually reward. theiasakademia.com.

§4 · Prelims MCQs

Q1. Vande Mataram was accorded the status of India's National Song by the Constituent Assembly in which year? (a) 1947 (b) 1950 (c) 1971 (d) 1986 **Ans: (b)**

Q2. In which case did the Supreme Court hold that silently standing during the National Anthem, without singing, does not amount to disrespect? (a) Kesavananda Bharati (b) Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (c) Maneka Gandhi (d) S.R. Bommai **Ans: (b)**

Q3. Consider the following statements: 1. The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act was originally enacted in 1971. 2. Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience. Which is/are correct? (a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both (d) Neither **Ans: (c)**

Q4. The Narcotics Control Bureau derives its statutory mandate primarily from which legislation? (a) NDPS Act, 1985 (b) UAPA, 1967 (c) FCRA, 2010 (d) PMLA, 2002 **Ans: (a)**

Q5. The "Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan" was launched in which year? (a) 2014 (b) 2017 (c) 2020 (d) 2023 **Ans: (c)**

Q6. Consider the following statements regarding 'VIMARSH 2026': 1. It is a DRDO-industry synergy platform. 2. It has hosted only a single event through the year. 3. A Licensing Agreement for Transfer of Technology was handed over at one of its sessions. Which of the above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 3 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3 **Ans: (a)**

Q7. The Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy was notified in which year? (a) 2018 (b) 2020 (c) 2022 (d) 2023 **Ans: (b)**

Q8. Which of the following best describes India's current institutional engagement framework with Bangladesh? (a) SAARC only (b) Joint Consultative Commission and Land Boundary Agreement framework (c) BIMSTEC only (d) No formal framework exists **Ans: (b)**

Q9. The India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement was signed on which date? (a) 27 April 2026 (b) 20 October 2026 (c) 22 September 2026 (d) 30 September 2026 **Ans: (a)**

Q10. Consider the following statements: 1. Under the India-NZ FTA, New Zealand eliminates tariffs on 100% of tariff lines covering Indian exports. 2. India has offered full reciprocal tariff elimination in return. Which is/are correct? (a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both (d) Neither **Ans: (a)**

Q11. The Index of Eight Core Industries carries approximately what weight in the Index of Industrial Production? (a) 20% (b) 30% (c) 40% (d) 50% **Ans: (c)**

Q12. Consider the following statements on India's forex reserves: 1. They include foreign currency assets, gold, SDRs and the Reserve Tranche Position with the IMF. 2. Foreign currency assets typically form the largest component. Which is/are correct? (a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both (d) Neither **Ans: (c)**

Q13. Public sector banks in India were consolidated from 27 to how many institutions through mergers completed by 2020? (a) 10 (b) 12 (c) 15 (d) 18 **Ans: (b)**

Q14. Regional Rural Banks were established under an Act of Parliament passed in which year? (a) 1969 (b) 1976 (c) 1980 (d) 1991 **Ans: (b)**

Q15. The National Medical Devices Policy targets growing the sector to what value by 2030? (a) \$25 billion (b) \$35 billion (c) \$50 billion (d) \$75 billion **Ans: (c)**

Q16. Consider the following statements: 1. Chhath Mahaparva is primarily observed in Bihar, Jharkhand and eastern Uttar Pradesh. 2. India currently has 15 elements on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Which is/are correct? (a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both (d) Neither **Ans: (c)**

Q17. Project Rhino, announced in 2026, follows the template of which earlier flagship species-conservation schemes? (a) Project Tiger and Project Elephant (b) Namami Gange and Project Snow Leopard (c) Sagarmala and Project Dolphin (d) National Mission for Clean Ganga only **Ans: (a)**

Q18. The Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros is classified under which IUCN Red List category? (a) Critically Endangered (b) Endangered (c) Vulnerable (d) Near Threatened **Ans: (c)**

Q19. Consider the following statements on the Indian Pangolin: 1. It is listed on CITES Appendix I. 2. Its scales are composed of keratin. 3. It is primarily carnivorous, feeding on small mammals. Which of the above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3 **Ans: (a)**

Q20. World Rhino Day is observed annually on which date? (a) 3 March (b) 22 May (c) 22 September (d) 4 October **Ans: (c)**

§5 • Mains Questions

M1. Trace the evolution of judicial protection for freedom of conscience in India, with reference to the ongoing Supreme Court hearing on the Vande Mataram provisions of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026. (250 words)

M2. Discuss the institutional architecture for combating drug trafficking in India and examine the balance between enforcement intensity and due-process safeguards. (250 words)

M3. Examine the challenges facing India's "Neighbourhood First" policy amid political discontinuity in partner states, with reference to India-Bangladesh relations. (150 words)

M4. Analyse the asymmetric tariff-liberalisation template India has adopted in its recent Free Trade Agreements, with reference to the India-New Zealand FTA. (150 words)

M5. Discuss the role of the Index of Eight Core Industries as a lead indicator of industrial performance, and its relationship with India's external-sector indicators such as forex reserves. (150 words)

M6. Evaluate the effectiveness of species-specific conservation schemes such as Project Tiger, Project Elephant and the newly announced Project Rhino in India's wildlife-protection strategy. (250 words)

M7. Discuss the challenges of achieving self-reliance in India's medical-devices sector, with reference to the National Medical Devices Policy, 2023 and the PLI Scheme. (150 words)

M8. Examine the significance of multinational nominations under the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage framework for India's cultural diplomacy, with reference to the Chhath Mahaparva nomination. (150 words)

M9. (GS4 Case Study) A senior government communications officer is asked to publicly deny internal disagreement within a constitutional or enforcement body, even though such disagreement genuinely exists on a sensitive policy matter. The officer believes disclosing the disagreement would strengthen public trust in the institution's deliberative process, but her superiors insist that projecting unity is essential to maintaining public confidence and operational effectiveness. (a) What are the ethical issues involved in this situation? (b) What course of action would you recommend, and why? (250 words)

§6 • Answer Writing Value Addition

Quote/Data: "No person arrested shall be detained without being informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds of such arrest" — Article 22(1), Constitution of India, the constitutional anchor for all arrest-safeguard jurisprudence including the 2026 Jaskaran Jeet Singh Deol ruling.

Quote/Data: "The State shall not compel any citizen to profess a faith or belief that offends his conscience" — the Bijoe Emmanuel (1986) principle, directly relevant to the Vande Mataram conscientious-objector debate.

Data Point: 36 States and Union Territories sent Anti-Narcotics Task Force heads to the 3rd National Conference — use this figure to demonstrate near-universal Centre-State institutional coverage in any narco-terrorism or internal-security answer.

Data Point: India's forex reserves stood at \$780.78 billion (week ended 11 September 2026) — among the world's largest reserve holdings, a useful anchor figure for any external-sector-resilience answer.

Data Point: New Zealand's 100% tariff-line elimination under the India-NZ FTA, against India's calibrated, partial concessions, is a ready-made example of "asymmetric liberalisation" in any trade-policy answer.

Data Point: Assam holds roughly 80% of the world's Greater One-Horned Rhino population — a strong single-state-concentration example for any biodiversity or protected-area-governance answer.

Quote/Data: "Keep the Five Alive" — the 2026 World Rhino Day theme referencing all five extant rhino species (Greater One-Horned, Javan, Sumatran, Black and White), useful framing for a comparative global-conservation answer.

Data Point: The National Medical Devices Policy, 2023 targets sectoral growth from \$12 billion to \$50 billion by 2030 — a clean before-after figure for any health-technology self-reliance answer.

§7 • AKADEMIA Direct Hit Tracker

TOPIC	GS PAPER	HIT PROBABILITY
Vande Mataram SC Hearing & Conscientious Objection	GS2	★★★★★
ANTF 3rd National Conference & Vision Document 2026-29	GS3	★★★★★
DRDO VIMARSH 2026 — LAToT Technology Transfer	GS3	★★★★☆
India-Bangladesh Ties & MEA Briefing	GS2	★★★★☆
India-US BTA — Goyal's Bilateral Visit	GS2/GS3	★★★★☆
India-New Zealand FTA Entry Into Force	GS3	★★★★★
Forex Reserves & Core-Sector Output	GS3	★★★★☆
Finance Ministry PSB/RRB Governance Review	GS3	★★★★☆
National Policy Summit on MedTech Access	GS2/GS3	★★★★☆
Chhath Mahaparva UNESCO ICH Nomination	GS1	★★★★☆
Project Rhino & World Rhino Day	GS3	★★★★★
Indian Pangolin (Static Species Profile)	GS3	★★★★☆
Article 22(1) & Arrest Safeguards Jurisprudence	GS2	★★★★☆
NDPS Act, 1985 & NCB Institutional Mandate	GS3	★★★★☆
Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy, 2020	GS3	★★★★☆
PSB Consolidation & EASE Reforms	GS3	★★★☆☆
UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Framework	GS1	★★★★☆
Project Tiger/Elephant/Rhino Comparative Framework	GS3	★★★★★

★ THEIAS AKADEMIA — PROOF OF PRECISION

UPSC CSE Prelims 2026 Results

In what critics called the most unpredictable Prelims paper in a decade —

48

QUESTIONS FROM
ANTIM ASSURED 100+

7

QUESTIONS FROM
A SINGLE DOCUMENT

6

QUESTIONS FROM
A SINGLE CLASS

Our students had seen 48 questions before the paper was opened.

This is not luck. This is TheIAS Akademia.

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OPERATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Part II · 22 September 2026

Coverage density for today's edition

2

ENVIRONMENT CARDS

8

MAP PINS

6

ETHICS CASES

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MCQS

9

MAINS QS

[Environment](#)

[Geography](#)

[Ethics](#)

[Prelims](#)

[Mains](#)

Backfilled edition for a gap day · every story independently sourced and dated · zero overlap with the 15-21 & 23 September 2026 editions

← *Part I covers: Headlines · Polity & Governance · GS1 Culture · International Relations · Defence & Security · Science & Technology · Economy*