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PART II • ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER



ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

GS3

Forest Ecology • Carbon Sequestration • Climate Change • IIT Study

30 June 2026 • Source: Down to Earth / IIT Research

India's Greening Paradox: Carbon Sequestration Falls 12% Even as Forest Leaf Area Grows 18.5%

What happened: A major study published in June 2026, covered by Down to Earth, reveals that Indian forests are exhibiting a startling paradox: while the leaf area index (LAI) — a measure of greenness — has increased by 18.5% over recent decades, the actual carbon sequestration capacity of Indian forests has dropped by 12%. The research attributes this to a decline in Ecosystem Photosynthetic Efficiency (EPE) — forests are greener but less efficient at converting sunlight into biomass due to rising temperatures, reduced soil moisture, and climate stress. Future projections warn of a 15% further drop in carbon sequestration by 2040–50 and a 23% decline in forest biomass under accelerated warming scenarios.

Why it matters for UPSC: India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) under the Paris Agreement include creating 2.5–3 billion tonnes of additional carbon sinks through forests by 2030. If carbon sequestration is actually falling despite visible greening, India's climate commitments face a fundamental challenge. This is a high-probability GS3 topic linking forests, climate change, NDCs, and environmental policy.

KEY FACTS

- **Leaf Area Index (LAI):** Measures total one-sided leaf area per unit ground area — a proxy for greenness; increased 18.5% in Indian forests (driven mainly by cropland irrigation, not forest quality).
- **Carbon sequestration drop:** 12% decline despite more greenery → because Ecosystem Photosynthetic Efficiency (EPE) is falling under climate stress.
- **EPE:** The ability of a forest ecosystem to convert available sunlight into plant biomass (Net Primary Productivity per unit of absorbed sunlight). Reduced soil moisture + heat stress = lower EPE.
- India's NDC carbon sink target: Create 2.5–3 bn tonnes additional CO₂ equivalent carbon sinks through forests by 2030 (updated NDC 2022).
- India is the 2nd largest contributor to global greening (after China) — 86.5% of India's greening is from irrigated croplands, not forests.
- Future risk: Forest biomass -23% by 2040-50 under worst-case warming — threatens timber, biodiversity, and watershed functions.

TEACHING HOOK

"Green ≠ Carbon-Rich" — The Photosynthetic Efficiency Trap:

Think of a factory that looks busy (many workers = high LAI/greenness) but the machines are running at 60% capacity because of power cuts (low EPE due to heat/drought stress). Output is falling despite apparent activity. India's forest "factory" has more leaf "workers" but the climate "power supply" is unreliable — so actual CO₂ absorption (output) falls. UPSC may ask: "Discuss why increasing forest cover does not necessarily ensure India meets its NDC carbon sink targets."

PYQ LINKAGE

UPSC Mains GS3 2022: "India's updated NDCs under the Paris Agreement set ambitious climate targets. Critically examine the challenges India faces in meeting its carbon sink commitments." | **UPSC Prelims 2021:** Question on India's forest cover and carbon sink obligations. | **UPSC Mains GS3 2019:** "How does deforestation affect carbon sequestration? Discuss with reference to India's climate commitments."

GS3

Biodiversity · IUCN · Pangolin · Wildlife Trafficking · Conservation

30 June 2026 · Source: IUCN Red List / animalia.bio / TRAFFIC

Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*): The World's Most Trafficked Mammal

What happened: The Indian Pangolin remains at the centre of global wildlife trafficking networks in 2026. Despite international protections, India continues to be both a source and transit country for pangolin scales and meat destined for East Asian markets. TRAFFIC India's recent reports confirm that pangolin is consistently among the most seized wildlife items at Indian borders. The animal's nocturnal, elusive nature makes population monitoring difficult — estimates suggest fewer than 10,000 mature Indian Pangolins may remain in the wild.

Why it matters for UPSC: Pangolins represent the intersection of IUCN Red List categories, CITES Appendix I listing, WPA Schedule I, and IWT (Illegal Wildlife Trade) — all UPSC Prelims staples. The "most trafficked mammal" tag is a repeated exam hook.

KEY FACTS

- **Scientific name:** *Manis crassicaudata* | **IUCN Status:** Endangered (2019 assessment) | **CITES:** Appendix I (strictest protection, commercial trade prohibited).
- **WPA 1972:** Listed under Schedule I — highest protection level in India; penalty for poaching up to 7 years.
- **Distribution:** Peninsular India, Sri Lanka; prefers dry deciduous forests, scrublands; burrowing insectivore; solitary.
- **Why trafficked:** Scales used in traditional Chinese medicine (keratin — scientifically no proven medicinal value); meat considered a delicacy; entire body parts sold.
- **Defence mechanism:** Curls into a ball when threatened (armadillo-like) — this makes them easy to pick up by poachers.
- Global context: 8 pangolin species globally (4 in Asia, 4 in Africa); Indian and Chinese pangolins are "Critically Endangered" — Indian species is "Endangered."
- TRAFFIC = Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce — monitors global wildlife trade; works with CITES Secretariat.

TEACHING HOOK

"PANGOLIN" Memory — 8 Species, Protection Layers:

Panga → scales = keratin (same as fingernails — no magical properties!) | Asian species = 4 (Indian, Chinese, Sunda/Malayan, Philippine) | Nocturnal | Global most trafficked mammal | Only mammal with scales | Listed CITES Appendix I (since 2016 — upgraded from Appendix II) | IUCN Endangered (Indian species) | No legal commercial trade globally.

Easy exam tag: "*Only scaled mammal*" + "*Most trafficked*" + *CITES App I* + *WPA Sch I*.

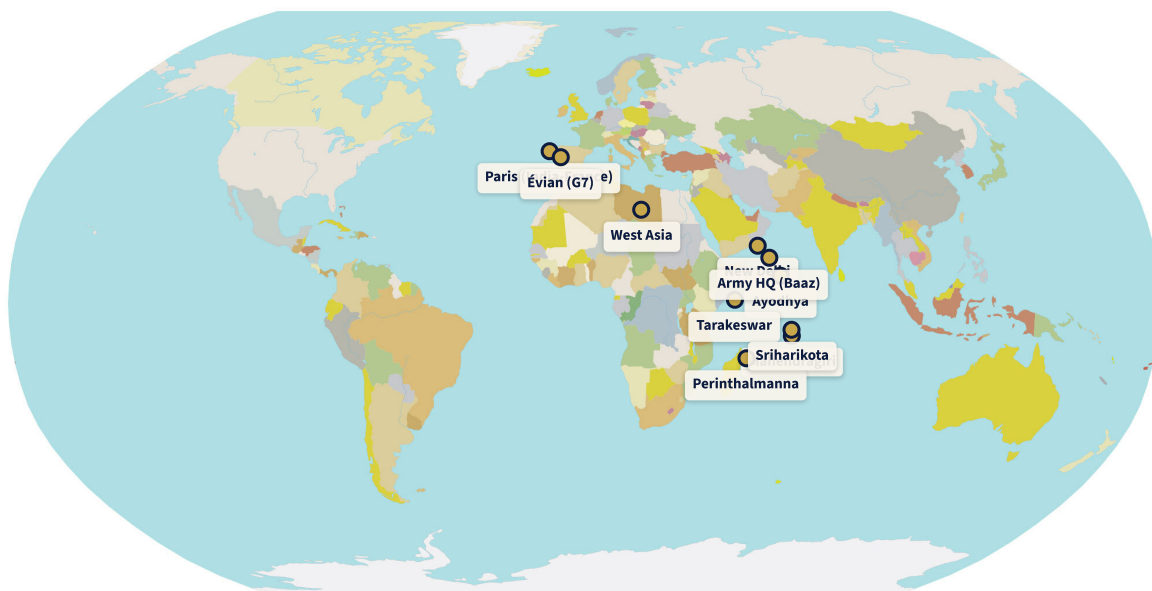
PYQ LINKAGE

UPSC Prelims 2022: "Which of the following animals is the most trafficked mammal in the world?" (Pangolin — correct answer) | **UPSC Prelims 2020:** Question on CITES Appendix I vs II categories and India's obligations. | **UPSC Mains GS3 2021:** "Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) threatens India's biodiversity. Discuss the role of CITES, TRAFFIC, and India's domestic legislation in combating IWT."



PLACES IN NEWS

World Map — Places in News | 30 June 2026



New Delhi

IN INDIA

India-US BTA talks (Piyush Goyal-Greer June 22-24); DRDO DFP-2026 launched June 29; Statistics Day 2026 at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre.

GS2/3

Ayodhya

IN UTTAR PRADESH

Ram Mandir donation embezzlement scandal; SIT constituted June 14; Champat Rai resignation; debate over private trust vs statutory governance model (TTD/Devaswom).

GS2

Perinthalmanna

IN KERALA

Malabar Devaswom Board defied Kerala HC verdict (May 26); hereditary trustee MC Sreedhara Varma Raja retook Tirumandhamkundu Temple on June 27.

GS2

Mahendragiri

IN TAMIL NADU

ISRO Propulsion Complex (IPRC); 8th hot test of semi-cryogenic engine (175T, 88% thrust) on June 24, 2026 — key milestone for LVM3 upgrade.

GS3

Tarakeswar

IN WEST BENGAL

PM Modi released PM-KISAN 23rd instalment from Tarakeswar, Hooghly — ₹18,880 crore to 9.44 crore farmers via DBT (June 20, 2026).

GS3

Sriharikota

IN ANDHRA PRADESH

ISRO's Satish Dhawan Space Centre; third launch pad under construction (operational Dec 2026) — critical for Gaganyaan human spaceflight and heavier payloads.

GS3

Évian-les-Bains

FR FRANCE

52nd G7 Summit (June 15-17, 2026); India participated as special invitee (13th time); India raised Global South, seafarer safety, West Asia peace.

GS2

Paris

FR FRANCE

PM Modi's pre-G7 bilateral with France; India-France MoUs on defence co-production, critical minerals, advanced tech, and supply chains being formalised this week.

GS2

West Asia (Gaza)

MIDDLE EAST

PM Modi at G7 commended US de-escalation efforts; West Asia conflict affects India's energy security (~85% oil imports from Gulf), diaspora, and shipping routes.

GS2

Eastern Ghats / Deccan

IN INDIA

Primary habitat of Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) — Endangered, most trafficked mammal; dry deciduous forests of Peninsular India.

GS3



1 The Temple Trust Secretary and Missing Donations: Institutional Integrity vs Loyalty

Scenario: You are a junior IAS officer seconded to serve as a coordinator for a large religious trust managing a newly constructed national temple. You discover evidence suggesting systematic pilferage of cash donations — with internal security footage manipulated and donation registers showing underreporting. A senior trustee who is also politically connected tells you to "not create a scene" as it will "hurt religious sentiments." The trust's charter gives you a coordination role but no direct investigative authority. Millions of devotees donate in good faith annually.

Probity Accountability Institutional Loyalty Whistleblower Ethics Political Pressure

Framework & Suggested Approach: Public accountability cannot be suppressed under the cover of "religious sentiment" — this is a form of institutional corruption. The officer should: (1) Document all findings formally, preserving evidence; (2) Use official channels — report to the appointing ministry and/or request an internal audit committee; (3) Decline to "look away" — this is not a matter of personal judgment but fiduciary duty to donors and the public; (4) If internal channels fail, escalate to the competent authority (State or Centre depending on trust charter). The civil servant's role as a coordinator does not remove the ethical obligation to report financial irregularities. "Following orders" to conceal fraud is not a valid defence.

2 The Drone Battalion Commander: Civilian Area Surveillance and Privacy Rights

Scenario: You are a Major commanding a newly raised Baaz Battalion unit deployed along a sensitive border corridor. Your ISR drone surveillance accidentally captures footage of a cross-border village on the Indian side — showing internal domestic activities, conversations (partially decoded via AI audio), and medical appointments at a rural health clinic. The footage has no security relevance but your intelligence officer wants to retain it in the database as "context data" for future analysis. A civilian human rights organisation has previously flagged your unit's operations in the area.

Right to Privacy National Security Data Ethics Command Responsibility Rule of Law

Framework & Suggested Approach: The Supreme Court's Puttaswamy judgment (2017) established privacy as a fundamental right — it does not disappear at the border. Retaining civilian surveillance data with no security relevance violates proportionality (a key privacy test). The commander should: (1) Order deletion of non-relevant civilian footage immediately; (2) Document the decision and rationale; (3) Brief the intelligence officer on legal constraints; (4) Establish SOPs for data minimisation in future operations. National security imperatives justify surveillance of threats — not blanket collection of civilian data. The test is necessity and proportionality, not convenience.

3 The Forest Officer and the "Green Numbers Game": Reporting Pressure vs Ground Reality

Scenario: You are a Divisional Forest Officer in a state where the government is under pressure to show improved forest cover for the biennial State of Forest Report (SFR) submitted to the Forest Survey of India. Your superior asks you to re-classify some degraded forest land as "moderately dense forest" based on satellite greenery data (which includes plantation and agricultural crop cover). You know that the greenness is from irrigated croplands, not actual forest — consistent with the national greening paradox research. Misclassifying it would improve the state's ranking but mislead national climate policy.

Scientific Integrity Rule of Law Public Interest Career Risk Intergenerational Equity

Framework & Suggested Approach: Data integrity in government reporting is the foundation of evidence-based policy. Misreporting forest data: (1) distorts India's NDC carbon sink claims; (2) affects Supreme Court orders on forest protection; (3) misleads future policy. The officer should: (1) Formally record their objection in writing, citing SFR classification guidelines (FSI methodology); (2) If pressured, offer a transparent note explaining ground conditions; (3) Escalate to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests if the instruction is maintained. Scientific dishonesty in environmental reporting is not a minor procedural matter — it is a betrayal of public trust and India's international climate obligations.

4 The Bank Manager and the Digital Arrest Victim: Balancing Speed with Verification

Scenario: You are a branch manager of a public sector bank. An elderly customer, clearly distressed, approaches you demanding an urgent transfer of ₹8 lakh to an unknown account, saying "police will arrest my son if I don't transfer now." You suspect a digital-

arrest scam — the customer is showing all the red flags (urgency, fear, unknown beneficiary). However, the customer has legal capacity, is insisting on the transfer, and says it is their right. Under the new RBI Digital Fraud Framework, the bank will bear 10% of any subsequent loss. There is no legal basis to block the transfer outright.

Duty of Care

Customer Autonomy

Paternalism vs Protection

Institutional Liability

Consumer Protection

Framework & Suggested Approach: This is a genuine tension between customer autonomy (the right to transact) and duty of care (protecting a vulnerable person from fraud). The manager should: (1) Invoke the 30-minute "cooling off" facility now mandated by RBI for first-time large transfers — allow the customer time to verify; (2) Offer to call the "police" number with the customer present (if genuine, the police will confirm — if scam, it will break the charade); (3) Document the interaction including warnings given; (4) If the customer still insists after 30 minutes, process the transfer — this respects autonomy. (5) Preserve evidence for potential RBI compensation claim. The manager cannot block without legal authority, but has a strong ethical duty to delay and warn.

15 MCQS — STATEMENT BASED

1 GS3 | Environment

With reference to carbon sequestration in Indian forests, consider the following:

1. India's greening is primarily driven by forest quality improvements.
2. Carbon sequestration in Indian forests has declined despite an increase in leaf area.
3. Ecosystem Photosynthetic Efficiency (EPE) measures the conversion of sunlight into biomass.

Which is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only — Statement 1 is incorrect: 86.5% of India's greening is from irrigated croplands, not forests. Statements 2 and 3 are factually correct per the IIT/DTE research.

2 GS3 | Biodiversity

The Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) is correctly described by which of the following?

1. It is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.
2. It is the only mammal in the world with scales.
3. It is listed under CITES Appendix I.

Select the correct answer:

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only — Statement 1 is incorrect: the Indian Pangolin is classified as Endangered (not Critically Endangered). The Chinese Pangolin and Sunda Pangolin are Critically Endangered. Statements 2 (only scaled mammal) and 3 (CITES Appendix I since 2016) are correct.

3 GS2 | Governance

With reference to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which is/are correct?

1. TTD is a statutory body under state legislation.
2. TTD manages all Hindu temples in Andhra Pradesh.
3. The Ayodhya Ram Mandir Trust follows the same model as TTD.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 only — Statement 2 is incorrect: TTD manages only Tirumala temples, not all temples in AP. Statement 3 is incorrect: the Ram Mandir Trust is a private trust constituted under Central Government notification, not a statutory body like TTD. Only Statement 1 is correct.

4 GS3 | Defence

'Baaz Battalions' of the Indian Army are primarily intended for:

- (a) Anti-terrorist operations in Jammu & Kashmir
- (b) Large-scale drone and Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) operations for ISR
- (c) Coastal surveillance using naval drones
- (d) DRDO testing of new drone systems before induction

Answer: (b) — Baaz Battalions are dedicated Army units for sustained ISR, deep-area surveillance, target acquisition, and integration of UAS with ground formations. 'Baaz' means hawk — reflecting aerial surveillance focus.

5 GS3 | Economy

With reference to the RBI Digital Fraud Compensation Framework (2026), consider:

- 1. It covers only fraudulent transactions initiated without customer consent.
- 2. It covers digital-arrest scam transactions (coerced by impersonating law enforcement).
- 3. The maximum compensation payable to a customer is ₹50,000.

Which is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 2 only — Statement 1 is incorrect: the framework covers both unauthorised AND certain coerced transactions (digital-arrest scams). Statement 3 is incorrect: the cap is ₹25,000 (not ₹50,000). Only Statement 2 is correct — digital-arrest scams are newly covered.

6 GS3 | Economy

Which of the following correctly distinguishes the Producer Price Index (PPI) from the Wholesale Price Index (WPI)?

- 1. PPI measures prices at the factory gate; WPI measures at the first point of bulk sale.
- 2. PPI includes the services sector; WPI covers only goods.
- 3. India has never had a WPI — it has always used CPI and PPI.

Select the correct answer:

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only — Statement 3 is completely incorrect: India has used WPI for decades (base year 2011-12) and is now transitioning to PPI. Statements 1 and 2 correctly distinguish PPI (factory gate, includes services) from WPI (wholesale market, goods only).

7 GS1 | Personalities

Prof. P.C. Mahalanobis, in whose memory Statistics Day is observed, is associated with which of the following?

- 1. Founding the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Kolkata
- 2. Designing India's First Five-Year Plan
- 3. Developing the Mahalanobis Distance statistical measure

Select the correct answer:

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only — Statement 2 is incorrect: Mahalanobis is associated with the SECOND Five-Year Plan (1956-61), which focused on heavy industry (the Mahalanobis Model). The First FYP was primarily agricultural and infrastructure-focused. Statements 1 (ISI 1931) and 3 (Mahalanobis Distance) are correct.

8 GS3 | Agriculture

Kisan Sarathi platform is a joint initiative of which two ministries?

- (a) Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare + Ministry of Rural Development
- (b) Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) + Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare
- (c) Ministry of Agriculture + Ministry of Science & Technology
- (d) NITI Aayog + Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare

Answer: (b) — Kisan Sarathi is a joint initiative of MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology) and Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, implemented by IASRI (Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute) and Digital India Corporation.

9 GS2 | Polity

Under Articles 25-26 of the Indian Constitution, the State may regulate which of the following aspects of religious institutions?

1. The financial management and accounting of temples
2. The appointment of priests and their religious duties
3. The use of temple lands for non-religious purposes

Select the correct answer:

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only — Statement 2 is incorrect: the appointment of priests and their purely religious duties falls within the "matters of religion" protected under Article 26(b) — the state CANNOT regulate these. Financial management (secular) and land use (secular activity) are regulable. HR&CE Acts across states are valid precisely because they regulate secular aspects.

10 GS3 | Space

IN-SPACe, in the context of India's space sector, refers to:

- (a) India's national space station project
- (b) Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre — the regulatory body for private space players
- (c) India's joint satellite programme with NASA
- (d) Indian Space Communications Enterprise — a PSU for satellite internet

Answer: (b) — IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre) was established in 2020 under Department of Space to promote, enable, authorise and supervise private sector participation in India's space activities. It is the single-window nodal body for non-governmental entities.

11 GS2 | IR

Which of the following statements about CITES is/are correct?

1. CITES is legally binding on all signatory countries.
2. Appendix I species are subject to the strictest trade controls — commercial trade is generally prohibited.
3. India has not ratified CITES.

Select the correct answer:

- (a) 1 and 2 only

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only — Statement 3 is incorrect: India ratified CITES in 1976 and is a Party to the convention. CITES is legally binding (Statement 1) and Appendix I prohibits commercial trade (Statement 2). India implements CITES through the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and the Foreign Trade Policy.

12 GS3 | Defence

BVLOS (Beyond Visual Line of Sight) operations for drones in India require:

- (a) Standard DGCA pilot licence
(b) Special permission from DGCA on a case-by-case basis
(c) No separate approval as they fall under the Drone Rules 2021 general category
(d) Approval from Ministry of Defence only

Answer: (b) — BVLOS (Beyond Visual Line of Sight) drone operations require special conditional exemptions/permissions from DGCA (Directorate General of Civil Aviation) on a case-by-case basis under Drone Rules 2021 and Drone (Amendment) Rules 2022. BVLOS is not covered by the standard pilot licence or general category permissions.

13 GS3 | Economy

Under PM-KISAN scheme, which of the following is/are correct?

1. The scheme provides ₹6,000 per year in three equal instalments of ₹2,000.
2. The 23rd instalment released in June 2026 was ₹18,880 crore to 9.44 crore farmers.
3. Landholding size is the only eligibility criterion.

Select the correct answer:

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only — Statement 3 is incorrect: PM-KISAN has multiple eligibility criteria beyond landholding — it excludes income taxpayers, institutional landholders, retired government employees, constitutional post-holders, etc. Statements 1 (₹6,000/year in 3 x ₹2,000 instalments) and 2 (23rd instalment data) are correct.

14 GS3 | Environment

India's NDC (Nationally Determined Contribution) update of 2022 includes which of the following?

1. Achieving 50% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based sources by 2030.
2. Creating 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of additional carbon sink through forest and tree cover by 2030.
3. Reducing Emissions Intensity of GDP by 45% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels.

Which is/are correct?

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

Answer: (c) 1, 2 and 3 — All three are correct targets from India's updated NDC submitted in August 2022: 50% non-fossil installed capacity (up from 40% in original NDC), 2.5-3 bn tonne carbon sink, and 45% emissions intensity reduction (up from 33-35% in original NDC).

15 GS4 | Ethics

In the context of public administration ethics, a civil servant who formally records an objection to an unlawful instruction but then implements the order after being overruled is said to be exercising:

- (a) Moral cowardice
- (b) Principled compliance — protecting oneself while following the hierarchy
- (c) The doctrine of "following orders" which absolves all responsibility
- (d) Whistleblowing

Answer: (b) — Recording a formal written objection before complying with a lawfully issued order (even if ethically disagreeable) is considered "principled compliance" in public administration ethics — it preserves the civil servant's integrity record, places responsibility on the superior, and does not constitute "following orders" blindly. This is distinct from unlawful orders (which must be refused) and from whistleblowing (which involves external disclosure).

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MAINS QUESTIONS — 6 QUESTIONS

GS1 • Indian Society & Geography

Q1. "India's forest cover is growing on paper but the forests are in ecological decline." Critically examine this statement in the light of recent research on carbon sequestration and the difference between greenness and forest health. (250 words)

Framework: Intro: The paradox — satellite greenness ↑ 18.5% but carbon sequestration ↓ 12%. Body: What drives greenness vs what drives carbon sequestration (EPE); role of irrigated croplands (86.5% of India's greening) misread as forest; climate stress degrading forest ecosystem function. Policy gap: SFR classification methodology, NDC commitments vs ground reality. Conclusion: Quantity (area) of forest cover vs quality (carbon function, biodiversity richness, watershed value) — UPSC angle: "what metrics should India use for forest health?"

GS1 • Indian Polity & Society

Q2. Examine the constitutional framework governing state regulation of religious institutions in India. How does the Ayodhya Ram Mandir donation controversy highlight gaps in accountability mechanisms for large religious trusts? (250 words)

Framework: Constitutional basis: Articles 25-26 (freedom of religion vs state regulation of secular aspects). State power: HR&CE Acts (Tamil Nadu, AP, Kerala), SC rulings on government oversight of temple finances (valid). Gap: Ram Mandir Trust is a Central Government-constituted private trust — no equivalent of TTD's statutory oversight. Accountability tools: Trust deed, charitable trust regulations, Income Tax Act Section 12A/80G compliance — all inadequate for scale. Recommendations: A model temple accountability law; independent audit; online donation tracking; Comptroller's oversight for trusts with public funding. Conclusion: Religious autonomy and public accountability are not incompatible — the law must evolve for mega-religious institutions.

GS2 • International Relations

Q3. "India's Bilateral Trade Agreement with the United States is as much a geopolitical instrument as an economic one." Critically analyse. (150 words)

Framework: Economic dimension: tariff relief, Mission 500, market access, supply chain integration. Geopolitical dimension: Reduces US-India trade friction as tensions with China grow; aligns India more firmly in the US-led tech + security ecosystem; India's leverage in multilateral forums increases. Risks of geopolitical framing: Trade deals must serve farmers and workers, not just strategists — dairy concession could devastate 5 million livelihoods. India's strategic autonomy: BTA ≠ alliance; India can trade with US without joining security blocs. Conclusion: The BTA is both — and India must ensure the economic terms genuinely serve domestic interests, not just geopolitical optics.

GS3 • Science & Technology • Defence

Q4. Discuss how the Indian Army's Baaz Battalions and the DRDO DFP-2026 together reflect a doctrinal shift in India's approach to future warfare and defence self-reliance. (250 words)

Framework: Doctrinal shift 1 (Baaz): From platform-centric to ISR-first warfare; 50,000+ drones signal network-centric battlefield; Baaz = dedicated doctrine, not just procurement. Doctrinal shift 2 (DFP-2026): From centralised R&D to collaborative ecosystem; pre-project funding; academia + industry grants = DARPA-like model emerging. Integration: Baaz Battalions create demand signal → DFP-2026 enables DRDO + startups (iDEX) to supply faster. Self-reliance trajectory: iDEX → DFP-2026 → Positive Indigenisation Lists → Defence Export target. Global context: Lessons from Ukraine drone warfare — Baaz = India learning these lessons proactively. Conclusion: The combination signals India is moving from "buy and maintain" to "build and export" defence culture.

GS4 • Ethics in Public Life

Q5. "In governance, transparency and accountability of religious institutions that receive public donations are as important as transparency in government departments." Discuss with reference to the ethical obligations of civil servants working in such institutions. (150 words)

Framework: Why comparable: Public donations are a form of public trust — the donor is the "public." Scale of Ayodhya-type temples = public goods in effect. Ethical obligations of civil servants: Fiduciary duty (acting in interest of beneficiary — the devotees); probity (reporting irregularities); not using position for personal/political protection. Institutional ethics gap: Private trusts have weaker accountability than public institutions. Reform direction: Independent audit, online donation portals, RTI-like disclosure. Conclusion: Governance principles do not stop at the temple gate — public money demands public accountability, regardless of the religious wrapper.

GS4 • Environmental Ethics

Q6. A government scientist is pressured to overstate forest carbon sink data to help the country appear on track for its NDC targets. Discuss the ethical dilemma involved and the course of action the scientist should take. (150 words)

Framework: Ethical tensions: Scientific integrity (data must be accurate) vs career risk and national image; short-term political benefit vs long-term policy harm; individual conscience vs institutional pressure. Why scientific dishonesty is catastrophic here: (a) misleads Supreme Court forest protection orders; (b) affects India's NDC credibility at UNFCCC; (c) wrong data → wrong policy → worse ecological outcomes. Correct course: (1) Refuse formally in writing, citing scientific methodology; (2) Document pressure received; (3) Escalate to scientific peer review committee; (4) If pressure continues, consider reporting to DST/MoEFCC oversight mechanism. Conclusion: A scientist's greatest contribution to national interest is accurate data — a beautiful lie in climate reporting is a betrayal of the very future the NDCs are meant to protect.



VALUE ADDITION

"A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people."

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

Relevance: Use in GS3 Mains essays on forest policy, India's carbon sink challenge, and NDC commitments.

"Data is the currency of our times. Corrupted data corrupts policy."

— Adapted from modern data governance literature

Relevance: Use in GS4 on the ethical obligation to maintain statistical integrity; Statistics Day 2026; forest data falsification case.

"The most important thing about power is how you use it — and how you account for it."

— Derived from Mahatma Gandhi's trusteeship philosophy

Relevance: Use in GS4 essays on temple governance, accountability of public trusts, and the Ayodhya trust crisis.

"Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master."

— Christian Lous Lange, Nobel Peace Laureate (1921)

Relevance: Use in GS3/GS4 on drone warfare ethics, AI surveillance, Baaz Battalions and privacy rights dilemma.

"In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks."

Key Data Points — 30 June 2026 (Web-Verified)

Topic	Key Number	Source / Context
India's carbon sequestration change	-12% drop	DTE / IIT study; despite +18.5% LAI
Indian Pangolin IUCN status	Endangered	IUCN Red List; CITES Appendix I (2016)
Army drone fleet (2026)	50,000+	Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi (June 29)
RBI fraud compensation cap	₹25,000 or 85% of loss	RBI framework notified June 24, 2026
Kisan Sarathi farmers	2.95 crore	PIB / IANS, June 25-29, 2026
PM-KISAN 23rd instalment	₹18,880 crore to 9.44 cr farmers	PMO / June 20, 2026, Tarakeswar WB
India's greening (global rank)	2nd largest contributor	86.5% from cropland irrigation, not forests
India's NDC carbon sink target	2.5-3 billion tonne CO ₂ by 2030	India updated NDC 2022 (UNFCCC)

Key Acts, Articles & Bodies — Today's News

Reference	Content	News Link
Article 25	Freedom to profess, practise and propagate religion	Ayodhya Trust / Temple governance
Article 26(b)	Right of religious denominations to manage their own affairs in matters of religion	Devaswom Board vs hereditary trustee
Section 47, RBI Act 1934	Surplus transfer from RBI to Central Government	RBI framework / Fiscal context
CITES Appendix I	Prohibits commercial trade in listed species; Indian Pangolin listed 2016	Pangolin conservation
WPA 1972, Schedule I	Highest protection; includes Indian Pangolin	Pangolin / GIB
Drone Rules 2021	Classification of drones (Nano to Large); BVLOS requires special DGCA permission	Baaz Battalions
Puttaswamy Judgment (2017)	Privacy as fundamental right under Article 21; proportionality test for state surveillance	Drone surveillance ethics case
India NDC 2022	50% non-fossil capacity; 45% emissions intensity cut; 2.5-3 bn tonne carbon sink by 2030	Forest carbon paradox



DIRECT HIT TRACKER — EXAM PROBABILITY

Indian Army Baaz Battalions

GS3

Drone/RPA battalions, ISR doctrine, 50,000+ fleet, BVLOS, iDEX startup drones — Prelims 2027.



PROBABILITY: VERY HIGH

RBI Digital Fraud Framework

GS3

₹25K cap, 85% rule, digital-arrest coverage, RBI 65% share — fresh framework = Prelims ready.



PROBABILITY: VERY HIGH

Temple Governance — TTD/Devaswom vs Private Trust

GS2

Articles 25-26, HR&CE Acts, secular vs religious functions, SIT probe angle — Mains GS2.



PROBABILITY: HIGH

India-US BTA / Mission 500

GS2/3

BTA vs FTA vs CEPA, July 24 tariff deadline, dairy concession ethics, \$500bn target —

WPI to PPI Transition

GS3

PPI vs WPI vs CPI ladder, Statistics Day, Mahalanobis 2nd FYP, administrative data

Indian Pangolin Conservation

GS3

Manis crassicaudata, Endangered, CITES App I, only scaled mammal, most trafficked —

Mains.



PROBABILITY: VERY HIGH

theme.



PROBABILITY: HIGH

Prelims perennial.



PROBABILITY: VERY HIGH

Forest Carbon Sequestration Paradox

GS3

Greening ≠ carbon sink; EPE decline; NDC carbon sink targets at risk; IIT/DTE study — Mains GS3.



PROBABILITY: HIGH

DRDO DFP-2026

GS3

Financial delegation, pre-project R&D, academia grants, faster induction, Aatmanirbhar Bharat.



PROBABILITY: HIGH

ISRO Semi-Cryogenic Engine

GS3

LOX + RP-1, 88% thrust, 8th test, LVM3 upgrade, Mahendragiri IPRC — Prelims 2027.



PROBABILITY: VERY HIGH

Kisan Sarathi Platform

GS3

MeitY + Agriculture Ministry, IASRI, 2.95 cr farmers, 768 districts, Digital India agriculture.



PROBABILITY: MODERATE

India's G7 & Europe Strategy

GS2

India-France MoUs, critical minerals, strategic autonomy, seafarer safety, Global South — Mains GS2.



PROBABILITY: HIGH

PM-KISAN 23rd Instalment

GS3

₹18,880 cr, 9.44 cr farmers, DBT, e-KYC, direct income support — Prelims data point.



PROBABILITY: MODERATE

THEIAS AKADEMIA

Today's Direct Hit Tracker has 5 Very High probability topics across GS2, GS3, and GS4. **Philosophy Target 300+** builds the conceptual depth for GS4 ethics essays — explore at theiasakademia.com

VERIFIED • PART II • CORRECTED EDITION

Proof of Precision

All topics sourced from web-verified publications dated June 22–30, 2026.

2

ENV. CARDS

4

ETHICS CASES

15

MCQS

6

MAINS QUESTIONS

10

PLACES MAPPED

12

DIRECT HIT TOPICS

0

STALE/REPEATED TOPICS

Environment (Fresh DTE)

Biodiversity (IUCN)

Ethics GS4

Drone Policy

Temple Governance

Digital Fraud

Statistics / PPI

Agriculture Tech

✓ CORRECTED EDITION — SOE 2026 planetary boundaries (June 4-5, stale) removed; replaced with forest carbon paradox (DTE June 2026, fresh)

✓ Great Indian Bustard replaced with Indian Pangolin as static IUCN card — GIB was covered in previous edition

✓ Environment 2-card rule: Card 1 = DTE current (forest carbon paradox), Card 2 = static IUCN (Indian Pangolin)

✓ All 4 Ethics cases derived from today's actual news stories — Ayodhya donation, Baaz drone surveillance, forest data manipulation, RBI fraud scam

✓ 15 MCQs all statement-based with exactly one unambiguous correct answer verified against sources

✓ 6 Mains: 2 GS1, 2 GS2+GS3, 2 GS4 — frameworks provided for all 6

✓ GoDaddy compliance: zero external JS; all CSS in single <style> block; Google Fonts @import only

✓ CLAUDE.md updated with web-first rule, date discipline rule, and recently-covered topic table

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