OCTOBER 2026

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1: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & FOREIGN POLICY

1.1 India’s Foreign Policy Dilemma & Strategic Autonomy

Shift in Diplomatic Stance: At the 2026 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Bishkek and the BRICS summit in New Delhi, India endorsed multilateral declarations describing attacks on Iran as violations of international law and backing Palestinian rights and the two-state solution. Simultaneously, the Prime Minister publicly appealed to the Russian President that "endless war" must give way to an "end of war" regarding the Ukraine conflict.

Evolution of Strategic Autonomy: Strategic autonomy is defined as a nation's ability to take independent foreign policy decisions without military alliances or external coercion. India transitioned from the Cold War-era **Non-Alignment Policy (1947–1991)**—focused on avoiding power blocs—to a post-2014 **Multi-Alignment Policy**, managing simultaneous strategic partnerships (e.g., holding dual membership in both the Quad and BRICS).

Challenges to India–Russia Trust: India's balancing act risks being viewed by Moscow as "performative diplomacy". Furthermore, India’s gradual shift away from Russian arms toward Western, French, and Israeli suppliers, alongside growing Sino-Russian strategic closeness, has contributed to a transactional drift in India–Russia ties.

1.2 12th BRICS Parliamentary Forum & Counter-Terrorism

Key Outcome: Hosted in New Delhi, the 12th BRICS Parliamentary Forum adopted a Joint Declaration that explicitly condemned the **April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack** in Jammu and Kashmir by name.

Stance on Global Terrorism: The declaration committed member states to fight cross-border movement of terrorists, terror financing, and safe havens while rejecting "double standards" in counter-terrorism. It called for the expeditious adoption of India's long-standing proposal, the **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)**, at the United Nations.

UN Reforms: The forum stressed the urgent need for comprehensive reform of the United Nations, including the UN Security Council (UNSC).

BRICS Evolution: Founded as BRIC in 2006, renamed in 2010 with South Africa's entry, BRICS expanded in 2024 (adding Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE) and admitted **Indonesia** as a full member in 2025.

TOPIC 2: INTERNAL SECURITY & DEFENCE REFORMS

2.1 Theatre Commands & Tri-Service Integration

Status Quo: India currently operates **17 single-service military commands**, where operational areas of the Army, Navy, and Air Force do not geographically overlap.

Concept of Theatre Command: A Theatre Command integrates all tri-service forces within a designated geographical area under a single operational commander. This is considered crucial to matching the speed required in modern AI-guided algorithmic warfare.

Inter-Service Concerns & Doctrines: The Indian Air Force (IAF)—operating 31 squadrons against a sanctioned strength of 42—fears dividing scarce

air assets across theatre commands could disrupt its doctrine of **"centralised control and decentralised execution"**. Proponents clarify that central operational control would simply shift to the theatre commander advised by a three-star IAF Component Commander.

Global Precedents: The US integrated its services through the **Key West Agreement (1948)** (allocating specific combat roles) and the landmark **Goldwater-Nichols Act (1986)**.

Institutional Initiatives:

CDS & DMA: Created in 2019–2020 to drive tri-service integration.

Joint Logistics Nodes: Operationalised in 2021 at **Mumbai, Guwahati, and Port Blair**.

Inter-Services Organisations Act, 2023: Empowers commanders of tri-service formations with disciplinary control over personnel from all three services.

TOPIC 3: ENVIRONMENT, ECOLOGY & POLLUTION CONTROL

3.1 Air Pollution Governance & NCAP 2.0

Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan Limitations: The survey evaluates cities primarily on administrative activities (waste management, road sweeping, action plans). Actual reductions in measured particulate matter account for only **2.5%** of a city's total score. For example, Lucknow topped the 2026 million-plus city survey despite its PM10 level remaining at 135 µg/m³, well above the national standard of 60 µg/m³.

Economic Cost of Air Pollution: The UNEP/CCAC Hidden Assets report estimates that air pollution costs South Asia roughly **10% of its regional GDP annually**. Every rupee invested in clean-air measures yields a return of

approximately **₹21** through reduced health expenditures and higher productivity.

Key Schemes & Frameworks: Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) Act 2021; Bharat Stage VI (Phase 2) norms; **Nagar Van Yojana** (620 urban forest projects with ₹654 crore outlay); 15th Finance Commission air-quality grants to 48 million-plus cities.

3.2 EIA & Hill Ecology (Himachal Highway Expansions)

SC Central Empowered Committee (CEC) Findings: The CEC recommended replacing individual project clearances ("permission-based approach") with holistic planning based on **scientific carrying capacity**.

Key Environmental Issues: Near-vertical slope cutting without proper geological design, leading to frequent landslides (e.g., Kiratpur-Manali corridor); unrestored muck dumping sites from hydro projects (Larji, Parvati-II, Parvati-III); and an unchecked boom in unregistered/registered homestays.

Key Recommendations:

Mandatory Environmental Clearance (EC) for hill roads of two or more lanes and railway lines.

Setting up an independent **Highway Ombudsman** in each state for NHAI project grievances.

Creation of a unified single hill-planning authority.

3.3 River Conservation & Polluter Pays Principle

SC Directives on Rajasthan Rivers: In a suo motu petition protecting the **Jojari, Luni, and Bandi** rivers (arid western Rajasthan), the Supreme Court mandated:

100-metre no-construction zone from river edges.

500-metre no-hazardous-industry zone along river paths/flood lines.

Root Causes: Untreated textile-dyeing and steelworking effluents, severely underutilised Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs), and illegal riverbed sand mining.

Polluter Pays Principle: Requires polluters to bear the costs of pollution prevention, ecological restoration, and victim compensation. Judicial recognition was established in Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996), with statutory backing provided under **Section 20 of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) Act, 2010**.

TOPIC 4: SOCIAL SECTOR & HEALTH

4.1 Coronary Stents & Overuse Debates

Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI): Involves widening a narrowed artery via balloon angioplasty and placing a mesh stent. While essential in acute heart attacks, a stent treats a localised blockage rather than **atherosclerosis** (fatty buildup) itself.

The ISCHEMIA Trial (2020): A multi-country trial involving 5,179 patients with stable coronary artery disease demonstrated that **optimal medical therapy** (statins, anti-platelets, BP/diabetes control) yields no significant

difference in major cardiac events or mortality compared to invasive stenting or bypass surgery.

Procedure Trends: Annual PCI procedures in India expanded over six-fold (from ~1.13 lakh in 2008 to ~7.26 lakh in 2024), whereas PCI procedures in the United States declined by ~40% between 2003 and 2016 due to preventive medical management.

Government Health Programmes: National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NPNCD); **India Hypertension Control Initiative (IHCI)** (jointly run by ICMR, Health Ministry, and WHO); PM-JAY and Ayushman Arogya Mandirs.

MCQs

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the 12th BRICS Parliamentary Forum:

The Joint Declaration adopted at the forum specifically condemned the Pahalgam terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir by name.

Indonesia joined BRICS as a full member in 2025.

The forum called for the expeditious finalisation and adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT).

Which of the statements given above are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q2. Which of the following statements best describes the concept of 'Strategic Autonomy' in India's foreign policy?

(a) Complete isolation from global trade and financial institutions to promote domestic self-reliance.

(b) A nation's ability to take independent foreign policy positions without entering military alliances or being subjected to external coercion.

(c) Formal military alliance building with non-Western powers to counter Western influence.

(d) Strict adherence to Cold War-era non-alignment principles without engaging in bilateral strategic partnerships.

Q3. With reference to military reforms in India, consider the following statements regarding Theatre Commands:

A Theatre Command places army, navy, and air force assets in a designated geographical area under a single operational commander.

Currently, India has 17 single-service military commands.

The Inter-Services Organisations Act, 2023 grants commanders of tri-service formations disciplinary powers over personnel from all three services.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and military integration in India:

The CDS acts as the Head of the Department of Military Affairs created under the Ministry of Defence.

Joint Logistics Nodes have been operationalised at Mumbai, Guwahati, and Port Blair to integrate tri-service logistics.

The CDS exercises direct operational military command over the three Service Chiefs during wartime.

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) 1, 2 and 3

Q5. In the context of India's air quality initiatives, consider the following statements regarding 'Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan':

It ranks cities based primarily on actual measured reductions in PM2.5 and PM10 levels, which account for over 75% of the total score.

In the 2026 survey for million-plus cities, Lucknow secured the top rank despite its PM10 level exceeding national air quality standards.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q6. According to the Hidden Assets report published by the UNEP and Climate and Clean Air Coalition, what is the estimated annual economic cost of air pollution borne by South Asia?

(a) 2% of regional GDP
(b) 5% of regional GDP
(c) 10% of regional GDP
(d) 18% of regional GDP

Q7. With reference to the recommendations of the Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) regarding environmental management in Himachal Pradesh, consider the following statements:

The CEC recommended moving from a 'permission-based approach' to a coordinated planning system based on scientific carrying capacity.

The CEC proposed mandatory environmental clearance for hill roads of two or more lanes.

The CEC recommended establishing a 'Highway Ombudsman' in each State to address grievances related to NHAI projects.

Which of the statements given above are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q8. The rivers Jojari, Luni, and Bandi, recently in the news regarding Supreme Court directives on industrial effluent pollution and riverbank protection, are located in which State?

(a) Gujarat
(b) Rajasthan
(c) Madhya Pradesh
(d) Haryana

Q9. In a suo motu petition concerning the pollution of seasonal rivers in Rajasthan, the Supreme Court imposed specific spatial buffer zones. Which of the following correctly state these prohibited zones?

Complete ban on construction within 100 metres of the river edge.

Complete ban on hazardous industries within 500 metres of the river path or flood lines.

Select the correct answer using the code given below: (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q10. With reference to the 'Polluter Pays Principle', consider the following statements:

It requires the entity causing pollution to bear the financial costs of prevention, restoration, and compensation to victims.

The Supreme Court of India recognized this principle as part of domestic environmental law in Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996).

Statutory backing for this principle is explicitly provided under Section 20 of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) Act, 2010.

Which of the statements given above are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q11. With reference to medical procedures for heart conditions, consider the following statements:

Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI) involves widening a narrowed artery using balloon angioplasty and placing a mesh tube called a stent.

Placement of a coronary stent completely cures atherosclerosis and eliminates the need for long-term preventive medication.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q12. What was the core clinical finding of the landmark 'ISCHEMIA Trial' (2020) regarding stable coronary artery disease?

(a) Emergency stenting reduces 5-year mortality in all asymptomatic individuals by 80%.
(b) Most patients with stable coronary artery disease on optimal medical therapy show no significant difference in major cardiac outcomes compared to those undergoing invasive stenting or bypass surgery.
(c) Stenting is mandatory for any anatomical narrowing visible on an angiogram regardless of symptoms.
(d) Bypass surgery is universally superior to optimal medical therapy for mild angina.

Q13. Consider the following statements regarding cardiac procedures and health initiatives in India:

Annual PCI procedures in India increased more than six-fold between 2008 and 2024.

The India Hypertension Control Initiative (IHCI) is an initiative jointly implemented by ICMR, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and WHO.

While PCI procedure numbers rose sharply in India, PCI procedures in the United States registered a decline of about 40% between 2003 and 2016.

Which of the statements given above are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q14. At the 2026 SCO summit in Bishkek, member states issued the 'Bishkek Declaration'. Consider the following statements regarding the declaration:

It endorsed language describing attacks on Iran as violations of international law.

It explicitly named the United States and Israel as aggressors in its text.

India reaffirmed its support for Palestinian rights and the two-state solution.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q15. Consider the following government initiatives related to environmental conservation and pollution control:

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) was established as a statutory body in 2021 for the Delhi-NCR airshed.

The Nagar Van Yojana aims to expand urban green cover through urban forest projects.

Under the 15th Finance Commission, specific grants were earmarked for air quality improvement in million-plus cities.

Which of the statements given above are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

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ANSWER KEY & DETAILED EXPLANATIONS

Q1. Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct: The Joint Declaration of the 12th BRICS Parliamentary Forum in New Delhi condemned "in the strongest terms" the Pahalgam terror attack of April 2025 by name.

Statement 2 is correct: Indonesia joined BRICS as a full member in 2025, following the 2024 expansion that admitted Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE.

Statement 3 is correct: The declaration specifically urged the expeditious finalisation and adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) at the UN.

Q2. Answer: (b)

Explanation: Strategic autonomy is defined as a nation's ability to take independent foreign policy positions without entering military alliances or submitting to external coercion. It allows India to engage in multi-alignment—maintaining strategic partnerships across rival global blocs (such as membership in both the Quad and BRICS).

Q3. Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct: A Theatre Command integrates army, navy, and air force elements under a single operational commander for a specific theatre.

Statement 2 is correct: India currently functions with 17 single-service military commands.

Statement 3 is correct: The Inter-Services Organisations Act, 2023 grants disciplinary and administrative authority to commanders of tri-service formations over personnel from all three services.

Q4. Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct: The CDS heads the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) created in 2020 under the Ministry of Defence.

Statement 2 is correct: Joint Logistics Nodes were established in Mumbai, Guwahati, and Port Blair in 2021.

Statement 3 is incorrect: The CDS acts as the Principal Military Advisor to the Defence Minister on tri-service matters and Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, but does **not** exercise direct operational command over the three Service Chiefs.

Q5. Answer: (b) 2 only

Explanation:

Statement 1 is incorrect: Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan scores cities primarily on administrative activities (road sweeping, waste management, sidewalk paving). Actual particulate matter reduction accounts for only **2.5%** of the total score.

Statement 2 is correct: Lucknow topped the 2026 survey for million-plus cities despite having a PM10 level of 135 µg/m³, which exceeds the national standard of 60 µg/m³.

Q6. Answer: (c) 10% of regional GDP

Explanation: According to the Hidden Assets report by UNEP and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, South Asia bears the world's heaviest air pollution burden, costing approximately **10% of regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** each year.

Q7. Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct: The SC Central Empowered Committee (CEC) advocated shifting from a project-by-project "permission-based approach" to carrying capacity assessments.

Statement 2 is correct: The CEC recommended mandatory Environmental Clearance for hill roads of two or more lanes and railway lines.

Statement 3 is correct: The CEC proposed appointing a 'Highway Ombudsman' in each State to address grievances arising from NHAI highway projects.

Q8. Answer: (b) Rajasthan

Explanation: The Jojari, Luni, and Bandi are seasonal rivers flowing through western Rajasthan (Jodhpur, Balotra, and Pali districts) that face heavy industrial effluent contamination from local textile-dyeing and steelworking clusters.

Q9. Answer: (c) Both 1 and 2

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct: The Supreme Court prohibited any construction within **100 metres** of the river edges.

Statement 2 is correct: The Court banned hazardous industries within **500 metres** of the river paths or flood lines.

Q10. Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct: Under the Polluter Pays Principle, the polluter bears the costs of pollution control, environmental remediation, and compensation to affected parties.

Statement 2 is correct: The Supreme Court formally incorporated it into Indian jurisprudence in Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996).

Statement 3 is correct: Section 20 of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 mandates the NGT to apply the Polluter Pays Principle along with the precautionary principle and sustainable development.

Q11. Answer: (a) 1 only

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct: PCI involves balloon angioplasty and placement of a mesh stent to prop open a narrowed artery.

Statement 2 is incorrect: A stent treats a localized arterial narrowing but does **not** cure underlying atherosclerosis (fatty plaque accumulation); patients require ongoing preventive medical therapy.

Q12. Answer: (b)

Explanation: The ISCHEMIA Trial (2020) enrolled 5,179 patients with stable coronary artery disease across 37 countries and found no significant difference in major cardiac events, heart failure hospitalisations, or overall mortality between patients on optimal medical therapy and those undergoing invasive stenting or bypass surgery.

Q13. Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct: Annual PCI procedures in India grew from ~1,13,000 in 2008 to over 7,26,000 in 2024 (more than a six-fold rise).

Statement 2 is correct: The India Hypertension Control Initiative (IHCI) is run jointly by ICMR, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and WHO.

Statement 3 is correct: Between 2003 and 2016, PCI procedures in the United States fell by approximately 40% due to improvements in preventive medical treatments.

Q14. Answer: (b) 1 and 3 only

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct: The Bishkek Declaration endorsed text describing attacks on Iran as violations of international law.

Statement 2 is incorrect: While the reference to the strikes was unambiguous, the declaration did **not** explicitly name the US or Israel in its text.

Statement 3 is correct: India endorsed language affirming Palestinian rights and supporting the two-state solution.

Q15. Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct: CAQM was established as a statutory body via the CAQM Act, 2021 for airshed-level coordination across Delhi-NCR and adjoining states.

Statement 2 is correct: Nagar Van Yojana aims to build 620 urban forest projects to expand urban green cover.

Statement 3 is correct: The 15th Finance Commission allocated dedicated air-quality grants (₹2,194.25 crore) to 48 million-plus cities