

MORNING EDITION · 08:00 IST

PART I · HEADLINES TO ECONOMY

ANTIM ASSURED 100+

TheIAS Akademia — Daily UPSC Intelligence

Friday, 17 July 2026

“The Topper’s Last Read. Every Morning.”

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§1 Top 10 Headlines

1. JPC on ONOE (PP Chaudhary, 39 members) formally adopts report on July 17 — ready for tabling in Monsoon Session (July 20) **GS2**
2. Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill listed for Monsoon Session — proposes to replace UGC, AICTE & NCTE with single apex body **GS2**
3. SC (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill 2026 listed — sanctioned bench strength rises from 33 to 37 (excl. CJI) **GS2**
4. India secures FATF Vice-Presidency — Vivek Aggarwal (1994-IAS, fmr FIU-IND Director) is first Indian VP since India joined FATF in 2010 **GS2**
5. MSME Development (Amendment) Bill 2026 listed — enforces delayed-payment timelines; restructures MSEFC **GS3**
6. SOE 2026 (CSE/DTE): 7 of 9 planetary boundaries breached; extreme weather on 99% of days in India in 2025 **GS3**
7. GSLV-F18 / GISAT-1A (EOS-05): pre-launch integration underway at SDSC Sriharikota — NET July 31, 2026 **GS3**
8. AKASH TARANG anti-UAV EW system — DAC-cleared (₹52,000 cr package); inducted into Sudarshan Chakra air-defence grid **GS3**
9. India–Japan Energy Resilience: MoP&NG–METI Joint Statement on strategic crude stockpiling & supply-chain diversification signed **GS2**
10. CBDT notifies Cost Inflation Index (CII) at 384 for FY 2026-27; used for long-term capital gains calculation **GS3**

THEIAS AKADEMIA 10 distinct GS domains active today — a high-density edition. Sahyog Mentorship students: flag all headlines in your coverage matrix before reading the full cards. theiasakademia.com

§2 Polity & Governance

GS2

Governance · Education Policy

17 July 2026 · PIB / Lok Sabha

Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025 — Single Apex Regulator for Higher Education

Why in News: The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025, listed for Monsoon Session (July 20), proposes to replace UGC (1956), AICTE (1987), and NCTE (1993) with a single statutory apex body, operationalising NEP 2020's vision of unified higher education regulation.

Background: Introduced in Lok Sabha on December 15, 2025 by Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan; referred to a JPC for consultations. Three separate regulators created fragmentation and duplication — VBSA merges their mandates with three sub-councils.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- VBSA replaces UGC (est. 1956, UGC Act 1956), AICTE (est. 1987, AICTE Act 1987), and NCTE (est. 1993, NCTE Act 1993).
- Three sub-councils: Regulatory Council (standards/norms), Accreditation Council (NAAC functions), Standards Council (academic quality).
- Composition: Chairperson + up to 12 members (3 Council Presidents, HE Secretary, 5 eminent experts, 2 state HEI representatives).
- NMC (medicine) and BCI (law) are excluded; architecture education is brought under VBSA from AICTE.

💡 TEACHING HOOK

— Three Into One: UGC (universities) + AICTE (technical) + NCTE (teacher training) → VBSA. Medicine (NMC) and Law (BCI) stay out; Architecture shifts IN from AICTE. Draw the merger once — you'll never confuse this again.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2023: "Examine the role of higher education regulatory bodies in quality assurance and equity." | GS2 2019: "Higher education needs both access and excellence. Critically examine UGC's role."

Prelims MCQ: Which bodies are proposed to be replaced by VBSA? 1. UGC 2. AICTE 3. NCTE 4. NMC

(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1, 2 and 3 only (c) 2, 3 and 4 (d) All four

Answer: (b) — NMC (medicine) is excluded from VBSA's purview.

GS2

Education

NEP 2020

UGC

AICTE

NCTE

Monsoon Session

SC (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026 — Bench Strength Rises from 33 to 37

Why in News: The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, listed for introduction in Monsoon Session, raises the sanctioned SC judge strength from 33 to 37 (excluding CJI) — the first increase since 2019 — as India's apex court faces over 80,000 pending cases.

Background: SC bench strength has expanded periodically via Parliamentary law: 7 (1950) → 10 (1960) → 13 (1977) → 17 (1986) → 25 (2008) → 33 (2019) → 37 (proposed 2026). Article 124(1) empowers Parliament to prescribe the ceiling.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Governed by The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 — this Bill amends that Act; Parliament sets the ceiling, President appoints on Collegium recommendation.
- India's judge-to-population ratio: ~21 per 10 lakh — one of the lowest globally; Law Commission recommended 50 judges per 10 lakh.
- Art 124(1): "There shall be a Supreme Court... of not more than seven other Judges" — Parliament may prescribe a greater number by law.
- Four new judges allow formation of additional constitutional benches to expedite constitutional questions and high-pendency matters.

💡 TEACHING HOOK

Parliament sets the *ceiling* via law (Art 124); President *appoints* on Collegium advice (CJI + 4 senior-most judges). Remember the sequence: 7→10→13→17→25→33→ — each step by Parliament. Exam loves this escalation chart.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2022: "Judicial pendency is a systemic failure. Discuss mechanisms to reduce arrears." | GS2 2016: "Who decides the strength of SC judges? Examine the constitutional provision."

The sanctioned strength of Supreme Court judges (excl. CJI) is determined by:

(a) Article 124 alone (b) Law enacted by Parliament (c) Presidential ordinance (d) Collegium recommendation

Answer: (b) — Art 124(1) empowers Parliament to prescribe a greater number; the SC (Number of Judges) Act 1956 and its amendments set the ceiling.

GS2

Judiciary

Art 124

Pendency

Collegium

Parliament

🌐 §3 International Relations

India Assumes FATF Vice-Presidency — First Since Joining as Full Member in 2010

Why in News: Vivek Aggarwal (1994-batch IAS, Culture Secretary; formerly FIU-IND Director) has been appointed FATF Vice-President for July 2026–June 2027 — India's first-ever FATF Vice-Presidency, marking a milestone in India's multilateral financial-crime governance leadership.

Background: FATF (Financial Action Task Force) was established in 1989 by G7 in Paris to combat money laundering; mandate expanded post-9/11 to counter-terrorist financing; since 2012 also covers Proliferation Financing. India underwent its 4th FATF Mutual Evaluation in 2024.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- FATF: 40 full members + 9 FSRBs (Financial Action Task Force–Style Regional Bodies); India's FSRB is APG (Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, est. 1997, Secretariat: Sydney).
- FIU-IND: est. 2004 under Dept of Revenue, MoF; receives Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs) from banks; previously headed by Vivek Aggarwal.
- FATF "grey list" (Increased Monitoring) and "black list" (Call for Action) directly impact a country's FDI, credit ratings and correspondent banking relationships.
- India's FATF VP term (July 2026–June 2027) positions India for future rotational FATF Presidency — the first Indian to reach this level in the body.

💡 TEACHING HOOK

G7 (created FATF 1989) → 40 Members → FSRBs (APG = India's regional body) → FIU-IND (India's STR node) → VP (Vivek Aggarwal 2026-27). India just climbed to near the top rung of the global money-crime fighting ladder.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2021: “What is FATF? Discuss its significance for India’s AML framework.” | GS3 2018: “Examine the threat of money laundering to India’s financial system and legislative measures.”

Consider: 1. FATF established by G7 in 1989 in Paris. 2. India joined FATF as full member in 2010. 3. India’s FSRB is MENAFATF. Which is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) — India’s FSRB is APG (Asia/Pacific Group), not MENAFATF (Middle East & North Africa).

GS2 FATF AML/CFT FIU-IND Multilateral APG PYQ

GS2 India–Japan · Energy Security

July 2026 · MoP&NG / METI · Memory Hook

India–Japan Energy Resilience: MoP&NG–METI Joint Statement on Strategic Crude Stockpiling

MEMORY TECHNIQUE — RETURNING TOPIC

Previously covered:	13 Jul 2026 — India-Japan 16th Annual Summit; Special Strategic & Global Partnership; semiconductor MoU; Quad context.
What’s new today:	MoP&NG and Japan’s METI signed dedicated Joint Statement on Energy Resilience — institutionalising strategic crude oil stockpiling cooperation and West Asia supply-chain diversification.
UPSC angle shift:	From broad India-Japan diplomacy → energy security policy: SPR (ISPRL), India’s 87% import dependency, IEA Association status, Japan’s 90-day SPR model as a benchmark for India.

Why in News: India and Japan formalised energy resilience cooperation through an MoP&NG–METI Joint Statement covering strategic petroleum reserve management, LNG supply security, and renewable energy technology transfer amid heightened West Asia tensions.

KEY FACTS

- India imports ~87% of its crude oil; West Asia supplies ~65% — Strait of Hormuz is the critical chokepoint for India’s energy supply.
- India’s SPR: managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd (ISPRL); underground rock caverns at Visakhapatnam (1.33 MMT), Mangaluru (1.5 MMT), Padur (2.5 MMT) — total ~5.33 MMT (~9.5 days of consumption).
- Japan’s SPR model: legally mandated 90-day national reserve + 30-day commercial reserve under Petroleum Reserve Act — one of IEA’s most robust frameworks.
- India joined IEA as an Association member in 2017 (not a full member; full membership requires OECD membership, which India is pursuing).

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2015: “Discuss India’s dependence on oil imports and steps to ensure energy security.” | GS2 2020: “What is the significance of India–Japan Strategic Partnership for the Indo-Pacific?”

India’s Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) is managed by:

(a) ONGC (b) ISPRL (c) HPCL (d) Ministry of Petroleum directly

Answer: (b) ISPRL (Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd) — an SPV under MoP&NG. ONGC is an upstream producer, not the SPR manager.

GS2 Energy Security India–Japan SPR ISPRL IEA West Asia

THEIAS AKADEMIA FATF VP + India–Japan energy security = India’s multilateral footprint on two fronts. ANTIM 2027 students: map these into your “India’s Global Institutions” module. theiasakademia.com

§4 Defence & Security

GS3 Defence Technology · Internal Security

3 July 2026 (DAC AoN) · PIB

AKASH TARANG — India’s Anti-UAV Electronic Warfare System Joins Sudarshan Chakra Air-Defence Grid

Why in News: The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) granted Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for AKASH TARANG — India’s dedicated Anti-UAV Electronic Warfare system — as part of its ₹52,000 crore package. The system is being inducted into PM Modi’s Sudarshan Chakra integrated air-defence grid.

Background: Post-Operation Sindoor (2025), drone warfare exposed India's counter-UAV gaps. AKASH TARANG is a Make-I (70% GoI R&D funding) indigenously developed system to detect, track, jam and neutralise hostile drones — from reconnaissance swarms to kamikaze UAVs.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- AKASH TARANG uses three-tier architecture: RF sniffers (drone comm signals), GPS/GNSS jammers, anti-swarm simultaneous tracking — can neutralise multiple drones at once.
- Sudarshan Chakra grid: AKASH TARANG (counter-UAV EW) + Akash SAM (medium-range) + L-70 guns (close-in) + V-SHORADS (very short range) + AS-HAPS (high-altitude surveillance).
- DAC ₹52,000 crore package (July 3): also included MPATGM (Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile), MRSAM, Active Protection System for tanks, and Kamikaze Drone System for the Army.
- Procurement category: Make-I under DAP 2020; 100% indigenous manufacture required, aligned with Aatmanirbhar Bharat in defence.

💡 TEACHING HOOK

Lord Vishnu's spinning weapon intercepts at every range — India's grid mirrors this: UAV layer (AKASH TARANG), SHORAD layer (L-70/V-SHORADS), SAM layer (Akash), HAPS layer (AS-HAPS for surveillance). Layered defence = concentric protection rings. Easy to draw in a mains answer.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2021: "Discuss the challenges posed by drone warfare to India's national security and existing countermeasures." | GS3 2019: "What is Aatmanirbhar Bharat in Defence? Examine DAP 2020."

AKASH TARANG is best described as:

(a) A surface-to-air missile system (b) An EW system for counter-UAV operations (c) A naval shipborne radar (d) A hypersonic glide vehicle

Answer: (b) — AKASH TARANG is a dedicated Anti-UAV Electronic Warfare system using RF detection, GNSS jamming and anti-swarm tracking, NOT a missile system.

GS3 Defence AKASH TARANG Counter-UAV Sudarshan Chakra DAP 2020 Make-I

THEIAS AKADEMIA Drone warfare is a GS3 + GS4 cross-over. EMP students: this week's class examines the ethical dilemma of autonomous drone targeting decisions in civil conflict zones. theiasakademia.com

🔬 §5 Science & Technology

GS3 Space Technology · Earth Observation

17 July 2026 · ISRO · Memory Hook

GSLV-F18 / GISAT-1A (EOS-05): Pre-Launch Operations at SDSC — NET July 31, 2026

📖 MEMORY TECHNIQUE — RETURNING TOPIC

Previously covered:	11 Jul 2026 — GISAT-1A mission specs (GEO orbit, SWIR/TIR sensors, 30-min revisit, CE20 cryogenic engine, SDSC background).
What's new today:	Pre-launch integration and countdown operations have commenced at Second Launch Pad, SDSC Sriharikota; NET July 31 confirmed; GSLV-F18 vehicle integration in progress.
UPSC angle shift:	From mission specs → strategic significance: filling India's 10-year geostationary EO gap (GISAT-1 failed 2021); disaster nowcasting; IMD integration; national security real-time surveillance from GEO.

Why in News: ISRO has commenced pre-launch operations for GSLV-F18/GISAT-1A (EOS-05) at Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh, with the launch confirmed NET July 31, 2026, ending India's absence from geostationary Earth observation since GISAT-1's failure in August 2021.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- GISAT-1A orbits at ~36,000 km (GEO); full Indian subcontinent image every 30 minutes at 42-m resolution; selected field images every 5 minutes.
- Payloads: Multi-Spectral VNIR + Hyper-Spectral SWIR (256 bands) + Thermal Infrared (TIR) — enables cloud tracking, vegetation health, water bodies, heat island mapping.
- GSLV-F18 uses CE20 cryogenic engine (LOX/LH2, 20 tonne thrust) — indigenously developed by ISRO's LPSC after Russia denied cryogenic technology in 1992.

- SDSC SHAR, Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh — India's primary spaceport; named after Dr. Satish Dhawan (2nd ISRO Chairman); has two launch pads (FLP & SLP).

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2016: "Discuss ISRO's earth observation programme and its applications for disaster management and agriculture." | GS3 2020: "What is geostationary orbit? How is the EOS series significant for India?"

GSLV-F18 uses which engine technology in its third stage?

(a) Vikas liquid engine (b) CE20 cryogenic (LOX/LH2) (c) SCE-200 semi-cryogenic (d) PSOM solid boosters

Answer: (b) — CE20 (Cryogenic Engine, 20 tonne thrust, LOX/LH2) is the GSLV Mk-II third stage; developed by LPSC Thiruvananthapuram.

GS3 ISRO GISAT-1A GSLV-F18 EOS-05 Sriharikota CE20

THEIAS AKADEMIA LAKSHYAM AIR1 students: GISAT-1A's disaster nowcasting role links GS3 (S&T + Disaster Mgmt). Build the chain: GISAT-1A → IMD nowcast → NDMA alert → SDRF response. theiasakademia.com

§6 Economy

GS3 Indian Economy · MSME · Legislative Reform

17 July 2026 · Ministry of MSME / PIB

MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026 — Enforcing Delayed Payments and Restructuring MSEFC

Why in News: The MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026, listed for the Monsoon Session, amends the MSMED Act, 2006, to enforce delayed-payment timelines to MSMEs, provide for enforcement of arbitral awards, and allow States to restructure the Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Council (MSEFC).

Background: ~₹10.7 lakh crore in delayed payments were owed to MSMEs as of 2025. Sections 15–17 of MSMED Act 2006 mandate a 45-day payment cycle but lack enforcement of arbitral awards — the Bill closes this gap.

KEY FACTS

- MSMED Act 2006 classification (revised 2020): Micro (invest ≤ ₹1 cr, turnover ≤ ₹5 cr), Small (≤ ₹10 cr, ≤ ₹50 cr), Medium (≤ ₹50 cr, ≤ ₹250 cr).
- Payment rule (Sec. 15): buyer must pay within agreed period (max 45 days); if no agreement — within 15 days; violation attracts compound interest at 3× RBI bank rate.
- MSEFC: quasi-judicial body; handles delayed-payment disputes under Sec. 15–24; must conciliate + arbitrate within 90 days; buyer must deposit 75% disputed amount before MSEFC can entertain the case (Sec. 19).
- MSME sector: 6.3 crore units; 11 crore+ employees; ~30% of GDP; ~48% of exports; covered under PM SVANidhi, MUDRA, 59-minute loan portal.

TEACHING HOOK

45 days max with agreement; 15 days without; 3× RBI bank rate penalty; 75% upfront deposit to activate MSEFC. The Amendment adds enforcement of arbitral awards — closing the "award-but-no-payment" loophole that plagued small businesses for decades.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2022: "Discuss the challenges faced by MSMEs in accessing credit and receiving timely payments. Suggest policy measures." | GS3 2018: "Examine the significance of MSMEs in India's industrial economy and the role of MSMED Act 2006."

Under MSMED Act 2006, if no payment agreement exists, buyers must pay MSMEs within:

(a) 45 days (b) 30 days (c) 15 days (d) 60 days

Answer: (c) 15 days — Sec. 15: if no written agreement exists, payment must be made within 15 days of acceptance; with agreement, max 45 days.

GS3 MSME MSEFC Delayed Payments MSMED Act 2006 Economy Monsoon Session

THEIAS AKADEMIA MSME delayed-payment reform + MSEFC restructuring = a NEEB 300+ Live PYQ writing cluster. One answer covers GS3 Economy + GS2 Governance simultaneously. theiasakademia.com

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.

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