

MORNING EDITION · 08:00 IST

PART II · ENVIRONMENT TO DIRECT HIT TRACKER

ANTIM ASSURED 100+

TheIAS Akademia — Daily UPSC Intelligence

Friday, 17 July 2026

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

PART II CONTENTS

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GS3

Environment · Planetary Boundaries · Conservation

July 2026 · Source: CSE / Down to Earth (SOE 2026) — Available from 17 Jul

SOE 2026: 7 Planetary Boundaries Breached — Ocean Acidification Joins as 7th; Tiger Behaviour Changing

Why in News: The State of India's Environment (SOE) 2026 report, released by CSE and Down to Earth magazine, warns that 7 of the 9 planetary boundaries have been breached globally, with ocean acidification becoming the newly identified 7th; India recorded extreme weather on 99% of days in 2025 and at least 43 deaths from tiger attacks in H1 2025.

Background: Planetary Boundaries framework (Rockström et al., 2009, revised 2023) defines 9 Earth-system processes within which humanity can safely operate. SOE is published annually by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) / DTE — an authoritative annual environmental assessment for India.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- 7 boundaries breached (as of SOE 2026): Climate Change, Biosphere Integrity, Land System Change, Freshwater Depletion, Biogeochemical Flows, Novel Entities, and **Ocean Acidification** (7th — new addition; ocean acidity up 30–40% since pre-industrial era).
- Human-tiger conflict: Lantana camara (invasive plant) now covers ~50% of Indian forest scrubland — suppresses native grasses → reduces prey → tigers prey on cattle → increased human-tiger interaction.
- India extreme weather 2025: 99% of days saw extreme weather events; deaths from heat, floods, cyclones and landslides collectively; far exceeding previous decade averages.
- SOE 2026 calls for strengthening NGT and environmental clearance processes to prioritise ecological substance over procedural paperwork.

💡 TEACHING HOOK

Remember the 7 breached boundaries: climate change, biosphere integrity, land system change, freshwater, biogeochemical flows, novel entities, ocean acidification. Two safe: Atmospheric aerosol loading and Stratospheric ozone (recovering). Draw the boundary circles with 7 red lines once.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2022: “Discuss the concept of planetary boundaries and their relevance for India’s sustainable development.” | GS3 2019: “What is ocean acidification? Examine its impact on marine biodiversity.”

GS3

Planetary Boundaries

SOE 2026

Ocean Acidification

CSE/DTE

Tiger Conflict

Lantana

GS3

Biodiversity · Static Species Card

Static UPSC Topic · Source: IUCN Red List / animalia.bio / Mongabay India July 2026

Clouded Leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) — Northeast India's Most Elusive Wild Cat

Why in News: A July 2026 Mongabay India article (“A cat that is clouded by design”) highlighted a new habitat connectivity study (PMC, July 2026) modelling clouded leopard distribution across Northeast India, identifying only ~7% of the NE landscape as highly suitable habitat, underscoring urgent conservation needs.

Background: The Clouded Leopard is one of the least-studied wild cats in India; its reclusive, semi-arboreal lifestyle makes population surveys difficult. It is the *de facto* state animal of Meghalaya and has the largest canine teeth relative to skull size of any living cat.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Scientific name: *Neofelis nebulosa* | Family: Felidae | IUCN Status: **Vulnerable** | CITES: Appendix I | India: Schedule I WPA 1972.
- Distribution in India: Northeast India (Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Assam, Sikkim, Tripura, Manipur); also Sundarbans fringe (West Bengal); total global estimate: 3,700–5,580 mature individuals.
- Key adaptations: cloud-like spots (camouflage in dappled forest light); rotatable rear ankles (can descend trees headfirst); longest canine teeth relative to skull size of any living felid; semi-arboreal lifestyle.
- Threats: deforestation (jhum shifting cultivation; road projects in NE), poaching for traditional medicine markets (bones, teeth, fur), habitat fragmentation by highways (NH-37 corridor); **only ~7% of NE India landscape** provides highly suitable habitat (2026 MaxEnt model).

💡 TEACHING HOOK

Remember: Its spots evolved to match dappled canopy light; it is semi-arboreal (lives partly in trees); its rear ankles rotate backward (unique among cats) so it descends trees head-first. Remember: *Neofelis* = “new cat” (Greek) — placed in its own genus between big cats and small cats. IUCN: Vulnerable; India: Schedule I; CITES: Appendix I.

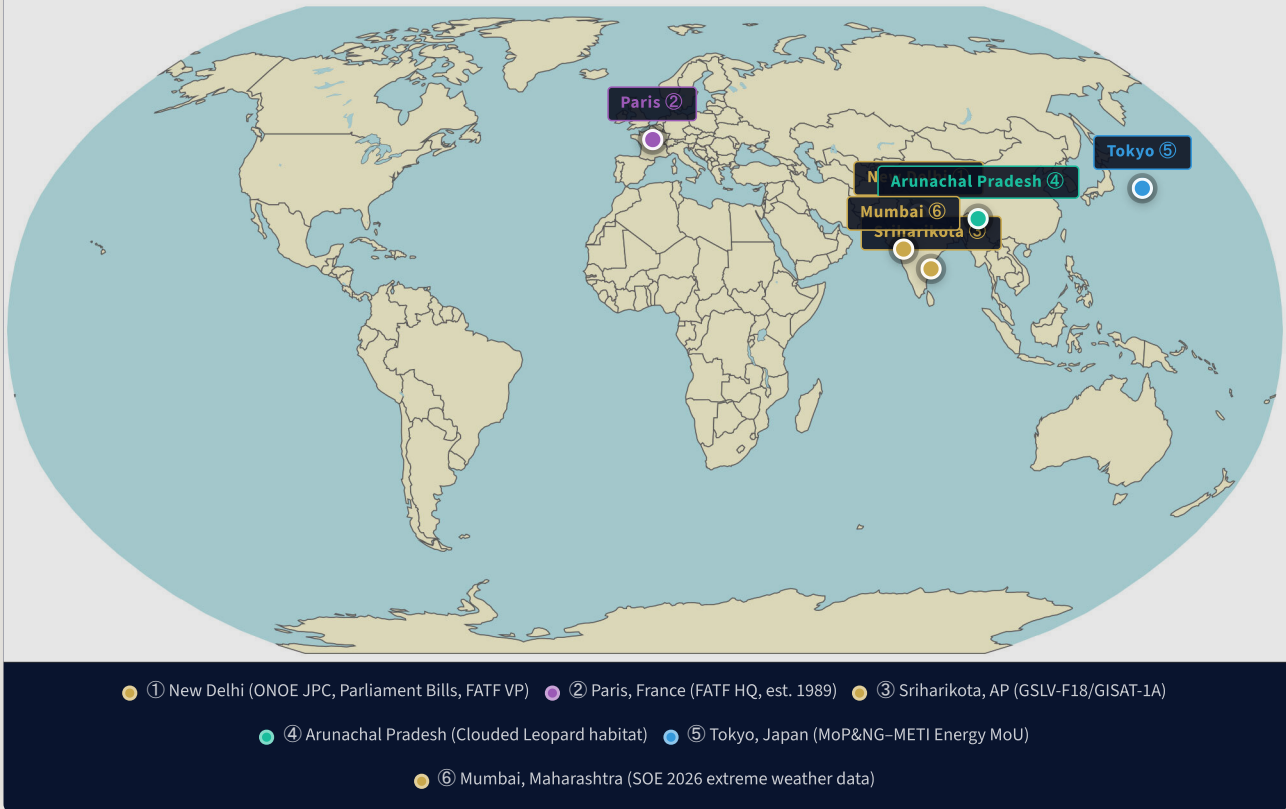
PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2021: “Discuss threats to biodiversity in Northeast India and conservation measures under WPA 1972 and international conventions.” | GS3 2018: “CITES Appendix I vs Appendix II: what protection does each afford? Give examples from Indian fauna.”

GS3 Clouded Leopard Neofelis nebulosa IUCN Vulnerable Northeast India WPA 1972 CITES App I

§2 Places in News

PLACES IN NEWS — 17 JULY 2026 | ANTIM ASSURED 100+



① New Delhi, India

Parliament bills listed (VBSA, SC Judges, MSME); JPC on ONOE adopts report; India assumes FATF Vice-Presidency (Vivek Aggarwal); Monsoon Session begins July 20. 28.6°N, 77.2°E

② Paris, France

FATF headquarters since est. 1989 by G7; hosts FATF Secretariat and Plenary meetings; 40-member AML/CFT standard-setter. India holds VP for July 2026–June 2027. 48.9°N, 2.3°E

③ Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh

Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC SHAR) — India’s primary spaceport; GSLV-F18/GISAT-1A (EOS-05) pre-launch integration underway at Second Launch Pad; NET July 31. 13.7°N, 80.2°E

④ Arunachal Pradesh, India

Key clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) habitat in NE India; new MaxEnt model (July 2026) identified only ~7% of NE landscape as highly suitable; threats include NH projects and jhum cultivation. 27.5°N, 93.6°E

⑤ Tokyo, Japan

India–Japan Energy Resilience: MoP&NG–METI Joint Statement on strategic crude stockpiling signed; Japan model (90-day SPR) serves as benchmark for India’s ISPRIL expansion. 35.7°N, 139.7°E

⑥ Mumbai, Maharashtra

SOE 2026 extreme weather data: Mumbai among worst-hit cities; urban heat island + flooding frequency rising; 99% of India’s days in 2025 saw some extreme weather event per CSE report. 19.1°N, 72.9°E

§3 Ethics & Integrity (GS4)

Case 1 The Silent Regulator

A professor nominated to the VBSA drafting committee realises that the Bill, as framed, significantly reduces state HEI autonomy and privileges central oversight over diverse regional needs. Her institution’s leadership pressures her not to raise objections, citing risk to the

Case 2 The FATF Irregularity

An IAS officer posted at FIU-IND discovers that a politically connected business house is systematically filing false Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs) against a commercial rival — weaponising the AML framework to harm a competitor, not to prevent genuine financial

institution's NAAC accreditation. She must choose between institutional loyalty and her duty to provide honest expert input to the legislature. *Values at stake: Intellectual integrity, academic freedom, duty of candour to constitutional bodies, courage of conviction.*

crime. Investigating this would expose powerful interests and delay India's FATF VP tenure's image-building. *Values at stake: Rule of law, fearlessness, institutional credibility, conflict of interest.*

Case 3 The Drone Whistleblower

A defence scientist identifies a critical RF vulnerability in AKASH TARANG's jamming system that adversaries could exploit. His supervisor, concerned about delaying the ₹52,000 crore procurement timeline, directs him to suppress the finding until after AoN formalisation. The scientist weighs national security risk against institutional pressure and career consequences. *Values at stake: National security, whistleblower courage, professional ethics in defence, chain of command vs conscience.*

Case 4 The Forestry Data Crisis

A Forest Officer in a tiger reserve area receives instructions from her DFO to under-report tiger-human conflict deaths to avoid negative coverage before a World Heritage site review. She knows the SOE 2026 data gap (official figures vs actual deaths) is a systemic problem — the same pattern that led to undercounting of heatwave deaths. She must decide whether to file accurate records or comply. *Values at stake: Data integrity, public health accountability, institutional courage, transparency.*

? §4 Prelims MCQs (15 Questions)

Q1 The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill proposes to replace which of the following? 1. UGC 2. AICTE 3. NCTE 4. NMC (National Medical Commission)

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

Answer: (b) — NMC (medicine) and BCI (law) are excluded from VBSA; architecture is brought under VBSA from AICTE.

Q2 FATF (Financial Action Task Force) was established in which year and by which group?

(a) 1989, G7 (b) 1999, G20 (c) 2001, UN Security Council (d) 2009, BRICS

Answer: (a) — FATF was established in 1989 by the G7 at the Paris Economic Summit, initially to combat drug-related money laundering.

Q3 India's FSRB (Financial Action Task Force-Style Regional Body) within the FATF framework is:

(a) APG (b) MENAFATF (c) ESAAMLG (d) MONEYVAL

Answer: (a) APG (Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, est. 1997, Secretariat in Sydney). MENAFATF covers Middle East & North Africa.

Q4 The sanctioned strength of Supreme Court judges (excluding 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 strength; currently done via SC (Number of Judges) Act 1956 as amended.

Q5 AKASH TARANG, recently in news, is best described as: (a) Surface-to-air missile (b) Anti-UAV Electronic Warfare system (c) Hypersonic glide vehicle (d) Underwater mine

Answer: (b) — AKASH TARANG is a dedicated counter-UAV EW system using RF sniffers, GNSS jammers, and anti-swarm tracking; DAC cleared under Make-I, DAP 2020.

Q6 India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) is managed by: (a) ONGC (b) HPCL (c) ISPRL (d) MoP&NG directly

Answer: (c) ISPRL (Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd) — an SPV under MoP&NG; locations: Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, Padur; total ~5.33 MMT (~9.5 days).

Q7 According to SOE 2026, how many of the nine planetary boundaries have been breached?

(a) 5 (b) 6 (c) 7 (d) All 9

Answer: (c) 7 — Climate Change, Biosphere Integrity, Land System Change, Freshwater Depletion, Biogeochemical Flows, Novel Entities, and Ocean Acidification (7th, newly identified).

Q8 GSLV-F18, which will launch GISAT-1A (EOS-05), uses which engine in its third (cryogenic) stage?

(a) Vikas liquid engine (b) CE20 (LOX/LH2) (c) SCE-200 semi-cryogenic (d) PS4 apogee motor

Answer: (b) CE20 — Cryogenic Engine (20 tonne thrust, LOX/LH2), indigenously developed by ISRO's LPSC; powers GSLV Mk-II upper stage.

Q9 Under MSMED Act 2006, if no payment period is agreed, buyers must pay MSME suppliers within:

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

Answer: (c) 15 days — Sec. 15 MSMED Act: without agreement, payment within 15 days of acceptance; with agreement, max 45 days. Violation: compound interest at 3× RBI bank rate.

Q10 VBSA (Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan) has how many sub-councils under it?

(a) 2 (b) 3 (c) 4 (d) 5

Answer: (b) 3 — Regulatory Council, Accreditation Council, and Standards Council.

Q11 The Clouded Leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) is listed in which IUCN category?

(a) Endangered (b) Vulnerable (c) Near Threatened (d) Critically Endangered

Answer: (b) Vulnerable — IUCN Red List; also CITES Appendix I and Schedule I of WPA 1972. Global estimate: 3,700–5,580 mature individuals.

Q12 GISAT-1A will orbit at approximately what altitude for continuous Earth observation?

(a) 500 km (LEO) (b) 20,000 km (MEO) (c) 36,000 km (GEO) (d) 1,000 km (Sun-sync)

Answer: (c) ~36,000 km — geostationary orbit; enables fixed-point continuous imaging of Indian subcontinent every 30 minutes.

Q13 India joined the International Energy Agency (IEA) as:

(a) Full member in 2017 (b) Associate member in 2017 (c) Observer in 2020 (d) Full member in 2015

Answer: (b) Associate member in 2017 — full membership requires OECD membership which India is pursuing. India participates in IEA governing board meetings as an associate.

Q14 Which of these correctly describes FIU-IND? (a) Established 2010, under MHA (b) Established 2004, under Dept of Revenue, MoF (c) Established 1999, under RBI (d) Established 2015, under MEA

Answer: (b) — FIU-IND (Financial Intelligence Unit – India) was established in 2004 under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance; receives STRs from banks/FIs and passes them to investigating agencies.

Q15 The Lantana camara plant mentioned in SOE 2026 is associated with which of the following issues?

(a) Marine acidification (b) Suppression of native grasses leading to tiger-human conflict (c) Air pollution in metro cities (d) Groundwater contamination

Answer: (b) — Lantana camara (invasive shrub) covers ~50% of Indian forest scrubland, suppresses native prey grasses, reducing prey for tigers, forcing cattle predation and human conflict.

THEIAS AKADEMIA NEEB 300+ Live PYQ Writing students: Q4 (SC Judges), Q9 (MSMED payment rule), and Q13 (IEA) are classic statement-based prelims traps. Practice these in your writing sessions. theiasakademia.com

§5 Mains Questions

GS2 · 250W “The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill proposes to consolidate UGC, AICTE and NCTE under a single apex body. Critically examine the implications for higher education quality, federal autonomy, and NEP 2020 implementation.”

Framework: Regulatory fragmentation problem → VBSA structure (3 councils) → Pros (unified vision, reduced duplication, NEP alignment) → Cons (centralisation, state HEI autonomy, transition risks) → Way forward (cooperative federalism model, sunset clauses for legacy regulators).

GS2 · 250W “India’s assumption of FATF Vice-Presidency represents a significant step in multilateral financial governance. Discuss how this strengthens India’s AML/CFT framework and what challenges remain.”

Framework: FATF architecture → India’s journey (2010 membership → 4th MER 2024 → VP 2026) → Domestic strengths (FIU-IND, PMLA, FEMA) → Challenges (crypto/VDA grey areas, hawala, porous borders) → VP role significance for FATF Presidency aspiration.

GS2 · 250W “Increasing the sanctioned strength of Supreme Court judges alone cannot address India’s judicial pendency crisis. Comment, while suggesting a holistic reform framework.”

Framework: Scale of pendency (80,000 SC; 61L HC; 4.4cr district) → Why judge strength alone is insufficient (infrastructure, IT, procedural delays, adjournment culture) → Holistic reforms (fast-track courts, Gram Nyayalayas, Pre-Institution Mediation, e-Courts Phase III, NJDG data) → Role of constitutional court vs statutory courts.

GS3 · 250W “AKASH TARANG represents India’s response to drone warfare. How does it fit into India’s layered air-defence architecture, and what are the broader implications of EW systems for modern conflict?”

Framework: Drone warfare threat post-Operation Sindoor → Sudarshan Chakra layered grid (AKASH TARANG + Akash SAM + L-70 + V-SHORADS) → EW vs kinetic kill: cost asymmetry advantages → Make-I/DAP 2020 implications for Aatmanirbhar → Escalation risks and arms race dynamics.

GS3 · 250W “SOE 2026 warns that 7 of 9 planetary boundaries have been breached. What are the implications for India’s climate commitments, SDGs, and biodiversity governance?”

Framework: Planetary boundaries concept (Rockström 2009/2023) → India-specific impacts (extreme weather, tiger conflict, ocean acidification affecting fisheries) → India’s NDC 45% emission intensity → CBD targets (Kunming-Montreal 30×30) → NGT strengthening → Environmental jurisprudence.

GS4 · 250W “A Forest Officer receives instructions to under-report tiger-human conflict deaths to protect a World Heritage review. Using ethical frameworks, examine the dilemma and the appropriate course of action.”

Framework: Identify the ethical conflict (data integrity vs institutional loyalty vs public safety) → Apply consequentialist (what if data is suppressed long-term?), deontological (duty of truthful reporting to NGT/MoEFCC), and virtue ethics (what would an officer of integrity do?) → Whistleblower protections (Public Interest Disclosure Act) → Recommended action with justification.

\$6 Answer Writing Value Addition

“Justice delayed is not merely justice denied — it is a systemic failure of constitutional promise.” — Justice D.Y. Chandrachud (fmr CJI, 2024)

“We are living in an era of planetary emergency, not merely climate change.” — Sunita Narain, Director General, Centre for Science and Environment (SOE 2026)

Data point — Judicial Pendency (2026): Supreme Court: 80,000+ cases; High Courts: 61 lakh; District/Subordinate Courts: 4.4 crore. India’s judge-to-population ratio: ~21/10 lakh (Law Commission target: 50/10 lakh). Law Commission’s 245th Report (2014) recommended Arrears Committees.

FATF Grey List (Increased Monitoring, 2026): Myanmar, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Haiti, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Vietnam, Yemen, Laos — illustrates real-world consequences of FATF listing on trade and investment flows.

\$7 AKADEMIA Direct Hit Tracker

VBSA Bill 2025

GS2 · Governance

★★★★★

Replaces UGC+AICTE+NCTE; 3 sub-councils; NEP 2020

SC Judges Amendment Bill

GS2 · Judiciary

★★★★☆

33→37; Art 124(1); pendency 80,000+ SC cases

India–FATF VP 2026

GS2 · IR / Institutions

★★★★★

Vivek Aggarwal; 1st Indian VP; APG; FIU-IND 2004

AKASH TARANG

GS3 · Defence

★★★★☆

Anti-UAV EW; Sudarshan Chakra; Make-I; DAP 2020

GISAT-1A / EOS-05

GS3 · S&T

★★★★☆

GSLV-F18; GEO 36,000km; CE20; NET July 31

MSME Amendment Bill

GS3 · Economy

★★★★☆

45/15 day rule; MSEFC; 3× RBI rate penalty; MSMED 2006

SOE 2026 Planetary Boundaries

GS3 · Environment

★★★★★

7/9 breached; Ocean acidification 7th; 99% extreme weather days

Clouded Leopard (Neofelis)

GS3 · Biodiversity

★★★★☆

Vulnerable; NE India; CITES App I; 7% suitable habitat

India SPR (ISPRL)

GS3 · Energy Security

★★★★★

Vizag+Mangaluru+Padur; 5.33 MMT; ~9.5 days; ISPRL

MSMED Act 2006 Rules

GS3 · Economy

★★★★★

45 days (agreed) / 15 days (no agreement); 75% MSEFC deposit

FATF Grey List (2026)

GS2 · IR

★★★★☆

Myanmar, Nigeria, Philippines, Vietnam... 16 countries

Lantana camara & Tiger Conflict

GS3 · Environment

★★★★☆

Invasive; 50% forest scrubland; suppresses prey; tiger attacks

★ THE IAS 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.

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