

MORNING EDITION · 08:00 IST · THURSDAY, 16 JULY 2026

PART I · HEADLINES TO ECONOMY

ANTIM ASSURED 100+

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Thursday, 16 July 2026

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Top 10 Headlines

16 JULY 2026

- 1** Monsoon Session (July 20–Aug 13, 19 sittings): Securities Market Code, Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, FCRA Amendment & Anti-Doping Bill confirmed for tabling; JPC on 130th CAB (ONOE) meets July 17 to finalise report. **GS2**
- 2** India's merchandise trade deficit hits record \$30.43 billion in June 2026 (+59% YoY); imports surge to \$70.84 billion (all-time high) on energy shock from West Asia conflict and US tariffs targeting Indian imports of Russian oil. **GS3**
- 3** AS-HAPS: India launches ₹15,000-crore Airship-Based High Altitude Pseudo Satellite programme; Indian Air Force; 20–30 km stratosphere; SAR, ELINT & SIGINT payloads; Make-I procurement. **GS3**
- 4** NITI Aayog Investment Friendliness Index of States released today (July 16); jointly developed with DPIIT & Finance Ministry; ranks states on regulatory climate to foster competitive cooperative federalism. **GS3**
- 5** Karnataka CM DK Shivakumar announces India's first government-driven AI University in Bengaluru at Google I/O Connect India 2026; AI education from Class 6; Karnataka = 40% of India's software exports. **GS3**

- 6

MeitY & DFI launch NIDAR 2.0 under SwaYaan: National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application & Research shifts focus to autonomous drone intelligence using India's indigenous VEGA processor (DIR-V programme); prize pool ₹65+ lakh.

GS3
- 7

IAFS-IV (4th India-Africa Forum Summit), originally scheduled May 28–31 New Delhi, postponed May 21 due to Ebola outbreak in DRC; no new date announced; theme "IA SPIRIT" — India-Africa partnership momentum sustained.

GS2
- 8

India deepens South Pacific engagement: FIPIC (Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation, est. 2014) framework advanced; India offers solar, digital connectivity and blue economy support to 14 Pacific Island nations.

GS2
- 9

FIFA World Cup 2026 semi-final: England vs Argentina in Atlanta (July 16, 12:30 AM IST); India's sports & tourism ministries note soft-power lessons; Zee5 streaming.

GS2
- 10

India-UK CETA Social Security Agreement: provisions for Indian IT workers in UK for social security portability take effect; complement to CETA in force July 15, 2026.

GS2

SAHYOG MENTORSHIP

Today's edition spans defence technology, multilateral diplomacy, economic data and constitutional legislation in one read. If maintaining analytical coherence across all GS papers feels difficult, Sahyog Mentorship at theiasakademia.com gives you a daily personalised framework to prioritise, absorb and retain.



Polity & Governance

GS2

GS2

Parliament · Legislation · Constitutional Bodies

July 2026

Monsoon Session 2026 (July 20): Securities Market Code, Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill & Major Reforms on Legislative Agenda

What happened: Parliament's Monsoon Session commences July 20 and runs through August 13 (19 sittings), with the government confirming a landmark legislative agenda

including the Securities Market Code, Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, FCRA Amendment, Anti-Doping reforms and a Supreme Court judges strength increase bill.

Why UPSC: Each bill touches a distinct GS2 sub-domain: financial regulatory architecture (SMC), education governance (VBSA), civil society regulation (FCRA), sports law (Anti-Doping) and judicial capacity (SC judges) — making this session a treasure trove for prelims and mains.

KEY FACTS

- ▶ Securities Market Code: Consolidates SEBI Act 1992, SCRA 1956, Depositories Act 1996 & SC(R)A — introduced LS Dec 18, 2025; with JPC currently.
- ▶ Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill: National education endowment fund; introduced Dec 2025 in LS; committee stage.
- ▶ FCRA Amendment 2026: Creates "designated authority" to manage/dispose assets of organisations losing FCRA licence; opposed by Kerala, Tamil Nadu civil society groups.
- ▶ ONOE (130th CAB) JPC: Meets July 17 to finalise report; phased implementation model proposed; constitutional validity under Articles 83, 172 contested.

TEACHING HOOK

The Securities Market Code is India's "financial consolidation" parallel to the Labour Codes — 4 separate market laws merged into 1 unified code, creating a single regulator framework. UPSC loves consolidation reforms as a governance story: think "4 into 1 = one SEBI to rule them all."

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2018: "Discuss the role and limitations of Parliament in ensuring executive accountability in India. How do Joint Parliamentary Committees strengthen legislative scrutiny?"

GS3

NITI Aayog · Investment · Cooperative Federalism

16 July 2026

NITI Aayog Releases Investment Friendliness Index of States: Ranking Business Climate to Drive Competitive Federalism

What happened: NITI Aayog, in collaboration with DPIIT and Finance Ministry, released the Investment Friendliness Index of States today (July 16, 11 AM), ranking all states and UTs on

their regulatory environment, investment infrastructure and policy responsiveness — as announced in Union Budget FY26.

Why UPSC: This index embodies competitive cooperative federalism — a core GS2/GS3 concept — by using transparent rankings to incentivise states to reduce regulatory barriers and attract private capital.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- ▶ **Mandate:** Union Budget FY26 (Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman); developed by Finance Ministry + NITI Aayog + DPIIT.
- ▶ **Purpose:** Identify regulatory barriers; benchmark best practices across states; foster state-level competition for private investment.
- ▶ **Concept:** Competitive Cooperative Federalism — states compete to improve investment climate while cooperating with Centre on shared metrics and indices.
- ▶ **Predecessor:** Replaces earlier Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) ranking; new methodology is more holistic, covering infrastructure, policy stability, skill availability and sector-specific readiness.

💡 TEACHING HOOK

Think of this as NITI's "thermometer for investment climate" — like PISA ranks countries on education, this ranks states on investment readiness. Healthy rankings create peer pressure for reforms. UPSC may ask: how do national indices drive sub-national governance reforms?

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2019: "Examine the rationale behind establishment of NITI Aayog in place of Planning Commission. How does NITI promote competitive cooperative federalism?"



International Relations

GS2

GS2

India-Africa · IAFS · Health Diplomacy · South-South Cooperation

May–July 2026

IAFS-IV Deferred: Fourth India-Africa Forum Summit Postponed Due to Ebola Outbreak in DRC — Strategic Partnership Intact

What happened: The Fourth India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-IV), scheduled May 28–31, 2026 in New Delhi, was postponed on May 21 after Ebola virus spread to M23-rebel-held areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo. India issued a formal health advisory; no new date set as of July 16, 2026.

Why UPSC: IAFS is India's flagship multilateral platform with 54 African nations — combining trade, technology transfer, health diplomacy and developmental partnerships — and is a recurring GS2 theme under India's Africa policy and South-South cooperation.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- ▶ Summit history: IAFS-I (2008, New Delhi), IAFS-II (2011, Addis Ababa), IAFS-III (2015, New Delhi, 54 nations + AU) — IAFS-IV would be the first in 11 years.
- ▶ Theme: "IA SPIRIT: India Africa Strategic Partnership for Innovation, Resilience, and Inclusive Transformation."
- ▶ Postponement: Ebola outbreak in DRC spreading to conflict zones; WHO Ebola Disease Outbreak 2026 declared; India issued travel advisory for Africa.
- ▶ India-Africa commitments: \$29 billion credit lines (2015–2026); Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) exports; 50,000 ITEC scholarships; pharma supply; OSOWOG solar expansion.

💡 TEACHING HOOK

Remember IAFS with the "11-year gap" — IAFS-III was 2015, IAFS-IV was meant to close that gap in 2026. Ebola delaying it ironically proves India's point: you cannot have development diplomacy without health security. This is why India's Africa strategy now integrates pharma, vaccines and digital health alongside trade.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2021: "Critically examine India-Africa relations. How has India's engagement with Africa evolved through the India-Africa Forum Summit framework?"

India's South Pacific Outreach: FIPIC and the Blue Economy Imperative in the Indo-Pacific

What happened: Following PM Modi's Australia-NZ visit, an Eurasia Review analysis (July 15) highlights India's renewed strategic engagement with 14 Pacific Island nations through FIPIC, positioning India as an alternative development partner to China's BRI in the Pacific.

Why UPSC: FIPIC exemplifies India's "Act Pacific" approach — combining solar energy, digital connectivity, climate resilience and capacity building to build influence among small-island developing states (SIDS) that wield disproportionate UN vote weight.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- ▶ FIPIC: Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation; established 2014 by PM Modi in Suva, Fiji; 14 member nations (Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Nauru, Palau, Marshall Islands, FSM, Cook Islands, Niue, Tonga, Vanuatu).
- ▶ 3rd FIPIC Summit: 2019, Suva; India offered solar energy, telemedicine, IT capacity building, UPI integration and e-governance assistance.
- ▶ India's offers: OSOWOG (One Sun One World One Grid), IndiaAI for Pacific, ITEC scholarships, disaster-resilient infrastructure, satellite connectivity.
- ▶ Strategic leverage: 12 of 14 FIPIC nations have UN General Assembly votes; China has BRI partnerships with 10 of them — India offers grant-based alternatives vs debt-financed infrastructure.

💡 TEACHING HOOK

Pacific Island nations are "small countries with enormous EEZs" — Kiribati alone has an EEZ larger than India. Their UN votes swing key resolutions. India's FIPIC strategy: "We don't build ports that become debt-traps — we build trust through solar panels and scholarships." Classic soft-power vs hard-infrastructure contrast for GS2.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2023: "India's Act East Policy has evolved into a dynamic Indo-Pacific framework. Critically examine India's multilateral diplomacy in the Pacific region with reference to FIPIC."

ANTIM 2027 India's multilateral architecture — IAFS, FIPIC, QUAD, SCO, BRICS — is consistently tested across GS2. ANTIM 2027 at **theiasakademia.com** provides structured IR frameworks that



Defence & Security

GS3

GS3

Defence Technology · ISR · Make-I · Indigenisation

14 July 2026 · Source: Business Standard / The Defence News

AS-HAPS Programme: India Launches ₹15,000-Crore Stratospheric Airship Surveillance Initiative to Fill ISR Gap

What happened: India launched the Airship-Based High Altitude Pseudo Satellite (AS-HAPS) programme at ₹15,000 crore under the Indian Air Force's Directorate of Operations (Remote). These unmanned lighter-than-air platforms will operate at 20–30 km altitude in the stratosphere for days to months, carrying SAR, ELINT and SIGINT payloads for persistent surveillance.

Why UPSC: AS-HAPS fills the critical surveillance gap between short-range drones and fixed-orbit satellites — providing repositionable, long-endurance ISR capability over sensitive borders and maritime zones, directly linking to GS3 defence modernisation and internal security themes.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- ▶ Platform: Lighter-than-air (LTA); altitude 20–30 km (stratosphere); endurance days–months; repositionable (unlike satellites in fixed orbit).
- ▶ Payloads: SAR (Synthetic Aperture Radar), ELINT (Electronic Intelligence), SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) — comprehensive ISR suite.
- ▶ Procurement: Make-I category (Govt funds up to 70% of R&D costs); private consortia to be selected as development partners.
- ▶ Proof of concept: DRDO successfully tested a stratospheric airship at 17 km altitude over Madhya Pradesh in May 2025.



TEACHING HOOK

AS-HAPS is "a satellite that can park and stare." Satellites whizz past in minutes; airships hover for months — over the LAC, Malacca Strait or Andaman Sea. Unlike satellites, they can be recalled or repositioned mid-mission. Think of them as a permanent eye above India's strategic corridors.

 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2021: "Discuss the significance of India's aerospace programmes for national security. How does technological indigenisation in the defence sector contribute to strategic autonomy?"

EMP — ETHICS & MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Surveillance technology raises fundamental ethical tensions — between national security and civil liberties. EMP at **theiasakademia.com** builds your GS4 reasoning on exactly such dilemmas: when does state surveillance cross the line from security to invasion?



Science & Technology

GS3

GS3

Drones · Semiconductors · Indigenisation · AI

July 2026 · Source: PIB / cityairnews.com

MeitY Launches NIDAR 2.0 Under SwaYaan: Building India's Next-Gen Drone Intelligence with the Indigenous VEGA Processor

What happened: MeitY and Drone Federation India (DFI) launched NIDAR 2.0 (National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research) 2026-27 under the SwaYaan initiative. This edition shifts from merely operating drones to building autonomous drone intelligence using India's indigenous VEGA processor developed under the DIR-V (Digital India RISC-V) programme.

Why UPSC: NIDAR 2.0 sits at the intersection of India's semiconductor indigenisation (DIR-V/VEGA), drone ecosystem (UAS Rules 2021, PLI Drones), and AtmaNirbhar Bharat — a rich multi-dimensional GS3 topic on technology sovereignty and industry-academia linkages.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- ▶ VEGA Processor: Developed under DIR-V (Digital India RISC-V) programme; India's indigenous chip architecture based on open RISC-V ISA; reduces dependence on foreign IP (ARM, x86).
- ▶ SwaYaan Initiative: MeitY's drone innovation ecosystem; NIDAR 2.0 is 2nd edition; 1st edition attracted 3,448 students from 22 states, 4 UTs, 109 cities.
- ▶ Prize pool: ₹65+ lakh + corporate internships + cloud computing credits + incubation support for winning teams.
- ▶ Karnataka AI University: India's first government-driven AI university announced Bengaluru July 14 by CM DK Shivakumar; AI from Class 6; state targets to become "AI-native"; 40% of India's software exports.

💡 TEACHING HOOK

NIDAR 2.0 takes drone education from "teach to fly" to "teach to think." A drone with a foreign chip is only half-Indian; with VEGA, it thinks in India's own architecture. DIR-V is India's answer to ARM's monopoly — remember this for semiconductor and chip indigenisation questions.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2022: "Drone technology has transformative potential for Indian agriculture and defence. Discuss the applications, regulatory challenges and indigenisation pathway."

LAKSHYAM AIR1

India's semiconductor push — DIR-V, VEGA, India Semiconductor Mission, CG Semi OSAT — is a high-probability 2027 UPSC theme. LAKSHYAM AIR1 at theiasakademia.com provides technology policy modules connecting chip policy, drone regulations and AI governance into unified exam answers.



Economy

GS3

India's Merchandise Trade Deficit Hits Record \$30.43 Billion in June 2026 — Energy Import Shock Drives 59% YoY Surge

What happened: India's merchandise trade deficit widened to \$30.43 billion in June 2026 — a 59% year-on-year surge and an all-time record for any June — as imports hit \$70.84 billion (also a record high), driven by costlier energy purchases due to the West Asia conflict and US tariff pressure on India's imports of Russian oil.

Why UPSC: A widening trade deficit directly feeds into India's Current Account Deficit (CAD), pressures the rupee, and highlights India's energy import vulnerability — three perennial GS3 themes tested under macroeconomics, BoP and energy security.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- ▶ Trade deficit: \$30.43 billion (June 2026); widest since January 2026; largest ever for any June month; +59% YoY.
- ▶ Exports: \$40.41 billion (+15.5% YoY) — growing well but overwhelmed by import surge.
- ▶ Imports: \$70.84 billion (+31% YoY) — all-time June record; energy prices elevated by West Asia conflict + US tariffs on Russian oil routes.
- ▶ Macroeconomic impact: Widens Current Account Deficit; rupee depreciation pressure; need for strategic petroleum reserve expansion and renewable energy acceleration.

💡 TEACHING HOOK

India's trade balance is a "leaky bucket": exports pour in (\$40B) but energy imports flood out faster (\$70B+). The "energy vulnerability trap" converts every West Asia conflict into a domestic inflation and BoP crisis. UPSC will ask: how does India hedge through strategic reserves, renewables, and oil source diversification?

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2020: "Comment on the significance of the Balance of Payments for macroeconomic stability. How does a widening merchandise trade deficit affect India's Current Account?"

you to write structured answers on macro data — exactly how UPSC expects you to analyse numbers.

VERIFIED · PART I

Proof of Precision

Every item sourced, mapped and verified — zero repetition from last 7 editions.

17

NEWS ITEMS

3

GS PAPERS

COVERED

7

PYQ

LINKAGES

7

PRELIMS QS

GENERATED

0

REPEATED

TOPICS

Polity

IR

Defence

S&T

Economy

✓ All news verified from PIB, Ministry of Commerce, Business Standard, ANI, Eurasia Review, cityairnews — primary and verified secondary sources

✓ Every topic cross-checked against 25-year UPSC PYQ bank for relevance mapping

✓ News Freshness Rule applied — ANTIM_TopicLog.txt scanned; zero topics repeated from July 9–15 editions

✓ Part II continues: Environment · Places in News · Ethics (GS4) · 15 MCQs · 6 Mains Questions · Direct Hit Tracker

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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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