ujiyari

UPSC & STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

# Starship Flight 13: SpaceX Deploys 20 Starlink V3 Satellites, Booster Splashdown Falls Short

26 July 2026 · SCIENCE & TECH · GS3

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

## Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

linkedin.com/in/epicbharat

# Starship Flight 13: SpaceX Deploys 20 Starlink V3 Satellites, Booster Splashdown Falls Short

26 July 2026 · 5 min read ·

**Every fact web-verified against primary sources**

> *SpaceX launched the thirteenth integrated test flight of Starship from Starbase, Texas at 5:51 p.m. Central Time on July 24, 2026. The vehicle deployed all 20 Starlink V3 satellites and completed a controlled splashdown of the upper stage in the Indian Ocean, while the Super Heavy booster splashed down at higher-than-planned speed after not all engines ignited during its landing burn.*

## THE FLIGHT

Flight 13 was the second launch of Starship's **Version 3** configuration. The Super Heavy first stage ignited all **33 Raptor 3 engines** and ascended over the Gulf, followed by a hot-staging manoeuvre in which the upper stage lights its engines before separation is complete. Starship's upper stage then ignited its six Raptor engines to continue to space.

| PARAMETER | DETAIL |
|---|---|
| Mission | Starship Flight 13, second flight of Version 3 |
| Date and time | July 24, 2026, 5:51 p.m. Central Time |
| Launch site | Starbase, Texas |
| First stage | Super Heavy Booster 20, 33 Raptor 3 engines |
| Upper stage | Starship, six Raptor engines |
| Payload | 20 Starlink V3 satellites, all deployed |
| Booster recovery | Soft splashdown attempted; landing burn incomplete, higher-than-planned impact speed |
| Upper stage | Controlled splashdown in the Indian Ocean |

SpaceX confirmed it made contact with all 20 satellites deployed. Two earlier attempts had been scrubbed: on July 16, 2026 at T-0 after four engines failed to ignite, and on July 23, 2026 at about T-2 hours 50 minutes due to weather.

### Hot Staging

Hot staging is the technique of igniting the upper stage's engines while the first stage is still attached and firing. It avoids the momentum loss of a coasting separation and improves payload performance, at the cost of designing the interstage to survive direct exhaust impingement. It is standard on Soviet and Russian launch vehicles and was adopted by SpaceX during the Starship programme.

## WHY FULL REUSABILITY IS THE POINT

Starship is designed as a **fully and rapidly reusable** two-stage vehicle. The distinction matters.

| MODEL | DESCRIPTION | COST IMPLICATION |
|---|---|---|
| Expendable | Vehicle discarded after one flight | Full vehicle cost borne by each mission |
| Partially reusable | First stage recovered, upper stage expended | Significant but bounded savings |
| Fully reusable | Both stages recovered and reflown | Cost approaches propellant plus refurbishment |

The Falcon 9 established partial reusability at operational scale. Starship's design target is the harder problem: recovering the upper stage, which re-enters at orbital velocity and faces far more severe thermal loading than a booster that separates well below orbital speed. Flight 13's outcome, a successful payload deployment and controlled upper-stage splashdown alongside an imperfect booster landing burn, is characteristic of an iterative test campaign in which each flight is instrumented to fail informatively.

### The Starlink V3 Connection

The 20 satellites deployed were **Starlink V3**, a generation designed around Starship's payload volume and mass capacity rather than Falcon 9's. This is the commercial logic that funds the development programme: a larger vehicle enables larger satellites, which deliver more bandwidth per launch.

## THE INDIAN CONTEXT

India's space sector is undergoing a structural transition that makes this relevant beyond spectator interest.

- **IN-SPACe**, the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre, was created in 2020 as the single-window authorisation and promotion body for non-governmental entities.
- **NewSpace India Limited (NSIL)**, incorporated in 2019, is the commercial arm of the Department of Space.
- The **Indian Space Policy, 2023** formalised the roles of ISRO, IN-SPACe and NSIL and opened the end-to-end space value chain to private participation.

- **Foreign direct investment** norms for the space sector were liberalised in 2024, permitting higher automatic-route limits across satellite manufacturing, launch vehicles and ground segment activities.

ISRO's own reusability work has proceeded through the **Reusable Launch Vehicle Autonomous Landing Experiment (RLV LEX)** series, with successive autonomous landing experiments validating approach and landing under progressively harder conditions. India's heavy-lift capability rests on the **LVM3**, and human spaceflight development continues under the **Gaganyaan** programme.

The analytical point for an answer is that reusability is an economic argument before it is an engineering one. It matters to India not because ISRO must replicate Starship, but because launch cost per kilogram determines whether an Indian commercial space sector can compete for global payloads.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

**GS Paper 3:** Awareness in the fields of space; achievements of Indians in science and technology; indigenisation of technology and developing new technology.

**Prelims pointers:**

- Starship Flight 13 launched on July 24, 2026 from Starbase, Texas; it was the second flight of the Version 3 configuration.
- Super Heavy uses 33 Raptor engines; the Starship upper stage uses six.
- The mission deployed 20 Starlink V3 satellites; the upper stage splashed down in the Indian Ocean.
- Hot staging means igniting the upper stage before separation from the first stage is complete.
- IN-SPACe was created in 2020; NewSpace India Limited was incorporated in 2019.
- The Indian Space Policy was released in 2023; space-sector FDI norms were liberalised in 2024.
- LVM3 is India's heavy-lift launch vehicle; Gaganyaan is the human spaceflight programme.
- ISRO's reusability testing has proceeded through the RLV LEX autonomous landing experiments.

## FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

### STARSHIP FLIGHT 13:

Date: July 24, 2026, 5:51 p.m. Central Time, from Starbase, Texas

Second flight of the Starship Version 3 configuration

Super Heavy Booster 20 with 33 Raptor 3 engines; upper stage with six Raptor engines

Payload: 20 Starlink V3 satellites, all deployed and contacted

Booster: landing burn incomplete, splashdown at higher speed than planned

Upper stage: controlled splashdown in the Indian Ocean

Earlier scrubs: July 16, 2026 at T-0 after four engines failed to ignite; July 23, 2026 due to weather

### KEY CONCEPTS:

Hot staging: upper-stage ignition before separation is complete, avoiding coast-phase momentum loss

Full reusability: recovery and reflight of both stages, as against Falcon 9's partial reusability

The upper stage is the harder recovery problem because it re-enters at orbital velocity

### INDIA'S SPACE ECOSYSTEM:

IN-SPACe, Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre, created 2020, single-window authorisation body

NewSpace India Limited, incorporated 2019, commercial arm of the Department of Space

Indian Space Policy, 2023, defining roles of ISRO, IN-SPACe and NSIL

Space-sector FDI norms liberalised in 2024

LVM3: India's heavy-lift launch vehicle

Gaganyaan: India's human spaceflight programme

RLV LEX: Reusable Launch Vehicle Autonomous Landing Experiment series

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Antrix Corporation, incorporated in 1992, was the earlier commercial arm of the Department of Space; NSIL now leads commercial activity.

ISRO was established in 1969 and functions under the Department of Space.

*Sources: ISRO, IN-SPACe, The Hindu*

Source: Starship Flight 13: SpaceX Deploys 20 Starlink V3 Satellites, Booster Splashdown Falls Short — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

## RELATED EDITORIALS

THE HINDU

The Missing Clause: What the Saudi-US Nuclear Deal Leaves Out

26 Jul

BUSINESS STANDARD

The Age Question: Why Social Media Bans Are Easier to Legislate Than to Enforce

25 Jul

THE HINDU

Intelligence at the Edge: Why On-Device AI Matters for India

24 Jul

INDIAN EXPRESS

Writing India's AI Law for Autonomous Agents and Deepfakes

23 Jul

## RELATED KEY TERMS

KEY TERM

3D Glass Solutions

US semiconductor packaging firm founded 2010, originating...

KEY TERM

3I-ATLAS Comet

The third confirmed interstellar object to enter our solar system,...

KEY TERM

Active Case Finding (TB)

A proactive public health strategy where health workers systematically...

KEY TERM

Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) Programme

India's classified, decades-long programme to indigenously design and...

CURATED & WRITTEN BY


# Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

linkedin.com/in/epicbharat


📖 Read Full Article on Ujiyari →

https://ujiyari.com/daily/2026/07/26/spacex-starship-flight-13-starlink-v3-2026/