

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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Page01:GS II :Indian Polity/ Preliminary Examination

Recently, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Chief Justice (CJI) Surya Kant, has agreed to consider formulating a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for urgent matters related to the life and liberty of citizens.

- This step has been taken in the background of citizens needing immediate judicial protection in recent times against executive actions such as late-night arrests, early morning bulldozer demolitions, or deportations carried out during holidays. The petition primarily argues that in a constitutional democracy governed by the Rule of Law, access to justice should not merely be theoretical, but must be practically accessible at all times (day or night).

Key Points of News Analysis

1. Main Issue and Petitioner's Argument

- Continuous Availability of Judiciary:** The petitioner (Advocate Mahr Vish Rein) argues that access to justice cannot be bound by the limitations of court schedules.
- Prevention of Irreparable Loss:** In the absence of a structured institutional mechanism, affected individuals face damage (such as demolition of houses or illegal detention) that cannot be undone later, even before they can reach the constitutional courts.
- Continuity of Constitutionality:** The petition stated that in a constitutional democracy, "the Constitution cannot remain silent at night, nor can the protection of liberty wait for the morning bell of the courts."

SC weighs SOP for urgent cases affecting citizens' life and liberty

Constitutional remedies must be accessible at all time, says petition in top court; Bench headed by CJI Kant says an SOP could be put in place to reduce 'response time' in cases such as illegal detentions, demolition drives or other state actions

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to consider framing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to allow citizens to knock on the doors of the courts any time, day or night, in cases affecting life and liberty, including illegal detentions, imminent demolition of homes, deportations, custodial violence, or other state actions.

Beyond court schedules
A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant was hearing a petition filed by a top court advocate, Mahr Vish Rein, who said the courts cannot afford to close especially against the background of credible reports of late-night arrests, early-morning demolition drives, and deportation or executive actions undertaken during weekends or holidays.

"The absence of a structured and institutionalised mechanism ensuring continuous judicial accessibility may result in irreversible consequences before affected persons are able to approach constitutional courts... The protection of liberty cannot remain dependent upon the temporal boundaries of court schedules. In a constitutional democracy governed by the rule of law, the Constitution cannot fall silent at night, nor can the protection of liberty wait the morning bell of the courts," Ms. Rein submitted.

Access to justice cannot exist merely in theory. Constitutional remedies must be practically accessible at all times, she said.

The Bench noted that an SOP could be put in place to reduce the "response time" to urgent requests in cases of life and liberty. "Maybe the response from the court should come within an hour of such an urgent mention," Chief Justice Kant noted.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta said the preparation of a structured and institutionalised mechanism ensuring continuous judicial accessibility may result in irreversible consequences before affected persons are able to approach constitutional courts...

Preparation of an SOP should be undertaken by the Supreme Court on its administrative rather than judicial side.

TUSHAR MEHTA
Solicitor-General

Maybe the response from the court should come within an hour of an urgent mention

SURYA KANT
Chief Justice of India

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, a part of the Bench, said there was a difference in approach in accessing justice during office hours and after office hours. The judge said a "graded approach" to access to justice after court hours cannot be interpreted as a denial of justice.

Digital access
The judge pointed out that courts never "close-up" when there was digital access to justice through e-filing. "A letter, an email or a phone call would be enough to activate the justice system," Justice Bagchi said.

Ms. Rein agreed with Justice Bagchi that technological advancements, including digital filing, electronic court records and virtual hearing infrastructure had significantly enhanced the capacity of courts to provide remote access to justice.

"The present institutional framework of courts largely restricts access to judicial remedies to designated court hours, working days and limited vacation benches. As a result, individuals facing urgent violations of liberty and fundamental rights often encounter significant practical difficulty in obtaining immediate judicial protection during nights, weekends, public holidays and court recesses," Ms. Rein submitted.

"However, these technological capabilities have not yet been integrated into a uniform institutional framework enabling emergency judicial access for urgent constitutional matters outside regular court hours," she submitted.

2. Supreme Court's Stand and Observations

- Reduction in Response Time:** The bench acknowledged that in extremely urgent matters related to life and liberty, the court's response should come within an hour of mentioning the petition.
- Role of Technology (Digital Access):** The court (particularly Justice Joymalya Bagchi) highlighted that due to digital filing (e-filing), electronic records, and virtual hearings, courts are never entirely "closed". Even an email, letter, or phone call is sufficient to activate the judicial system.
- Graded Approach:** The court clarified that there may be differences in the methods of accessing justice during regular working hours and after-office hours, but this cannot be considered a denial of justice.

3. Administrative vs. Judicial Jurisdiction Conflict

Daily News Analysis

- **Solicitor General's Argument:** On behalf of the government, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta suggested that the formulation of this type of SOP should be done by the Supreme Court on its administrative side rather than through a judicial order.
- **CJI's Remark and Federal Structure:** Chief Justice Surya Kant clarified that in India's federal structure, all High Courts of the country do not come under the administrative purview of the Supreme Court. Therefore, to implement a uniform system for all courts, it may be necessary to consider and pass orders on this petition from the judicial side.

Important Dimensions for UPSC Mains (Mains Value Addition)

Constitutional Linkages

- **Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty):** This SOP will directly strengthen the protection of Article 21, as under this, no citizen can be deprived of their life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law.
- **Articles 32 and 226 (Right to Constitutional Remedies):** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar called Article 32 the 'soul' of the Constitution. This SOP will ensure that this 'soul' remains alive and active 24/7.
- **Article 39A (Equal Justice and Free Legal Aid):** It is the duty of the State to ensure that no citizen is deprived of opportunities for securing justice by reason of economic or other disabilities.

Expected Benefits of this Potential SOP

- **Check on Executive High-handedness:** This will effectively curb hasty punitive actions taken by the executive by taking advantage of court holidays or night hours.
- **Rule of Law:** The concept that the law of the land is supreme and the judicial system is always ready to protect the rights of citizens will be strengthened.
- **Optimal Use of Technology (Leveraging Legal Tech):** The digital infrastructure (e-filing, Virtual Courts) developed under the e-Courts Mission Mode Project can be put to its actual use during times of crisis.

Challenges and Concerns

- **Pressure on Judicial Infrastructure:** The additional administrative pressure of working round the clock may increase on the staff and judges of the Supreme Court and other courts, which are already burdened with over 90,000 pending cases.
- **Possibility of Misuse:** In the absence of a clear definition of 'emergency or extremely urgent' cases, this system could be misused for quick disposal of routine or less serious cases, thereby affecting the time available for genuine victims.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's initiative towards ensuring round-the-clock access to justice is a progressive step in Indian judicial history. Technological advancements (Digital Infrastructure) have already eliminated physical distances and time barriers; the only requirement now is to transform this into a uniform and structured institutional framework. However, while drafting this SOP, a clear and strict definition of 'extremely urgent' (Urgent) cases must be established so that the workload on the judiciary does not become uncontrollable. Ultimately, this step will establish India as a sensitive state where a citizen's liberty is not dependent merely on working days, but is a continuous constitutional guarantee.

Daily News Analysis

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding the concept of the 'Circular Economy':

1. It aims to increase the reuse and recycling of resources.
2. Waste-to-Energy projects are examples of this concept.
3. It aims to reduce the exploitation of natural resources.

Which of the above statements are correct?

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

Ans:d)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "Striking a balance between energy security and food security is the biggest challenge for India's biofuel policy." Explain this in the context of the experiences of Germany and India. (10Marks, 150Words)



According to a recent study published in the international research journal *Birds*, the Indian Grey Hornbill, which had gone extinct from Gujarat's Gir forests about 60 years ago, has recorded successful breeding for four consecutive years following a reintroduction programme. Along with this, the second chick of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) born through the 'jump-start' technique in Gujarat has also successfully survived the critical 40-day period, marking another major wildlife conservation achievement for the state.

Grey hornbills thrive again in Gir as four years of successful breeding revive a lost species

Abhinay Deshpande
AHMEDABAD

More than 60 years after the Indian Grey Hornbill disappeared from Gujarat's Gir forests, the species has recorded four consecutive years of successful breeding following its reintroduction, according to a scientific study published in the international peer-reviewed journal *Birds*.

The findings come as Gujarat recently reported another wildlife conservation milestone, with the second Great Indian Bustard chick hatched through the "jump-start" technique surviving beyond the critical 40-day period.

The study, *Reintroduction of Indian Grey Hornbills in Gir, India: Insights into Ranging, Habitat Use, Nesting and Behavioural*



Indian Grey Hornbill

Patterns, presents the first comprehensive assessment of the reintroduction programme undertaken by the Gujarat Forest Department and its conservation partners after the species disappeared from Gir.

'Significant success'

"Wildlife conservation in Gujarat has entered a new phase, particularly in spe-

cies recovery and the protection of rare and endangered wildlife. Grey Hornbills reintroduced into the Gir landscape in 2021 have successfully established territories, adapted to their new habitat, and produced offspring, marking a major milestone in restoring a species that had disappeared from the region between the 1950s and 1960s. The research conducted following the reintroduction of the Grey Hornbill into the Gir forests is a significant success for us," Forest and Environment Minister Arjun Modhwadia said.

According to Vinod Rao, Principal Secretary, Forests and Environment, "One pair successfully bred during the first year after release, while three additional breeding pairs nested in

the second year, demonstrating that the restored population is beginning to establish itself naturally. The Grey Hornbill plays a crucial ecological role as a long-distance seed disperser, helping regenerate forests by transporting seeds of fruit-bearing trees across large areas."

The project involved the release of 40 Indian Grey Hornbills in two phases. Twenty-eight birds were released between 2021 and 2022, followed by another 12 in 2023.

"Eleven males were fitted with satellite transmitters, allowing scientists to track their movements, habitat use, and breeding behaviour over several years," Mohan Ram, Conservator of Forests, Junagadh Circle, and one of the authors of the study, said.

1. Key Points: Project and Study Findings

- **Background of Extinction:** Indian Grey Hornbills had completely disappeared (gone extinct) from the Gir forests between the 1950s and 1960s.
- **Reintroduction Programme:** A special programme was launched in the year 2021 by the Gujarat Forest Department and its conservation partners to bring this species back into the Gir ecosystem.
- **Phase-wise Release:** Under this project, a total of 40 Indian Grey Hornbills were released into the forest in two phases. 28 birds were released in the first phase (2021-2022) and 12 birds in the second phase (2023).

Daily News Analysis

- **Successful Natural Breeding:** A pair successfully bred in the very first year of release, while three more breeding pairs nested in the second year. This indicates that this population is now establishing itself naturally.
- **Technical Monitoring:** To understand the birds' movements, home range, and behaviour, 11 male hornbills were equipped with satellite transmitters.

2. Important Facts for UPSC Examination (Prelims & Mains)

A) About the Indian Grey Hornbill:

- **Scientific Name:** *Ocyrceros birostris*
- **Geographical Distribution:** It is a common hornbill found mainly in the Indian subcontinent. Instead of dense forests, it prefers to live in open forests, urban gardens, and rural areas with large fruit-bearing trees.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:** Least Concern (LC)
 - **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule-II
- **Unique Nesting Behavior:** During breeding, the female hornbill seals herself inside a tree hollow (cavity) and closes the opening using mud and debris, leaving only a tiny slit. The male delivers food to the female and the chicks through this slit.

B) Ecological Importance of Hornbills:

- **Forest Engineers:** Hornbills are called 'Engineers of the Forest' or 'Farmers of the Forest'.
- **Seed Dispersal:** These birds are primarily frugivorous (fruit-eating). After eating fruits, they disperse the seeds over very long distances (long-distance seed disperser). This greatly aids the natural regeneration of fruit-bearing trees in dry deciduous forests like Gir.

C) Great Indian Bustard (GIB) and 'Jump-start' Technique:

- **IUCN Status:** Critically Endangered (CR)
- **Jump-start Technique:** This is an advanced conservation breeding technique in which wild eggs are naturally incubated under protected conditions, and the chicks are reared under human care during their initial delicate days, which increases their survival rate. After 40 days, they are released into a free or semi-wild environment.

3. Significance and Challenges from Mains Perspective

- **Successful Model of Species Recovery:** The success of the hornbill in Gir proves that locally extinct species can be restored to their historical habitats through scientific approach, satellite tracking, and phase-wise management.

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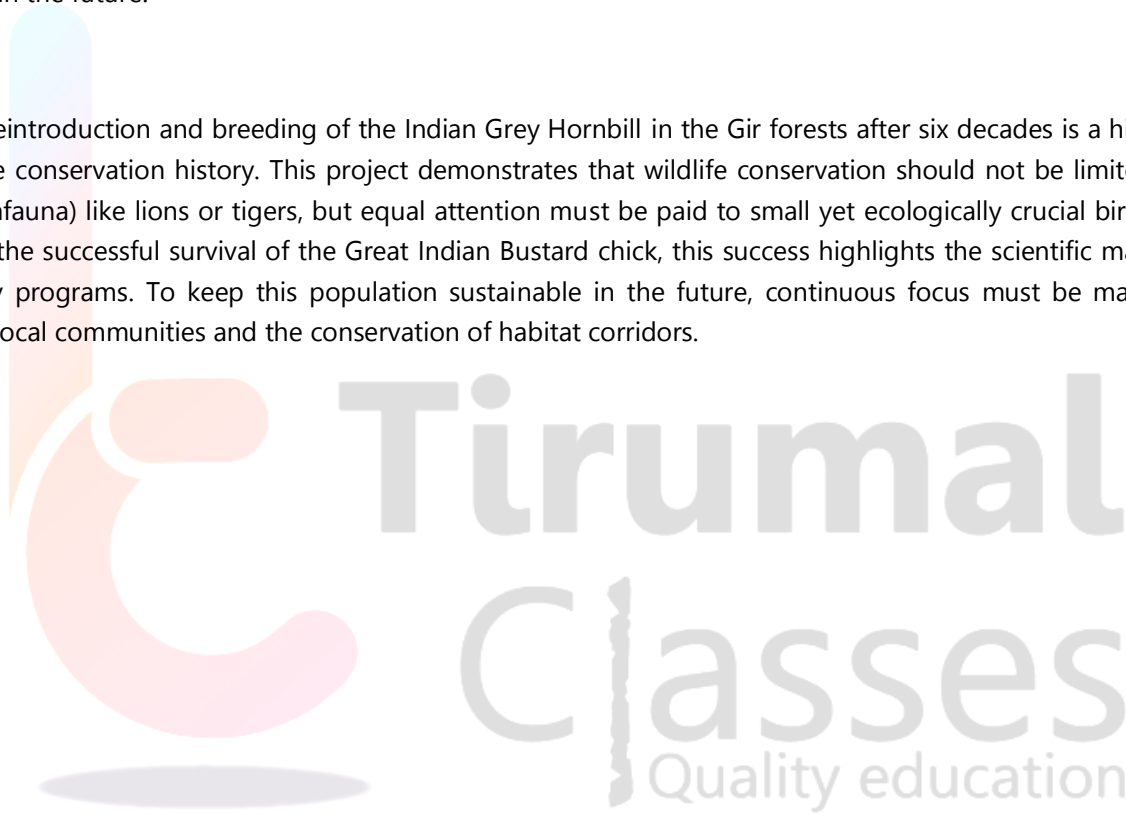
- **Restoration of Ecological Balance:** The return of a keystone or crucial seed-disperser species will strengthen the biodiversity and food chain of Gir forests, directly and positively impacting the habitat of lions and other herbivores living there.

Future Challenges:

- **Habitat Fragmentation:** Due to expanding infrastructure and human activities around Gir, there could be a shortage of large and old trees (which are essential for nesting) for the hornbills.
- **Genetic Diversity:** This population, which started with only 40 birds, may face the risk of inbreeding in the future, which could weaken their disease resistance. To prevent this, there might be a need to introduce new hornbills from other regions in the future.

Conclusion

The successful reintroduction and breeding of the Indian Grey Hornbill in the Gir forests after six decades is a historic milestone in India's wildlife conservation history. This project demonstrates that wildlife conservation should not be limited only to large mammals (megafauna) like lions or tigers, but equal attention must be paid to small yet ecologically crucial birds like hornbills. Combined with the successful survival of the Great Indian Bustard chick, this success highlights the scientific maturity of India's species recovery programs. To keep this population sustainable in the future, continuous focus must be maintained on the participation of local communities and the conservation of habitat corridors.



Daily News Analysis

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding the Indian Grey Hornbill:

1. It is primarily a frugivorous bird.
2. It plays a significant role in long-distance seed dispersal.
3. During the breeding season, it builds a nest in a tree hollow and seals the female inside.

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

Ans:d)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: What is the Species Reintroduction program? Explain its necessity in biodiversity conservation. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**



On July 15, a historical economic partnership has commenced between India and the United Kingdom (U.K.), under which the CETA and DCC agreements between both countries have become fully operational (Operationalize). India's Commerce Secretary has described this as the country's most "ambitious and aspirational" Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to date. This agreement is in line with India's goal of 'Viksit Bharat 2047', which will not only promote traditional trade (goods and services) but also prepare a future-oriented architecture for digital trade, green energy, and skilled labor mobility.

'Gold standard' India-U.K. trade deal is coming into effect today

Commerce Secretary describes pact as one of the 'most ambitious and aspirational free trade agreements' signed by the country; he adds that it will benefit farmers, fisherfolk; officials in U.K. welcome deal and highlight its multi-sectoral impact

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Double Contribution Convention (DCC) that will come into force on Wednesday are a "gold standard" and one of the "most ambitious and aspirational free trade agreements" signed by India, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Tuesday.

He added that the deals benefit India's farmers, fisherfolk, workers and women entrepreneurs. The India-U.K. CETA and the DCC were signed in July last year.

"This is one of the first free trade agreements (FTAs) of its kind, which establishes a future-oriented economic architecture between two major economies of the world," Mr. Agrawal said at a press briefing. "This is also one of the most ambitious and aspirational FTAs of India, which we are operationalising as till date."

"It is a gold standard and the first of its kind be-

Terms of trade

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Double Contribution Convention (DCC) are set to come into force on Wednesday

- Under the CETA, the U.K. will immediately eliminate tariffs on **96.8%** of its tariff lines, accounting for **97.7%** of the trade value
- India will immediately eliminate tariffs on **30.3%** of the trade value, with **47%** more seeing tariffs eliminated in a phased manner
- The DCC will exempt Indian workers and their employers from paying social security contributions in the U.K. for **5 years** if contributions are being made in India
- India has protected **sensitive sectors** such as dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers



cause of its wide sectoral coverage and deep reduction in both tariff and non tariff barriers," he added.

Under the deal, the U.K. will immediately eliminate tariffs on 96.8% of its tariff lines, accounting for 97.7% of the trade value. An additional 2% of tariff lines, amounting to 1.8% of trade value, will see reduced tariffs based on quotas. In total, this covers 98.8% of tariff lines and 99.5% of trade value.

India, on the other hand, will immediately eliminate tariffs on 30.3% of the trade value, with 47% more seeing tariffs eliminated in a phased manner. It will also provide reduced quota-based tariffs on 12.1% of the trade value. In total, this would cover 89.5% of tariff lines and 89.4% of trade value.

Officials in the U.K. have also welcomed the deal, highlighting a multi-sectoral impact. "For the City of

London, the agreement provides a strong platform to unlock even greater collaboration in financial and professional services, insurance, fintech, sustainable finance and infrastructure investment," Chris Hayward, Policy Chairman of the City of London Corporation, told *The Hindu*.

"As India continues its remarkable economic growth story, London stands ready to support the mobilisation of global capital and expertise needed to help deliver those goals," he added.

Mr. Agrawal said that the 30 chapters across which negotiations have taken place under this pact extend beyond conventional tariff liberalisation to cover digital trade, government procurement, SMEs, innovation, labour, environment, and gender.

He added that the deal addresses non-tariff barriers as well, so that issues like Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) "do not become unjustified trade restrictions for our businesses in the future".

He further explained that the deal protects India's sensitive sectors such as dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers.

'Game changer'

On the DCC, he said that the agreement was a "game changer" for India's services sector and skilled workforce. "Indian employees and their employers contribute around 25% of their salary to the U.K.'s national insurance system," he said. "Their contribution is like a tax of 25% as employees are unable to draw benefits. These are like sunk costs."

He said that the DCC will ensure that workers will not need to pay double contributions towards their social security. That is, if they are paying social security in India, then they will not have to pay it in the U.K. as well for a period of five years.

According to Mr. Agrawal, this will benefit over 75,000 Indian workers and over 900 employers. (With inputs from Sriram Lakshman in London)

Key Provisions of CETA and DCC

- Comprehensive Sectoral Coverage:** This agreement includes a total of 30 chapters, which are not limited to traditional customs duties (Tariff) alone. It includes modern subjects such as digital trade, government procurement, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), innovation, labor, environment, and gender equality.
- Deep Tariff Cuts by the UK:** Under this agreement, the U.K. will immediately eliminate customs duties on 96.8% of its tariff lines, which accounts for 97.7% of the total trade value of both countries. Additionally, quota-based concessions will be given on 2% of the lines.

Daily News Analysis

- **Phased Liberalization by India:** India will immediately eliminate tariffs on 30.3% of its trade value, while tariffs on 47% of the share will be removed in a phased manner. Apart from this, quota-based concessions will be given on 12.1% of the share.
- **Addressing Non-Tariff Barriers:** Special attention has been given in the agreement to Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) so that these do not become unfair obstacles for Indian exporters in the future.
- **Protection of Sensitive Sectors (Defensive Interests):** India has protected its sensitive domestic industries like dairy, grains, pulses, vegetables, gold-silver, smartphones, and critical polymers by keeping them out of concessions under this agreement.
- **Double Contribution Convention (DCC) - A Game Changer:** Under this, Indian professionals going to work temporarily (up to 5 years) in the U.K. will no longer have to contribute to social security (Social Security/National Insurance) in both India and the U.K. If they are contributing in India, they will get an exemption from this deduction in the U.K.

Significance for India

- **Boost to Labour-Intensive Sectors:** The immediate duty-free access provided by the U.K. will immensely benefit India's textiles, leather, footwear, marine products (Fisheries), and agriculture-related sectors. This will create new employment opportunities in the rural economy.
- **Financial Benefit to Skilled Workforce and Services Sector:** Currently, Indian employees working in the U.K. contribute about 25% of their salary to the National Insurance there, from which they receive no benefit (Sunk Cost). With the implementation of DCC, more than 75,000 Indian professionals and over 900 employers will directly save crores of rupees, and this money will be able to be deposited in their Provident Fund (EPF) in India.
- **Access to Global Capital:** London is a major financial hub of the world. This agreement will make it easier to raise British investment and global capital in India's infrastructure, fintech, and sustainable finance sectors.
- **Strategic Importance:** After exiting the European Union (Brexit) for Britain, and as an alternative to China on the global stage for India, this agreement gives a new dimension to the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" between the two countries.

Challenges & Concerns

- **Tariff Asymmetry:** While the U.K. is covering 98.8% of its tariff lines, India has been able to cover only 89.5% of its lines. This could increase competitive pressure on some of India's domestic manufacturing sectors (such as automobiles or premium products).
- **New-Gen Issues:** Chapters on environment, labor standards, and digital trade (Data Sovereignty) have been included in the agreement. Adhering to the strict standards of developed countries in these areas can be a tough challenge for Indian MSMEs in the initial phase.
- **Implementation Challenges:** Various regulatory bodies and export procedures within India will have to adapt quickly to this 'Gold Standard' agreement so that its actual benefits are visible on the ground.

Conclusion

Daily News Analysis

The implementation of India-UK CETA and DCC is a historic turning point for India's economic diplomacy. This agreement shows that India can shape a highly ambitious and modern trade agreement at the global level while protecting its sensitive domestic interests (such as dairy and agriculture). While this agreement will give Indian goods a competitive edge in British markets, India has presented an excellent example of 'people-centric' diplomacy by protecting the interests of service sector professionals through DCC. In the coming times, this economic corridor will prove to be a milestone in making India a strong part of the Global Value Chain.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Consider the following statements regarding the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA):

1. It is limited only to trade in goods.
2. It also includes provisions related to digital trade, government procurement, and MSMEs.
3. It also incorporates chapters related to labour and the environment.

Which of the above statements are correct?

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

Ans: (b)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question:What are Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)? Briefly outline their role in India's economic development.(10 Marks, 150 Words)

Page 06 :GSII :Social Justice

Recently, the Department of Health Research (DHR) under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has released the 'Draft National Health Research Policy, 2026'. The primary objective of this policy is to bring comprehensive reforms to India's health research ecosystem. This policy endeavors to align the country's scientific capabilities with the actual disease burden and public health priorities, so as to promote indigenous innovation and evidence-based policymaking.

Draft health research policy proposes overhaul of India's research ecosystem

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The Centre has released the draft National Health Research Policy, 2026, that seeks to align the country's scientific research more closely with its disease burden and public health priorities, proposing a wide-ranging restructuring of India's health research ecosystem with a sharper focus on indigenous innovation, evidence-based policymaking, and measurable outcomes.

Prepared by the Department of Health Research, the draft is the first attempt at a unified national framework spanning biomedical science, clinical medicine, public health, epidemiology, digital health, health systems, behavioural sciences, and emerging technologies.

The Ministry has invited stakeholder feedback be-



Among the key proposals is a system for identifying priority research areas.

fore the policy is finalised. It aims to address long-standing problems, including fragmented research efforts, wide regional disparities in research capacity, and the slow translation of scientific findings into actual healthcare delivery and policy.

While India has built considerable scientific capability through institutions such as the Indian Council of Medical Research

(ICMR), universities, medical colleges and other research bodies, the policy points out that this capability remains concentrated in a handful of institutions and States.

Research priorities, it notes, do not always track the country's real disease burden, health-system gaps, equity concerns or its preparedness for future public health emergencies. Administrative and regulatory delays, it adds, continue to slow down research even when funding is not the constraint.

Among the key proposals is a system for periodically identifying priority research areas, based on disease burden, scientific opportunity, equity, pandemic preparedness and strategic national interest – an agenda to be drawn up in consultation with States, Union Territories, researchers, health profes-

sionals, patients and community representatives.

Three-tier structure

The draft also lays out a three-tier governance structure: a National Health Research Stewardship Committee for overall strategic coordination, the Department of Health Research as the nodal implementing agency, and the ICMR as the scientific and technical lead. States, in turn, will be expected to weave research more tightly into local health programmes and service delivery.

Ethics, research integrity, data governance, cybersecurity and community participation have been placed at the core of this framework. Long-term national targets have also been proposed for research investment, medical science Ph.D., publications, and patents.

Challenges in the Current Health Research Sector

The policy highlights several shortcomings in India's existing research framework:

- **Fragmented Efforts:** There is a lack of coordination in research work among various institutions, leading to the duplication of both efforts and resources.
- **Regional Imbalance:** In India, research capabilities are confined to only a few selected states and premium institutions (such as ICMR and top medical colleges).
- **Imbalance with Disease Burden:** The determination of current research priorities is often not in alignment with the country's actual health needs, rural-urban disparity, and pandemic preparedness.
- **Slow Translation:** The pace of translating scientific techniques or findings discovered in laboratories into actual health services and government policies is very slow.

- **Administrative and Regulatory Barriers:** Even when there is no shortage of funding, delays in administrative and regulatory clearances slow down the pace of research.

Key Proposals and Features of the Policy

1. Periodic Determination of Priorities:

- The determination of research areas in the country will be done periodically based on the actual disease burden, scientific opportunities, social equity, pandemic preparedness, and strategic national interest.
- For this, extensive consultations will be held with states, researchers, health professionals, and representatives of the general community.

2. Three-Tier Governance Structure: To streamline this ecosystem, work will be done at three levels:

- **Top Level:** National Health Research Stewardship Committee – This will perform the task of overall strategic coordination.
- **Nodal Agency:** Department of Health Research (DHR) – This will be the main implementing agency of the policy.
- **Technical Leadership:** Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) – This will provide scientific and technical guidance.

3. Active Role of States:

- States and Union Territories will be expected to deeply integrate health research with local health programs and health services provided at the grassroots level.

4. Core Principles and Long-Term Goals of Research:

- Ethics, research integrity, data governance, cybersecurity, and community participation have been kept at the center of this framework.
- The policy sets long-term national targets for research investment (R&D Investment), increasing the number of Ph.Ds in medical science, and growth in scientific publications and patents.

Significance for UPSC Mains Examination

- **Importance of Evidence in Policymaking:** This policy will ensure that future health plans are not based merely on assumptions, but on solid scientific data (Evidence-based policymaking).
- **Universal Health Coverage (UHC):** Indigenous innovation will reduce the cost of medicines and treatment, helping to achieve the goal of affordable healthcare for all.
- **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 3):** This policy will strengthen India's efforts toward achieving the global goal of 'Good Health and Well-being'.

Conclusion

The National Health Research Policy, 2026 is a progressive step toward making India self-reliant in the health sector and preparing a robust protective shield against future pandemics. However, the success of this policy will depend on how bureaucratic shortcomings are addressed, how financially empowered the states are made, and how rapidly research findings are applied to the treatment of the general public at the grassroots level. If implemented effectively, it can rejuvenate India's public health infrastructure.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Ques: Discuss the key objectives and features of the National Health Research Policy, 2026. How can it strengthen India's public health system? **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**



Page :08 : Editorial Analysis

India-U.S. defence tech ties — big ambitions, little delivery

India-United States defence cooperation has acquired an unenviable reputation in strategic circles for generating ambitious political announcements that fail to translate into industrial outcomes. Over the past two decades, successive administrations in New Delhi and Washington have unveiled defence technology partnerships and industrial collaborations promising to transform bilateral military ties, only for them to become bogged down in protracted negotiations, export-control restrictions, technology-transfer disputes and differing commercial expectations.

The irony is that the relationship itself has expanded considerably. Since 2002, India has acquired over \$22 billion worth of U.S. defence equipment, including Apache and Chinook helicopters, C-17 and C-130J transport aircraft, P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, and M777 howitzers. While the US has become a major defence supplier, meaningful co-production and technology transfer remain elusive.

The case of the GE engine

The recent impasse over General Electric's (GE) F414 fighter engine, once hailed as the centrepiece of bilateral defence cooperation, is merely the latest – and arguably the most significant – illustration of the gap between political declarations and industrial outcomes. The estimated cost of each F414 engine has reportedly nearly tripled, rising from around ₹70 crore-80 crore to over ₹200 crore. GE has also sought an Indian investment of around \$800 million (₹7,576 crore) to establish a dedicated production line.

Disagreements over technology transfer, intellectual property and export controls have further complicated negotiations. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited is negotiating procurement and licensed manufacture of the F414 for the Tejas MkII, while the Defence Research and Development Organisation and Aeronautical Development Agency are separately engaging GE over the same engine for the proposed Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) and the Indian Navy's Twin-Engine Deck-Based Fighter. The result is a web of interlinked negotiations proving difficult to resolve.

The F414 programme was unveiled during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2023 Washington



Rahul Bedi

Defence reporter and analyst based in New Delhi and Chandigarh

visit as the flagship achievement of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), intended to symbolise a shift from a buyer-seller relationship towards genuine defence-industrial collaboration. Instead, it has become another illustration of the enduring gap between political ambition and industrial reality. Nor is this an isolated instance.

Vision to stagnation

The first serious attempt to institutionalise defence cooperation came in 2012 with the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI). Conceived to promote co-development and co-production, it generated years of meetings but delivered no significant military capability before fading into irrelevance.

Its successor, iCET (2022), expanded the agenda to semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, telecommunications, space, biotechnology, drones and resilient supply chains. Among its principal defence initiatives was the GE F414 programme, whose unresolved negotiations have become emblematic of the wider difficulty in translating political ambition into industrial outcomes.

The India-United States Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X), launched in 2023 to link defence start-ups, academia and industry, likewise generated enthusiasm but has yet to produce noteworthy co-development outcomes. Other prospective collaborations have fared little better. Discussions on co-producing the Javelin anti-tank guided missile have remained unresolved for more than a decade, while the proposed collaboration on the General Dynamics Stryker infantry combat vehicle has suffered a similar fate. Both now appear increasingly likely to be shelved quietly.

Even India's 2024 acquisition of 31 MQ-9B SkyGuardian and SeaGuardian remotely piloted aircraft from General Atomics through the U.S. government's Foreign Military Sales route for around \$3.5 billion has resembled a purchase rather than the industrial collaboration originally envisaged. Its promised package – including local assembly, partial manufacture and a domestic maintenance, repair and overhaul ecosystem – has yet to materialise.

Taken together, these outcomes reveal a pattern that is difficult to ignore. Successful

India-U.S. defence initiatives have been heralded as "historic", "transformational" or "game-changing", yet implementation has repeatedly fallen well short of the rhetoric.

The technology transfer divide

At the heart of this disconnect lie fundamentally different philosophies underpinning the two countries' defence sectors. India views defence partnerships as a means of acquiring advanced technologies, strengthening indigenous manufacturing and reducing dependence on imported matériel.

The U.S., by contrast, regards advanced defence technologies as strategic assets governed by stringent export-control regulations, particularly the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), under which the release of technical data and manufacturing know-how remains subordinate to broader security considerations.

The unresolved F414 negotiations illustrate this divide. India has sought manufacturing expertise and intellectual property to build long-term domestic capability, while the U.S. remains constrained by export-control regimes regardless of Washington's broader strategic objectives. The consequence is a defence relationship that has matured as a procurement partnership but far less as a mechanism for transferring capability and strengthening India's atmanirbharta.

Despite the undeniable expansion of India-U.S. strategic ties – marked by increasingly sophisticated military exercises, logistics agreements and enhanced interoperability – the industrial dimension of the relationship has yet to keep pace. The alphabet soup of DTTI, iCET and INDUS-X has largely disappointed, leaving officials in both countries looking to the proposed Reciprocal Defence Procurement Agreement (RDPA) as the next test of industrial cooperation.

The U.S. believes that the RDPA could reshape bilateral defence trade by granting reciprocal access to each other's procurement markets. Yet, that reciprocity could expose India's still-nascent defence manufacturers to direct competition with America's larger, wealthier and technologically more advanced defence giants. Whether this creates genuine balance or simply institutionalises unequal competition is another matter altogether.

Meaningful defence technology collaboration continues to elude the United States and India

GS Paper II: International Relations

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: "India-US defense relations are struggling to move beyond the traditional 'buyer-seller' framework and transform into genuine defense-industrial cooperation." Critically analyze this statement in the context of recent initiatives (such as iCET and the GE F414 engine deal). **(10Marks, 150 Words)**

Context :After In recent years, unprecedented progress has been observed in the strategic and military relations between India and the United States (U.S.). Both countries have launched several ambitious initiatives, such as DTTI, iCET, and INDUS-X, to strengthen defense cooperation. However, in strategic circles, this partnership is increasingly being recognized for the growing gap between political declarations and actual industrial outcomes. While India has purchased military equipment worth over \$22 billion from the U.S. since 2002, co-production and actual technology transfer (ToT) still remain a major challenge. This analysis outlines the current status, challenges, and the way forward for India-U.S. defense relations.

Key Analysis Points

1. The Procurement vs Collaboration Divide

- **Successful Procurement Partnership:** India has purchased state-of-the-art systems from the U.S., such as Apache and Chinook helicopters, C-17 and C-130J transport aircraft, P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, and M777 howitzers. The U.S. has become a major defense supplier for India.
- **Failed Industrial Cooperation:** Despite heavy procurement, both countries have been unable to break out of the traditional 'buyer-seller' framework to develop true co-development and domestic defense production capacity.

2. GE F414 Engine Deal: Political Ambition vs Industrial Reality

- **Critical Focal Point:** Announced during Prime Minister Modi's Washington visit in 2023 under the 'Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies' (iCET), the General Electric (GE) F414 fighter jet engine deal was considered a historic milestone. It is intended for use in the Tejas Mk-II, AMCA, and naval fighter jets.
- **Rising Costs and Financial Demands:** The estimated cost of each engine has risen from approximately ₹70-80 crore to over ₹200 crore (nearly a three-fold increase). Furthermore, GE has demanded an investment of around \$800 million (₹7,576 crore) to set up a dedicated production line in India.
- **Stalemate in Negotiations:** Due to issues regarding Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), the level of Technology Transfer (ToT), and U.S. export controls, this deal has become entangled in prolonged negotiations.

3. Chronology of Stagnant Initiatives

- **DTTI (2012):** The Defence Technology and Trade Initiative was formed to promote co-development, but it remained confined to meetings without delivering any significant military capability.
- **iCET (2022) and INDUS-X (2023):** These initiatives expanded to include AI, quantum computing, and semiconductors alongside defense, but they too have failed to deliver concrete results so far.
- **Other Stalled Projects:** The co-production of the Javelin Anti-Tank Guided Missile and the Stryker Infantry Combat Vehicle appears to be heading to the backburner after remaining pending for a decade.
- **MQ-9B Drone Deal:** In the purchase of 31 MQ-9B Predator drones from General Atomics for \$3.5 billion, the promises of local assembly and a domestic 'Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul' (MRO) ecosystem have not yet materialized on the ground.

4. The Core Philosophies Clash

- **India's Perspective:** India views defense partnerships as a means to enhance its 'Atmanirbharta' (self-reliance), acquire advanced technologies, and reduce foreign dependence.
- **U.S. Perspective:** The U.S. considers its advanced defense technologies as national strategic assets. These technologies are subject to stringent export control regulations, such as the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), which do not permit the sharing of technical data despite broad strategic interests.

5. Future Test: Reciprocal Defence Procurement Agreement (RDPA)

- Both countries are now looking toward a Reciprocal Defence Procurement Agreement (RDPA) to reshape bilateral defense trade.
- **Challenge:** The U.S. believes this will grant both nations access to each other's procurement markets, but critics argue it will place India's nascent defense manufacturers in direct competition with American defense giants, creating a risk of unequal competition.

Conclusion

While the strategic relationship between India and the U.S. has strengthened significantly in terms of military exercises, logistics agreements (such as LEMOA, COMCASA), and interoperability, the defense-industrial dimension lags far behind. If both nations are to realize the true potential of their strategic partnership, the U.S. must ease its rigid export control regulations (ITAR), and India must proceed with realistic commercial expectations. Moving beyond mere paper agreements (DTTI, iCET), India's goal of defense self-reliance cannot be fully achieved while remaining dependent on the U.S. until actual transfer of technology and joint manufacturing begin. Bridging this gap between political claims and industrial reality is imperative for a long-term partnership.