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THE HINDU
INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

Daily News Analysis

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

Tuesday, 30 Dec, 2025

Edition : International Table of Contents

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Page 01 : GS III : Indian Economy / Prelims Exam

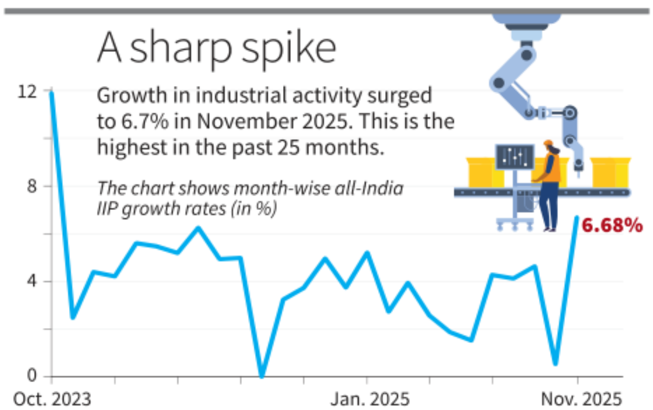
India's Index of Industrial Production (IIP) recorded a 25-month high growth of 6.7% in November 2025, led by a robust expansion in manufacturing (8%) and capital goods (10.4%). This marks a sharp rebound from the subdued 0.5% growth in October, indicating a revival in industrial momentum after recent disruptions caused by unseasonal rains and festive calendar effects.

Manufacturing, capital goods lead IIP growth to 25-month high of 6.7% in Nov.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) growth reached a 25-month high of 6.7% in November, driven by broad-based gains led by manufacturing and capital goods sectors, data released by the Union Statistics and Programme Implementation Ministry on Monday showed.

Within the IIP, the manufacturing output growth accelerated to a 25-month high of 8%. This was on a relatively high base of 5% in November 2024. "While the year-on-year IIP growth surged to a 25-month high of 6.7% in November 2025 from 0.5% in October 2025, this upswing largely reflects the shift in the festive calendar, restocking after the festive season sales, as well as some normalisation in activity across mining and electricity segments following the excess unseasonal rains in the previous month," Aditi Nayar, chief economist, ICRA Ltd., said.



Ms. Nayar said that despite the demand boost following GST rate rationalisation in September, IIP growth averaged 3.6% during the October-November period, lower than the 4.3% expansion seen in the July-September quarter.

The infrastructure and construction sectors grew at 12.1% in November, the fastest since October 2023.

Buoyed by strong performances in manufacturing and construction sectors, the capital goods sector recorded an 11-month-high growth of 10.4% in November.

Mining output growth accelerated to a three-month high of 5.4% in November. The electricity sector was the only one to contract, declining by 1.5% in November, down from a growth of 4.4% in November last year.

Consumer durables and consumer non-durables sectors rebounded in November, growing 10.3% and 7.3%, respectively.

Key Trends and Sectoral Performance

Manufacturing as the Growth Engine

Manufacturing growth accelerated to 8%, the highest in over two years, despite a relatively high base of 5% in November 2024.

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This suggests not merely a base effect but a genuine improvement in production activity, aided by post-festive restocking and stabilisation of supply chains.

Capital Goods: Indicator of Investment Revival

Capital goods output rose by 10.4% (11-month high).

This is a leading indicator of private and public investment, signalling improved business confidence, infrastructure push, and higher capacity creation—critical for medium-term growth.

Infrastructure and Construction Boost

Infrastructure and construction goods grew by 12.1%, the fastest since October 2023.

Reflects sustained government capital expenditure, particularly in roads, railways, housing, and urban infrastructure.

Mining and Electricity: Divergent Trends

Mining output grew by 5.4%, a three-month high, indicating normalisation after weather-related disruptions.

Electricity contracted by 1.5%, suggesting uneven demand recovery and possible efficiency gains or sector-specific constraints.

Consumer Demand Revival

Consumer durables (10.3%) and non-durables (7.3%) rebounded, pointing towards improved discretionary and essential consumption.

This is important given recent concerns over urban demand softness.

Underlying Drivers

Festive Calendar Effect: Shifting of festivals led to demand spillover into November.

Restocking Cycle: Post-festive inventory rebuilding supported manufacturing output.

GST Rate Rationalisation (September): Provided a demand impulse, though its impact appears moderate.

Weather Normalisation: Mining and electricity recovered after disruptions due to excess rains in October.

Critical Assessment

Not a Broad-Based Sustained Surge Yet: Despite November's spike, average IIP growth for Oct–Nov stood at 3.6%, lower than 4.3% in Q2 (July–September). This suggests that the recovery is uneven and episodic, not yet entrenched.

Investment vs Consumption Balance: The strong capital goods performance is encouraging, but sustained industrial growth requires durable consumption revival, especially in rural areas.

Electricity Contraction as a Red Flag: Persistent weakness in electricity output may constrain industrial scalability if demand accelerates faster than supply readiness.

Linkages with Broader Macroeconomic Themes

Atmanirbhar Bharat & Make in India: Manufacturing revival aligns with long-term industrial policy goals.

Capex-led Growth Strategy: Reinforces the government's emphasis on public investment crowding in private investment.

Employment Potential: Manufacturing and construction growth can support job creation, crucial for inclusive growth.

Inflation-Growth Trade-off: Industrial expansion without supply bottlenecks can help manage cost-push inflation.

Conclusion

The November 2025 IIP data signals a cyclical upturn in India's industrial activity, with manufacturing and capital goods providing a strong thrust. While the headline number reflects favourable base effects and festive-related factors, the robust capital goods and infrastructure growth point towards a gradual revival of the investment cycle. However, for this momentum to translate into sustained, broad-based industrial growth, consistent demand revival, energy sector stability, and continued policy support will be essential.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) in India, consider the following statements:

1. Capital goods growth in IIP is generally considered a proxy for trends in private investment in the economy.

2. A contraction in electricity output necessarily implies a contraction in overall industrial output.

3. Manufacturing has the highest weight among the three major sectors of IIP.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 3 only

(b) 1 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (a)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Evaluate how short-term factors such as festive demand and GST rationalisation interact with long-term industrial policy objectives like Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat.

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Page 06 : GS III: Science and Tech / Prelims Exam

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, has accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for defence capital acquisitions worth ₹79,000 crore for the Army, Navy, and Air Force. This approval is significant in the context of India's evolving threat environment, the push for jointness among the Services, and the broader objective of building a self-reliant defence industrial base under Atmanirbhar Bharat.

DAC gives its nod for defence purchases worth ₹79,000 cr.

Committee accorded approval for the Army's proposal for radars and guided rocket ammunition, Navy's request for tugs and high frequency radio, and Air Force's proposal for missiles, simulators

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Monday accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisition proposals amounting to about ₹79,000 crore from the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

According to the Ministry of Defence, the DAC approved the procurement of Loiter Munition Systems for Artillery Regiments, Low Level Light Weight Radars, Long Range Guided Rocket Ammunition for the Pinaka Multiple Launch Rocket System (MRLS), and Integrated Drone Detection and Interdiction System (IDD&IS) Mk-II for the Indian Army.

The Loiter Munition Systems will enable precision strikes against tactical targets, while the Low Level Light Weight Radars will enhance detection and tracking of small, low-flying unmanned aerial systems. The Long Range Guided Rockets will significantly improve the range and accuracy of the Pinaka MRLS, enabling effective engagement of high-value targets.

Joint synergy: The ₹79,000-crore package is aimed at boosting the operational capabilities of the three Services. FILE PHOTO

The IDD&IS Mk-II, with enhanced range, will strengthen the protection of vital assets in tactical battle areas and the hinterland, the Defence Ministry said.

For the Indian Navy, the AoN was accorded for the procurement of Bollard Pull (BP) Tugs, High Frequency Software Defined Radio (HF SDR) Manpack systems, and the leasing of High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS).

The BP Tugs will assist naval ships and submarines during berthing, unberthing and manoeuvring in confined harbour waters. The HF SDR Manpack will enhance long-range secure communications during boarding and landing operations, while the HALE RPAS will provide persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and strengthen maritime domain awareness across the Indian Ocean Region.

For the Indian Air Force, the DAC approved the AoN for procurement of the Automatic Take-off and Landing Recording System, Astra Mk-II beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles, Full Mission Simulators, and SPICE-1000 long-range guidance kits. The Automatic Take-off and Landing Recording System will enhance aerospace safety by enabling high-definition, all-weather automatic recording of take-off and landing phases. Astra Mk-II missiles, with enhanced range, will boost the capability of IAF fighter aircraft to engage adversary targets from extended distances.

The Full Mission Simulator for the Light Combat Aircraft Tejas will strengthen pilot training in a cost-effective and safe environment, while SPICE-1000 kits will enhance the IAF's long-range precision strike capability.

DRDO tests Pinaka rocket

NEW DELHI

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Monday successfully conducted the maiden flight test of the Pinaka Long Range Guided Rocket (LRGR-120) at the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur.

The Defence Ministry said that the test marked a major milestone in India's indigenous rocket artillery programme.

What does AoN signify in defence procurement?

AoN is the first formal approval stage in India's defence procurement process. It establishes:

The operational necessity of the equipment,

The broad cost envelope, and

The procurement category (Buy Indian, Buy & Make Indian, Leasing, etc.).

Thus, AoN reflects strategic intent rather than immediate contract finalisation, but it is a critical signal of future capability development.

Service-wise Analysis and Strategic Significance

1. Indian Army: Focus on Precision, Drones, and Counter-UAS

Key approvals include:

Loiter Munition Systems: Enable precision strikes against tactical targets, reflecting lessons from recent conflicts (Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh) where loitering munitions altered battlefield dynamics.

Low Level Light Weight Radars: Enhance detection of small, low-flying drones, addressing asymmetric threats along borders.

Long Range Guided Rocket Ammunition for Pinaka MLRS: Improves range and accuracy, enhancing India's stand-off strike capability.

Integrated Drone Detection and Interdiction System (IDD&IS) Mk-II: Strengthens protection of critical military and civilian assets against drone-based attacks.

2. Indian Navy: Maritime Domain Awareness & IOR Focus

Approvals include:

Bollard Pull (BP) Tugs: Essential for safe harbour operations, often overlooked but critical for naval readiness.

HF Software Defined Radio (SDR) Manpack: Improves secure, long-range communications, especially during boarding and amphibious operations.

Leasing of High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) RPAS: Enables persistent Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

3. Indian Air Force: Air Superiority, Training, and Precision Strike

Approved systems include:

Astra Mk-II Beyond Visual Range (BVR) Missiles: Enhances air-to-air combat capability and reduces dependence on imports.

SPICE-1000 Guidance Kits: Strengthen long-range precision strike options with high accuracy.

Automatic Take-off and Landing Recording System: Improves aerospace safety and accident investigation.

Full Mission Simulators for LCA Tejas: Boosts pilot training in a cost-effective and risk-free environment.

Broader Strategic and Policy Implications

Jointness and Integrated Capability Development

The package reflects tri-service synergy, moving beyond service-specific silos.

Supports future integration under theatre commands.

Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence

Many systems (Pinaka, Astra, IDD&IS) are indigenously developed or manufactured, boosting domestic defence industry and MSMEs.

Shift from Quantity to Quality

Focus on precision, ISR, electronic warfare, and drones indicates a qualitative transformation rather than mere numerical expansion.

Lessons from Contemporary Conflicts

Counter-drone systems, loiter munitions, and ISR platforms show India's learning from modern, technology-intensive warfare.

Conclusion

The DAC's approval of ₹79,000 crore worth of defence acquisitions represents more than routine procurement—it reflects India's strategic recalibration towards technology-driven, precision-centric, and joint military capabilities. By prioritising counter-drone systems, long-range precision weapons, ISR assets, and advanced training infrastructure, India is preparing its armed forces for future warfare while strengthening indigenous defence manufacturing. For UPSC, this development is a textbook illustration of the linkage between national security, defence reforms, indigenisation, and geopolitical imperatives.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : With reference to the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), consider the following statements:

1. It is chaired by the Defence Minister of India.

2. Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) is the final stage of defence procurement.

3. DAC approves capital acquisition proposals for the Armed Forces.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 3 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (a)

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Page 08 : GS II : Governance / Prelims Exam

Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance has emerged as a critical public policy challenge as AI systems increasingly influence economic decision-making, social behaviour, and psychological well-being. India's current regulatory approach relies largely on existing legal frameworks—the IT Act and Rules, sectoral financial regulations, and data protection norms—rather than a dedicated AI safety or consumer protection regime.

In contrast, countries such as China have begun experimenting with explicit "duty of care" frameworks, especially to address psychological and behavioural harms. The debate, therefore, is not only about how to regulate AI, but also when and at what level of the value chain regulation should intervene, given India's limited domestic AI capacity.

India's Current Regulatory Posture: Strengths and Gaps

1. Fragmented but Functional Regulation

India currently regulates AI indirectly:

- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) uses the IT Rules to address risks such as deepfakes, online fraud, and synthetic content labelling.
- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced expectations for model risk management in credit and the FREE-AI framework to ensure responsible AI use in finance.
- Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has pushed for accountability and explainability in AI tools used by regulated entities.

Strength:
This approach avoids over-regulation at an early stage and leverages sectoral expertise, especially in finance.

Limitation:
India lacks an explicit AI consumer safety or product liability regime, particularly addressing psychological harms, manipulation, and emotional dependence—risks that are not fully covered by unlawful-content-based regulation.

Comparative Perspective: China vs India

China's draft rules on emotionally interactive AI services introduce:

- Mandatory warnings against excessive use

Model conduct

India must improve access to AI resources, and upskill its workforce

India has been regulating Artificial Intelligence (AI) use by expecting due diligence from platforms under the IT Act and Rules, regulating the financial sector, and with privacy and data protection Rules. It does not yet have a consumer safety regime that deals with the state's duty of care. China pitched such a regime with draft rules that it unveiled last week, which target emotionally interactive services, and propose to require companies to warn against excessive use and intervene when they detect signs of extreme emotional states. If these rules seem justified for targeting psychological dependence that general rules about unlawful content do not address, they may also be harsh because expecting providers to identify users' states can incentivise more intimate monitoring. India's posture is less intrusive, but also more incomplete, because it banks on existing laws. Thus, it regulates adjacent risks but has not articulated a duty of care *vis-à-vis* AI product safety, especially for psychological harms. MeitY has used the IT Rules to push platforms to curb deepfakes and fraud, and define and label "synthetically generated" content. Financial regulators have also adopted structural measures, with the RBI setting expectations to govern model risk in credit and developing its FREE-AI framework process and SEBI pushing for clear accountability on how regulated entities use AI tools. While some measures are preemptive, MeitY has been largely reactive.

India has a large ecosystem that adopts models but is far behind the U.S. and China in building frontier models of its own. In this context, it should beware the cons of 'regulate first, build later', especially since domestic capacity is lacking. A more practical way might be to consider how it can nurture a frontier model and govern the overall use of models, many of which will remain privately built and foreign for a while, inside Indian markets. On the first count, India can focus on improving access to computational resources, upskilling the workforce, increasing public procurement, and translating research to industry while sidestepping the pitfall of paralysis by consensus, which could increase dependency. On the second, India should consider regulating downstream use more assertively without choking upstream capability. It can do this by adding obligations on companies that are deploying products in high-risk contexts, and regulating how they monitor and respond to a model's behaviour, to existing privacy and consumer protection rules, for example, by expecting companies to submit incident reports, rather than requiring them to monitor users' emotions. This way, India can write rules for how Indians use models without assuming that the global technology trajectory will rearrange itself to match its preferences.

Obligations on companies to intervene when users show signs of emotional distress

Implications:

These rules acknowledge psychological dependence as a regulatory concern.

However, they risk over-intrusive surveillance, incentivising platforms to monitor users' emotions deeply, raising privacy and civil liberties concerns.

India's approach is less intrusive, but also less comprehensive, as it assumes existing laws are sufficient and places the burden of responsibility largely on platforms' due diligence rather than on a clearly articulated state duty of care.

Structural Challenge: Regulating Without Building

A central concern highlighted is India's weak position in frontier AI model development:

India is a large adopter and market, but remains dependent on foreign-built, privately owned models, unlike the U.S. and China.

Premature or heavy-handed regulation risks creating a "regulate first, build later" trap, increasing long-term technological dependence.

Way Forward: A Balanced and Context-Specific Strategy

1. Building Domestic Capacity (Supply-Side Focus)

India should prioritise:

Access to computational resources (public compute infrastructure, cloud credits).

Workforce upskilling in AI research, deployment, and safety engineering.

Public procurement of AI solutions to create demand and learning-by-doing effects.

Translation of research into industry, avoiding "paralysis by consensus" that delays execution.

This aligns with broader goals of Atmanirbhar Bharat and digital sovereignty.

2. Regulating Downstream Use, Not Upstream Innovation

Rather than intrusive monitoring of users:

Impose higher obligations on AI deployment in high-risk contexts (finance, healthcare, elections, education).

Require incident reporting, audit trails, and post-deployment monitoring of model behaviour.

Integrate these obligations into consumer protection and privacy frameworks, thereby extending existing laws instead of creating a rigid AI-specific code.

This approach allows India to govern how AI is used in Indian society, without attempting to reshape global technology trajectories beyond its control.

Broader Governance Significance

Reflects the tension between innovation and regulation in emerging technologies.

Highlights the limits of content-centric regulation in addressing behavioural and psychological harms.

Raises questions of state capacity, strategic autonomy, and regulatory sequencing in technology governance.

Demonstrates India's preference for adaptive, principle-based regulation over prescriptive controls.

Conclusion

India's AI governance framework is currently pragmatic but incomplete. While its reliance on existing laws avoids intrusive surveillance and preserves innovation space, it falls short in articulating a clear duty of care for AI-induced consumer and psychological harms.

The optimal path lies neither in China-style overreach nor in regulatory minimalism, but in a sequenced strategy—first building domestic AI capacity through compute access and skills, and simultaneously assertively regulating downstream, high-risk uses through accountability and incident-based oversight. Such an approach would allow India to safeguard citizens, reduce dependency, and remain aligned with global technological realities.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Which one of the following best explains the term "regulate first, build later" in the context of AI governance?

(a) Prioritising consumer protection over innovation

(b) Imposing AI regulation before domestic technological capacity is developed

(c) Delaying AI adoption until ethical standards are finalised

(d) Restricting foreign AI models to promote indigenous startups

Ans : b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Artificial Intelligence poses risks that go beyond unlawful content, including behavioural and psychological harms. In this context, discuss the relevance of a 'duty of care' framework for AI governance in India.

Page 08 : GS II : Indian Polity / Prelims Exam

The article outlines how India's growth trajectory in 2025 has been shaped less by headline-grabbing announcements and more by incremental, structural reforms. As India crosses the $4 trillion GDP mark and improves its sovereign credit outlook, the emphasis shifts from short-term growth impulses to long-term institutional capacity building.

The quiet foundations for India's next growth phase

Hardeep S. Puri

is Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India

As 2025 draws to a close, the loud headlines are easy to spot, but what is easier to miss is the quieter work of governance, the steady, week after week clearing of bottlenecks – the cumulative push is what I mean by Reform Express 2025.

India crossed about $4.1 trillion in nominal GDP and overtook Japan as the world's fourth largest economy. Standard and Poor's upgraded India's sovereign rating to BBB after 18 years, signalling that the macro story has acquired durability, not just speed. In an uncertain world where political churn has become the norm, India's stable leadership makes reforms credible, and credible reforms convert private caution into private investment.

I have seen, across negotiating tables, from the GATT and WTO system to multilateral forums, that rules are only as good as the incentives they create. When procedures are opaque, discretion expands, and then even well-intentioned policy ends up discouraging enterprise. When procedures are clean and time-bound, competition thrives, investment plans get executed, and jobs follow.

India's total exports hit $825.25 billion during 2024-25, representing an annual growth of over 6%. To support this volume of trade, the government introduced several digital tools such as The Trade Connect ePlatform, a single digital window for exporters, and the Trade Intelligence and Analytics (TIA) portal for providing real-time market data.

The trade agreements

The India-United Kingdom Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement signed in July 2025 created a stronger platform for Indian exporters, with wide duty-free access and clearer pathways for services and skilled mobility. In December 2025, India signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with Oman, strengthening a strategic economic corridor for goods, services, and investment. India also concluded negotiations for a free trade agreement with New Zealand, expanding India's reach into high value markets and setting a template for disciplined, commercially meaningful agreements.

India's startup sector expanded to include over two lakh government-recognised startups, which helped create more than 21 lakh jobs. The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) processed over 326 million orders, averaging more than 5.9 lakh daily transactions. Additionally, the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) saw its cumulative transaction value cross ₹16.41 lakh crore, with 11 lakh micro and small enterprises receiving orders worth over ₹7.35 lakh crore.

India also improved its position in the Global Innovation Index, rising to 38th place among 139 economies. Efforts to simplify business operations resulted in the reduction of over 47,000 compliances and the decriminalisation of 4,458 legal provisions. By late November, the National Single Window System processed more than 8.29 lakh approvals. Infrastructure planning also saw changes as the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan opened to the private sector, and the Project Monitoring Group portal has onboarded over 3,000 projects valued at more than ₹76 lakh crore.

Better legislation

Embracing trust-based governance, Parliament passed the Repealing and Amending Bill 2025, clearing out 71 obsolete Acts that had outlived their purpose. Ease of doing business also moved closer to the entrepreneur through district-level reform frameworks, including the District Business Reform Action Plan 2025, which seeks to make local administrations more responsive, predictable, and accountable.

A modern labour regime matters for scale, for manufacturing, and for a services economy that wants to formalise jobs while expanding social security coverage. With the four labour codes coming into effect from November 21, 2025, 29 central labour laws have been consolidated into a simpler framework covering wages, industrial relations, social security and workplace safety.

The Securities Markets Code Bill was introduced to modernise securities law and strengthen the Securities and Exchange Board of India's investigative and enforcement capacity, with proposals for specialised market courts, stronger information sharing with regulators, and time-bound grievance redress. At a moment when retail participation has expanded and India is drawing larger global portfolio interest, regulatory clarity becomes part of national competitiveness, helping savings flow into productive investment.

Logistics is where reform becomes visible in costs, and 2025 saw a push to modernise the maritime backbone of trade. Nearly 95% of India's trade by volume and about 70% by value moves through maritime routes, so port and shipping efficiency is a competitiveness issue. The Indian Ports Act, 2025 replaced a colonial-era framework and introduced modern governance tools, including state-level dispute resolution, a statutory coordination council, and stronger norms on safety, disaster readiness and environmental preparedness. The Merchant Shipping Act, 2025 and the Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 2025 further modernised shipping law, updating rules, liabilities and dispute frameworks to reflect contemporary commerce.

The Cabinet approved a package of ₹69,725 crore to strengthen shipbuilding, including a Maritime Development Fund of ₹25,000 crore and components for financial assistance and development, points to a larger ambition: build industrial depth, reduce dependence, and keep freight value within India over time. This is industrial policy in the classic sense, creating an ecosystem where private capital can enter with a clearer risk framework, and where jobs are created not only in ports but across shipyards, components, engineering, and services.

A focus on energy

Energy reforms, too, were designed for long cycle investment. The Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Act, 2025 and the new Petroleum and Natural Gas Rules 2025 sought to reduce investor risk by emphasising stability of terms during the life of a lease, moving toward a single petroleum lease across the project life cycle, and putting clearer timelines on approvals. The Open Acreage Licensing Policy continued widening the exploration map, with Round X offering 25 blocks across about 0.2 million square kilometres, predominantly offshore, including deepwater and ultra deepwater opportunities. Alongside this, the National Deep Water Exploration Mission signalled a strategic focus on domestic resources, technology, and capability in complex exploration.

Reform Express 2025 also carried a strategic energy and technology dimension. Budget 2025 set out a Nuclear Energy Mission with an outlay of ₹20,000 crore to accelerate small modular reactors and other advanced designs, aligned with the national objective of reaching 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047, and a target of five indigenously designed operational small modular reactors by 2033. The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill is a huge leap for modernising India's civil nuclear framework and opening a pathway for carefully regulated private participation. Nuclear energy adds firm, low carbon power to the grid, and strengthens India's ability to build advanced manufacturing, data infrastructure, and energy intensive industry with greater confidence.

Put together, these reforms show a pattern: clean up the statute book, decriminalise the trivial, modernise labour compliance, strengthen market governance, digitise trade processes, fix logistics, and de-risk long cycle energy investment.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently argued that the state's job is to reduce the burden on entrepreneurs so that productivity can compound. That is the strategic meaning of Reform Express 2025. The seeds of the next phase of double-digit growth are sown in this quiet, cumulative work, and India is doing it with a steadiness that many economies have lost.

> In a quiet and cumulative way, 'Reform Express 2025' is sowing the seeds of the next phase of India's double-digit growth

Core Themes and Analytical Dimensions

1. Institutional Reforms and Regulatory Certainty

A key takeaway is the focus on predictability and rule-based governance. Reduction of compliances, decriminalisation of minor offences, and repeal of obsolete laws reflect a transition from control-oriented regulation to facilitative governance.

This reduces transaction costs and regulatory risk, which are major deterrents to private investment in India.

The National Single Window System and district-level reform frameworks indicate decentralisation of ease-of-doing-business reforms, addressing India's long-standing "last-mile governance" problem.

UPSC Link: Governance reforms, regulatory quality, World Bank's institutional indicators, investment climate.

2. Trade Policy: From Defensive to Strategic Integration

India's recent trade agreements (with the UK, Oman, and negotiations with New Zealand) signal a shift toward selective and calibrated trade openness, unlike earlier phases of either excessive protectionism or uncritical liberalisation.

Emphasis on services, skilled mobility, and market access reflects India's comparative advantages.

Digital trade facilitation tools (Trade Connect ePlatform, TIA portal) enhance export competitiveness by addressing information asymmetry and procedural delays.

UPSC Link: External sector reforms, FTAs, export-led growth, digital public infrastructure.

3. Startup Ecosystem and Digital Marketplaces

The expansion of startups, ONDC, and GeM demonstrates how state-enabled digital platforms can democratise market access, especially for MSMEs.

ONDC reduces platform monopolies and promotes competition.

GeM integrates public procurement with MSME inclusion, supporting formalisation and scale.

Critical Perspective: Sustainability of startups, quality of employment, and regional concentration remain challenges.

UPSC Link: MSMEs, digital economy, platform governance.

4. Labour Reforms and Formalisation of Employment

The operationalisation of the four labour codes represents one of the most consequential yet sensitive reforms.

Consolidation of 29 laws improves compliance clarity and reduces inspector raj.

Potential benefits include higher labour productivity, better social security coverage, and improved manufacturing competitiveness.

Concerns: Implementation capacity at the State level and safeguarding worker rights during the transition.

UPSC Link: Labour reforms, demographic dividend, manufacturing-led growth.

5. Logistics and Maritime Reforms: Reducing Structural Costs

India's logistics costs (historically ~13–14% of GDP) have been a major competitiveness bottleneck.

New maritime legislation replaces colonial-era frameworks with modern governance, dispute resolution, and safety norms.

Investment in shipbuilding and maritime infrastructure reflects strategic industrial policy, aimed at import substitution and value retention.

UPSC Link: Infrastructure, logistics efficiency, industrial corridors.

6. Energy Sector Reforms: Long-Term Growth Enabler

Energy reforms are designed for long-gestation, capital-intensive investments.

Stability of contractual terms in hydrocarbons reduces policy risk.

Expansion of offshore exploration enhances energy security.

Nuclear energy reforms, including SMRs, address the trilemma of energy security, sustainability, and reliability.

Analytical Insight: Nuclear energy complements renewables by providing base-load power critical for advanced manufacturing and data infrastructure.

UPSC Link: Energy security, climate commitments, low-carbon transition.

7. Financial and Market Governance

The proposed Securities Markets Code Bill seeks to modernise capital market regulation amid rising retail participation.

Stronger enforcement and faster dispute resolution enhance investor confidence.

Efficient capital markets are essential for channelising household savings into productive investment.

UPSC Link: Financial sector reforms, capital markets, investment mobilisation.

Synthesis: What Makes These Reforms Significant?

Cumulative Impact: Individually modest, collectively transformative.

Second-Generation Reforms: Focus on implementation, institutions, and incentives rather than headline liberalisation.

Risk Reduction: Across energy, trade, labour, and logistics, the emphasis is on de-risking private investment.

State as Enabler: Shift from direct control to ecosystem creation.

Conclusion

The reforms highlighted represent a quiet but decisive recalibration of India's growth strategy—away from episodic stimulus and toward institutional resilience and productivity-led expansion. By cleaning up the statute book, modernising labour and market regulations, strengthening logistics, and securing long-term energy investments, India is laying the groundwork for sustained high growth. As articulated by Narendra Modi, the role of the state is increasingly to reduce friction rather than manage enterprise. For UPSC aspirants, this episode illustrates how governance quality, regulatory certainty, and infrastructure efficiency together form the real foundations of economic transformation, beyond transient political narratives.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : The National Single Window System (NSWS) is best described as:

A. A portal for dispute resolution in commercial courts

B. A digital platform integrating central and state-level business approvals

C. A marketplace for MSMEs to access government procurement

D. A trade intelligence system for export forecasting

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques : Discuss how regulatory certainty and reduction of compliance burden contribute to private investment and long-term economic growth in India. (250 words)

Page 11 : GS II & III : International Relations & Indian Economy

The recently concluded India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) marks a significant milestone in India's evolving trade diplomacy. Finalised in December after being announced in March 2025, the agreement reflects India's calibrated shift towards selective trade liberalisation while safeguarding sensitive domestic sectors. In a global context marked by protectionism, supply-chain disruptions, and geopolitical realignments, the FTA exemplifies India's attempt to diversify markets, deepen strategic partnerships, and integrate more meaningfully into global value chains.

EXPLAINER

What is the India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement?

What zero-duty access will India get, and how much FDI is New Zealand committing to by 2030? Which sectors in New Zealand have criticised the deal? Why is India accelerating FTAs with countries? How will labour-intensive sectors like textiles, leather, gems, and processed foods benefit?

Saee Pande

The story so far:

The recent India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was concluded in December, under which New Zealand will levy zero duty on 100% of India's exports and bring in $20 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by 2030.

What are the key bargains?

India will receive zero-duty market access for all its exports to New Zealand. In return, India will relax tariffs on 95% of imports from New Zealand, with 57% of these products becoming duty-free from day one.

New Zealand has committed to investing $20 billion in India over the next 15 years, with firm clawback mechanisms in case the investment doesn't meet the stipulated timeline. The FDI is aimed at promoting skill mobility and services, creating employment and growth opportunities across 118 sectors. For the first time, New Zealand has agreed to facilitate trade in Ayurveda, yoga, and traditional medicine services with India.

The deal also makes provisions for the support and mobility of Indian skilled workers. Youth, students, and professionals will find it easier to live and work in New Zealand.

The FTA creates opportunities for India to become a key supplier of skilled workforce in services such as IT professionals, Engineers, Yoga instructors, Indian chefs, Music teachers, as well as in sectors including healthcare, education, and construction.

Student mobility, work permits of up to 20 hours per week while studying, and extended post-study work visas are some of the opportunities for Indian youth to get global exposure.

The agreement also builds on MSMEs and employment opportunities through labour-intensive sectors, including textiles and apparel, leather and footwear, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, and processed food items.

Which sectors has India kept outside the agreement?

India has refused to give market access to major items crucial to New Zealand, such as dairy and agricultural products, including milk, cheese, cream, butter, yogurt, onions, sugar, edible oils, spices, and rubber, in order to protect Indian farmers and small and medium industries.

New Zealand will develop focused action plans to develop and improve productivity, quality, and sectoral capabilities for fruit growers in India, particularly for exotic fruits like kiwifruit, apples, and honey. This cooperation will ensure the establishment of centres of excellence, improved planting material, capacity building for growers, technical support for orchard management, post-harvest practices, supply chains, and food safety.

Why is the FTA important?

More than a breakthrough, the India-New Zealand FTA is a framework for deeper cooperation in the future. It is India's conscious move to increase its global economic footprint. Trade diversification demands a deep and deliberate transformation of the country's productive sector and integration into global value chains.

Strong ties: Prime Minister of New Zealand, Christopher Luxon and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 17. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

The India-New Zealand FTA is hailed for being the fastest concluded, completed in a record time of nine months after being announced in March 2025. It enhances market access and tariff preferences for Indian exports to New Zealand, while proving to be a gateway to Oceania and Pacific Island markets. Standing at $49,380, New Zealand is among the higher-income economies in Oceania.

The Indian diaspora in New Zealand constitutes 5% of its population, which amounts to 3,00,000 persons. This creates a promising exchange and opens opportunities for soft power politics between the two nations.

Currently, India's bilateral merchandise trade with New Zealand stands at $1.3 billion. The deal aims to double this figure over the next five years.

India has instated strict safeguards to protect its sensitive sectors, like agriculture and dairy, from one of the world's largest dairy exporters.

This is also one of the first FTAs negotiated and concluded entirely by a women-led and women-driven team, from the chief negotiating officer to the ambassador to New Zealand.

Why is India accelerating new FTAs?

By engaging with the Pacific, West Asia, and Africa as trade partners, India is leveraging its position and promoting realignments through bilateral engagements and FTAs.

FTAs provide a platform to pursue unique and region-specific commitments, creating room for WTO-plus commitments, especially in areas like services, digital trade, and investment. Diversification of trade partners means that India doesn't have to be dependent on traditional markets such as the EU, the U.S., and China.

FTAs are aligned with India's development goals and policies, such as Make in India, and securing India's sensitive sectors through technology transfers and production-induced incentive schemes that can help in aligning Indian manufacturing with the global value chains.

India is currently determined to materialise FTAs with several countries, including Russia, Oman, the U.K., and New Zealand, in spite of its not-so-successful past FTA engagements. This points to India's attempt at securing strategic and geopolitical alliances via economic and trade liberalisation.

This is India's third FTA this year, after agreements with the U.K. and Oman. It is a part of a broad strategy that India is determined to take forward after the U.S. imposed steep tariffs. A large chunk of India's trade is U.S.-dependent. The bilateral trade between India and the U.S. stands at $132 billion, and changes in the tariffs by the U.S. really hurt India's trade.

India's exports to the U.S. declined sharply in September and October, dropping to 12% and 8.5%, respectively. The Indo-U.S. free trade deal is in slow progress, and 50% of the tariffs still remain unchanged. This has resulted in a departure from the U.S. and into an urgent need for diversification of India's trade policies and strategic alliances in order to attract greener trade pastures.

One of the main reasons for the stalling of the Indo-U.S. bilateral talks is India's steadfast policy of not opening up its farming and dairy sector to concessions in the FTA. India is thus making a substantial move from short-term economic partnerships to long-term trade alliances.

The India-New Zealand deal builds a structure that is more investor-friendly. India is willing to let go of its protectionist image by lowering trade barriers, promoting ease of business, and opening its markets. India's FTAs today go well beyond tariff reduction; they are more of a framework for future cooperation and economic alignment.

What criticisms does the agreement face?

This is New Zealand's first FTA that excludes dairy and agriculture from its purview, due to which it is heavily criticised in New Zealand by coalition partners of the current government. The Foreign Minister of New Zealand said that the deal is 'neither free nor fair' as it bypasses the dairy and agriculture sector, the country's largest industry, and added that they will vote against the bill when it comes to the floor in the New Zealand Parliament in 2026. India, on the other hand, assumes an easy passage to legislation.

In India, FTAs are criticised for widening trade deficits and generating asymmetric gains, as it has led to imports from partner countries growing faster than our exports. Although the safeguards established by the current India-New Zealand FTA claim to cover these risks and protect and promote India's sensitive sectors through manufacturing collaboration. The success of which will have to be determined as the implementation unfolds over the years.

What is the way forward?

Even though the India-New Zealand FTA is considered historic, it is important to learn from the trade agreements in the past, as many resulted in low yields.

India needs to invest in domestic competitiveness, meet global market standards and quality requirements, ensure strong rules of origin, define anti-dumping provisions, strengthen its sensitive sector and MSMEs and formulate them in line with global markets.

India also needs to invest in research and development for increasing quality and competitiveness of its products if it has to thrive in the global market.

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Core Features of the India–New Zealand FTA

1. Zero-duty access for Indian exports

100% of India's exports to New Zealand will enjoy zero-duty market access, substantially enhancing price competitiveness.

This is particularly beneficial given New Zealand's high per-capita income economy, offering quality-conscious and value-added markets for Indian goods and services.

2. Market access for New Zealand

India will reduce tariffs on 95% of New Zealand's exports, with 57% becoming duty-free from day one.

However, India has explicitly excluded dairy and key agricultural products, ensuring protection for small farmers and MSMEs.

3. FDI commitment

New Zealand has committed to USD 20 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by 2030 (over the next 15 years).

Notably, the agreement includes clawback mechanisms, making the FDI commitment legally and institutionally credible—an innovation in India's FTA practice.

Sectoral Gains for India

1. Labour-intensive sectors

The FTA is particularly aligned with India's employment and MSME objectives:

Textiles and apparel: Zero-duty access improves competitiveness against Southeast Asian exporters.

Leather and footwear: Enhanced demand from a premium consumer base.

Gems and jewellery: Duty-free access to a high-income market boosts value-added exports.

Processed foods: Opportunities for branded Indian food products, aligning with "Brand India" initiatives.

These sectors are central to India's demographic dividend strategy and have high employment elasticity.

2. Services and skill mobility

New Zealand has opened avenues for IT professionals, engineers, healthcare workers, educators, yoga instructors, chefs, and music teachers.

Provisions for student mobility, part-time work (up to 20 hours/week), and extended post-study work visas strengthen India's position as a global human capital supplier.

For the first time, Ayurveda, yoga, and traditional medicine services are formally recognised in an FTA framework.

Sectors Excluded by India: Strategic Protection

India has refused market access in sensitive sectors such as:

Dairy (milk, cheese, butter, yoghurt)

Key agricultural products (onions, sugar, edible oils, spices, rubber)

Rationale:

Protects livelihoods of millions of small farmers

Prevents market flooding by one of the world's largest dairy exporters

Maintains food security and rural income stability

This selective protection highlights India's learning from earlier FTAs where premature liberalisation led to trade deficits.

Criticism and Political Economy Concerns

In New Zealand

The exclusion of dairy and agriculture has triggered criticism from coalition partners.

The New Zealand Foreign Minister has labelled the agreement as "neither free nor fair", stating opposition during parliamentary ratification in 2026.

This reflects domestic political constraints in trade negotiations, especially when core export sectors are excluded.

In India

Critics argue that FTAs historically widen trade deficits and generate asymmetric gains.

However, safeguards, phased tariff reductions, and sectoral exclusions in this FTA aim to mitigate these risks.

Why India Is Accelerating FTAs

Trade diversification

Reduces over-dependence on traditional markets like the U.S., EU, and China.

Especially critical after tariff shocks and export decline in the U.S. market.

WTO-plus commitments

FTAs allow flexibility in services, digital trade, investment, and mobility—areas where WTO progress is limited.

Strategic and geopolitical alignment

FTAs are instruments of long-term strategic partnerships, not merely tariff-cutting tools.

Engagement with Oceania, West Asia, Africa, and Eurasia reflects India's multi-alignment strategy.

Domestic reform alignment

Supports initiatives like Make in India, PLI schemes, and integration with global value chains.

Encourages domestic competitiveness rather than protectionist insulation.

Post-U.S. tariff environment

Sluggish progress in Indo–U.S. trade talks and retained tariffs have forced India to seek alternative growth corridors.

Strategic Significance of the India–New Zealand FTA

Acts as a gateway to Oceania and Pacific Island markets.

Builds on strong people-to-people ties, with the Indian diaspora constituting ~5% of New Zealand's population.

Aims to double bilateral trade from USD 1.3 billion in five years.

Symbolically important as one of the fastest-concluded FTAs and among the first women-led trade negotiations for India.

Conclusion

The India–New Zealand FTA represents a qualitative shift in India's trade policy—from reactive protectionism to strategic, interest-based liberalisation. By combining zero-duty access, credible investment commitments, services mobility, and sectoral safeguards, the agreement balances growth ambitions with domestic sensitivities. Its true success, however, will depend on effective implementation, strengthening domestic competitiveness, and ensuring MSMEs and labour-intensive sectors can fully leverage new market access. For India, the FTA is less about immediate trade volumes and more about embedding itself into resilient, diversified, and future-oriented global economic networks.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA), consider the following statements:

1. New Zealand has agreed to provide zero-duty access to 100% of India's exports.

2. India has provided immediate duty-free access to all agricultural and dairy products from New Zealand.

3. The agreement includes legally enforceable FDI commitments with clawback provisions.

4. Trade in traditional Indian knowledge systems such as Ayurveda and Yoga has been recognised for the first time in an FTA.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 1, 3 and 4 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques : How does data-driven digital campaigning challenge the principles of free and fair elections? Suggest regulatory and technological measures to address these challenges. (250 words)

Page : 08 : Editorial Analysis

Invalidate all forms of unilateral talaq

On November 19, 2025, in *Benazeer Heena vs Union of India and Ors.*, a three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India comprising Justices Surya Kant, Ujjal Bhuyan and N. Kotiswar Singh, expressed strong reservations about *talaq-e-hasan*, a practice that allows a Muslim man to divorce his wife by pronouncing *talaq* once a month for three consecutive months during *tuhr*, the period of a woman's ritual purity between menstrual cycles. The divorce becomes irrevocable upon the third pronouncement, unless it is withdrawn earlier.

In Heena's case, the husband had communicated the *talaq-e-hasan* through his advocate without signing the document himself. The Court was visibly disturbed by the fact that advocates were granting divorces and remarked: "Tomorrow, what will happen if a client disowns the advocate?... Should a civilized society allow this kind of practice?"

A. Faizur Rahman

is an independent researcher and the Secretary-General of the Chennai-based Islamic Forum for the Promotion of Moderate Thought

A contract between equals

The concern of the judges was entirely justified, for the *Koran* does not grant men a superior status that entitles them to unilaterally dissolve a marriage either directly or through their agents. This is because, unlike traditions that treat marriage as an indissoluble sacrament, Islam views it as a firm but dissoluble contract between two equals.

The *Koran* uses two legally perceptive terms for marriage – *uqdatan-nikah* (2:235, 2:237), which means the "bond of marriage", and *meesaaqan ghaleean* (4:21), a solemn covenant between a man and a woman that enables them to live together in intimate companionship.

From a contemporary standpoint, these terms parallel the modern prenuptial contract, and thus demand that both spouses be consenting adults acting freely and with full knowledge. The underlying premise is one of equality between two autonomous persons, which negates any hierarchical assumption that places the husband above the wife. For this reason, a unilateral termination of marriage by the husband is impermissible in Islam. Such an act would also contravene the cardinal principle of natural justice, *nemo iudex in causa sua* (that no person may sit in judgment over his own dispute) which Islam upholds.

Only the *Koranic* process, which may be made gender-neutral, must be retained

The *Koranic* procedure

To guard against deviations from its egalitarian approach, the *Koran* treats divorce extensively in chapters 2, 4, and 65 – *al-Baqara*, *al-Nisa*, and *al-Talaq* – and stipulates four distinct conciliatory measures before the pronouncement of the first *talaq*.

First, it recommends (in 4:34-35) private resolution (*'izu hunna*). If this fails, the next step is temporary physical separation (*uhjuru hunna*). Should discord continue, the husband is advised, as a third step, to communicate clearly to his wife (*izribu hunna*) the seriousness of the dispute and attempt to repair the relationship.

For instance, he may tell his wife that unresolved tensions could escalate into public gossip, potentially harming the family. If reconciliation still remains elusive, the *Koran*, as a fourth step, instructs that the issue be brought before two arbiters from the families of both spouses.

Only after all four steps fail is the first *talaq* permitted, followed by *iddah* (2:228-232; 65:1-4). Within *iddah* – three menstrual cycles per 2:228, 229 – no more than two *talaqs* may be issued. For post-menopausal or amenorrhoeic women, *iddah* lasts three months; for pregnant women, it extends until childbirth (65:4).

If reconciliation does not occur during *iddah*, the final irrevocable *talaq* may be issued after *iddah* ends (2:231). Once pronounced, the final *talaq* terminates the marital relationship completely.

However, even after the lapse of *iddah*, the Koran permits reunion if the final *talaq* has not been invoked: "When you divorce women and they complete their term [*iddah*], do not prevent them from marrying their [former] husbands if they mutually agree on equitable terms" (2:232). In other words, after *iddah*, the couple may either re-contract the marriage on fresh terms or pursue permanent dissolution effected through the third and final *talaq*, declared before two witnesses (65:2).

This is the only *talaq* procedure authorised by the *Koran* and exemplified by the Prophet. It applies to both men and women, consistent with Islam's prohibition of gender-based discrimination. Accordingly, all other modes of divorce, including *talaq-e-bid'a*, *talaq-e-hasan*, *talaq-e-ahsan*, and *talaq-e-tafweed*, find no support in the *Koran* or the *hadith*.

They originate in *fatawa* traditions crafted by sectarian jurists who, shaped by entrenched patriarchy, rejected women's autonomy and legal personhood. Their stance is starkly reflected in their validation of *talaq-e-hasan*, which permits a husband to dissolve a marriage through an appointed agent (*vakeel*) under the concept of *tawkeel* (agency) – a notion wholly unsupported by *Koranic* or Prophetic precedent and deeply demeaning to women

An overview

The Supreme Court would thus be on firm constitutional and Islamic footing were it to strike down all unilateral divorce practices available exclusively to Muslim men, retaining only the *Koranic* process, which may be made gender-neutral.

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GS Paper 1 : **Indian Society and Social Issues**

UPSC Mains Practice Question : Personal law reforms are essential for achieving substantive equality in a plural society.Discuss this statement in the light of debates on unilateral talaq and constitutional morality. **(150 words)**

Context :

The recent observations of the Supreme Court of India in Benazeer Heena vs Union of India and Ors. (November 19, 2025) have reopened a critical constitutional and socio-legal debate on unilateral divorce practices under Muslim personal law. While instant triple talaq (talaq-e-bid'a) was criminalised earlier, the Court's strong reservations regarding talaq-e-hasan signal a possible judicial move towards a more comprehensive scrutiny of gender-discriminatory divorce practices. The issue lies at the intersection of constitutional morality, gender justice, and the reform of personal laws within a plural legal system.

Background of the Case

A three-judge Bench comprising Justices Surya Kant, Ujjal Bhuyan and N. Kotiswar Singh questioned the validity of talaq-e-hasan, where divorce becomes irrevocable after three pronouncements made over three months. The Court was particularly disturbed by the practice of divorce being communicated through advocates, raising concerns about:

Absence of personal agency and accountability

Violation of procedural fairness

Reduction of marriage to a unilateral, proxy-driven act

The Court's remark — "Should a civilised society allow this kind of practice?" — reflects its concern that such divorces undermine both rule of law and dignity of women.

Islamic Jurisprudence and the Koranic Position

Marriage as a Contract Between Equals

Islam does not treat marriage as a sacrament but as a solemn, dissoluble contract (nikah) between two consenting and equal individuals. The Koran describes marriage as:

Uqdatan-nikah (bond of marriage)

Meesaaqan ghaleean (a solemn covenant)

These terms underscore mutual consent, autonomy, and equality, rejecting any hierarchical superiority of the husband. Consequently, unilateral termination of marriage by the husband contradicts both Koranic ethics and the principle of natural justice (nemo iudex in causa sua).

The Koranic Procedure of Divorce

As per the Quran, divorce is a last resort, permitted only after a structured, reconciliatory process:

Private counselling and dialogue

Temporary separation

Clear communication of consequences

Arbitration by representatives of both families

Only after these steps fail can the first talaq be pronounced, followed by iddah (a waiting period). The final irrevocable talaq is permissible only after iddah and with due process, including witnesses. Importantly:

Reconciliation remains possible until the final talaq

The process is gender-neutral in spirit, allowing equal agency

Thus, the Koran authorises only one procedural form of divorce, rejecting instant, delegated, or agent-driven practices.

Constitutional Dimensions

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Unilateral talaq practices available exclusively to Muslim men violate:

- Article 14 (Equality before law)
- Article 15 (Non-discrimination on grounds of sex)
- Article 21 (Right to dignity)

The Supreme Court has consistently held that personal laws are not immune from constitutional scrutiny when they infringe fundamental rights.

Natural Justice and Rule of Law

Practices such as talaq-e-hasan and divorce through legal agents undermine:

- Procedural fairness
- Consent and participation of the wife
- Accountability of the divorcing party

They effectively allow one party to be judge in their own cause, contrary to constitutional morality.

Critique of Extra-Koranic Talaq Practices

Forms such as talaq-e-bid'a, talaq-e-hasan, talaq-e-ahsan, and talaq-e-tafweed:

- Have no clear sanction in the Koran or authentic Prophetic practice
- Emerged from patriarchal juristic interpretations
- Treat women as legally subordinate and passive recipients of divorce

Their continued recognition perpetuates structural gender injustice under the guise of religious freedom.

Way Forward: Judicial and Legislative Options

- Judicial invalidation of all unilateral talaq practices restricted to men
- Recognition of only the Koranic, reconciliatory procedure, applied in a gender-neutral manner
- Harmonisation of Muslim personal law with constitutional principles of equality and dignity
- Encouraging reform from within the community, grounded in scriptural authenticity rather than patriarchal custom

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's scrutiny of talaq-e-hasan represents a decisive moment in India's ongoing engagement with personal law reform. Striking down all forms of unilateral talaq would not only rest on strong constitutional foundations but also align with the egalitarian and justice-oriented spirit of Islamic jurisprudence itself. Such a move would reaffirm that religious freedom cannot be a shield for gender discrimination, and that constitutional morality remains the guiding star of India's plural legal order.

Daily News Analysis

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