

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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The Annual Report 2026 of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), recently released by the Home Minister, has highlighted a serious challenge to India's internal security. Following the ban imposed on opium by the Taliban in Afghanistan, Myanmar has emerged as an alternative global source of narcotics (especially opium and methamphetamine). Its direct impact is being observed on India's eastern border (particularly Manipur and Mizoram). On the other hand, on the western border (Punjab), an unprecedented increase has been witnessed in smuggling from Pakistan via drone technology. This situation places India within the ambit of multi-dimensional security threats.

Key Points & Analysis

A) Emerging Crisis on the Eastern Border: Myanmar and the Expansion of the 'Golden Triangle'

- **Shift in the Global Supply Chain:** Following the ban imposed on drugs by the Taliban in Afghanistan in the year 2022, Myanmar has become a major hub for the global supply of opium. Between 2021 and 2023, illegal opium cultivation in Myanmar increased by 56%, expanding the area of poppy cultivation to 45,200 hectares.

• **Trafficking Corridors:**

- **Manipur Corridor:** This is the most direct route for narcotics smuggling from Myanmar's 'Golden Triangle'. India's National Highway 102 (NH-102) has become the main land route for the trafficking of heroin and methamphetamine (Yaba tablets).
- **Mizoram (Champhai) Corridor:** This is close to Myanmar's 'Chin State'. From here, drugs are being transported through Aizawl to the Barak Valley (Silchar) in Assam.

- **Reasons for Vulnerability:** The unfenced nature of the India-Myanmar border and arrangements like the Free Movement Regime (FMR) have transformed this region from a mere 'transit zone' into an 'active staging ground' for drug distribution.

- **Complexity:** This illicit trade is flourishing in areas controlled by ethnic armed groups active in Myanmar's Shan State, making it a geopolitical issue as well.

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India's eastern borders affected by flow of opium from Myanmar: NCB

Neighbouring country emerges as alternative global opium source after ban on drugs in Afghanistan, says bureau; India's eastern borders through Manipur corridor are the most direct and porous entry point for this expanding production base

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Following the 2022 Taliban-imposed ban on drugs in Afghanistan, Myanmar has emerged as an alternative source of global opium supply and the consequences are already visible along India's eastern borders, through the Manipur corridor, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) said in its 2026 annual report.

The report, released on Friday by Home Minister Amit Shah, highlighted the fact that the northeastern States of Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland are bearing the sharpest frontline exposure due to the enhanced production of drugs in Myanmar.

Porous border
Porous border mechanisms, including the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the India-Myanmar border, have created conditions under which these States have transitioned from peripheral transit zones to active staging grounds for distribution of narcotics into the Indian hinterland.

Myanmar's illicit opium cultivation expanded by approximately 56% between 2021 and 2023, according to the NCB report, with the area under poppy cultivation reaching 45,200 hectares.

India's eastern borders through the Manipur corridor are the most direct and porous entry point for this expanding production base, the report said.

"Myanmar's Golden Triangle has expanded as both an opiate supplier and a dominant methamphetamine (Yaba tablets) hub. The convergence, primarily in areas controlled by ethnic armed groups in Shan State, has created a poly-drug production. The Manipur corridor, through which India's National Highway no. 102 passes, is the primary land entry point for both heroin and methamphetamine tablets," it said.

The second major trafficking corridor enters India through Champhai in Mizoram, which shares close proximity with Myanmar's Chin State.

Drugs are smuggled through unfenced and porous stretches of the border and routed towards Silchar in Assam's Barak Valley through Aizawl and adjoining road networks, the report added.

In 2025, Mizoram accounted for 1,477 kg of seized amphetamine-type stimulants, out of total seizures amounting to 3,485

kg across the country. The other States where such recoveries were reported are Manipur (535 kg), Delhi (454 kg), Gujarat (308 kg) and Karnataka (164 kg).

Drone-based trafficking
On the other side of the country, despite the Taliban's 2022 crackdown, which reduced Afghan opium production by 93% from its peak, around 13,200 tonnes of pre-ban narcotics are sustaining the trafficking pipelines and making their way into India through the western border.

The NCB said that drone-based drug trafficking from across the Pakistan border has seen a five-fold increase over the past five years, particularly into Punjab.

In 2025, there were 305 such cases, resulting in the seizure of 468 kg of narcotics, a 96% increase in quantity over 2024. Punjab alone accounted for 298 such cases and 461 kg seized, primarily heroin (449.751 kg) and methamphetamine (9.018 kg). Overall, Punjab accounted for 58% of total seizures, which amounted to 3,567

kg across the country. "The scale of this threat is underscored by the growth trajectory: from just 3 incidents in 2021, incidents surged to 35 in 2022, 28 in 2023, before accelerating sharply to 178 incidents in 2024 and 305 incidents in 2025, a 100-fold increase in incident count over five years," the report said.

This exponential rise reflects the growing operational maturity of trafficking networks using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to circumvent traditional border controls, the NCB said. Additional incidents were reported in Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir.

"The South Asian arm [of the drug trade via Afghanistan] flows through Pakistan into India via both the land frontier in Punjab and Rajasthan, and the maritime frontier along the Gujarat and Maharashtra coastlines, the latter a route of increasing concern given its use of fishing vessels and coastal craft that operate below the detection threshold of standard maritime surveillance," the NCB said.



Illegal trade: Myanmar's illicit opium cultivation expanded by approximately 56% between 2021 and 2023. AP

B) Challenge on the Western Border: Rising Levels of Drone-Based Smuggling

- **Impact of Afghan Stocks:** Although production in Afghanistan has declined by 93%, an old stock of approximately 13,200 tons from before the ban continues to keep the smuggling pipelines alive.
- **Misuse of Drone Technology (UAVs):** Drone-based smuggling into Punjab from the Pakistan border has seen a 100-fold increase over 5 years. While there were only 3 incidents in 2021, this number escalated to 305 in 2025.
- **Impact on Punjab:** Out of the total 305 cases of drone smuggling in 2025, 298 cases were registered in Punjab alone, where 461 kilograms of drugs (primarily heroin) were seized. This poses a massive threat to the social and security fabric of Punjab.
- **Vulnerability of Coastal Routes:** The report also expresses concern over the increasing utilization of maritime routes through Gujarat and Maharashtra, where fishing boats that evade standard radar surveillance are being deployed.

Impact on Internal Security

- **Narco-Terrorism:** The illicit earnings generated from drug trafficking are utilized to fund insurgent groups in the Northeast and anti-national elements in Kashmir and Punjab.
- **Damage to the Social Fabric:** Substance abuse is rising among youth in border states (such as Manipur, Mizoram, Punjab), leading to the depletion of human resources.
- **Failure of Border Management:** The use of modern technologies like drones has partially neutralized traditional border security infrastructure (such as fencing and checkpoints).

Way Forward / Suggestions

- **Modernization of Border Infrastructure:** It is essential to accelerate the fencing work on the eastern border and conduct a logical review of the Free Movement Regime (FMR).
- **Anti-Drone Technology:** Anti-drone systems and jammers need to be deployed on a large scale along the western border to prevent aerial intrusions.
- **Inter-Agency Coordination:** Strengthening the mechanism for real-time intelligence sharing among the NCB, Border Security Force (BSF), Assam Rifles, and state police.
- **Enhancing Coastal Surveillance:** Utilizing satellite and advanced maritime surveillance for tracking small boats in deep sea and coastal areas.

Conclusion

The NCB Report 2026 clearly demonstrates that India's drug crisis is not merely a social evil, but a serious hybrid security threat. Global geopolitical shifts (such as the situation in Afghanistan and Myanmar) are directly reflecting on India's borders.

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While maintaining its policy of 'Zero Tolerance against Narcotics', India must take stringent steps to break the cycle of this organized crime through technological enhancement and strict border management.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding the 'Golden Triangle'—

1. It comprises Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.
2. It is one of the world's major illicit opium-producing regions.
3. India shares a direct border with all the countries of the Golden Triangle.

Select the correct answer using the code given below—

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

Ans: (a)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Analyze the reasons for the rising drug trafficking along the India-Myanmar border and its impact on internal security. **(10Marks, 150Words)**

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Page 05 : GS II : Governance / Preliminary Examination

The Department of Food and Public Distribution under the Central Government has recently released a draft of significant amendments to the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. The primary objective of this amendment is to shift the method of foodgrain allocation under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) from a 'household-based' system to an 'individual-based' system. While the government describes this as a step toward improving nutritional requirements and eliminating disparity, civil rights activists and several states are criticizing it as a ration cut and a form of "North-South Divide".

Key Points & Analysis

A) What is the Proposed Amendment?

- **New Rule (Individual-Based Allocation):** According to the proposed amendment to Section 3 of the NFSA, every individual belonging to households covered under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) will receive 7 kilograms of foodgrains (free of cost) per month. However, a maximum ceiling of 35 kilograms per household has been fixed.
- **Old System (Household-Based Allocation):** Prior to this, every AAY cardholder household definitely received 35 kilograms of foodgrains per month, irrespective of the number of members in that family (e.g., even a family with 2 members received 35 kg).

NFSA amendments: 7 kg of foodgrains for a person, and maximum 35 kg for a household

EXPLAINER

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NEW DELHI

The story so far: The Union Food and Public Distribution Department on Wednesday published a draft of the proposed amendments to the National Food Security Act (NFSA). The draft is uploaded on the department's website. The public can comment on the amendments till July 13.

The amendment
A new provision in Section 3 of the National Food Security Act, 2013, proposes that every person belonging to households covered under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) shall be entitled to 7 kg of foodgrains every month to a maximum of 35 kg per household. For AAY cardholders, this allocation will be free of any

charges. Earlier, it was 35 kg per AAY household, irrespective of the number of members in the household.

Reason
The reason the Union government has given in the notice, along with the draft amendment, is that the existing household-based entitlement under the AAY, though intended as a protective measure for the most vulnerable families, results in significant inequities depending upon the size of the household. "Smaller households receive a higher per-capita entitlement, whereas larger households receive a lower per-capita entitlement, which may fall below the entitlement available to priority households," the notice adds. The government maintains that the aim and purpose are to remove "intra-category inequities."

Criticism
Certain non-BJP-ruled States and activists of the Right to Food Campaign have voiced concerns over the amendment. Kerala Food Minister Anoop Jacob told presspersons that the State government would write to the Union government against the proposed amendment. He said the

provide for more rational foodgrain allocation and better align entitlements with nutritional requirements."

allocation of 35 kg per AAY household must continue. The removal of this would result in decreased allocation to States such as Kerala, he added.

Anuradha Talwar, an office-bearer of the Right to Food Campaign, said the amendment would bring a "North-South divide" in foodgrain allocation. She said families in the South had fewer people than those in North India and smaller families would get less allocations. "Also the number of AAY families has not been revised as the Census was delayed. A large section of the population, who must come under AAY, are not getting the benefits of the Food Security Act despite the increase in population," she said, adding that instead of increasing the allocation, the government is decreasing it.

Another issue is that the activists have been de-

manding allocation of 14 kg per person. They argue that if the government wants to base the allocation on the recommendations of the Indian Council of Medical Research, then pulses and edible oil must also be provided. "The poorest of the poor doesn't have market access to buy essentials at the market rate. So the government must provide pulses or cooking oil for them," Ms. Talwar added.

The next step
After considering the comments from the public, the government is likely to place a fresh draft before the State governments and other departments. After that, a final draft will be brought to Parliament. Since the matter is politically sensitive, the government is likely to take careful steps as elections to States such as Uttar Pradesh are round the corner.

Activists have demanded allocation of 14 kg per person.



B) Rationale behind the Amendment

- **Addressing Intra-Category Disparity:** The government believes that under the current system, smaller families ended up receiving more ration per capita, whereas larger families received less ration per capita (which at times fell below the 5 kg per capita allotted to Priority Households).
- **Rational Allocation:** The new rule will make the allocation of foodgrains more rational, aligning it with the actual nutritional requirements of the households.

C) Key Concerns and Criticisms

- **Reduction in State Allocations (e.g., Kerala):** States like Kerala argue that this amendment will lead to a reduction in their total central foodgrain quota.
- **North-South Divide:** According to activists of the Right to Food Campaign, southern Indian states have smaller family sizes compared to northern India due to demographic transition. Consequently, smaller families will now receive much less ration (such as only 14 kg for 2 members) instead of 35 kg, which will adversely affect the poor in southern states.

Daily News Analysis

- **Census Delay:** Due to the delay in conducting the new census in the country, the list of AAY households has not been revised. Owing to the growing population, a large section of people remains outside the ambit of food security, and instead of expanding the allocation, the government is reducing it in the name of rationalization.
- **Demand for Adequate Allocation:** Activists demand that the per capita allocation should be at least 14 kilograms.
- **Lack of Nutritional Diversity:** If the government cites ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research) standards, it should also include pulses and edible oil in the ration instead of just foodgrains (wheat/rice), as the poorest population lacks the purchasing power to buy these from the open market.

Impact on Food Security

- **Financial Burden on Ultra-Vulnerable Sections:** Smaller and extremely poor households will have to depend on the open market to fulfill their food requirements, which will adversely hit their purchasing power.
- **Nutritional Security vs. Food Security:** Providing merely calorie-based (grain) security cannot eradicate 'hidden hunger' or micronutrient deficiencies in the country.

Way Forward / Suggestions

- **Digital and Updated Database:** The list of beneficiaries should be updated at the earliest based on a census or real-time socio-economic data so that no eligible individual is left out.
- **Diversification of PDS Basket:** Instead of distributing only wheat and rice through the PDS, coarse grains (millets), pulses, and fortified oils should be included to ensure comprehensive nutritional security.
- **Cooperative Federalism:** Since this is a highly sensitive and political subject, the Central Government must engage in extensive consultations with all state governments (especially the southern states) before introducing the final draft in Parliament.

Conclusion

The proposed amendment to the NFSA is an administrative attempt to make allocation more equitable and tailored to per capita requirements. However, in the concept of a Welfare State, the tilt of policy changes must remain toward protecting the person standing at the lowest rung of society (Antyodaya). The government should utilize the public feedback period (up to July 13) to incorporate constructive criticisms, ensuring that this reform does not become a mechanism for 'ration cuts' but truly serves as an instrument for 'nutritional security'.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: For which of the following reasons is the proposed amendment being criticized as creating a "North-South Divide"?

- (a) Food grain production is low in South India.
- (b) The average family size in South India is relatively small.
- (c) PDS is not implemented in South India.
- (d) Poverty is high in South India.

Ans: (b)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: Critically examine the proposed amendments to the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. Will it make food security more equitable? **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Page 06 : GS III : Disaster Management

Recently, two devastating earthquakes of magnitude 7.1 and 7.5 occurred at an interval of just a few seconds (Doublet Earthquake) in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas and northern coastal regions. This disaster has caused massive loss of life and property. From a geological standpoint, this kind of destruction in Venezuela is an aberration, because this region falls into a 'sliding' (Sideways slip) zone of tectonic plates. This disaster serves as a serious warning for countries with dense populations and high seismic vulnerability like India to review their structural preparedness and safety standards.

Key Points & Analysis

A) Nature of the Venezuela Earthquake: The 'Doublet' Phenomenon

- **What is a Doublet Earthquake?:** According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), when two large earthquakes of almost equal intensity occur at very short intervals of time and distance, it is termed a 'Doublet'. In Venezuela, the first shock of magnitude 7.1 was immediately followed by the second main shock of magnitude 7.5.
- **Shallow Depth:** The epicenter of these earthquakes was at a shallow depth of less than 30 kilometers (approximately 10–22 km) below the ground. The energy of shallow earthquakes hits structures on the surface directly, which multiplies the level of devastation manifold. The earthquake that struck Turkey-Syria earlier in 2023 was also of a similar nature.
- **Tectonic Configuration:** Venezuela is located on the boundary of the South American Plate and the Caribbean Plate. Here, instead of colliding and thrusting upward, the plates slide past each other horizontally (Strike-slip Fault). Along such boundaries, strain accumulates silently for generations and suddenly releases one day in the form of massive destruction.

B) Lessons and Concerns in the Context of India

- **Threat on the Himalayan Front:** India's entire Himalayan region is highly vulnerable due to the collision of the Indian Plate and the Eurasian Plate (Colliding Front).
- **Withdrawal of the Revised Report (Bureau of Indian Standards):** This year, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) withdrew a report prepared after a decade of work, which stated that the earthquake hazard in the Himalayan region has been severely underestimated.
 - This report recommended doubling the 'design force' in the highest-risk areas and adding a sixth zone (Zone VI) to the seismic map.

Tragic evening

Venezuela's quake holds lessons on the importance of preparedness

In Wednesday two earthquakes, of magnitudes 7.1 and 7.5, struck seconds apart, levelling large parts of Caracas, Venezuela. On Friday, the acting President, Delcy Rodríguez, put the dead at 589 and the injured at 2,980. In La Guaira, the worst-hit State, over a hundred buildings crumpled to rubble. Geologically speaking, such destruction is, in Venezuela, an aberration. The country sits where the South American and Caribbean plates grind past one another, a boundary that slips sideways rather than thrusting upward – unlike the frequent quakes along the Pacific's Ring of Fire. Strain here accumulates quietly, over generations, before the ground settles its accounts in a single afternoon. It is early days, but seismologists have explained the twin quakes as a 'doublet,' what the US Geological Survey (USGS) calls a "complex rupture-interaction". Northern Venezuela saw a smaller doublet last year: the Türkiye-Syria earthquakes of 2023, which killed over 55,000 people, were of the same provenance. Their shallowness – under 30 kilometres – drove the fury straight into the streets above. The USGS has flagged a plausible toll exceeding 10,000, and the past is proof that such fears are likely to bear out rather than be refuted.

India, which has already offered help, should make relief its first duty – search teams, medical supplies, and the unglamorous logistics of a disaster zone. But there is a lesson here that it ought not to file away and forget. This year the Bureau of Indian Standards withdrew a decade's worth of commissioned work that found seismic hazard along the Himalayan front badly underestimated – a revision that nearly doubled design forces in the highest zones and added a sixth zone to a map that stopped at five. It was shelved after a Cabinet Secretariat order warned the standards "materially affected" ongoing infrastructure, metro projects among them. India's Zone V still designs for 0.36g, where g measures for how much the ground can shake. Pakistan and Nepal, on the same colliding front, reckon on nearly 0.75g, the United States and Japan on a full g or more. Nearly 79% of Indians live under moderate to severe seismic threat, and 95% of earthquake deaths occur in the one- to three-storey houses that no code ever reaches. Venezuela is a portent of the implicit danger that exists. The science of prediction will remain, for the foreseeable future, hope filling the gaps of uncertainty. What can be done is build structures that hold and keep their inhabitants safe. The earth follows its rhythm; the only choice is whether or not to be ready.

Daily News Analysis

- **Matter of Concern:** Following an order from the Cabinet Secretariat, this report was put on the back burner because implementing the new standards was "materially affected" the cost and viability of ongoing mega infrastructure projects (such as metro projects).
- **Weak Design Standards (Seismic Design Forces):**
 - India's most dangerous zone, 'Zone V', is designed to withstand a peak ground acceleration of only 0.36g (g = acceleration due to gravity, which measures ground shaking).
 - In contrast, Nepal and Pakistan, which are situated on the same tectonic front, design their buildings for 0.75g, while the US and Japan prepare for 1.0g or higher.

C) Socio-Economic Vulnerability of India

- **Population under Risk:** Approximately 79% of India's population resides in moderate to severe seismic hazard zones.
- **Unregulated Construction:** About 95% of deaths resulting from earthquakes are caused by the collapse of one-to-three-story houses that do not fall under any building codes or safety regulations (Non-engineered structures).

Policy & Infrastructure Implications

- **The Dilemma of Safety vs. Economic Cost:** Enhancing safety standards increases the cost of infrastructure projects. The government's deferral of the policy demonstrates that short-term economic interests are being prioritized over long-term safety.
- **Limitations of Prediction:** Predicting the exact time and place of an earthquake remains impossible for science. Therefore, only structures that are capable of withstanding tremors (Earthquake-resistant) can save lives.

Way Forward / Suggestions

- **Enforcement of Strict Building Codes:** India must adopt a 'zero-compromise' policy in its disaster preparedness. The recommendations of the shelved BIS report should be reviewed and implemented in a phased manner.
- **Retrofitting:** Seismic strengthening (Retrofitting) should be made mandatory for old and weak buildings, especially in densely populated urban areas.
- **Local Awareness:** Local masons and citizens in rural and semi-urban areas should be trained in low-cost earthquake-resistant construction techniques (such as confined mud mortar and banding techniques).
- **Global Cooperation (Humanitarian Assistance):** Fulfilling its global responsibility, India should immediately dispatch search and rescue teams (NDRF), medical supplies, and logistical assistance to Venezuela, which would also enrich global experience in disaster management.

Conclusion

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The tragedy in Venezuela is living proof that nature settles its accumulated strain with absolute ruthlessness. Given the uncertainty of earthquakes, the only means of protection is 'pre-preparedness'. Beyond the immediate costs of infrastructure projects, India must understand that any laxity in standards today could prove fatal for millions of lives in the future. The Earth will follow its own rhythm; it is entirely up to us how prepared we are for the disaster.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Why are shallow-focus earthquakes more destructive?

1. Their focus is close to the Earth's surface.
2. Very little of their energy is dissipated before reaching the surface.
3. They occur only in oceanic regions.

Select the correct answer—

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

Ans: (a)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: Most of the loss of life caused by earthquakes in India is the result of human-induced vulnerabilities rather than natural causes. Explain with examples. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Page 11 :GS II : Governance

The Union Health Ministry has proposed a significant draft of amendments to the Drugs Rules, 1945, aimed at boosting Research and Development (R&D) and reducing the regulatory burden in the country's pharmaceutical sector. Under this amendment, a traditional licensing system for importing small quantities of drugs for test, examination, and analysis will be replaced by an 'intimation and acknowledgement-based' online system. Additionally, there is a proposal to rationalize the rules regarding 'residual shelf-life' for imported drugs.

Key Points & Analysis

A) Simplification of Import Rules for Test and Analysis

- **Acknowledgement-based System:** Currently, importing limited quantities of drugs for research, testing, or non-clinical evaluation requires navigating a lengthy licensing process. Under the new rules, applicants will only need to submit a 'Prior Intimation Form' online, and they can immediately import the drug based on the automatically generated 'Acknowledgement' upon form submission.
- **Reduction in Compliance Burden:** This step will eliminate the time consumed in securing regulatory clearances, helping pharmaceutical startups and established industries initiate their research activities much faster.
- **Exceptions:** Considering safety and sensitivity, this expedited system will not apply to certain specific categories, such as:
 - Sex Hormones
 - Cytotoxic Drugs (Anti-cancer)
 - Beta Lactam Drugs
 - Biologics containing living microorganisms
 - Narcotic and Psychotropic substances
- **Consistency with Domestic Testing Rules:** Earlier in January 2026, the government amended the 'New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019' to implement a similar notification system for domestic testing licenses. This is now being extended to imports as well.

Govt. to simplify drug import rules for test, examination, analysis

Ministry already amended New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019 in Jan. 2026 introducing similar notification system for local test licences

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Union Health Ministry has proposed amendments to the Drugs Rules, 1945 to simplify the procedure for securing permission for import of drugs for examination, test or analysis. The change introduces an acknowledgement-based system for import of all drugs in small quantities for analytical and non-clinical testing purposes.

Under the revised provisions, applicants intending to import such drugs will be required to submit a prior intimation form and may import the drug based on the acknowledgement generated upon submission of such intimation.

The procedure is applicable for import of drugs for analytical and non-clinical testing, except for certain drugs belonging to the categories of sex hormones, cytotoxic drugs, beta lactam drugs, biologics containing live microorganisms and narcotic and psychotropic substances, said a release issued by the Health Ministry.

The Ministry has already carried out amendments to the New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019 in January introducing a similar notification system for domestic test licences. The present proposed amendment expands it to imports also.



Right prescription: The amendment is expected to significantly cut compliance burden on applicants. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

The amendment is expected to significantly cut compliance burden on applicants by eliminating licensing needs for importing small lots of drugs for testing or R&D purposes.

Deregulation role
"This will play a substantial role in deregulating the R&D sector in pharmaceuticals and enable start-ups and industries to quickly initiate testing or analysis. The online intimation system will offer a seamless and instant gateway for the stakeholders," said a senior health official. The draft has been placed in the public domain for stakeholder consultation.

Meanwhile, the Ministry also published a draft notification proposing amendments to Rule 31 of the Drugs Rules, 1945 with the goal of rationalising the residual shelf-life norm for imported drugs and promoting ease of doing business in the pharma sector.

The draft amendment proposes to revise the norm of a minimum residual shelf life of more than 60% for imported drugs to a minimum residual shelf life of 12 months at the time of import. However, in view of specialised nature and public health considerations, the existing norm of a minimum residual shelf life of more than 60% shall continue to apply to biological products and radio pharmaceuticals.

The proposed amendment seeks to aid more efficiency in the pharmaceutical supply chain while maintaining availability of quality medicines for patients. By ensuring imported drugs have a minimum remaining shelf life of 12 months upon entry into the country, the proposal provides sufficient time for distribution and consumption before expiry, thereby ensuring patients continue to receive medicines with adequate usable shelf life.

B) Simplification of Residual Shelf-Life Norms

- **Existing Rule:** Currently, the residual shelf-life (the time remaining before a medicine's expiry) of any drug imported into India must be more than 60% of its total shelf-life at the time of import.

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Daily News Analysis

- **Proposed Change:** The new draft proposes changing this 60% rule to specify a minimum residual shelf-life of 12 months at the time of import.
- **Benefits:** This will make the global supply chain significantly more efficient. Frequently, due to prolonged transit durations, medicines failed to meet the 60% condition, which disrupted trade. A 12-month window will provide adequate time for the distribution and consumption of the medicines.
- **Protective Exceptions:** Given their unique nature and public health significance, biological products and radiopharmaceuticals will remain subject to the older rule of requiring more than 60% residual shelf-life.

Impact on the Pharmaceutical Sector & Economy

- **'Ease of Doing Business':** The reduction in complex licensing and red-tapism will accelerate drug testing and research in India at a global level.
- **Boosting Pharma R&D and Innovation:** This will give momentum to the vision of making India the "global laboratory of the world." Operating costs and time-to-market will decline, particularly for new pharma startups.
- **Availability of Life-Saving Drugs for Patients:** The simplification of shelf-life norms will remove bottlenecks in importing rare or specialized medicines, ensuring that Indian patients receive quality drugs in a timely manner.

Way Forward / Suggestions

- **Robust Post-Market Surveillance:** Along with deregulation, it is essential to ensure that small-quantity imported drugs are not misused. For this, there should be integrated digital tracking between Customs and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO).
- **Strengthening Digital Infrastructure:** The online intimation portal must be designed for 'zero-downtime' and made user-friendly to prevent any technical errors from delaying research.
- **No Compromise on Quality Standards:** While easing shelf-life rules, cold-chain management must be strictly monitored to prevent the efficacy of the medicines from deteriorating during the 12-month period.

Conclusion

The proposed amendments to the drug import and shelf-life rules reflect the Government of India's commitment to 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance'. By streamlining regulatory processes, this policy will pave the way for shifting the country's pharmaceutical industry beyond generic manufacturing toward value-driven research. Finalizing these amendments after public consultation is a step in the right direction toward establishing India as a hub for global health and innovation.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: What is the proposed amendment regarding 'Residual Shelf-Life'?

- (a) Increasing it from 60% to 80% for all imported medicines
- (b) Mandating a minimum residual shelf-life of 12 months instead of the 60% rule
- (c) Abolishing all rules related to shelf-life
- (d) Applying shelf-life regulations only to domestic medicines

Ans : b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Why is there a need for regulatory reforms in India's pharmaceutical sector? Explain this in the context of recent proposed amendments. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**



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India-New Zealand FTA, a modern trade partnership

For years, trade between India and New Zealand has been a relationship with untapped potential. The two economies have remained friendly partners, yet commercial engagement has never quite matched the opportunities available. Trade remains relatively modest. The bilateral merchandise trade stood at \$1.3 billion (approximately) in FY 2024-25, of which India's exports to New Zealand accounted for only around \$711 million, despite registering 32% year-on-year growth. The numbers are moving in the right direction, but remain small when compared to India's trade relationships with larger partners. The proposed India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) could change that equation as it attempts to create conditions for faster bilateral growth.

At first glance, the headlines are easy to focus on – zero-duty access for Indian exports, wider market access for services, and a proposed investment commitment of \$20 billion over the next 15 years. These are important outcomes. The larger story, however, is that the agreement reflects the evolving nature of trade partnerships.

Modern trade beyond tariffs

Modern FTAs are no longer just about lowering customs duties. Businesses today are equally concerned about how quickly goods move through ports, how easily certifications are recognised, whether regulations are predictable, and how much compliance effort is required to access preferential treatment. In many industries, these factors influence competitiveness as much as tariffs.

For Indian exports, New Zealand has extended duty-free access across 100% of its tariff lines. However, for businesses, particularly in labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather, and handicrafts, this is not merely a



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It is a strategic trade pact with long-term economic potential

removal of duties that had earlier reached to 10%, but a clear pricing advantage in a market otherwise dominated by established FTA partners. In a market where competing exporters already enjoy preferential access, even a single-digit tariff advantage can influence purchasing decisions.

On the other hand, India's approach is cautious. Sensitive sectors such as dairy have remained protected, reflecting a policy preference that has become increasingly visible in India's recent trade negotiations. The objective is clear: open and explore new opportunities without exposing vulnerable domestic industries to competitors.

Services could emerge as one of the most significant beneficiaries over the longer term. Indian businesses have strong capabilities in technology, consulting, engineering, health care, and education services. Greater market access along with clearer mobility provisions for professionals and students can make it easier for Indian firms to expand their presence in New Zealand. For a country where services account for an increasing share of economic output, these provisions deserve as much attention as tariff concessions.

Compliance unlocks trade benefits

One more feature that businesses should watch closely is the Rules of Origin (RoO) framework. Preferential access under an FTA is never automatic. Companies must demonstrate that products meet prescribed origin requirements before claiming lower duties. The India-New Zealand agreement incorporates detailed product-specific rules, documentation requirements, and traceability measures to prevent misuse through transshipment.

From a policy standpoint, this strengthens the

integrity of the agreement, while from a business standpoint; it raises the importance of supply chain visibility and compliance readiness.

The same principle applies to trade facilitation measures included in the pact. Faster customs clearances, digital certification systems, and simplified procedures often deliver tangible commercial benefits. Reduced delays can reduce inventory costs, improve cash flow, and create greater certainty across supply chains.

This agreement also aims to address non-tariff barriers, particularly in sectors where regulatory approvals often matter more than tariffs. Industries such as pharmaceuticals, food processing, chemicals, and agriculture could gain benefits if regulatory processes are streamlined and more predictable.

Preparing businesses for FTAs

Viewed more broadly, the agreement marks another step in India's transition towards a facilitation-led trade policy, where businesses enhance competitiveness not only through lower tariffs but also through reduced transaction costs, faster market access, and greater certainty across the trade ecosystem.

From a business perspective, the real opportunity lies not merely in availing lower duties but also in integrating operational, sourcing, and compliance functions with the framework of the agreement. Today, preferential access increasingly depends on demonstrable compliance, traceability, and process discipline. Given this, businesses should proactively review Harmonised System (HS) classifications, evaluate eligibility under the RoO framework, strengthen supply-chain documentation, identify sector-specific export opportunities, and reassess landed-cost models to maximise the commercial advantages offered under the agreement.

GS Paper II: International Relations

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: Modern free trade agreements are not limited merely to tariff reductions. Discuss this statement in the context of the India-New Zealand FTA. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

Context : In recent years, bilateral trade between India and New Zealand has remained below its true potential. In the financial year 2024-25, the bilateral merchandise trade between the two countries was approximately \$1.3 billion, in which India's exports were only \$711 million. Against this backdrop, the proposed India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is an effort to give a new dimension to the commercial relations between the two nations. This

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agreement is not limited merely to reducing customs duties (Tariffs), but it reflects a 'modern trade partnership' encompassing smoother customs clearance, digital certification, expansion of services, and removal of non-tariff barriers.

Key Points & Analysis

A) Beyond Traditional Trade: Elements of a Modern FTA

- **Thinking Beyond Tariffs:** In the modern trade landscape, merely reducing customs duties is not enough. Fast movement of goods at ports, mutual recognition of certificates, and regulatory predictability have become more important for businesses.
- **Benefit for India (100% Duty-Free Access):** New Zealand has extended zero-duty access (Duty-free access) on 100% of its tariff lines for India's exports.
- This will give a direct pricing advantage (Pricing Advantage) to India's labor-intensive sectors (Labour-intensive sectors) such as—textiles (Textiles), apparel (Apparel), leather (Leather), and handicrafts (Handicrafts) in the New Zealand market, where duties up to 10% were previously applicable.

B) India's Balanced Approach and Sensitive Sectors

- **Protection of Domestic Industries:** India has adopted an extremely cautious approach in this negotiation. Sensitive sectors like dairy (Dairy) have been kept out of the scope of this agreement (protected).
- **Policy Message:** The objective is to explore new market opportunities without leaving sensitive and vulnerable domestic industries (such as Indian dairy farmers) exposed to global competitors.

C) Emerging Possibilities in the Services Sector

- In the long run, the 'services sector' can become the biggest beneficiary of this agreement.
- India possesses strong capabilities in technology (IT), consulting (Consulting), engineering, healthcare (Healthcare), and education services.
- Clear rules for the movement of professionals and students (Mobility provisions) will make it easier for Indian companies to expand in New Zealand.

D) Rules of Origin (RoO) and Compliance

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Daily News Analysis

- **Prevention of Smuggling and Misuse:** Product-specific stringent rules, documentation, and traceability (Traceability) measures have been included in the agreement so that this route cannot be misused (Transshipment) by any third country.
- **Trade Facilitation:** Expedited customs clearance and digital certification systems will reduce supply chain (Supply Chain) delays, thereby lowering inventory costs for businesses and improving cash flow.
- **Non-Tariff Barriers:** The agreement aims to remove non-tariff barriers by simplifying regulatory processes in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, food processing (Food Processing), chemicals, and agriculture.

Strategic Imperatives for Indian Businesses

To take full advantage of this FTA, Indian corporates and exporters will have to take the following steps:

- **Restructuring the Supply Chain:** Businesses will have to strengthen documentation to prove their eligibility under the 'Rules of Origin' (RoO).
- **Review of Classification:** A careful review of the Harmonized System (HS) classification must be conducted to derive the correct benefit of zero-tariff categories.
- **Reassessment of Cost Models:** New landed-cost models (Landed-cost models) will need to be prepared for the New Zealand market based on lower manufacturing and logistics costs.

Way Forward / Suggestions

- **Grounding Investment Commitments:** To smoothly implement the proposed \$20 billion investment commitment over the next 15 years, a bilateral investment promotion task force should be constituted.
- **Regulatory Convergence:** Technical standards should be aligned quickly between the standard authorities of both countries (such as FSSAI and New Zealand's food safety body), especially for pharmaceutical and agricultural products.
- **Skill and Mobility:** A transparent mechanism should be developed to simplify visa processes for Indian professionals so that the full potential of the service sector can be exploited.

Conclusion

The India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is a major step toward India's facilitation-led trade policy (Facilitation-led trade policy). This agreement demonstrates that modern trade is not just about reducing taxes at borders, but it is about reducing transaction costs (Transaction Costs) and bringing certainty to the trade ecosystem.

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Opening new doors for services and labor-intensive industries while protecting sensitive sectors will prove to be a game-changer for India in terms of both economic growth and strategic diversification.



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