

# PROCURE INDIA

December- 2025

A Monthly Newsletter Dedicated to International Trade & Commerce



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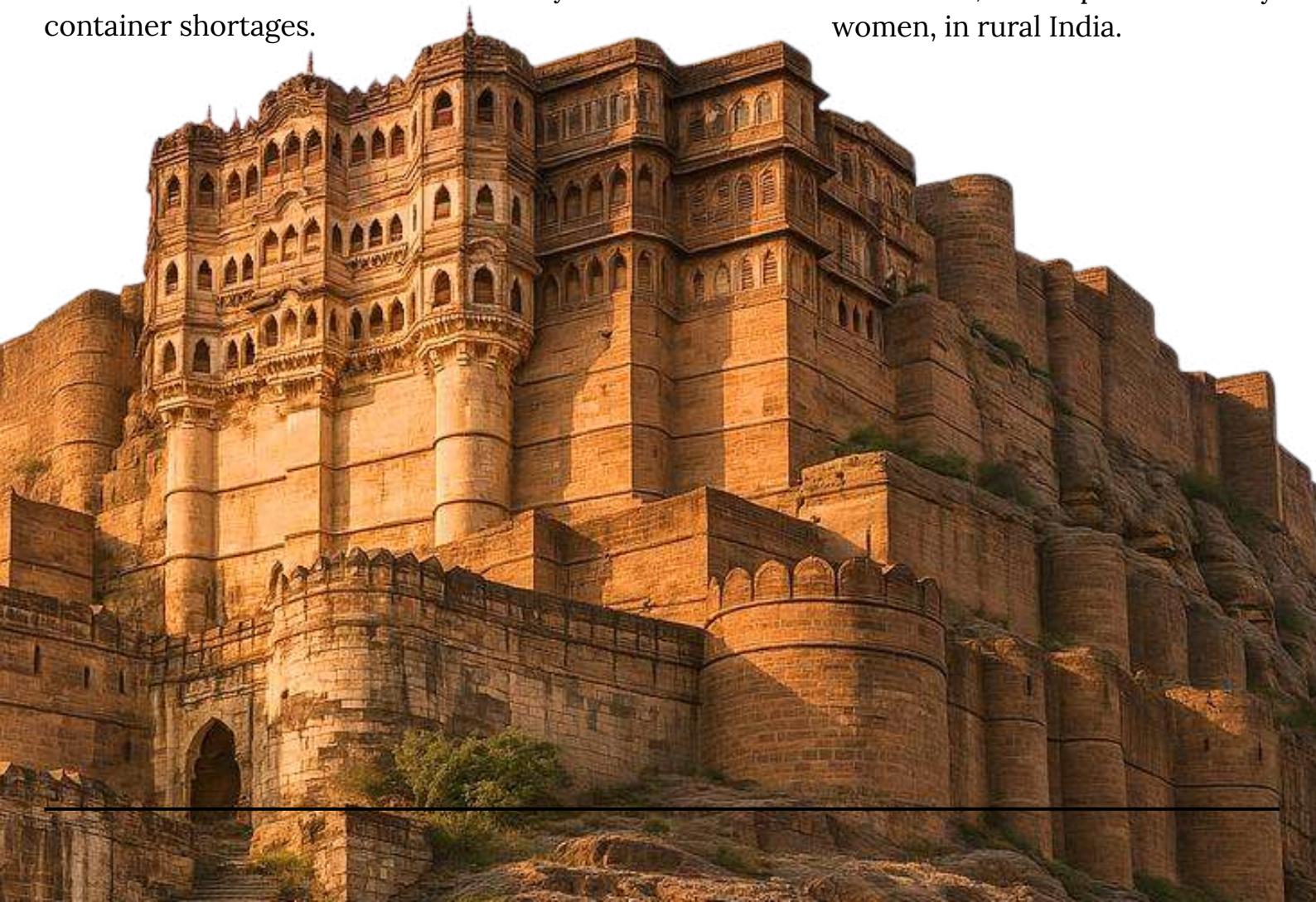
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# EDITOR'S NOTE

The December edition of Procure India arrives at a juncture characterized by both immense opportunity and logistical complexity. In this issue, we analyze the "Great Modal Shift," noting a 9.8% surge in air cargo exports as Indian firms strategically bypass maritime volatility in the Red Sea. This resilience is a testament to the adaptability of our export community in the face of extended transit times and container shortages.

We also prioritize regulatory literacy, outlining the four foundational registrations IEC, AD Code, GST, and LUT essential for seamless trade. A critical reminder for all stakeholders: the Importer-Exporter Code (IEC) now requires mandatory annual profile updates between April and June to maintain validity.

Our feature sections highlight the diversity of India's export basket. This month's Product of the Month focuses on Millets, where India now commands 38.4% of global production, rebranding ancient grains as "climate-smart" nutri-cereals for a health-conscious world. Finally, our case study on the Agarbatti industry examines a US\$ 1.28 billion sector that serves as a vital social stabilizer, providing livelihoods to over 2 million individuals, predominantly women, in rural India.



# DESK OF THE CEO

As we conclude the final quarter of 2025, India's trade trajectory has reached a definitive milestone, transitioning from a participant in global markets to a strategic architect of international commerce. This evolution is underpinned by a historic influx of US\$ 81.04 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for the fiscal year 2024–25, with the manufacturing sector emerging as a primary beneficiary.

Our feature sections highlight the diversity of India's export basket. This month's Product of the Month focuses on Millets, where India now commands 38.4% of global production, rebranding ancient grains as "climate-smart" nutri-cereals for a health-conscious world. Finally, our case study on the Agarbatti industry examines a US\$ 1.28 billion sector that serves as a vital social stabilizer, providing livelihoods to over 2 million individuals, predominantly women, in rural India.

The recent signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Oman on December 18, 2025, represents a fundamental pivot in our Gulf relations, granting Indian exporters zero-duty access to over 98% of Omani tariff lines. Simultaneously, our energy sector has undergone a paradigm shift; the implementation of the CoalSETU framework has transformed India from a coal-scarce nation into a potential exporter of thermal surplus, reflecting a new era of energy sovereignty.



**Alouk Kumar**  
**Founder & CEO,**  
**Inductus Group**

# MARKET TRENDS

## AN OVERVIEW

### BRIDGING SOUTH ASIA AND THE GULF: THE PROMISE OF THE INDIA-OMAN FTA

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between India and the Sultanate of Oman, signed on December 18, 2025, in Muscat, represents a definitive institutionalization of strategic synergy between the two nations. This agreement is not merely a transactional trade arrangement but a sophisticated architectural framework designed to integrate India's manufacturing and services prowess with Oman's strategic geography and "Vision 2040" developmental roadmap.

#### MACROECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

The CEPA arrives at a critical juncture in global trade, characterized by the erosion of multilateralism and a pivot toward "de-risking" supply chains from traditional Western markets. For India, the agreement serves as a vital tool to diversify its export base amid rising protectionism, specifically countering the impact of high tariffs in the United States and the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).



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#### THE 98% LIBERALIZATION: GOODS AND TARIFFS

The most significant pillar of the CEPA is the depth of tariff liberalization. Oman has granted India zero-duty access on 98.08% of its tariff lines, which effectively covers 99.38% of India's current exports by value. This near-universal duty-free treatment is a radical departure from the pre-CEPA regime, where more than 80% of Indian goods were subject to a 5% common external tariff, with some industrial products facing duties as high as 100%.



## SECTORAL CATALYSTS FOR GROWTH

The elimination of duties is expected to provide an immediate stimulative effect on several of India's labor-intensive and high-tech sectors:

**Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices:** The agreement introduces an unprecedented regulatory fast-track. Indian pharmaceutical products and manufacturing units that have secured approvals from stringent global regulators such as the US FDA, the UK's MHRA, or the European Medicines Agency (EMA) will be eligible for automatic marketing authorization in Oman within 90 days. This convergence reduces the time and cost of compliance, enabling India to tap into Oman's US\$ 12.52 billion global services and health import market.



**Textiles and Apparel:** Indian manufacturers, who previously faced a 5% duty, now enjoy a price advantage that enhances their competitiveness against regional rivals. This allows for deeper integration into Omani retail supply chains and provides a hedge against fluctuating demand in Western markets.

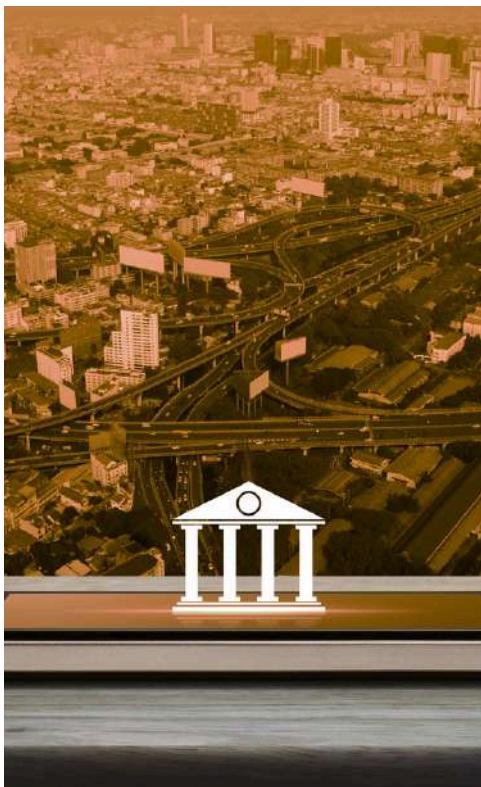


**Gems and Jewelry:** This sector is expected to see a surge in growth, with export potential projected to rise from US\$ 35 million in 2024 to approximately US\$ 150 million within three years due to reduced transaction costs and the elimination of import levies.



**Engineering and Automobiles:** The zero-duty regime benefits Indian Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and suppliers of automotive components, machinery, and precision instruments. This supports Oman's own burgeoning industrial zones in Sohar and Duqm.





Extending the permitted duration of stay for contractual service suppliers from 90 days to two years, with the possibility of a further two-year extension.

Liberalizing entry and stay conditions for skilled professionals in accountancy, taxation, architecture, and medical services.

Additionally, the CEPA allows for 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by Indian companies in major Omani services sectors through a commercial presence.



## SERVICES TRADE AND PROFESSIONAL MOBILITY

The services chapter is arguably the CEPA's most progressive feature, encompassing 127 sub-sectors including IT, professional services, education, healthcare, and research and development. Despite India's global reputation, its current share in Oman's global services imports is only 5.31%, indicating vast untapped potential.

A major breakthrough is the enhanced framework for the "Movement of Natural Persons" (Mode 4). Key provisions include:

Increasing the quota for intra-corporate transferees from 20% to 50%.



## INVESTMENT PROTECTION AND INFRASTRUCTURE SYNERGY

Investment ties are deeply rooted, with over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures currently operating in the Sultanate, contributing an estimated US\$ 7.5 billion in total capital investment. The agreement provides "Most Favored Nation" (MFN) status to Indian investors, ensuring international legal protections for their capital.

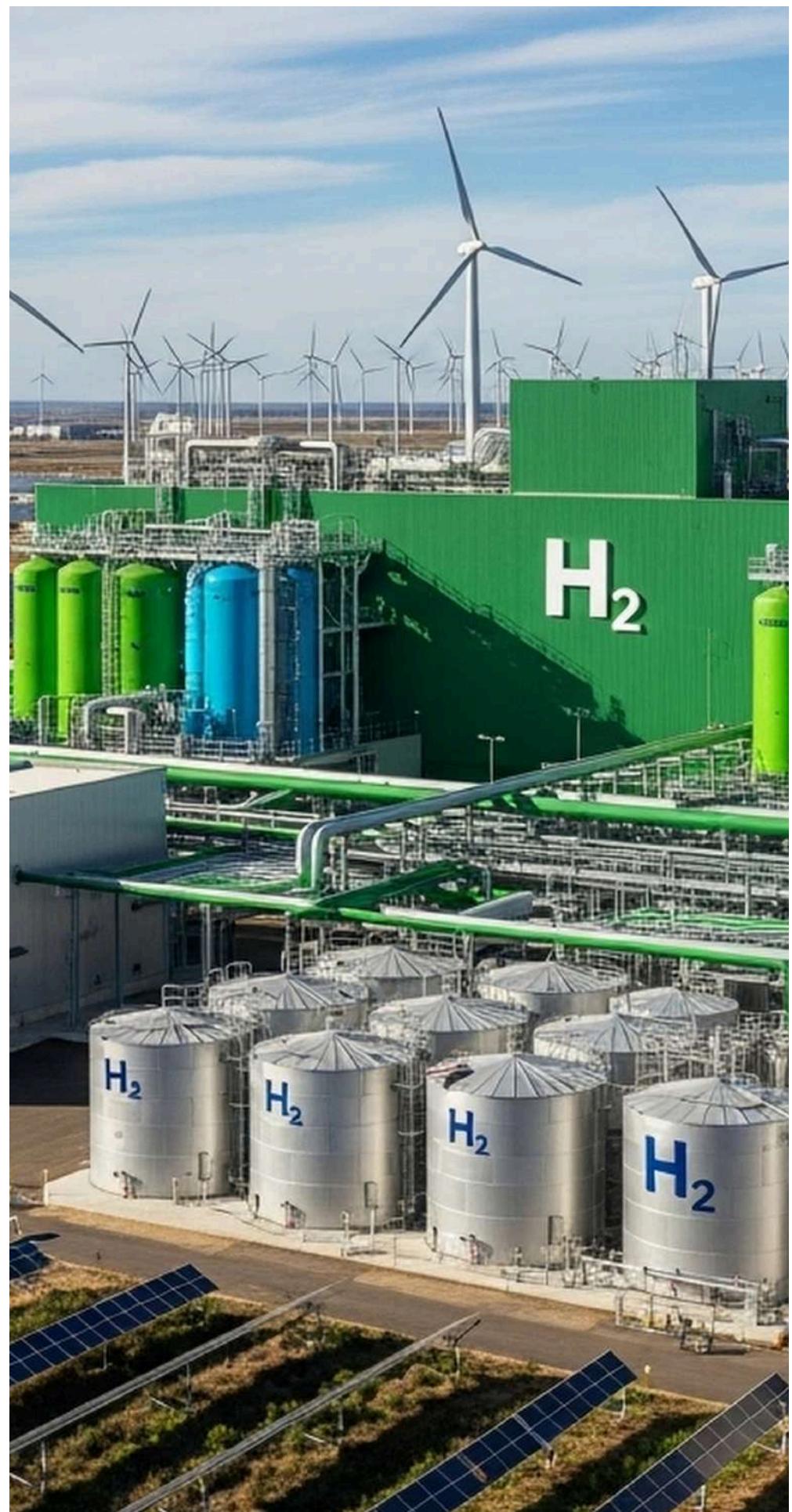
A central institutional pillar is the Oman-India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF), a 50:50 joint venture between the State Bank of India (SBI) and the Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

The fund's third tranche of US\$ 300 million, announced in 2023, is currently being utilized to finance major industrial projects. Flagship collaborations like the Oman India Fertilizer Company (OMIFCO) a US\$ 969 million project demonstrate the partnership's role in securing India's supply of essential commodities like urea.

## THE GREEN HYDROGEN FRONTIER

Aligned with "Vision 2040" and Oman's goal of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050, the partnership has expanded into renewable energy. Oman aims to produce 1 million tonnes of green hydrogen annually by 2030, increasing to 8.5 million tonnes by 2050.

Indian developers are at the forefront of this transition. In 2021, the ACME Group secured a landmark US\$ 3.5 billion bid to construct one of the world's largest green ammonia facilities at the Port of Duqm. This facility, powered by 3 GW of solar and 500 MW of wind energy, is designed to produce 900,000 tonnes of green ammonia annually. This project serves as a pilot for the integration of Indian technical expertise into Oman's energy diversification strategy.

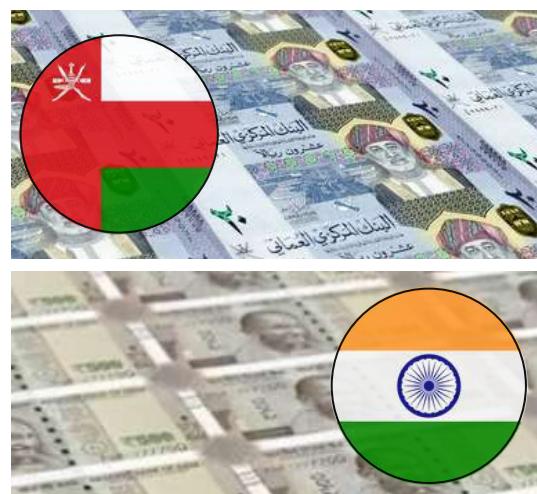




## LOGISTICS AND THE "DUQM ADVANTAGE"

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Furthermore, the integration of digital payment systems RuPay and UPI is facilitating real-time cross-border remittances for the 700,000-strong Indian diaspora in Oman, who remit approximately US\$ 2 billion back to India annually. This digital corridor reduces transaction costs and strengthens the financial linkages between the two economies.



## CONCLUSION

The India-Oman CEPA is a comprehensive blueprint for economic excellence that transforms historical ties into a modern, high-growth reality. By combining unprecedented tariff liberalization with deep services commitments, investment protection, and logistical synergies, the agreement provides a stable and predictable environment for businesses. As India continues to pivot its trade strategy toward the Gulf, the CEPA with Oman stands as a critical anchor of influence and a gateway to the broader markets of Africa and the Middle East. I have provided a comprehensive summary of the agreement's key features, sectoral impacts, and strategic significance. Let me know if you would like more details on any specific section.



# REGULATORY UPDATES



## A Strategic Paradigm Shift in India's Coal Export Policy: From Scarcity to Strategic Surplus Management

The trajectory of India's energy sector reached a definitive historical milestone in late 2025, marking the conclusion of a decades-long narrative characterized by chronic domestic shortages and a defensive reliance on global imports. For the better part of the post-liberalization era, the Indian coal industry was defined by its struggle to synchronize domestic production with the voracious appetite of a burgeoning industrial and power sector. However, the Union Cabinet's landmark directives, specifically the implementation of the Coal Linkage for Seamless, Efficient and Transparent Utilisation (CoalSETU) framework, have fundamentally re-engineered this landscape. India, once the world's second-largest coal consumer, has officially transitioned toward an export-oriented posture, signaling a move from the management of energy scarcity to the strategic deployment of energy surplus.

### THE GENESIS OF LIBERALIZATION: DECONSTRUCTING THE COALSETU FRAMEWORK

The structural overhaul of the Indian coal sector is anchored in the Policy for Auction of Coal Linkage for Seamless, Efficient and Transparent Utilisation (CoalSETU). Approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) on December 12, 2025, this framework represents the most significant regulatory evolution since the commercialization of mining in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Historically, the allocation of coal linkages, essentially long-term supply agreements, was governed by rigid "end-use" restrictions. Under the previous regime, coal procured through specific auction windows was strictly earmarked for predetermined captive purposes, such as thermal power generation, or specific industrial segments like cement, steel, and aluminum.<sup>1</sup>

The CoalSETU policy effectively dismantles these industrial silos. By introducing a dedicated "CoalSETU window" within the existing Non-Regulated Sector (NRS) Linkage Auction Policy of 2016, the government has rendered domestic coal linkages "end-use agnostic".<sup>1</sup> This regulatory flexibility allows industrial consumers to utilize coal for any industrial purpose, including coal washing, and, most pivotally, international export.<sup>5</sup> The removal of these constraints is a direct response to the accumulation of legacy stocks in captive mines and a growing surplus of certain coal grades (G6–G14), where domestic production has outpaced immediate local demand.<sup>4</sup>



## TABLE 1: COMPARATIVE EVOLUTION OF COAL LINKAGE POLICIES

Parameter	Pre-2025 NRS Linkage Policy	CoalSETU Framework (Post-December 2025)
<b>End-Use Restriction</b>	Mandatory (Tied to specific plants)	Agnostic (Any industrial use) 1
<b>Export Provisions</b>	Strictly Prohibited	Permitted up to 50% of allocation 5
<b>Secondary Market</b>	No domestic resale allowed	No domestic resale (except as washed coal) 4
<b>Participation</b>	Limited to specific sub-sectors	Open to all domestic industrial buyers 2
<b>Group Consumption</b>	Limited flexibility	High flexibility across group companies 8
<b>Trading Eligibility</b>	Restricted	Industrial buyers only; Traders barred 1

To preserve market integrity and prioritize domestic energy security, the Ministry of Coal has implemented several operational guardrails. To prevent speculative volatility and "middleman" inflation, the government has explicitly barred traders from participating in the CoalSETU auctions; only genuine industrial buyers and linkage holders are permitted.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, coking coal remains strictly excluded from the export provision.<sup>1</sup> Given India's ongoing deficit in metallurgical coal required for steel production, domestic coking coal reserves are reserved for internal use, with a target to reach 140 MT of production by 2030 to reduce import dependence.<sup>10</sup>

## THE GENESIS OF LIBERALIZATION: DECONSTRUCTING THE COALSETU FRAMEWORK

The cornerstone of the December 2025 reform is the regulatory provision allowing linkage holders to export up to 50% of their allocated coal quantity.<sup>5</sup> This shift addresses a unique economic juncture where domestic output of thermal coal has achieved record benchmarks while demand in specific power-generating segments has begun to moderate or plateau.<sup>8</sup> The move is strategically designed to ensure that state-run entities and private commercial miners maintain healthy cash flows and operational momentum by tapping into the global market arbitrage.



A significant incentive has been placed on the "washed coal" segment. The Ministry has identified beneficiated or processed coal as a high-potential export commodity.<sup>1</sup>

By encouraging the export of washed coal, the regulation aims to enhance the value-addition of Indian mineral exports while simultaneously reducing the domestic environmental footprint associated with transporting high-ash content mineral waste. This is particularly relevant as international prices for coal (approximately \$94.50 per tonne) significantly exceed domestic rates (\$17.53–\$61.43 per tonne), offering a lucrative opportunity for Indian producers to monetize surplus grades.<sup>4</sup>

## LEGISLATIVE EVOLUTION: FROM THE 2015 ACT TO THE 2025 MINERAL CONCESSION RULES

The transition to an export-capable sector is the result of a decadal legislative trajectory aimed at dismantling the state monopoly and fostering competition. The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Amendment Act of 2021 first provided the legal basis for captive mines to sell 50% of their annual production in the open market.<sup>4</sup>



This was followed by the Mineral Concession (Amendment) Rules, 2025, notified on May 20, 2025, which introduced sweeping reforms to streamline "Mine Opening Permissions" and operationalize blocks with greater efficiency.<sup>12</sup>

The 2025 amendments also introduced provisions for "No Objection Certificates" (NOCs) from the Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Limited (CMPDIL) for boundary extensions beyond existing block limits, allowing miners to exploit contiguous coal-bearing areas that were previously inaccessible due to rigid lease boundaries.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the lease lifespan of auctioned mines was extended to 50 years, up from 30, providing long-term investment certainty to the private sector.<sup>4</sup>

**TABLE 2: KEY MILESTONES IN THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF INDIAN COAL**

Year	Regulatory Action	Impact on Market Structure
2015	CMSP Act	Replaced Screening Committee with transparent auctions. <sup>11</sup>
2021	MMDR Amendment	Allowed captive mines to sell 50% of output in open market. <sup>4</sup>
2025	Mineral Concession Rules	Streamlined boundary extensions and production hikes. <sup>12</sup>
2025	CoalSETU Policy	Authorized international exports and end-use flexibility. <sup>1</sup>

## ECONOMIC RATIONALE: THE BILLION-TONNE MILESTONE AND FISCAL SOVEREIGNTY

The policy pivot toward exports is validated by historic production statistics. In the financial year 2024-25, India achieved the landmark milestone of surpassing 1 billion tonnes (BT) of annual coal production on March 20, 2025.<sup>15</sup> By the end of the fiscal year, total production reached approximately 1,047.57 MT, representing a 4.99% growth over the previous year.<sup>15</sup> This surge was most pronounced in the commercial and captive segments, which recorded a 28.11% increase in output, reaching 197.50 MT.<sup>15</sup>

This production boom has had a direct impact on the national balance of trade. In FY 2024-25, India reduced its coal imports to 243.62 MT from 264.53 MT in the previous year, resulting in foreign exchange savings of approximately \$7.93 billion (₹60,681.67 crore).<sup>16</sup> As domestic production targets a scale of 1.5 BT by 2029-30, the ability to export surplus thermal coal ensures that the domestic price environment remains stable while strengthening the national trade balance.<sup>17</sup>



**TABLE 3: NATIONAL COAL PRODUCTION AND DISPATCH METRICS (MT)**

Category	FY 2023-24 (Actual)	FY 2024-25 (Provisional)	Growth (%)
All-India Production	997.83	1,047.57	4.99% 15
CIL Production	773.81	781.08	0.94% 18
Captive/Commercial	154.16	197.5	28.11% 15
Total Coal Dispatch	973.01	1,024.99	5.34% 15
Coking Coal Target 2030	66.82 (FY24)	77.00 (FY25)	Target: 140 10



## INFRASTRUCTURE AND DIGITAL GOVERNANCE: PAVING THE WAY FOR EXPORT EFFICIENCY

A successful export strategy requires more than regulatory permission; it demands a modernized logistical backbone. The Ministry of Coal has prioritized "First Mile Connectivity" (FMC) projects, which automate the evacuation of coal from mines to railheads through mechanized systems like conveyor belts and silos.<sup>19</sup> As of December 2025, 139 FMC projects with a combined capacity of 1,319 MT have been undertaken, with 65 projects already commissioned.<sup>19</sup> These systems are estimated to reduce road-based truck traffic by over 32,000 trips per day, resulting in annual diesel savings of ₹3,300 crore and a significant reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>21</sup>



Complementing this physical infrastructure are the Koyla Shakti Dashboard and the CLAMP (Coal Land Acquisition, Management and Payment) portal. These digital tools provide real-time monitoring of the coal supply chain, from pithead stocks to vessel schedules at ports.<sup>22</sup> The CLAMP portal, in particular, has streamlined land acquisition for coal PSUs, ensuring that new blocks like Bhaskarpura (Chhattisgarh) and Rajhara North (Jharkhand) can scale production in alignment with global demand.<sup>22</sup>



**TABLE 4: KEY FIRST MILE CONNECTIVITY (FMC) PROJECTS COMMISSIONED BY DEC 2025**

Project Name	Sub-Company	Capacity (MTPA)	Impact/Efficiency
Gevra RLS Siding	SECL	20	Mechanized rapid loading <sup>19</sup>
Jayant CHP SILO	NCL	15	Integrated dust control <sup>19</sup>
Lingraj CHP SILO	MCL	16	Reduced wagon turnaround <sup>19</sup>
Sonepur Bazari Silo	ECL	12	Automated dispatch <sup>19</sup>
Dinesh CHP SILO	WCL	8	Improved quality control <sup>19</sup>

## INSTITUTIONAL OVERSIGHT: THE RISE OF COAL EXCHANGES AND REGIONAL DIPLOMACY

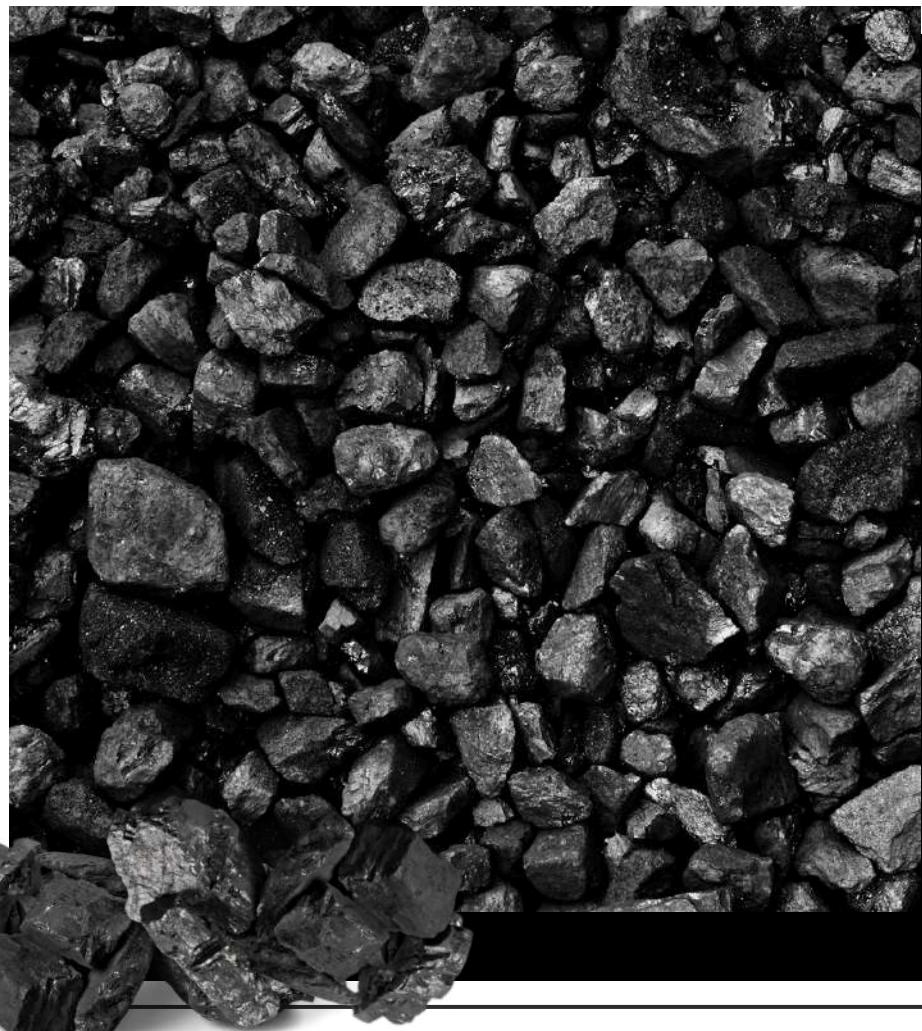
To facilitate transparent price discovery, the government is establishing India's first Coal Trading Exchange (CTE), to be regulated by the Coal Controller's Organisation (CCO).<sup>26</sup> The exchange will transition coal sales from a "One-to-Many" model (dominated by public sector giants) to a "Many-to-Many" digital marketplace, allowing private and public miners to trade surplus coal as a commodity.<sup>27</sup> This transparency is crucial for exporters seeking to benchmark Indian coal against global indices.

On the geopolitical front, the export policy serves as a pillar of India's "Neighborhood First" strategy. Nations such as Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan have been identified as primary beneficiaries, given their immediate requirement for thermal coal and the lower logistical costs associated with Indian supply compared to global competitors.<sup>5</sup> Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has indicated that this regional energy diplomacy will foster greater economic integration within the subcontinent.<sup>5</sup>

## CONCLUSION: A DECLARATION OF ENERGY POWERHOUSE STATUS

The opening of the Indian coal sector to international exports is not a mere technical adjustment but a fundamental declaration of the nation's evolving status as a regional energy powerhouse. By dismantling end-use restrictions through the CoalSETU framework and leveraging a production surplus that has exceeded historical benchmarks, the Ministry of Coal has provided Indian exporters with a powerful new commodity.

As the industry moves toward the *Viksit Bharat@2047* goals, these reforms ensure that natural resources are utilized with maximum efficiency. The combination of legislative modernization, digital transparency, and logistical mechanization has created a self-reliant energy ecosystem capable of supporting both domestic growth and regional stability. For stakeholders, the message is definitive: the domestic coal landscape has matured, and the global market is the next frontier. The transition to an export-capable economy is the definitive evidence of India's strategic pivot from energy dependency to energy sovereignty.



# LOGISTICS SPOTLIGHT

## Shipping & Freight



### THE GREAT MODAL SHIFT INDIA'S AIR CARGO SURGE AMIDST MARITIME VOLATILITY

The global logistics landscape in 2025 has been defined by a stark divergence between traditional maritime corridors and the rapidly ascending air freight sector. As disruptions in the ocean freight market persisted through the final quarter of the year, India's air cargo exports witnessed a significant surge, growing by approximately 9.8% year-on-year in November 2025. This pivot, often termed the "Great Modal Shift," reflects a strategic adaptation by Indian exporters to mitigate the risks associated with extended transit times, port congestion, and the ongoing geopolitical instability in the Red Sea. For the stakeholders of Procure India, this shift represents more than a temporary contingency; it signals a fundamental restructuring of high-value supply chains.



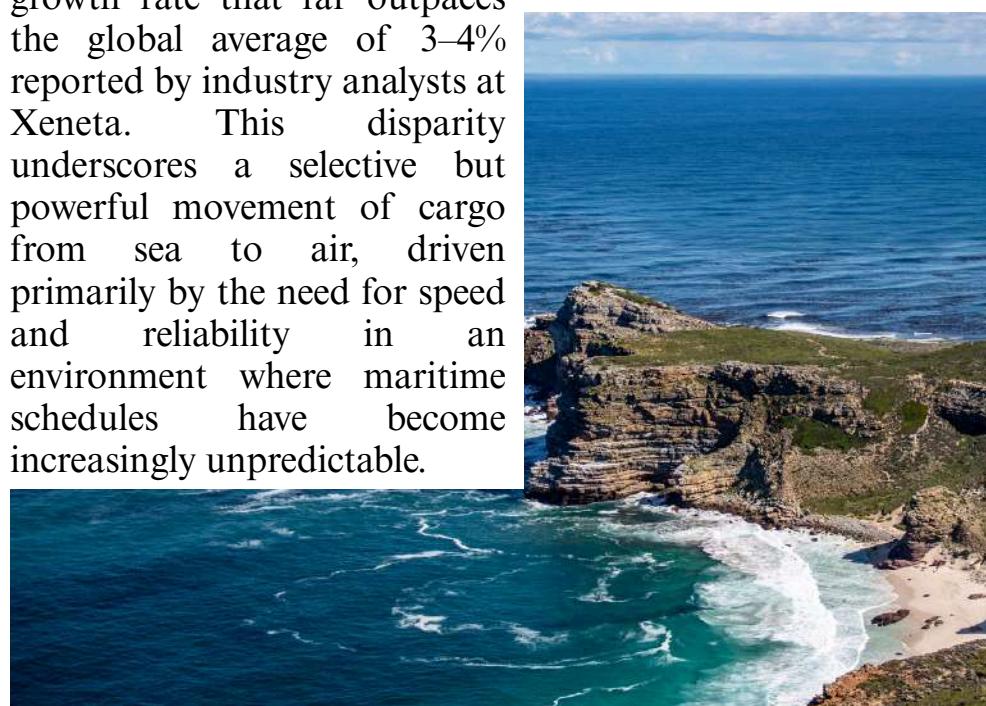
### THE STATISTICAL DIVERGENCE: AIR VS. SEA

The growth in air cargo is best understood when contrasted with the contraction in maritime export volumes. According to data from the Global Trade Magazine and IndexBox Market Intelligence (December 2025), India's containerized export volumes saw a 6.3% year-on-year decline in November. This trend was particularly pronounced at the Port of Nhava Sheva (JNPT), India's premier container gateway, which experienced a 9.2% drop in export volumes during the same period.

Conversely, the air cargo sector recorded a nearly 10% uptick, a growth rate that far outpaces the global average of 3–4% reported by industry analysts at Xeneta. This disparity underscores a selective but powerful movement of cargo from sea to air, driven primarily by the need for speed and reliability in an environment where maritime schedules have become increasingly unpredictable.

### MACROECONOMIC CATALYSTS: THE RED SEA FACTOR AND TRANSIT DELAYS

The primary catalyst for this modal shift remains the protracted crisis in the Red Sea. Despite early 2025 expectations of a potential resolution, the diversion of vessels around the Cape of Good Hope has become a semi-permanent feature of global trade. This rerouting adds approximately 7,000 to 11,000 nautical miles to the Asia-Europe journey, extending transit times by 10 to 25 days depending on the service loop (UNCTAD Maritime Trade Report, 2025).





For Indian exporters, these delays are not merely logistical inconveniences but financial liabilities. The increased transit times have led to:

- Acute Equipment Shortages:** The prolonged turnaround time for vessels has resulted in a scarcity of empty containers at Indian inland container depots (ICDs).
- Inventory Carrying Costs:** Longer lead times force firms to maintain higher buffer stocks, tying up working capital and increasing warehousing overheads.
- Rate Volatility:** While ocean freight rates in late 2025 stabilized below their 2024 peaks, the "slot challenge" the difficulty in securing space on vessels remained a significant hurdle.

In response, many shippers of time-sensitive and high-value goods have opted for air freight. While air cargo costs per kilogram remain substantially higher than sea freight, the "total cost of fulfillment" which accounts for inventory costs, insurance premiums, and the risk of contract penalties for late delivery now often tips the scales in favor of aviation.

## SECTORAL ANALYSIS: THE DRIVERS OF AIR GROWTH

The surge in air cargo is not uniform across all commodities but is concentrated in sectors where speed is a competitive necessity.

- Electronics and High-Tech Components:** Data from the Press Information Bureau (PIB) (October 2025) reveals that India's electronics exports grew by a staggering 40.63% in the April–August 2025 period. Given the short lifecycle and high value-to-weight ratio of semiconductors, mobile handsets, and consumer electronics, this sector has become the primary anchor for air freight demand.
- Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare:** India's pharmaceutical sector continues to rely on air cargo for the export of biologics, vaccines, and high-quality generics. The requirement for temperature-controlled environments makes air transport the preferred mode, especially as the Red Sea diversions have made the maintenance of "cold chains" more complex and expensive over long maritime voyages.
- Perishables and Agri-Exports:** According to Cargo Talk (October 2025), Bangalore's Kempegowda International Airport (BLR) has maintained its lead in perishables exports. The shift toward air has been essential for Indian exporters of fresh produce, flowers, and marine products, where even a three-day maritime delay can result in a 100% loss of cargo value.



## INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY SUPPORT

The Government of India has been proactive in ensuring that the aviation infrastructure can handle this increased load. In December 2025, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) granted No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to two new cargo-focused entities, including FlyExpress, to enhance domestic and international freighter capacity. This move is part of a broader strategy to break the "duopoly" of major carriers and introduce more competitive pricing into the air logistics market.

Furthermore, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and private operators have accelerated the development of dedicated air cargo terminals. ICRA Research (October 2025) projects that international air cargo volumes will touch new highs of 3.6–3.7 million tonnes in FY2025, supported by double-digit growth in international throughput.

## STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR EXPORTERS

The 10% surge in air cargo exports suggests that the Indian export landscape is maturing.

We are witnessing the emergence of a "bi-modal" strategy where exporters no longer rely solely on ocean freight for long-haul shipments. Instead, they are utilizing air cargo as a strategic lever to maintain market share in Europe and North America.

However, this shift also presents challenges. The "winter fog" in North India and the congestion at major hubs like Delhi and Mumbai in late 2025 have occasionally strained the system. Professional logistics managers are now advised to:

- **Engage in Block Space Agreements (BSAs):** To secure capacity at predictable rates, especially during peak e-commerce seasons.
- **Utilize Secondary Hubs:** Diverting cargo through airports like Hyderabad or Cochin to avoid the bottlenecks at major metropolitan hubs.
- **Leverage Digital Freight Forwarding:** Using AI-driven tools to compare real-time air vs. sea rates and transit times to make data-backed routing decisions.



## CONCLUSION

The current surge in air cargo is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of the Indian export community. By leveraging a nearly 10% growth in aviation volumes to bypass the gridlock of the oceans, Indian firms are ensuring that the global supply chain remains unbroken. As we move into 2026, the integration of air cargo as a core component of the export strategy rather than a last-minute emergency measure will be the hallmark of a successful international trade operation.

# Advantage INDIA

India Soars as a Global Aircraft Components Supplier



The global aerospace industry is currently undergoing a structural pivot of historic proportions, transitioning from a centralized transatlantic manufacturing model to a decentralized, multi-polar supply network. Within this shift, India has emerged not merely as a low-cost alternative for basic machining, but as a strategic center for high-value component manufacturing, system integration, and advanced engineering services. This transformation is underpinned by a confluence of record-breaking foreign direct investment (FDI), proactive legislative overhauls most notably the replacement of century-old aviation laws and a maturing domestic industrial ecosystem that has successfully moved up the value chain. As global original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) grapple with a decade-long production backlog and systemic supply chain vulnerabilities, the Indian aerospace sector has demonstrated a unique readiness to absorb complex manufacturing mandates, positioning the nation as a pivotal node in the global aircraft component supply architecture.

## MACROECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS AND THE SURGE IN MANUFACTURING INVESTMENT

The fiscal trajectory of the Indian economy in the mid-2020s serves as the primary engine for its aerospace ambitions. Provisional data for the financial year 2024–25 reveals a historic milestone: India recorded total FDI inflows of US\$ 81.04 billion, representing a 14% increase from the US\$ 71.28 billion registered in the previous year.<sup>1</sup> This surge in capital is not an isolated event but the culmination of a decade of liberalized policy frameworks. Between 2014 and 2025, India attracted a staggering US\$ 748.78 billion in FDI, which accounts for nearly 70% of all FDI received by the country over the last twenty-five years.<sup>1</sup> The manufacturing sector has been a disproportionate beneficiary of this influx, with manufacturing-specific FDI rising by 18% in FY 2024–25 to reach US\$ 19.04 billion.<sup>1</sup>



The geographical concentration of these investments suggests the emergence of highly specialized industrial hubs. Maharashtra continues to lead the nation, attracting 39% of total FDI equity inflows, followed by Karnataka at 13% and Delhi at 12%. For the aerospace sector, the dominance of Maharashtra and Karnataka is particularly significant; these states host the requisite infrastructure, from advanced material testing labs to specialized aerospace parks. Singapore remains the largest source of this capital, contributing 30% of total inflows, while Mauritius and the United States follow with 17% and 11% respectively, highlighting a diversified base of international confidence in India's industrial resilience.<sup>1</sup>



Key FDI and Economic Indicators (FY 2024–25)	Value / Metric
Total FDI Inflow (Provisional)	US\$ 81.04 Billion <sup>1</sup>
Year-on-Year FDI Growth	14% <sup>2</sup>
Manufacturing FDI Inflow	US\$ 19.04 Billion <sup>4</sup>
Manufacturing FDI Growth	18% <sup>1</sup>
Top Recipient State (Maharashtra)	39% Share
Top Source Country (Singapore)	30% Share <sup>1</sup>
Total Merchandise Exports (FY 2024–25)	US\$ 824.9 Billion <sup>5</sup>

The implications of this macroeconomic strength extend into the trade balance. In FY 2024–25, India's total exports reached a record US\$ 824.9 billion. Within the engineering goods category, which includes aerospace parts, exports have reached US\$ 67.49 billion, signaling that the "Make in India" initiative has transitioned from a policy slogan to a tangible export engine.<sup>5</sup> Notably, India's aerospace exports jumped 224% year-on-year during April–January 2024–25, reaching US\$ 6.37 billion, marking the fastest growth among all engineering sectors.

## THE AIRCRAFT COMPONENT MARKET: A DECADE OF EXPANSION

The Indian aircraft components market is currently valued at approximately US\$ 16.22 billion as of 2024.<sup>6</sup> Projections for the coming decade suggest a period of accelerated growth, with the market expected to reach US\$ 29.50 billion by 2033, exhibiting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.37% to 6.41%.<sup>6</sup> This expansion is fueled by two distinct demand vectors: an unprecedented domestic fleet renewal and the deepening integration of Indian tier-one and tier-two suppliers into global OEM value chains.



The domestic landscape is characterized by massive order books from Indian carriers, such as Air India's order for 85 Airbus aircraft in late 2024.<sup>8</sup> This demand necessitates a localized supply chain for replacement parts, avionics, and structural components. Beyond simple manufacturing, the market is witnessing a qualitative shift toward technological sophistication. The integration of Internet of Things (IoT) sensors into aerospace components and the increasing use of advanced composites are now standard practices in Indian facilities. These innovations are critical for achieving the weight savings and fuel efficiency mandated by global sustainability targets.



## STRATEGIC INDUSTRIAL PARTNERSHIPS AND THE C295 MILESTONE

A watershed moment for India's aerospace sector is the establishment of the Final Assembly Line (FAL) for the Airbus C295 military transport aircraft in Vadodara, Gujarat. This program, a joint venture between Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) and Airbus, represents the first time a complete aircraft will be manufactured by a private sector player in India from the ground up. Under the US\$ 2.5 billion contract, the project will involve the production of more than 85% of the aircraft's structural components and the manufacturing of over 13,000 detailed parts within India.<sup>9</sup> This has necessitated the onboarding of 37 India-based suppliers who have been certified through 21 specialized manufacturing processes.<sup>11</sup>



The engine segment is witnessing similar depth. In February 2025, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) signed a long-term contract with Safran Aircraft Engines for the supply of turbine forged parts for the LEAP engine family. These engines power the world's most successful commercial aircraft, including the Airbus A320neo and Boeing 737 MAX. This collaboration solidifies India's position in high-temperature material science and precision forging.

## THE MRO REVOLUTION AND LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Historically, nearly 85% of India's Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) work took place outside the country, leading to massive foreign exchange outflows.<sup>12</sup> The policy landscape in 2024 and 2025 has undergone a radical transformation to correct this. The cornerstone of this change is the reduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) on MRO services from 18% to a uniform 5%.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, a uniform 5% Integrated GST (IGST) was applied to all aircraft parts and engines, bringing India in line with global best practices.<sup>15</sup>

The legislative framework was further modernized by the Bharatiya Vayu Adhiniyam, 2024, which came into effect in January 2025, replacing the Aircraft Act of 1934.<sup>9</sup>

This new law provides explicit legislative recognition for maintenance, design, and manufacturing. As a result, the Indian MRO industry is expected to double in value from US\$ 2 billion in 2024 to US\$ 4 billion by 2031.<sup>15</sup>



## HUMAN CAPITAL AND THE ECONOMICS OF ENGINEERING

India's most sustainable competitive advantage is its reservoir of cost-effective human capital. In 2025, the employability of Indian graduates reached significant rates, with B.Tech graduates at 71.5% and MBA graduates at 78%.<sup>16</sup> The economic case for sourcing engineering from India is underscored by a profound labor cost differential. An entry-level aeronautical engineer in India earns between US\$ 4,500 and US\$ 9,000 annually.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the same entry-level position in the United States commands a salary of approximately US\$ 105,000.

Global Salary Comparison: Aerospace Engineers (2025–26)	Entry-Level (USD)	Senior-Level (USD)
United States	~US\$ 105,000	US\$ 150,000+
India	US\$ 4,500 - \$9,000	US\$ 28,000 - \$35,000



## FUTURE OUTLOOK: THE PATH TO 10% GLOBAL SHARE

The global aerospace sector is currently operating under a state of "supply strain," with a combined backlog stretching beyond ten years and over 15,000 aircraft on backorder. This environment has created a unique opening for Indian firms. While India currently accounts for only 2% of the global aerospace supply chain, industry leaders anticipate this figure will rise to 10% within the coming decade.

To support this growth, the Union Budget 2025–26 allocated ₹57 crore for the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for drones, a 7.5% increase over the previous year.<sup>20</sup> NITI Aayog projects the Indian UAV market alone will reach US\$ 15 billion by 2030.<sup>21</sup> By combining technical skill with the cost-efficiency of the East, India is well-positioned for a sustained and soaring trajectory in the global aerospace ecosystem.



# KNOW YOUR MARKET

## IEC, AD CODE, GST, LUT: THE REGISTRATIONS EVERY INDIAN EXPORTER MUST GET RIGHT

In the contemporary era of globalized commerce, India's strategic pivot toward becoming a global manufacturing and export hub has necessitated a robust, albeit complex, regulatory framework. For the burgeoning exporter, navigating this bureaucratic landscape is not merely a legal obligation but a strategic prerequisite. Ensuring that statutory registrations specifically the Importer-Exporter Code (IEC), the Authorized Dealer (AD) Code, Goods and Services Tax (GST), and the Letter of Undertaking (LUT) are meticulously managed is the difference between seamless international trade and a logistical quagmire.



### 1. THE IMPORTER-EXPORTER CODE (IEC): THE PRIMARY GATEWAY

The Importer-Exporter Code (IEC) serves as the foundational identity for any person or entity seeking to engage in international trade within the Indian jurisdiction. Issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the IEC is a 10-digit alphanumeric code that is now intrinsically linked to the entity's Permanent Account Number (PAN).

While the IEC does not expire and possesses lifelong validity, a critical regulatory update mandates that all IEC holders update their profiles annually between April and June. Failure to comply with this annual verification results in the deactivation of the code, effectively halting all cross-border movement of goods.



### KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IEC:

- Mandatory Status:** No export or import of goods can be legally transacted without a valid IEC.
- Bank Linkage:** It is a prerequisite for opening bank accounts and transacting in foreign exchange for trade purposes.
- Digital Integration:** The application process is entirely digitized through the DGFT portal, requiring a Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) or Aadhaar-based e-verification.



## 2. THE AUTHORIZED DEALER (AD) CODE: CONNECTING FINANCE TO CUSTOMS

While the IEC identifies the trader, the Authorized Dealer (AD) Code identifies the financial conduit. An AD Code is a 14-digit number provided by the bank where the exporter maintains their business current account. It is essentially a certification from the bank to the Customs Department, confirming that the exporter is a legitimate entity with an authorized banking channel for foreign exchange.

The significance of the AD Code becomes apparent at the point of Customs Clearance. Without registering this code at the specific port (airport or seaport) from which goods are being shipped via the ICEGATE (Indian Customs Electronic Data Interchange Gateway), an exporter cannot generate a Shipping Bill.

**Note:** Since 2022, the regulatory environment has simplified; once an AD Code is registered at a primary port, it is generally applicable across multiple locations, though verification at each port's system remains a standard procedural check.

## 3. GST AND THE CONCEPT OF ZERO-RATED SUPPLIES

Under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, exports are classified as "Zero-rated supplies." This does not mean the goods are exempt from tax, but rather that the tax rate on the final product is 0%, and the exporter is entitled to claim a refund on the taxes paid on inputs (raw materials, services, etc.).



For an exporter, GST registration is mandatory regardless of the business's annual turnover threshold, provided they are making interstate or international supplies. The integration of the GST portal with the Customs' ICEGATE system ensures that the information provided in the GSTR-1 and GSTR-3B filings matches the Shipping Bill, which is the cornerstone for processing tax refunds.

## 4. THE LETTER OF UNDERTAKING (LUT): PRESERVING WORKING CAPITAL

The Letter of Undertaking (LUT) is a facility provided under GST to ensure that an exporter's working capital is not unnecessarily blocked. Legally, an exporter has two paths for tax compliance:

- **Payment of IGST:** Paying the Integrated GST at the time of export and later claiming a refund from the government.
- **Filing an LUT:** Exporting goods or services without an upfront payment of IGST.

The LUT is filed via Form GST RFD-11 on the GST portal. It is essentially a promise by the exporter to the government that they will complete the export within the stipulated timeframe and realize the foreign exchange proceeds.



Feature	Letter of Undertaking (LUT)	IGST Payment Route
<b>Upfront Payment</b>	No IGST paid at the time of export.	IGST paid upfront on every shipment.
<b>Cash Flow</b>	High; capital remains with the business.	Moderate; funds are blocked until refund.
<b>Validity</b>	Valid for one Financial Year.	Perpetual (per transaction).
<b>Compliance</b>	Requires annual renewal.	Requires meticulous refund tracking.

## CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC COMPLIANCE FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

In the professional sphere of international trade, compliance is not a hurdle but an enabler. A failure to secure these registrations correctly or to maintain them through annual renewal can lead to severe penalties, shipment delays, and the loss of critical government incentives like Duty Drawback or RoDTEP (Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products).

For the modern Indian exporter, a "compliance-first" approach is the only sustainable strategy for scaling operations in an increasingly scrutinized global marketplace. By securing the IEC, registering the AD Code, and utilizing the LUT under the GST framework, businesses can ensure that their focus remains on market expansion rather than administrative firefighting.



# PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

## MILLETS GO GLOBAL: INDIA'S ANCIENT GRAINS BECOME THE WORLD'S MODERN SUPERFOOD

In the theater of global food security, a profound paradigm shift is underway, one that moves the focus from caloric volume to nutritional density and environmental sustainability. At the center of this transition is a group of small-seeded grasses collectively known as millets.<sup>1</sup> Long relegated to the periphery of global commodity markets in favor of the "Big Three" wheat, rice, and maize millets are now undergoing a dramatic commercial renaissance.<sup>2</sup>



Driven by Indian leadership and bolstered by the legacy of the United Nations International Year of Millets (2023), these ancient grains have emerged as a high-value strategic asset for international trade.<sup>3</sup>

## THE AGRARIAN LANDSCAPE: INDIA'S COMMAND OF THE GLOBAL SUPPLY

India stands as the undisputed titan of millet production.<sup>4</sup> According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), India accounts for approximately 38.4% of global production, a figure that reflects both historical heritage and modern agrarian prowess.<sup>5</sup> For the fiscal year 2024–25, India's total millet production reached an estimated 18.015 million metric tonnes (MMT), representing a significant year-on-year increase and reinforcing its position as the "Global Hub for Millets."<sup>6</sup>

The geographical distribution of this output is concentrated within India's semi-arid regions. Rajasthan remains the primary producer, leveraging its vast drylands for pearl millet (Bajra) cultivation, followed closely by Maharashtra and Karnataka.

<sup>7</sup> This production is not monolithic but comprises a diverse portfolio including Sorghum (Jowar), Finger Millet (Ragi), and several "small millets" such as Foxtail, Kodo, and Barnyard varieties.



<sup>8</sup> This diversity allows Indian exporters to address a wide spectrum of international culinary and industrial requirements.



## THE CLIMATIC IMPERATIVE: A HEDGE AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL VOLATILITY

The ascendancy of millets is inextricably linked to the escalating exigencies of climate change.<sup>9</sup> As global agriculture grapples with depleting aquifers and erratic monsoons, millets offer a blueprint for "climate-smart" farming.<sup>10</sup> Unlike rice, which is notoriously water-intensive, millets require significantly fewer resources.<sup>11</sup>

Research indicates that millets possess a 70% lower irrigation requirement compared to rice.<sup>12</sup> While rice often demands approximately 1,200 mm of water per growth cycle, certain millet varieties can reach maturity with as little as 200 mm to 400 mm of rainfall.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, millets possess a remarkable thermotolerance, thriving in temperatures exceeding 40°C, where traditional staples often suffer yield collapse. For the global exporter, this resilience translates into a more stable and predictable supply chain, shielded from the immediate shocks of climatic variability.

## THE NUTRITIONAL PARADIGM: REBRANDING "COARSE GRAINS" AS "NUTRI-CEREALS"

The professional transition of millets from "poor man's food" to "elite superfood" is grounded in rigorous clinical data.

In a world increasingly burdened by lifestyle-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs), the nutritional profile of millets provides a compelling market proposition.<sup>14</sup>

- **Glycemic Index (GI):** Millets are characterized by a low to moderate glycemic index, facilitating a slow release of glucose into the bloodstream.<sup>15</sup> This makes them a critical dietary component in the management of Type-2 diabetes, a market segment currently seeing exponential growth in North America and Europe.
- **Gluten-Free Composition:** As the prevalence of celiac disease and gluten sensitivity rises globally, the demand for naturally gluten-free grains has surged.<sup>16</sup> Millets provide a structurally superior alternative to synthetic gluten-free formulations.

- **Micronutrient Density:** Proso and Finger millets are particularly noted for their mineral content. For instance, Finger Millet (Ragi) contains nearly three times the calcium of milk by weight, while Pearl Millet is a significant source of iron and zinc.

## GLOBAL TRADE DYNAMICS AND MARKET PROJECTIONS

The economic trajectory of the millet sector is strikingly upward. The global millet market, valued at approximately USD 12.26 billion in 2025, is projected to expand at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 5.5%, reaching an estimated USD 16.04 billion by 2030.

For Indian exporters, the export volume for 2024-25 stood at approximately 1.21 lakh metric tonnes, with a valuation exceeding USD 60 million. While the volume is currently a fraction of India's total cereal exports, the growth in "value-added" products such as millet-based pasta, gluten-free flour blends, and ready-to-eat snacks is where the highest margins reside.



Metric	2023-24 (Actual)	2024-25 (Est.)
<b>Total Production (India)</b>	17.57 MMT	18.01 MMT
<b>Export Quantity</b>	1.46 Lakh MT	1.21 Lakh MT*
<b>Primary Export Market</b>	UAE	UAE
<b>Secondary Export Market</b>	Saudi Arabia	Nepal
<b>Global Market Share (Prod.)<sup>17</sup></b>	~38% <sup>18</sup>	~40% <sup>19</sup>
<i>*Partial year/Advance estimate data</i>		

Research indicates that millets possess a 70% lower irrigation requirement compared to rice.<sup>12</sup> While rice often demands approximately 1,200 mm of water per growth cycle, certain millet varieties can reach maturity with as little as 200 mm to 400 mm of rainfall.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, millets possess a remarkable thermotolerance, thriving in temperatures exceeding 40°C, where traditional staples often suffer yield collapse. For the global exporter, this resilience translates into a more stable and predictable supply chain, shielded from the immediate shocks of climatic variability.



## GLOBAL TRADE DYNAMICS AND MARKET PROJECTIONS

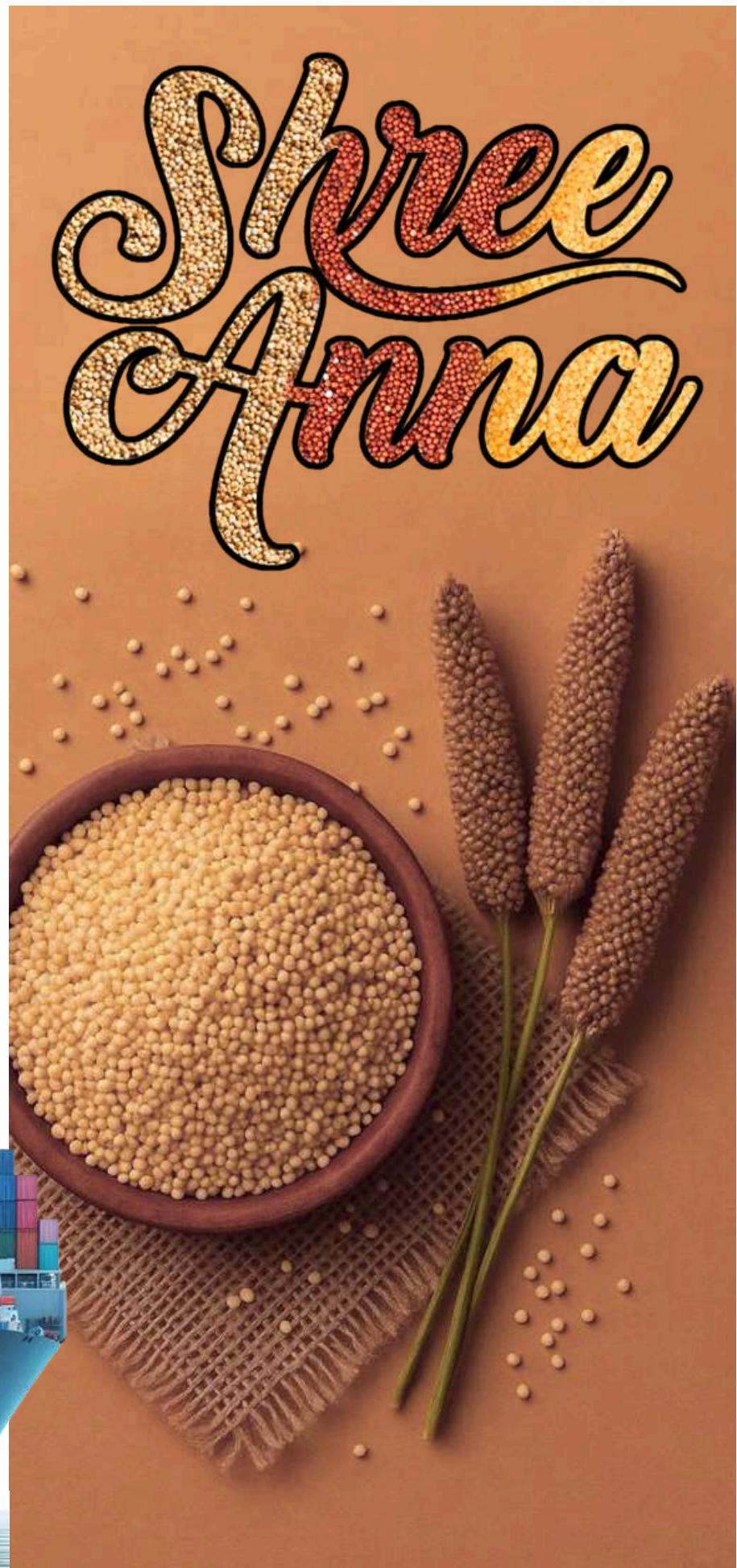
The Government of India, through the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), has implemented a robust institutional framework to support exporters.<sup>21</sup> The "MAHARISHI" initiative, launched during India's G20 Presidency, aims to harmonize international research on millets and ancient grains, thereby reducing trade barriers and standardizing quality benchmarks.

Furthermore, the PLI (Production Linked Incentive) Scheme for food processing has incentivized Indian manufacturers to move up the value chain.<sup>22</sup> Instead of exporting raw grain, companies are now increasingly focused on sophisticated processing technologies such as extrusion and cold-pressing to create consumer-centric products that meet Western regulatory standards (FDA, EFSA).

## CONCLUSION: THE STRATEGIC OUTLOOK FOR EXPORTERS

For the sophisticated exporter, millets represent more than just a commodity; they represent a strategic convergence of health, sustainability, and economic growth.<sup>23</sup> The transition of millets into the global mainstream is not a fleeting trend but a structural adjustment of the global food basket.

To capitalize on this opportunity, exporters must prioritize traceability and certification, particularly in the organic segment. As the global consumer becomes more discerning regarding the carbon footprint and nutritional integrity of their food, India's "Shree Anna" (the Mother of Grains) is uniquely positioned to dominate the 21st-century superfood market.



# CASE STUDY

## THE OLFACTORY ECONOMY: THE EXPORT DYNAMICS OF INDIA'S AGARBATTI INDUSTRY

The global fragrance market is undergoing a structural transformation, pivoting from purely synthetic aerosol-based solutions toward "wellness-centric" ambient scents. At the heart of this shift lies the Indian Agarbatti (incense stick) industry a sector that effectively bridges the gap between ancient cultural heritage and modern industrial economics. Once relegated to the unorganized "cottage" category, the industry has evolved into a formidable export powerhouse, valued at approximately USD 1.28 billion in 2025 and projected to reach USD 2.1 billion by 2033.1



This case study examines the intersection of rural labor economics, global value chain integration, and the "premiumization" of traditional commodities.

### 1. MARKET ARCHITECTURE AND MACRO-ECONOMIC FOOTPRINT

The Indian incense industry is characterized by a dual-structure: a vast, labor-intensive unorganized sector and an emerging, highly professionalized organized segment. As of 2025, India remains the world's preeminent producer and exporter of incense sticks, commanding nearly 70% of the global market share.



The industry's transition from a ritualistic utility to a therapeutic lifestyle product has been the primary driver of its value appreciation. While domestic consumption remains robust with nearly 62% of demand stemming from rural areas the export sector is the engine of high-margin growth.

Metric	Statistic
<b>Current Market Valuation</b>	USD 1.28 Billion (approx. ₹10,600 Crore)
<b>Projected CAGR (2025-2033)</b>	5.3% – 5.89%
<b>Monthly Production Volume</b>	15,000 Tonnes (approx. 15 Billion sticks)
<b>Export Destinations</b>	150+ Countries
<b>Top Export Markets</b>	USA, UAE, UK, Malaysia, Nigeria

KEY MARKET INDICATORS (2024-2025)

## 2. THE EXPORT PIVOT: FROM RITUAL TO WELLNESS

Historically, the demand for Indian incense was tethered to the Indian diaspora and religious observances.<sup>2</sup> However, the post-pandemic global emphasis on holistic wellness, mindfulness, and aromatherapy has radically expanded the consumer base.<sup>3</sup>

The "Westernization" of agarbatti usage has led to several key trends:

- **Premiumization:** Foreign markets, particularly the USA (the top importer with a ~38% share of Indian handicraft exports), demand high-quality, charcoal-free, and organic variants.<sup>4</sup>
- **The Yoga Dividend:** The global proliferation of yoga and meditation studios has created a recurring institutional demand for "calming" fragrances like sandalwood, lavender, and lemongrass.<sup>5</sup>



- **Sustainability Branding:** Innovative startups are now recycling temple floral waste into incense (circular economy), a move that resonates deeply with ESG-conscious European and North American consumers.



"The industry is no longer just selling a scent; it is exporting a lifestyle. The transition from 'pooja' (ritual) to 'patio' (leisure) is where the highest export margins are currently realized." Industry Analyst, AIAMA.

## 3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT: THE GENDERED LABOR FORCE

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the agarbatti industry is its role as a "social stabilizer" in rural India. The sector provides livelihoods to over 2 million people, approximately 80% of whom are women.<sup>6</sup>

### THE EMPLOYMENT MATRIX

- **Rural Empowerment:** In states like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu (which account for over 60% of national production), the industry serves as a primary source of non-farm income.<sup>7</sup>
- **Decentralized Production:** The "Hub-and-Spoke" model allows women to engage in "rolling" (the process of coating sticks with masala) from their homes, facilitating economic participation without disrupting domestic structures.<sup>8</sup>
- **Skill Gradation:** While the rolling process is manual, the packaging and R&D (fragrance blending) sectors are increasingly automated, requiring a more technically skilled workforce.

Despite these benefits, the industry faces scrutiny regarding health hazards, such as exposure to fine particulate matter, and the persistence of home-based labor which makes regulation difficult.<sup>9</sup> Recent 2025 reports, however, indicate a significant decline in child labor, with 82% of surveyed clusters reporting no underage participation due to stricter MSME compliance.<sup>10</sup>



#### 4. SUPPLY CHAIN VULNERABILITIES AND POLICY INTERVENTION

While India dominates the final product market, its supply chain remains paradoxically dependent on imports. For years, the industry relied heavily on Vietnam and China for raw bamboo sticks (specifically the round sticks required for uniform burning).

To address this, the Government of India has implemented several strategic interventions under the Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) initiative:

- 1. Import Restrictions:** Increased customs duties on imported bamboo sticks to incentivize domestic cultivation.
- 2. National Bamboo Mission (NBM):** A dedicated effort to cultivate high-quality bamboo species suitable for agarbatti production in the Northeast.
- 3. Handicraft Status:** In 2009, agarbatti was classified as a "handicraft," making exporters eligible for duty drawbacks and incentives under schemes like the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS).<sup>11</sup>

#### 5. FUTURE OUTLOOK: THE DIGITAL AND HERBAL FRONTIER

The next phase of the industry's evolution is characterized by digital transformation and herbal innovation. E-commerce platforms now account for the fastest-growing sales channel, allowing niche artisanal brands to bypass traditional distributors and reach global boutique markets directly.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, "Herbal Agarbattis" which avoid synthetic binders and use natural essential oils now account for 10-15% of the market and are growing at double the rate of conventional products.

#### CONCLUSION

The Indian Agarbatti industry serves as a quintessential case study of a "low-tech" traditional sector achieving high-impact global integration. By leveraging its vast rural labor pool and capitalizing on the global wellness boom, the industry has successfully decoupled from its purely religious origins. However, its long-term sustainability will depend on securing its raw material supply chain and formalizing its massive unorganized workforce. As the world continues to prioritize "clean" and "mindful" consumption, the humble incense stick is poised to remain a cornerstone of India's export economics.<sup>13</sup>



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## 61st IHGF Delhi Fair (Spring) 2026

One of the world's largest sourcing fairs for handicrafts and home decor, the 61st IHGF Delhi Fair (Spring) 2026 brings together Indian manufacturers and global buyers across lifestyle, gifting, and sustainable products. It serves as a key platform to discover new suppliers, design innovations, and export-ready collections from India.

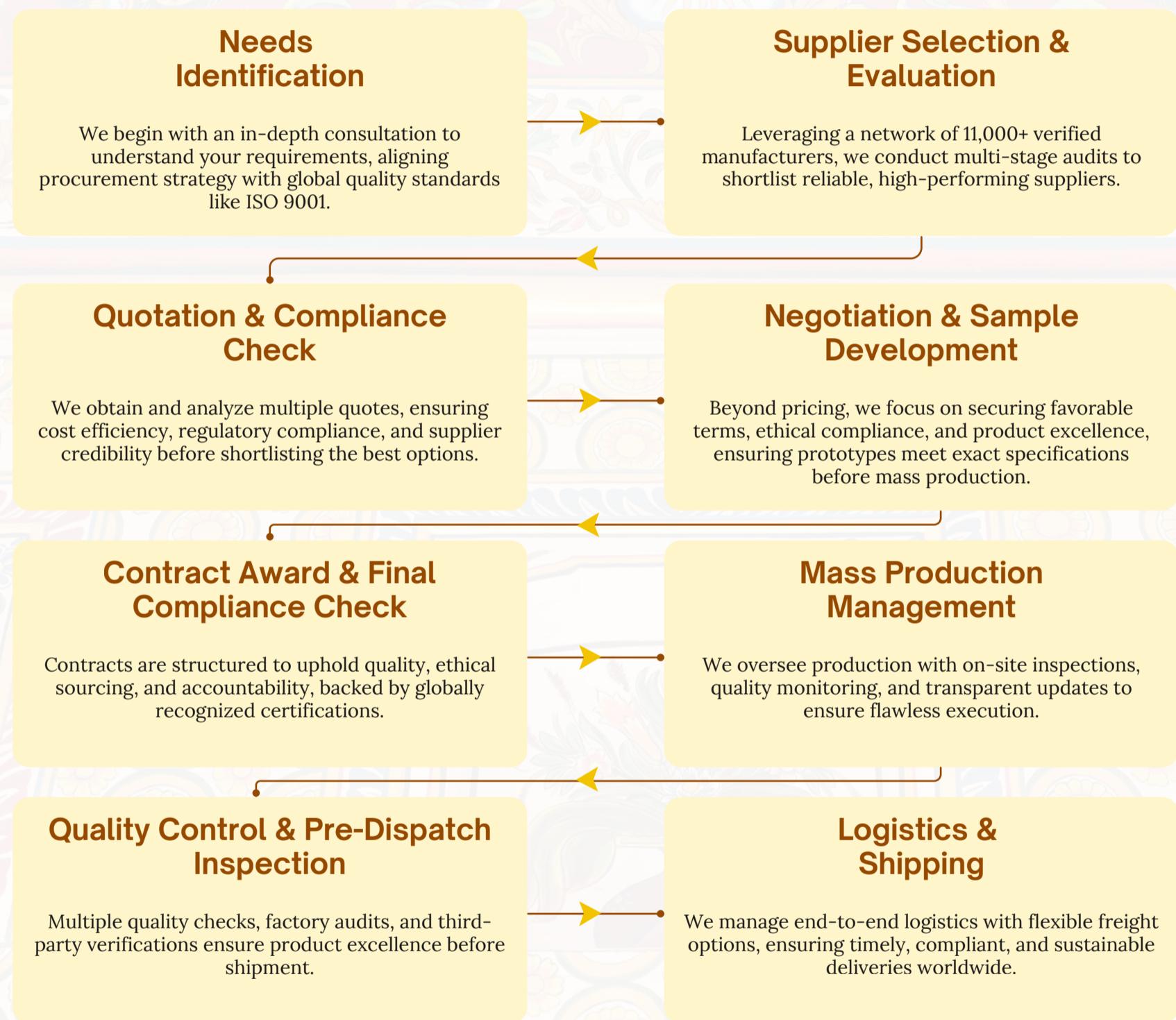
## Manufacturing & Logistics India 2026 (Exhibition & Summit)

Manufacturing & Logistics India 2026 is a focused exhibition and summit highlighting advancements in manufacturing efficiency, supply chain resilience, and logistics infrastructure. The event convenes industry leaders, solution providers, and policymakers to discuss future-ready manufacturing and integrated logistics strategies.



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