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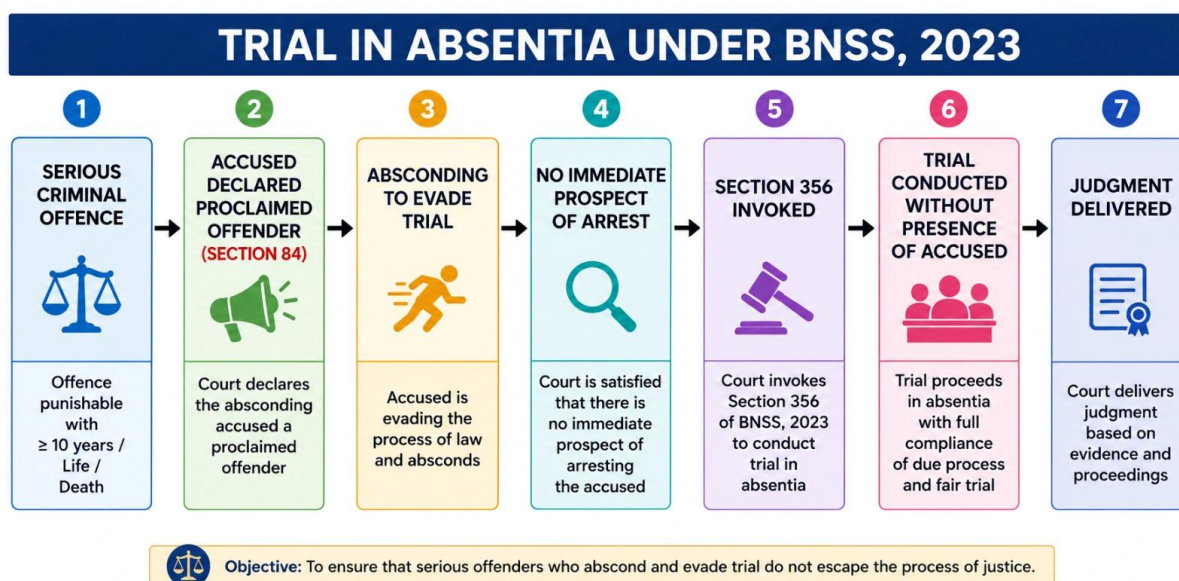
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GS Paper II: Polity

1. Trial in Absentia under the BNSS: Criminal Justice Reforms

a. Introduction

A Special NIA Court is expected to invoke Section 356 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023 for a trial in absentia against Hafiz Saeed in connection with the Pahalgam terror attack case, as he is unlikely to appear before an Indian court.



b. What is Trial in Absentia?

A trial in absentia is a criminal trial conducted without the physical presence of the accused.

Under Section 356 of the BNSS, if a proclaimed offender has absconded to evade trial and there is no immediate prospect of arrest, the court may proceed with the trial by treating the accused's absence as a waiver of the right to be present.

c. Who Can Be Tried in Absentia?

Trial in absentia is not applicable to all accused persons. It is restricted to proclaimed offenders under Section 84 of the BNSS, where:

- The offence is punishable with at least 10 years' imprisonment, life imprisonment, or death.
- The accused has absconded to evade trial.
- There is no immediate prospect of arrest.

d. What Changed Under the BNSS?

CrPC, 1973

Allowed limited proceedings in the accused's absence e.g., recording evidence or exempting appearance.

BNSS, 2023

Introduces a full-fledged trial in absentia for proclaimed offenders in serious offences.

CrPC, 1973

Trials often remained pending until the accused was arrested.

BNSS, 2023

Enables courts to conclude trials despite deliberate evasion by absconding accused.

e. Procedural Safeguards under Section 356

To protect the right to a fair trial, the BNSS prescribes several safeguards:

- Two consecutive arrest warrants must be issued at least 30 days apart.
- A public notice must be published in newspapers, giving the accused 30 days to appear.
- Notice must be displayed at the accused's last known residence.
- A relative or friend of the accused must be informed.
- Trial can begin only 90 days after framing of charges, providing adequate opportunity to appear.
- If the accused has no lawyer, the court must appoint a State-funded defence counsel.
- Witness testimony may be recorded through audiovisual electronic means and preserved for future review.

f. If the Accused Later Appears

If the accused is subsequently arrested or voluntarily appears before the court:

- The court may permit cross-examination of prosecution witnesses in the interests of justice.
- Preserved audiovisual recordings and witness statements facilitate judicial review while maintaining the integrity of the trial.

g. Significance

- Prevents delay in trials caused by absconding offenders, especially in terrorism and organised crime cases.
- Strengthens the criminal justice system by reducing impunity for fugitives operating from abroad.
- Improves judicial efficiency while balancing procedural fairness through statutory safeguards.

h. Concerns

- Trial without the accused may raise concerns regarding the right to fair hearing under Article 21.
- Possibility of misuse if courts do not strictly verify that the accused deliberately evaded trial.
- Effective implementation requires robust service of notice and competent legal representation.

i. Way Forward

- Ensure strict judicial scrutiny before declaring a person a proclaimed offender.
- Guarantee effective legal aid and adherence to due process.
- Use technology-enabled evidence recording to preserve transparency and fairness.
- Periodically review safeguards to balance speedy justice with constitutional protections.

Conclusion

Trial in absentia marks a significant reform under the BNSS to ensure that fugitives cannot evade justice by remaining beyond the reach of law. However, its legitimacy will ultimately depend on strict adherence to procedural safeguards, judicial oversight, and the constitutional guarantee of a fair trial under Article 21.

GS Paper II: Current Affairs

2. Tourism as a Driver of Inclusive Economic Growth

a. Introduction

India's tourism and hospitality sector has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the economy, driven by robust domestic demand, improving infrastructure and rising private investment. Industry stakeholders have emphasised the need for policy reforms to unlock India's vast tourism potential and position the country as a leading global tourism destination.



b. Tourism and the Indian Economy

Tourism is one of India's largest service industries, contributing nearly 7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and supporting over 9% of total employment through its strong multiplier effect. Every direct job created in tourism generates multiple indirect employment opportunities in transport, hospitality, handicrafts, retail, food services and other local enterprises.

Following the pandemic, the sector has witnessed a strong recovery, with hotel occupancy rates and average room tariffs surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Simultaneously, improved connectivity through airports, highways, railways and digital infrastructure has expanded tourism beyond metropolitan centres into Tier-II and Tier-III cities, attracting fresh private investment.

The sector's growing economic contribution underscores why tourism is increasingly viewed as an important instrument of inclusive and sustainable development.

c. Significance of Tourism

Tourism generates broad-based economic and social benefits that extend well beyond the hospitality industry.

- **Employment Generation:** As a labour-intensive sector, tourism creates large-scale employment opportunities, particularly for women, youth, artisans and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- **Inclusive Economic Growth:** It stimulates entrepreneurship and supports local economies by increasing demand for accommodation, transport, handicrafts, food services and other cultural industries.
- **Balanced Regional Development:** Tourism promotes economic activity in rural, coastal, heritage, wellness, eco-tourism and spiritual destinations, reducing regional disparities.
- **Foreign Exchange Earnings and Soft Power:** International tourism generates valuable foreign exchange while showcasing India's heritage, traditions and cultural diversity, thereby strengthening India's global image and soft power.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Rising tourism encourages investment in hotels, transport networks, digital connectivity and urban amenities, creating a strong multiplier effect across the economy.

Despite these advantages, several structural bottlenecks continue to limit the sector's full potential.

d. Challenges

India's tourism sector continues to face a number of structural and policy-related challenges.

- **Infrastructure Deficits:** Many destinations lack quality tourism infrastructure, last-mile connectivity, sanitation facilities and visitor amenities.
- **High Cost of Investment:** Hospitality projects often face high financing costs, lengthy approval processes and regulatory complexities, discouraging private investment.
- **Global Competition:** India competes with well-established international tourism destinations offering superior infrastructure, seamless travel experiences and aggressive global marketing.
- **Policy and Administrative Constraints:** Limited international promotion, taxation concerns, cumbersome visa procedures and fragmented implementation across States reduce India's global competitiveness.

Addressing these constraints requires coordinated policy reforms alongside sustained infrastructure development.

e. Way Forward

A comprehensive strategy is needed to fully harness tourism as a driver of economic growth.

- Develop tourism destinations through a mission-mode approach integrating infrastructure, destination planning and environmental sustainability.
- Grant industry status to tourism across all States to improve access to institutional finance and encourage greater private investment.
- Strengthen Brand India through sustained international promotion, targeted marketing campaigns and cultural diplomacy.
- Simplify visa procedures by expanding e-Visa facilities and improving the overall ease of travel for international visitors.
- Improve last-mile connectivity, digital infrastructure, public amenities and tourist safety to enhance visitor experience.
- Introduce single-window clearance mechanisms and simplify regulatory approvals to improve the investment climate for tourism projects.

These measures can significantly enhance India's competitiveness while ensuring sustainable and inclusive tourism development.

Conclusion

Tourism is a high-multiplier sector capable of generating employment, promoting inclusive regional development, earning foreign exchange and strengthening India's global cultural influence. A coordinated strategy combining world-class infrastructure, policy reforms, ease of doing business and sustainable destination management can transform tourism into a major pillar of Viksit Bharat and long-term economic growth.

GS Paper II: International Relations

3. India–United States Defence Technology Cooperation: Progress and Persistent Gaps

a. Introduction

The proposed General Electric (GE) F414 jet engine co-production programme has witnessed prolonged delays owing to disagreements over pricing, technology transfer and export-control regulations. The episode underscores the continuing gap between the strategic ambitions of India–United States defence cooperation and the limited progress in defence-industrial collaboration.

 MAJOR INDIA-US DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES 			
INITIATIVE	OBJECTIVE	CURRENT STATUS	KEY FOCUS AREAS
 DTTI (2012)	 Joint R&D, Co-development	 Limited outcomes	 Collaborative R&D in defence technologies
 iCET (2022)	 Critical & Emerging Technologies	 Slow progress	 AI, Quantum, Cyber, Space, Autonomy, etc.
 INDUS-X (2023)	 Industry–Start-up Collaboration	 Early stage	 Start-ups, Innovation, Co-creation
 GE F414 PROGRAMME	 Engine Co-production	 Negotiations delayed	 F414 Engine Manufacturing in India
 Goal: Build a resilient, technology-driven and self-reliant defence industrial ecosystem 			

b. Evolution of India–United States Defence Technology Cooperation

Over the past decade, India and the United States have sought to transform their relationship from a conventional buyer-seller model to one based on joint research, co-development and co-production of advanced defence technologies. Several institutional mechanisms have been established to facilitate this transition, although implementation has remained slower than expected.

Initiative	Objective	Present Status
Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), 2012	Promote joint defence research, co-development and co-production	Limited tangible outcomes

Initiative	Objective	Present Status
Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), 2022	Expand cooperation in critical and emerging technologies, including defence	Progress slower than expected
INDUS-X, 2023	Foster collaboration among defence start-ups, industry and academia	Early stage with limited industrial outcomes

The progress achieved under these initiatives provides the backdrop for understanding the significance of the GE F414 engine programme.

c. The General Electric F414 Engine Programme

The GE F414 is an advanced fighter aircraft engine intended to power India's Tejas Mk-II fighter aircraft and is also expected to support the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) programme in the future.

However, negotiations have progressed slowly because of:

- Differences over the extent of technology transfer and intellectual property rights.
- Restrictions arising from the United States' International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR).
- Rising project costs and investment commitments.

Consequently, the programme has emerged as a key test of the depth and credibility of India–United States defence-industrial cooperation.

The delays also highlight the broader structural challenges associated with technology transfer in the defence sector.

d. Why Technology Transfer Remains Difficult

Technology transfer in advanced defence systems is constrained by the strategic priorities of both countries.

India's Perspective

- Strengthen indigenous defence manufacturing under Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Acquire advanced technological capabilities rather than merely importing finished platforms.
- Reduce long-term dependence on foreign suppliers and improve strategic autonomy.

United States' Perspective

- Advanced defence technologies are treated as strategic national assets.
- ITAR and other export-control regulations restrict the transfer of sensitive technologies.
- Concerns relating to national security, intellectual property protection and end-use monitoring limit the scope of technology sharing.

Reconciling these differing priorities remains the principal challenge in expanding defence-industrial cooperation.

e. Significance

India–United States defence cooperation has emerged as a major pillar of the Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership.

Its importance lies in several areas:

- **Strategic Convergence:** Strengthens cooperation in promoting a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- **Military Interoperability:** Enhanced through logistics agreements, joint military exercises and greater operational coordination.
- **Emerging Technologies:** Expanding collaboration in artificial intelligence, drones, semiconductors, space and advanced defence technologies.
- **Defence Diversification:** Reduces India's dependence on a limited number of defence suppliers and enhances strategic flexibility.
- **Defence Indigenisation:** Potential technology transfer can accelerate domestic manufacturing and strengthen India's long-term technological capabilities.

Despite these strategic gains, important implementation challenges continue to impede deeper cooperation.

f. Challenges

- A significant gap persists between political commitments and actual implementation.
- Core defence technologies remain largely inaccessible despite expanding defence trade.
- Differences over intellectual property rights, export controls, licensing requirements and commercial terms continue to delay co-development and co-production projects.
- India's continued dependence on imported high-end defence technologies constrains the objectives of Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Regulatory uncertainty and lengthy approval processes reduce the pace of industrial collaboration.

Addressing these constraints will determine whether the partnership evolves into a genuine technology alliance.

g. Way Forward

India and the United States should adopt a long-term framework for defence technology collaboration.

- Conclude technology transfer agreements with clearly defined timelines, responsibilities and implementation mechanisms.
- Shift the partnership from a buyer-seller relationship towards joint research, co-development and co-production.
- Establish more predictable export-control, licensing and regulatory mechanisms while addressing legitimate national security concerns.
- Strengthen India's domestic defence manufacturing ecosystem, research institutions and private-sector participation to improve indigenous technological capabilities.
- Encourage greater collaboration among governments, industry, start-ups and academic institutions under platforms such as INDUS-X and iCET.

A balanced approach that safeguards strategic interests while enabling meaningful technology collaboration can substantially deepen the bilateral partnership.

Conclusion

India–United States defence relations have expanded significantly in strategic, diplomatic and military dimensions. However, meaningful technology transfer and defence-industrial collaboration remain the critical missing links. Bridging this gap through greater trust, institutional cooperation and sustained technological partnerships will be essential for advancing Atmanirbhar Bharat while transforming the bilateral relationship into a comprehensive long-term strategic and technological partnership.

Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

This document is part of the PrepAlpine Current Affairs Series — designed to bring clarity, structure, and precision to your daily UPSC learning.

While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

If you prefer a specific style (lists → paras, paras → tables, etc.), feel free to convert using any free LLM.

4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

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