From Process to Performance

Reforming India's Defence Procurement for Emboldening Operational Capability

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India has progressively reformed its defence procurement architecture through the Defence Procurement Procedure, the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020 and the draft DAP 2026. These reforms have strengthened transparency, indigenisation and procedural clarity; yet, capability gaps and prolonged acquisition timelines persist. The article argues that the problem cannot be explained simply by characterising the DAP as excessively process-driven. Rather, procedural reform has been expected to compensate for weaknesses originating across strategic direction, capability planning, requirement management, acquisition execution and lifecycle capability management. Using a five-layer framework, the article distinguishes procedural limitations from organisational, financial, planning and sustainment constraints, and also examines existing provisions relating to fast-track acquisition, lifecycle support, sustainment and innovation pathways. Comparative analysis is used selectively to identify institutional mechanisms, rather than models for replication. The article concludes by proposing a capability delivery

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model integrating all five layers to improve the timely delivery and sustained availability of operational capability.

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Introduction: The Reform Paradox

India's strategic environment is being reshaped by artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, cyber capability and hybrid conflict, alongside intensifying major power competition and regional security pressure. Meeting this environment requires a procurement system that is capable of matching the pace of technological change and not merely one that is procedurally sound. The two are not the same thing, and the distance between them is the subject of this article.

Over the past two decades, India has progressively reformed its acquisition framework, from the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) to the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020 and the draft DAP-2026,[1] improving transparency, clarifying categories and strengthening indigenisation incentives. Yet, capital acquisitions still routinely take 7–10 years from Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) to induction. Further, in complex cases, the period from AoN to induction may exceed a decade, with platforms being frequently inducted into an environment already reshaped by newer technology.[2] This article examines why procedural reform has not closed that gap in three ways:

1. It treats 'process-driven' as institutional behaviour with identifiable causes, rather than a label for disliked outcomes, and asks what produces the behaviour.
2. It separates what is actually a function of the acquisition 'procedure' from what is a function of surrounding organisational, financial and planning weaknesses outside the DAP's remit.
3. It tests the institutional argument against the manual's own urgency (Fast Track Procedure [FTP]), sustainment (Other Capital Procurement Procedure [OCPP]) and innovation absorption (Innovations for Defence Excellence [iDEX]/Technology Development Fund [TDF]) chapters, rather than resting on the headline acquisition cycle alone.

The article sets out a conceptual framework distinguishing process-orientation from performance-orientation, asks why India's system has settled

into the former, and introduces a five-layer model of capability acquisition that structures the analysis that follows. It also traces the evolution of the framework from DPP through DAP-2020 to the draft; separates genuinely procedural limitations from organisational and financial ones, with particular attention to how FTP and OCPP behave once a case leaves the AoN stage; examines existing but unevenly executed lifecycle provisions; and traces a parallel breakdown in the innovation pipeline. It draws bounded lessons from five comparator systems and closes with a capability delivery model and a sequenced set of recommendations.

Conceptual Framework: Process-Driven and Performance-Oriented Procurement

Procurement architectures sit along a spectrum between two orientations:

1. *Process-driven systems*: They emphasise procedural compliance, standardisation and risk minimisation. Success is measured by adherence to defined stages, documentation and multi-layered oversight. This reduces arbitrariness and protects public resources, but also produces rigidity and risk aversion in technology-intensive domains.
2. *Performance-oriented systems*: These measure success by the timely induction of operationally effective capability, managing risk through structured experimentation and iterative feedback rather than eliminating it.

A related but analytically separate axis distinguishes transactional from lifecycle-based procurement. Transactional procurement treats acquisition as a discrete purchasing event, with maintenance, upgrades and sustainment addressed later or separately. Lifecycle-based procurement treats acquisition as the opening stage of a continuous capability management process, incorporating total cost of ownership and sustainment planning from the outset. A system can be highly process compliant while remaining lifecycle-blind, which is closer to India's actual position (as later sections show), just as a leaner, faster system could still neglect sustainment. Reform needs to address both axes independently.

Why the System Defaults to Process?

Describing India's procurement system as 'process-driven' redescribes the problem rather than explaining it. Officials operating inside the system consistently choose compliance over speed for reasons rooted in the incentive

structure surrounding the rules, and not in any single rule. Three features of that structure matter the most.

First is the audit exposure. Every major capital case is scrutinised not only by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), whose reports go to the Public Accounts Committee, but also by the Central Vigilance Commission which oversees high-value procurements. Deviation from the documented procedure—even one that would have produced a faster or more capable outcome—is far harder to defend after the fact than adherence to a procedure that produced a slow but unimpeachable result. This asymmetry means the downside risk of procedural deviation (career exposure, possible vigilance inquiry) is, from an individual official's vantage point, far larger than the downside risk of delay, even though delay carries the larger institutional cost. This is a principal–agent misalignment: the official's risk profile diverges sharply from the armed forces' and the nation's interest in timely capability.

The second aspect is the absence of a dedicated acquisition cadre. Officials rotating through acquisition postings typically serve 2–3 year tenures, against the 7–10 years' span of a major capital case.[3] An official who initiates a case rarely sees it through to induction; and the official who signs a contract often inherited its qualitative requirements (QRs) rather than shaped them. This discontinuity reduces the incentive to invest in specifications that might need defending years later. Additionally, it increases reliance on default, well-precedented and more conservative choices.

Third, the historical legacy of past procurement controversies has left a durable institutional memory in which any departure from the most rigid, price-transparent, lowest technically compliant bidder (L1) method reads as an integrity risk rather than a legitimate exercise of judgement. The General Financial Rules guidance favouring the lowest compliant bid, reinforced by that memory, creates a strong default towards price-only selection, even where quality-cum-cost or best-value frameworks would better serve capability outcomes.

Together, these describe a risk allocation equilibrium: the system does not lack rules for moving faster; it lacks incentive structures that make officials willing to use them. This generates a testable prediction, namely, wherever the manual grants 'permission' to move faster without changing who bears the downside risk, that permission goes underused. Further, reform built from such permissions shows up as more headings and shorter stated clocks without a proportionate rise in inducted capability. The article tests this against FTP, OCPP and the iDEX pathway in later sections, and finds that it holds in each case. Effective reform must either reduce the underlying risk asymmetry,

protecting good-faith judgement calls made within a documented framework from being treated as presumptively irregular, or relocate decision authority to roles built for continuity rather than short tenure, a point taken up later in the discussion on Integrated Project Teams (IPTs).

A Five-Layer View of Capability Acquisition

The process/performance and transactional/lifecycle distinctions are useful diagnostically, but can obscure where a given failure sits. It is worth disaggregating the acquisition procedure into five layers:

1. *Layer 1—Strategic Direction*: This includes national security objectives, threat assessment and force planning.
2. *Layer 2—Capability Planning*: It covers the Integrated Capability Development Plan (ICDP)/Defence Capital Acquisition Plan (DCAP) sequence, prioritisation across services and multi-year financial commitment.
3. *Layer 3—Requirement Management*: It involves services qualitative requirements (SQRs) formulation, provisional SQRs for developmental cases, market assessment via Request for Information (RFI) and QR revision mechanisms.
4. *Layer 4—Acquisition Execution*: This includes AoN, Request for Proposal (RFP), trials, evaluation, negotiation and contracting what 'the DAP procedure' conventionally means.
5. *Layer 5—Lifecycle Capability Management*: It covers production, induction, maintenance and overhaul, spares, upgrades, sustained availability and disposal or replacement.

India's problem is not that Layer 4 is inherently incapable of delivering capability. The problem is that performance across all five layers is insufficiently integrated. A case can clear Layer 4 flawlessly, that is, a compliant RFP and contract, and still fail to deliver capability because Layer 2 never ring-fenced the money, Layer 3 reopened the requirement after Layer 4 had committed to it or Layer 5 was never assigned an owner once the contract closed. Most of the DAP-2020 and the draft DAP-2026 is Layer 4 engineering: categories, trial formats and committee composition. The layers where India's capability gaps actually originate (2 and 5, with 3 as a recurring point of re-entry) are addressed only partially by the acquisition manual, and not at all in coordination with other instruments, such as the Defence Procurement Manual, the annual budget process or service-specific standard operating procedures (SOPs). This framework organises the rest of

the article: each limitation identified next is located within the layer actually responsible for it.

The Evolution of India's Procurement Architecture

India's capital acquisitions were governed by the DPP from 2002 to 2020, through eight successive revisions (2003, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2016), before the nomenclature and structure changed to DAP in 2020. Each revision responded to the controversy or shortfall most recently exposed rather than to a settled design philosophy: early versions introduced competitive bidding and offset obligations; the 2006 revision added lifecycle cost (LCC) estimation as a bid parameter; the 2011 and 2013 revisions progressively tightened the 'Buy and Make' and 'Buy (Indian)' categories in response to slow indigenisation; and the 2016 revision recalibrated offset obligations and introduced the Strategic Partnership (SP) model, in the wake of controversy surrounding an earlier inter-governmental fighter deal. This pattern was incremental and reactive, with each version adding a safeguard against the most recently visible failure rather than re-examining whether compliance layers were the right instrument, rendering itself as a symptom of the process-oriented equilibrium described earlier.

The DAP-2020 rationalised procurement categories around the Buy (Indian-Indigenous Design, Development and Manufacturing [IDDM]) route, tightened indigenous content (IC) definitions and recalibrated offset policy, specifically removing offset obligations from inter-governmental agreements, single-vendor cases and certain foreign military sales in exchange for speed and reduced litigation risk.[4] The mechanics of that trade explain why it disappointed: offset obligations, where they still apply, are discharged against a multiplier system meant to reward technology transfer over manufacturing work-share, but original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) have found it commercially rational to accept a comparatively modest non-fulfilment penalty rather than transfer sensitive technology to an Indian Offset Partner (IOP) selected late in the contracting process, after the deal's core technical content was already fixed. Only one offset contract has been signed since the 2020 recalibration, with little evidence of technology transfer meaningfully discharged under it, which is a continuing weakness in India's offset architecture rather than a settled success.[5] Earlier, the CAG's scrutiny of offset implementation also found that five of the 16 contracts examined involved ready-built equipment being accepted without the required value addition through IOPs, alongside weaknesses in monitoring.[6]

The DAP-2020's other changes were more clearly positive: clearer categorisation; greater transparency; and rising private sector participation. Further, its Chapter V already contained a full FTP and its Chapter III had a structured 'Innovation and Make' pathway linking the iDEX, the TDF and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)/defence public sector undertaking (DPSU)-led development to eventual procurement. The gains that did not translate into materially shorter timelines are, therefore, not explained by an absence of fast or innovation-linked pathways, they are explained by how those pathways behaved once cases entered them.

DAP-2026 Draft versus DAP-2020: What Changes, What Does Not?

The acquisition cycle begins with capability-gap identification by each service, feeding into the ICDP, a 10-year framework split into two five-year DCAPs, replacing the earlier three-tier Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan, Services Capital Acquisition Plan and Annual Acquisition Plan (AAP) with a restructured ICDP–DCAP–AAP sequence intended to be more responsive.

The procurement cycle proper begins with an RFI, informing formulation of QRs. Once QRs are settled, the case proceeds to AoN, including assessing operational necessity, financial viability and IC thresholds. The AoN is followed by the RFP, two-bid technical–commercial evaluation, field evaluation trials and staff evaluation, Technical Oversight Committee review, Contract Negotiation Committee (CNC) deliberation and final approval by the Competent Financial Authority (CFA).

Released in draft in February 2026, with comments closing 3 March 2026, the DAP-2026 is positioned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) as a 'transformative leap', shifting the underlying philosophy from 'Made in India' (licensed manufacture) towards 'Owned by India' (design ownership, intellectual property [IP] control and self-reliant upgrades).

Table 1 Comparative Analysis of DAP-2020 and the Draft DAP-2026

Aspect	DAP 2020	DAP 2026 (Draft)	Impact
Procurement categories	Five prioritised categories.	Reduced to four.	Simplifies decision making.
Top priority category	Buy (Indian-IDDM).	Retained and strengthened as default.	Reinforces genuine indigenisation.
Buy (Indian)	A distinct category.	Merged into Buy (Indian-IDDM) and Manufacture-in-India routes.	Not a clean deletion; the 'assembled in India' risk shifts to how the merged categories are policed.

Indigenous content (IC)	50% in Buy (Indian-IDDM).	Raised to 60%; Buy (Global) now requires 30% IC where previously none applied.	Extends localisation pressure to foreign vendor routes.
Indigenous design	Loosely defined.	First enforceable definition: full IP ownership, source code and independent upgrade capability.	Shifts focus to sovereign control.
Named indigenous sub-systems	Not addressed.	Sponsoring service *may* name mandatory indigenous line replaceable units (LRUs) (such as propulsion, seeker and radar-class items); not essential to do so.	Leaves the deepest chokepoints outside enforcement unless invoked.
IP rights (Strategic Partnership)	Licensed for platform life plus upgrades.	Licensed to MoD in perpetuity.	Reduces vendor lock-in.
Urgency lane	FTP already existed (Chapter V).	Relocated to Chapter VI: Service chief in-principle approval replaces Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) adoption; AoN lapses in two months without RFP; in-service OEM restock deemed not a single-vendor case.	Changes on-ramps and single-vendor law; does not create an urgency lane where none existed.
Sustainment/ upgrade lane	A capital sub-category with limited definition.	Formalised as OCPP (Chapter VIII): repair and overhaul, refit, mid-life upgrade, ground support equipment—still run as a mini 'Buy' case (AoN–RFP–L1), AoN validity cut from 12 months to six months.	Names and lists the workload more clearly; tightens rather than loosens its procedural burden.

Micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME)/ start-up entry	Standard criteria.	Eased financial and experience criteria.	Broader private sector participation.

Sources: 'Defence Acquisition Procedure-2020', Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 2020; 'DAP 2026 Proposes Transformative Leap in India's Defence Procurement Framework', Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 13 February 2026, available at https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2227775&lang=1&reg=3&utm, accessed on 10 March 2026.

A few points follow from this comparison. First, the reform concentrates on indigenisation, IP sovereignty and clock shortening, rather than on removing procedural vetoes: the most consequential single change in the urgency lane is a reclassification of what counts as a single-vendor case, bundled with clocks that are, if anything, tighter than before. Second, 'Owned by India' sits in tension with the SP model. A perpetual, in-country IP licence with full source code access is demanding, and OEMs with genuinely differentiated technology, the kind India most wants, have the greatest commercial incentive to resist such terms since they retain full IP control elsewhere. The likely effect is a selection bias towards OEMs with less to protect, narrowing the field even as the policy succeeds in principle at preventing lock-in.

Third, the 60 per cent IC threshold risks rewarding the wrong kind of localisation without a tighter calculation method. The IC, as a share of contract value, does not distinguish high value-add design work from low value-add assembly of imported sub-assemblies. Further, letting the sponsoring service name specific line replaceable units (LRUs), such as propulsion, seeker, radar and combat management systems, as mandatory IC is optional rather than required. Thus, a platform can clear 60 per cent aggregate IC, while its most operationally decisive 20–30 per cent of value remains entirely outside Indian control. Fourth, the technology readiness level (TRL)-based fast track carries a structural irony: categorising a case as fast track is itself a discretionary call made by the same risk-averse environment described earlier. Unless eligibility triggers on an objectively verifiable TRL score, the fast track becomes one more exposed gate rather than a bypass.

Fifth, the urgency lane is reformed at the margin, not invented. The DAP-2020's FTP required the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) adoption of

fast-track treatment, whereas the draft lets the service chief accord in-principle approval directly. The clearest procedural improvement in the draft explicitly deems a repeat order or spares/maintenance purchase from the OEM of in-service equipment as *not* a single-vendor case. This changes who opens the lane and one legal classification; it does not create speed where none existed. India has run an urgency lane for years and still produced 7–10 year cycles, yet the burden falls on what makes the lane go unused.

Sixth, the sustainment lane is tightened, not loosened. Formalising Repair and Overhaul (ROH), refit and mid-life upgrade into a named Chapter VIII list, with delegated financial powers at command level, is a genuine planning improvement, but AoN validity is cut from 12 months to six, applied to exactly the case type (mid-life work involving OEM data packs and yard or depot scheduling) least suited to compression. A genuinely useful urgency lane reform and a genuinely counterproductive sustainment tightening coexist because shortening a clock reads as reform, regardless of whether the case can actually move faster.

Structural Limitations within the Acquisition Procedure

This section covers limitations that are genuinely a function of 'procedure', from Layer 4 and its interface with Layer 3, as distinct from organisational and financial constraints (Layers 1, 2 and 5) addressed in the next section.

Front-end Requirement Setting

The problem is not merely theoretical. The CAG has documented defence development cases in which unfirmed or frequently revised general SQRs were associated with time overruns, non-acceptance and failure to progress to production.[7] Provisional SQRs already govern design-and-development cases pending prototype validation, and the QRs have been revised with recorded dispensation at senior level, as in the productionisation of the BrahMos system. The sharper criticism is institutional: revising a QR mid-cycle carries audit exposure that short-tenured generalist officials have an incentive to avoid, particularly once a case has cleared AoN. This is not an argument that QRs should never be frozen. Every case must eventually stabilise or no vendor can price a bid.

The genuine question is at what stage, and under what mechanism, requirements should be frozen, moderated or revised without restarting the cycle; and the answer differs by case type. Proven off-the-shelf procurement should have clear, stable requirements from the outset. Developmental

programmes are already served, in principle, by provisional SQRs and iterative refinement, hence the gap is in how confidently officials use them. Rapidly evolving technology categories warrant modular requirements and defined revision gates set in advance rather than negotiated under audit pressure. What the draft DAP has not delivered is a defined, delegated revision window for the latter two categories, rather than a binary freeze/restart choice applied to all three. Some of the other limitations are as follows:

1. *Absence of risk-calibrated trial intensity*: Field evaluation trials and staff evaluation apply similar rigour whether a case involves a proven in-service platform that is being repeat procured or a genuinely novel system with no track record. A tiered trial framework, calibrated to novelty and risk, would compress timelines for the low-risk tail of the portfolio without loosening scrutiny where needed.
2. *Price-based selection and the two-bid system's intent*: A quieter tension exists between these two. General Financial Rules guidance defaults to the lowest technically compliant bidder (L1), defensible for standardised commodities but poorly suited to complex platforms where quality, sustainment cost and upgrade potential vary across compliant bidders. As mentioned earlier, the L1 default persists partly through the audit exposure logic: a best-value award overriding a lower price invites far more scrutiny than a straightforward L1 award, even where best value was manifestly the better capability decision. This becomes actively counterproductive where, in practice, only one capable vendor exists, such as a licensed OEM repair facility, and the two-bid system performs a competition that cannot meaningfully occur.
3. *Multi-layered oversight and single-vendor outcomes*: The two-bid system, field evaluation trials, technical oversight committees and sequential CNC–CFA approval are individually justified as safeguards, but their cumulative effect is best understood probabilistically. Each layer catches a different risk category, but because each can independently trigger a re-tender or disqualification, the probability that *at least one* does so compounds across the sequence. A case clearing each gate with, say, 85 per cent probability faces a materially lower probability of clearing five or six cleanly, not because any one safeguard is poorly designed but because the layers were added incrementally and never evaluated as a compounding system.
4. *Fragmented decision ownership*: Responsibility is distributed across the sponsoring service, the ministry, the DRDO/DPSU and industry, with review concentrated at specific gates rather than held by a single

accountable owner across the full cycle. Each gate enforces compliance at its stage. The gap is that no one is accountable for the case's outcome end-to-end due to the absence of a compact, dedicated acquisition organisation, closer to a single Programme Executive Officer model.

5. *Innovation absorption*: The DAP 2020 already provides a procurement route for the iDEX, the TDF and the DRDO/DPSU-led design and development products, so the pathways exist. The live question is how consistently a successful prototype converts into a scaled, sustained production order.[8]

Speed Tools that Still Require Permission

A closer reading of the draft's urgency and sustainment chapters shows the same institutional equilibrium reproducing itself inside mechanisms explicitly designed to escape it. Several distinct instruments compress different parts of the cycle, each retaining a different part of the old one. The FTP's Track A, the deemed non-single-vendor route for restocking or repeating an already-inducted, trial-accepted item from its OEM, is the only structurally fast lane in the draft. It removes the single-vendor waiver, dispenses with quantity vetting and scaling and lets the last negotiated price anchor a new order. The FTP's Track B, covering new equipment not yet in service, bars field evaluation trials but otherwise remains a 'Buy' case with a four-week bid window and a six-month contract signature clock.

The OCPP removes field evaluation trials but keeps AoN, Schedule I format RFP, L1 selection and CNC review—a mini-acquisition run against the same over-committed capital vote as new platforms. The Low-Cost Capital Acquisition (LCCA) permits a small, delegated exploitation buy, capped in tens of crores per case and a low hundreds of crores annual service-wide ceiling, but is not a route to fleet-scale induction. The TRL 6–9 categorisation for a mature indigenous design permits single-vendor treatment, but whether a case receives it remains discretionary at AoN. These are not one undifferentiated agility package: the performance failure is not the absence of a fast track, but that the one instrument which actually removes a legal veto is fenced off by a classification boundary, from a significant contributor to fleet availability, which is in-service maintenance and mid-life work.

The classification boundary, thus, is a hidden veto. The same underlying job, such as restocking an engine module, replacing a licensed sensor or refitting a ship system, can be filed as routine revenue repair (Defence Procurement Manual, outside DAP), OCPP capital enhancement, FTP Track A restock or, if judged 'new', FTP Track B or a conventional Chapter

II Buy. The OCPP bars items on its own list from being procured under any other chapter, foreclosing the FTP Track A route that would otherwise treat identical restock work as deemed non-single vendor. Pendency frequently begins before AoN, in a dispute over which heading a case belongs to, with the finance and the user arguing whether an engine module replacement is scheduled overhaul or unscheduled repair; and an acquisition office arguing whether a sensor swap restores certified utility (OCPP) or introduces new capability (Chapter II, with a trial requirement that then closes the case to any fast lane). A binding classification test resolved before AoN, with OCPP's closed list explicitly yielding to FTP Track A for OEM restock of an already-inducted type, would remove more pendency than any further shortening of post-AoN clocks.

Shorter clocks, unmatched by any change to what the underlying case requires, manufacture lapsed files. The FTP's AoN lapses automatically if an RFP or Letter of Request is not issued within two months; the OCPP's AoN validity is cut from 12 months to six; and an FTP case unsigned within six months of AoN reverts to the AoN-according authority. Each reads, in isolation, as discipline. Where a defensible RFP requires collegiate vetting, an OEM data pack and an identified vendor list—none of which compress simply because the clock does—officials may have an incentive to allow an AoN to lapse and restart the process, since a lapsed-and-restarted file is procedurally cleaner than a contested thin one, even though restarting adds the months the shortened clock was meant to save. Consequently, 'AoNs accorded' in a given year is a poor proxy for capability delivered.

Every import inside a fast-lane routes through the same political gate that clears new platforms. Any import content in an FTP or OCPP case, at any value, requires explicit DAC approval, the same council that approves new fighter, ship and missile programmes. Since most in-service engine, sensor and system restock work involves a foreign-sourced component, the Service Chief's authority to open an urgency lane does not translate into authority to move the case that matters through it.

In addition, the number of surviving discretionary gates is itself evidence for the institutional equilibrium thesis. The TRL 6–9 single-vendor categorisation applies only 'if' the service recommends it; two-stage or waived trials only 'if' AoN specifies them; the FTP lane opens only if the Service Chief accords in-principle approval and trials are judged unnecessary; an Empowered Committee may negotiate and sign only 'if' the DAC so authorises, failing which a conventional CNC forms; and named-LRU enforcement applies only 'if' the service specifies it. Counting how many such

'may' clauses stand between AoN and contract signature on a live file, against how many are exercised, would demonstrate the equilibrium more concretely than further description.

One further gap deserves a brief note. Chapter I states that FTP includes emergency procurement, but Chapter VI does not restate DAP 2020's emergency procurement rule, an indigenous-first default, importable only against a time-bounded DAC directive. The most urgent label in the manual is, as drafted, the least specified: officials cannot safely invoke a procedure whose triggers and permitted deviations are unwritten.

Beyond Procedure: Organisational, Financial and Planning Constraints

Much of what is criticised as 'procurement failure' is not a defect of procedure at all, but of the organisational, financial and planning environment around it (Layers 1, 2 and 5). Conflating the two risks prescribing procedural fixes for problems procedure was never designed to solve.

Absence of a Public Strategic Planning Anchor

Without a publicly articulated National Security Strategy and a sufficiently empowered, integrated and continuously accountable defence planning architecture, the ICDP–DCAP–AAP sequence lacks an authoritative capability baseline against which QRs can be tested for realism—a pattern the CAG has repeatedly flagged—producing QRs that are vendor-influenced or unrealistically exhaustive relative to available platforms. The creation of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and the Department of Military Affairs was intended, in part, to inject tri-service jointness into planning that had historically run in service-specific silos. The theatre command reform, still in progress, is the operational expression of that push, and procurement planning has been slower to follow.

Financial Commitment, Not Merely Allocation

Budget shortfall figures often cited in this context (15–33 per cent in some years) sit uneasily with more recent data: in financial year 2025–2026, the ministry signed capital contracts worth Rs 1,82,492 crore and, for the first time, fully deployed its Rs 1.86 lakh crore capital budget without surrendering any allocation.[9] The binding constraint, in recent years, is less a shortfall in annual allocation than a structural feature of how that allocation

is consumed. Multi-year capital contracts generate committed liabilities, including binding payment obligations spread across future years, and as live contracts accumulate, an increasing share of each subsequent year's capital budget is pre-committed before a rupee is available for new schemes.

The sequence repeats: in year *t*, the ministry signs a strong slate of new 'Buy' contracts and reports full utilisation; and in year *t* + *1*, the OCPP items in Part D of the AAP and the FTP items in Part E are procedurally ready to proceed, but committed liabilities from year *t*'s contracts have already claimed the bulk of the new allocation, and the sustainment and urgency lists, lacking a ring-fenced sub-head, lose the year to a freshly signed new-platform contract. 'Full capital utilisation' and 'pending modernisation' are, in a given year, frequently the same statistic viewed from two ledgers. The draft's five-year aggregation of repetitive OCPP items and 25 per cent quantity/cost flexibility is useful planning language, but does not ring-fence an ROH or refit envelope against this crowding effect.

The Persistence Problem

Continuing underperforming or delayed programmes, past their optimal viability, is a governance and sunk-cost failure, distinct from process orientation as such. The Tejas Mk1A programme illustrates a related but different dynamic: as of mid-2026, approximately 30 Mk1A airframes had been built, flight-tested and evaluated, yet formal delivery remained stalled by delayed GE F404 engine deliveries, a single foreign-sourced sub-system holding an otherwise complete, indigenously assembled platform hostage. This sharpens the case for named-LRU enforcement far more concretely than the aggregate 'Owned by India' framing: a 60 per cent IC figure at contract value level offers little protection against exactly this chokepoint if the 20–30 per cent of value concentrated in propulsion remains outside Indian design or production control and outside any named-LRU requirement.

Capital–Sustainment–Logistics Imbalance

Acquisition decisions remain weighted towards upfront capital cost, with maintenance ecosystems, spares availability and logistics planning frequently underdeveloped at induction. This is a pattern documented repeatedly in CAG observations on inventory management and repair delays.[10] The next section shows that the procedure already contains instruments meant to address this. The gap lies in resourcing and enforcing them, and in who owns the outcome after handover.

Existing Lifecycle and Sustainment Provisions: Progress and Gaps

The DAP-2020 explicitly describes a 'womb-to-tomb' approach, covering design, acquisition, maintenance, upgrades and disposal, and several concrete instruments exist for this, such as: LCC estimation at RFP stage; mandated engineering support packages; lifecycle support (LCS) contracts extending 3–5 years beyond warranty; and piloted performance-based logistics (PBL). The Indian Air Force's C-130 fleet support is an example of this.

The shortcomings are failures of 'execution' within these provisions, not evidence of their absence. The Pilatus case is instructive: nine maintenance head cost components were reportedly omitted from the LCC estimate at RFP stage, a methodological failure rather than a missing framework.[11] The PBL's limited scale has a structural cause: it requires a domestic maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) base mature enough to bear availability risk without pricing it into an unaffordable premium, as well as data infrastructure mature enough to measure and adjudicate disputed availability. These are conditions that India's ecosystem satisfies for only a handful of mature fleets.

The deeper reason that 'womb-to-tomb' has not delivered sustained availability is architectural: the draft splits ownership of a single platform across three separate books and none is accountable for the outcome the others produce. The CAG's examination of naval refits and mid-life upgrades similarly illustrates how delays in planning, execution and support can affect the availability of already-inducted platforms.[12] The DAP governs capital acquisition and capital-classified enhancement (OCPP); the Defence Procurement Manual, on the revenue vote, governs routine repair; and LCS and PBL, where negotiated at all, are optional elements the CNC 'would also negotiate' rather than a mandated default.

Once a platform is handed over, OCPP monitoring consists of a quarterly service headquarters report to the ministry's acquisition wing on non-delegated cases, which is a reporting obligation and not an ownership role. This weakness has a longer institutional history: previously, the CAG has found the absence of a systematic mechanism for monitoring capital contracts and weaknesses in post-contract administration and monitoring.[13] For naval offloaded refits, the draft states that a navy-specific SOP for Growth of Work (GoW) 'will be promulgated separately' and the existing, unreformed procedure continues until then—an admission that the heaviest, single sustainment workload sits outside the chapter's improvements at the moment of notification. The platform is thus procured under one book,

repaired under a second, mid-lifed under a third and supported, if at all, under an optional annex to any of the three, with no office scored on whether it was actually available for tasking.

The DPSU repair pathway shows the same pattern differently. Where a ministry-approved pricing philosophy exists for a platform–depot combination, the AoN and expenditure sanction can be accorded together and an order placed without a fresh RFP, which is fast and appropriately non-competitive where only one licensed facility can do the work. Where that philosophy has lapsed, a frequent state for mixed private–DPSU work, the case falls back to a conventional tender and the queue re-forms. Overhaul speed, thus, tracks a price book maintained outside the DAP altogether, which no chapter obliges anyone to keep current.

Independent of both gaps, a formal, standing IPT structure, a single-owner programme office, is genuinely absent: existing bodies (technical oversight committees, CNC, category-specific higher committees) check compliance at procedural gates rather than owning a programme end-to-end from AoN through sustainment.

Civil–Military Fusion and the Innovation Pipeline: Nesting, Nurturing, Maturing

The ministry frames the draft DAP-2026 around civil–military fusion, that is, pulling civilian innovation, particularly from startups and dual-use domains, into military capability. A 'nest, nurture, mature' decomposition tests how far that framing is matched by procedure: how a civilian idea enters a military requirement (nesting); how a validated prototype stays commercially viable while tested against that requirement (nurturing); and how a proven prototype becomes a sustained procurement order (maturing). The gaps regarding this are discussed next.

Nesting Largely Happens Outside DAP's Own Governance

The iDEX challenges, TDF grants and internal innovation organisations of services identify problem statements and fund prototype development under separate Defence Innovation Organisation and DRDO SOPs. The draft directs iDEX development to follow 'extant TDF SOPs' rather than writing its own nesting rules. The scale of the current challenge pipeline also illustrates the continuing expansion of the innovation architecture: the Defence India Start-up Challenge (DISC) 14 and Acing Development of Innovative Technologies with iDEX (ADITI) 4 launch in March 2026

announced 107 problem statements.[14] The DAP's governance begins only once a prototype exists and is offered for testing against a service-formulated requirement. Also, nesting remains a military-pull rather than civil-push, regardless of the preamble's language about dual-use walls having crumbled.

Nurturing is Real but Episodic

Both the DAP-2020 and the draft soften commercial terms for innovation route vendors: an Innovation Advantage Factor lets the price benchmark sit above raw bill-of-materials cost; a single successful prototype winner is not treated as a single-vendor case; and bank guarantees, advances and liquidated damages terms are relaxed for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) operating under the iDEX/TDF. Further, the draft DAP adds staged induction below full requirement compliance and, for software, iterative field deployment rather than a single pass/fail trial. Nurturing ends, however, at the point a prototype is judged ready for testing; from there, the file re-enters the machinery governing a conventional platform purchase.

Maturing is Where the Pipeline's Conversion Rate becomes Visible, and it is Low

A successful development contract proceeds to Single-Stage Composite Trials (SSCT) against preliminary SQRs, meant to substitute for a full field evaluation trial, with up to two additional attempts if the first fails and a single successful vendor explicitly not treated as a single vendor. From there, a case still passes through the Special Equipment Procurement Committee (SEPC)—the same body responsible for front-end rigidities discussed earlier—to ratify the resulting SQRs, thereby re-introducing a file after a prototype has already been built and tested against a different document. This is followed by securing AoN and the issue of RFP. However, the commercial RFP is restricted to SSCT-cleared vendors, carrying terms more conducive for an established prime than a capital-constrained start-up. Then, a Benchmarking Committee negotiates the Innovation Advantage Factor against finance concurrence. It is only after passing all these stages that a Minimum Pilot Order Quantity (MPQ) contract, which is 'mandatory' after successful trials, is issued.

The figures published in early 2026 show substantial attrition between development and procurement: of 548 iDEX development contracts reported by February 2026, 58 prototypes had received procurement clearance and 45 procurement contracts had been signed, converting only 8.2 per cent of development contracts into signed procurement orders.[15] Industry analysis

suggests that the funding gap between successful prototype completion and a meaningful procurement order can extend to approximately 18–30 months, a potentially significant runway problem for early-stage defence firms as it exceeds most start-ups' working capital runway.

The attrition recurs at several specific points rather than one blockage. A prototype meeting only part of a later-formulated requirement can be limited to a small fraction of the eventual MPQ, contingent on a CFA note rather than issued by default. The SEPC ratification after SSCT gives the same requirement-setting apparatus responsible for front-end rigidity a second entry point against a firm already built and tested to an earlier document, with no rule preventing a new essential parameter from being added. The MPQ itself is set only as a preference, 'preferably' at least ten times the development grant's value, with no binding floor, so a small, cautious first order is the safe outcome even where SSCT succeeded outright. Further, the 20-week contracting target carries no consequence if missed, unlike FTP's six-month lapse-and-revert rule, leaving a cleared, compliant prototype to wait on ordinary budget cycles and committed liability crowding, exactly as a conventional 'Buy' case would.

None of this argues for weakening oversight or treating the pipeline as broken beyond documented success. For instance, an army munitions-handling system was contracted within six months of RFP issuance under a streamlined trial methodology; and another case reused an SSCT already conducted for a different service and secured a multi-year comprehensive maintenance contract alongside the platform. These examples show the ceiling the system can reach when an institutional sponsor actively drives a file through discretionary gates rather than defaulting through them—the same equilibrium argument this article makes about the conventional 'Buy' cycle, now visible inside the innovation pipeline.

Against the DAP-2020, the draft's contribution to civil–military fusion is doctrinal rather than structural. The DAP-2020 already incorporated start-ups as acquisition categories through the iDEX, the TDF and 'Make' category. Meanwhile, the draft names civil–military fusion explicitly, mainstreams the iDEX as a stated pathway, hardens MPQ language and adds LCCA as a second, non-grant-based door for civilian-origin dual-use kits, real improvements, including SEPC exemption for fast track, OCPP and LCCA cases. However, the structural breaks, such as QR conversion after the prototype exists, an MPQ legally 'mandatory' but not cash-backed when the requirement is set, follow-on exclusivity capped at five years or ten times the initial order value and no bridge into civilian demand from other government

users of the same dual-use technology, are inherited from 2020 and have not been resolved in the 2026 draft.

A performance-oriented version would invert three defaults: (*i*) a dual-use/commercial-off-the-shelf lane as the template for eligible categories, with military-specification treatment the exception; (*ii*) an MPQ as a ring-fenced, automatic off-take fixed when the challenge is issued, and not negotiated after a later QR; and follow-on production or Make-I graduation as the default after successful field exploitation, not a capped window reopening the innovator's own product to bidders who bore none of the development risk.

Comparative Perspectives

Comparative reference identifies specific, adoptable mechanisms; however, none of these systems is a model for wholesale replication since each is embedded in institutional conditions India does not share.

The United States (US)

The total cost of ownership functions as a best-value criterion for selecting among vendors, with agencies evaluating on LCC cannot award purely on lowest acquisition price, and as a portfolio-affordability check feeding programme milestone documentation.[16] Other Transaction Authority (OTA), under 10 U.S.C. §§4021–4022, lets the Department of Defense bypass the Federal Acquisition Regulation for research and prototypes, with negotiable IP rights and no mandatory competitive format, provided the project involves significant non-traditional contractor participation, a defined cost-sharing threshold or exceptional circumstances. A successful prototype OTA can transition directly into production without a fresh competitive round—a mechanism that compresses timelines to weeks or months.[17]

The US system pairs this with an equally structural discipline instrument working the other way: the Nunn–McCurdy Act requires Congressional notification and, for a severe breach, justification for continuing a programme whose unit cost has grown beyond defined thresholds, on pain of automatic termination absent recertification.[18] The DAP-2026's fast-track and MPQ mechanisms are, by contrast, speed and mandate language, without a comparably binding companion discipline on cost or schedule growth.

China[19]

Shorter Chinese concept-to-deployment cycles are often attributed to inherently more flexible requirement setting. The Indian procedure also

permits QR revision, as BrahMos shows; the constraint is institutional incentive, not legal prohibition. China's post-2015 restructuring provides a contrasting institutional arrangement: the People's Liberation Army (PLA) established the Joint Logistic Support Force in 2016 to provide integrated joint logistics support, replacing a more fragmented logistics structure distributed across service-specific chains, the near-exact Layer 5 gap this article identifies for India. The PLA acquisition data is not independently verifiable, and specific programme timeline claims should be read as indicative rather than precise.

Israel

There is continuous interaction between the Israel Defense Forces, industry and developers. Such interaction is not wholly absent from Indian practice: for instance, the DRDO and service feedback loops exist within Make-II and design and development projects. The distinction is institutionalisation: Israel's Directorate of Defense Research and Development (MAFAT) is a standing, co-located bridge between requirements and industrial/academic capacity, with its own budget and continuity across programme cycles, whereas India's equivalent interaction remains project dependent.[20]

South Korea[21]

South Korea's Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA), established in 2006 to unify previously fragmented authority across the Ministry of National Defense and individual services, holds consolidated authority to plan, budget and execute, with sub-agencies for research and development (R&D) and quality certification under the same umbrella, close to the single-owner structure India lacks. Its KF-21 fighter programme shows both promise and limits. The DAPA-led consolidation enabled design-to-cost pricing that has kept projected unit cost meaningfully below the F-35 and Eurofighter, targeting export markets that cannot access top-tier Western fighters.[22] However, international risk-sharing partners have under-delivered on committed contributions, forcing cost restructuring, and a 2017 corruption investigation into DAPA leadership shows that consolidation concentrates risk as well as authority.

The Korean acquisition speed, thus, sits in a single accountable agency holding multi-year, programme-specific money, and not in a shortened approval clock layered onto an unchanged multi-agency structure. This is opposite of India's 2026 move, which compresses the AoN clock without consolidating the agency or ring-fencing the money.

Meanwhile, Russia, included as a cautionary counter-case, shows the cost of the persistence bias, namely, continued reliance on incrementally upgraded legacy platforms rather than a transferable procurement practice.[23]

Towards a Performance-Oriented Model: The Capability Delivery Model

The five-layer framework discussed earlier can be developed into an operational sequence, that is, a capability delivery model, making explicit what performance orientation would mean in practice, stage by stage.

1. *Stage 1—Capability Definition*: The output should be a defined operational problem, not a named platform: for instance, 'achieve persistent surveillance across a defined sector', not 'buy a medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)'. Defining the problem at capability level defers platform fixation to the point where requirement architecture (Stage 3) can weigh alternatives.
2. *Stage 2—Multi-year Capability Commitment*: Before a case progresses beyond definition, the financial commitment, LCC, production strategy and sustainment strategy should be assessed together and ring-fenced within the relevant DCAP, directly addressing the committed liability crowding mechanism, under which a case in Part D or E of the AAP has no protection against being starved by a newly signed contract.
3. *Stage 3—Requirement Architecture*: Requirements should be typed explicitly rather than treated as one document frozen at one point, such as: fixed, mission-critical parameters that are genuinely non-negotiable; performance requirements describing the operational outcome needed rather than a specific technical means; growth requirements reserved for future upgrade; and provisional requirements for developmental systems, tied to formal review gates set in advance.
4. *Stage 4—Acquisition Pathway Selection*: Different capability types should not default to the same pathway: a mature, in-service-type platform to conventional competitive acquisition; a developmental system to staged prototype validation; a rapidly evolving technology category to an accelerated, iterative pathway with defined revision gates; a startup-originated innovation to a prototype-to-induction channel with a cash-backed MPQ fixed at challenge stage; and a strategically sovereign technology, propulsion being the clearest current example, to long-term named co-development, rather than an aggregate IC percentage. This reframes the article's assessment of draft DAP-2026 around whether it matches pathway to capability type, case by case.

5. *Stage 5—End-to-End Programme Ownership*: A single accountable programme authority, drawing on user, acquisition, finance, R&D and industry representation, in the spirit of an IPT, should own a case from AoN through in-service sustainment, rather than responsibility passing between gate-specific committees with no continuing owner after contract signature.
6. *Stage 6—Lifecycle Readiness at Induction*: Contract signature and platform delivery should not, alone, constitute a successful acquisition. Induction should be judged complete only once trained personnel, maintenance infrastructure, spares, documentation, an upgrade pathway and, where applicable, the fuel or ammunition chain are in place, converting the capital–sustainment–logistics gap from an aspiration into a defined induction criterion.
7. *Stage 7—Performance Metrics*: Success should be measured on time (capability gap to induction); cost (lifecycle expenditure, not acquisition price alone); availability (operational availability rate, not units delivered); adaptability (realised upgrade cycle against Stage 3's growth requirements); sustainment (downtime and supply chain resilience); and operational capability generated and sustained, not procedural milestones completed.

A hypothetical case, pinned to the actual menu of DAP-2026 lanes, shows where this model diverges from current practice. Consider a mid-tier tactical unmanned system requirement. Under the current architecture, the case might begin as an LCCA exploitation lot for an Indian vendor's existing product; scaling it up requires the sponsoring service to actively invoke TRL 6–9 single-vendor treatment under the ab initio IDDM route, a discretionary categorisation, not an automatic consequence of the LCCA result. If the service instead judges a field evaluation trial necessary, the case is, by definition, closed to FTP and reverts to a conventional Chapter II Buy case. Sustainment support is, at this point, an optional add-on the CNC 'would also' negotiate, not a mandated base contract feature. The first repeat purchase to replace attrited units becomes either an OCPP case or a Defence Procurement Manual revenue case. Either way, it is a new file under a different institutional owner than the one that ran the original acquisition. Any later import content, such as a superior datalink or an upgraded engine, resets that later case to DAC approval, regardless of how the original platform was procured.

Under the capability delivery model, the same requirement is instead defined at Stage 1 as a persistent surveillance capability band rather than a

named platform; committed at Stage 2 with ring-fenced multi-year funding covering the initial buy and a defined replacement allowance; specified at Stage 3 with performance and growth requirements revisable within a pre-agreed envelope without a fresh AoN; routed at Stage 4 through the LCCA-to-IDDM pathway as a default, with the trial decision made once, early and explicitly; owned at Stage 5 by a single programme office from AoN through the first repeat buy, so that OCPP and the original programme are the same file; guaranteed at Stage 6 a PBL-based support contract as a base contract line; and measured at Stage 7 by achieved availability and cost per flight hour rather than units delivered. The distance between these two descriptions of the same requirement is the article's argument made concrete: the acquisition procedure, narrowly defined, can produce either outcome; what determines which one occurs is whether Layers 1, 2, 3, and 5 are integrated with Layer 4 or left to default around it.

Recommendations for the DAP-2026 Finalisation Process

1. *Publish a binding classification default matrix, resolved before AoN*: In-service OEM restock of a named LRU routes to FTP Track A by default, mandatory once a Service-notified availability threshold is breached; work-restoring certified utility routes to OCPP, whose closed list should explicitly yield to Track A for restock of an already-inducted type; a mature Indian design at TRL 6–9 routes to single-vendor IDDM as the category, not a discretionary escalation; and genuinely new capability requiring field trials is honestly routed to Chapter II. Exits from the default should be recorded, with reasons.
2. *Differentiate validity clocks by work type and establish an annual DAC repeat import schedule*: A two-month AoN lapse for a pure catalogue repeat order, 12 months for a class upgrade or ROH package requiring an OEM data pack and depot scheduling; and a pre-cleared type/LRU/quantity band for in-service fleets so Track A or DPSU route cases within it skip case-by-case Council approval. Track contracted capability delivered per year, not AoNs issued.
3. *Make named-LRU IC enforcement the default*: This should be done for IDDM and major OCPP upgrades, requiring an AoN annex naming propulsion, seeker, radar and combat management subsystems as applicable, with IC credit contingent on genuine Indian design or a time-bound substitution programme.

4. *Set a minimum content standard for upgrade and overhaul RFPs*: This will include: a configuration baseline; defined regression testing; a first-article process limited to airworthiness/seaworthiness certification rather than gating the entire class; priority for last-negotiated-price continuation where only a licensed plant exists; a pre-agreed GoW band (roughly 15–25 per cent) authorised at AoN; and ground support equipment on the same file as the parent platform, paired with a published, indexed schedule of DPSU repair pricing philosophies so the non-competitive RMSO route stays usable, rather than defaulting to a full tender when a philosophy lapses.
5. *Institute a formal IPT/single-owner programme office*: Scored on realised availability and cost per operational hour rather than files closed, with a default long-duration LCS or PBL contract on new fleets and major upgrades.
6. *Ring-fence a protected restock and sustainment sub-head*: This should be built within the capital budget against AAP Parts D and E, so committed liabilities from newly signed contracts cannot crowd out an already-approved OCPP or FTP case within the same year.
7. *Write, or withdraw, the emergency procurement rider*: Give Chapter VI its own triggers, default indigenous-first treatment, permitted deviations and contract clock.
8. *Fix the MPQ gap in the innovation pathway*: A cash-backed floor price should be set at the challenge stage, rather than negotiated after a later QR. Also, there should be a lapse-and-escalate rule for the 20-week contracting target comparable to FTP's six-month provision.
9. *Establish a non-discretionary periodic viability review*: This should be done for major legacy and delayed development programmes, with a defined sunset or restructuring trigger, distinct from ordinary overhaul cycling.
10. *Publish a National Security Strategy or, at minimum, a standing capability-planning baseline*: Against this, ICDP and DCAP requirements can be tested for realism, building on the jointness mandate of the CDS and the Department of Military Affairs.

Conclusion

India's procurement reforms since 2002 have strengthened transparency, category clarity and indigenisation incentives; and the draft DAP-2026 extends this further on indigenisation and IP sovereignty axis. However, the

persistence of 7–10-year acquisition cycles under the DAP-2020, a framework that already combined a stated 'womb-to-tomb' lifecycle philosophy with a functioning FTP, shows that procedural refinement alone has not been sufficient, and that the absence of an urgency lane was never the correct diagnosis. The Pilatus LCC omission and continuing thinness of offset-driven technology transfer are concrete instances of that gap under the DAP-2020; the BrahMos QR revision shows the existing procedure is less rigid than commonly assumed, but also that revision remains the exception rather than a routine, delegated option; and the Tejas Mk1A engine bottleneck shows why 'Owned by India' needs to be pursued at the level of named sub-systems, not only as an aggregate IC percentage.

Testing the institutional argument against the manual's own urgency, sustainment and innovation chapters, rather than the headline acquisition cycle alone, sustains it: DAP-2026 multiplies lanes and shortens clocks. The one lane that actually removes a veto, deemed non-single-vendor treatment for OEM restock of in-service equipment under FTP Track A, is legally fenced off by OCPP's own closed list, from the maintenance and mid-life work that most determines whether a fleet is available for tasking. The chapters covering that work still run a full AoN, a Schedule I RFP, L1 selection and DAC clearance for any imported content, which is the same sequence, only slightly shorter, applied to a case that was never the source of the delays it is bundled with in the reform narrative. Until restocking an engine, sustaining a fleet and buying a new platform are treated as genuinely different problems, with different owners, money and defaults, a faster manual will produce more lapsed AoNs and more iDEX 'clearances', not more aircraft on task.

The DAP-2026 is not deficient for failing to solve problems procedure cannot solve, as budgetary commitment, planning anchors and institutional ownership sit outside its remit. The problem is treating all of these as procurement problems, which obscures where reform effort actually needs to go. A credible transition from process to performance pairs DAP 2026 with multi-year financial commitment ring-fenced against the DCAPs and AAP Parts D and E; a delegated, bounded mechanism for QR revision protected from presumptive audit suspicion; a binding classification test that lets the one genuinely fast lane reach the workload that needs it; a single-owner programme structure along something closer to the South Korean DAPA model, with independent oversight built in from the start; and periodic, non-discretionary review of requirement realism and programme viability. Absent these companion reforms, the DAP-2026 will likely strengthen procedural integrity, a genuine achievement, without closing the gap between

acquisition intent and sustained operational capability that has defined India's procurement record for two decades.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views, policies or positions of ECB Sustainable Youth Foundation, the UNDP, the United Nations or any organisation or institution.

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