Self-Reliance in India's Defence Sector

Why in news?

DefExpo 2022 held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat drew attention on the need for India to acquire the appropriate degree of self-reliance in the defence sector.

What are the current issues in the Indian defence sector?

> *The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) yearbook has highlighted India as the top weapons importer during 2017-2021.*

- **Russian imports** - The high dependency index on foreign suppliers (on Russia) for major military inventory items is one of the major issues.
- **Compromise on strategic autonomy** - It induces a macro national vulnerability and dilutes India's credible strategic autonomy.
- **Gaps in combat capacity** - The current gaps in combat capacity expose the gaps in the Indian ability to safeguard core national security interests.
    - The Galwan setback against China is an example.
- **Other challenges** – Other challenges faced by the Indian defence manufacturing ecosystem includes
    - The Russian invasion of Ukraine
    - The Covid disrupting the global economy and supply chains
    - Weakening rupee

What are the impediments in acquiring self-reliance in the defence sector?

> *In 2021-22, defence exports from India reached 1.59 billion dollars and the government has set a target to reach 5 billion dollars in the coming years.*

- **Domestic competence** - India does not have the domestic competence to fully design and manufacture any significant combat weapon/platform.
- It depends on the foreign supplier for the critical components.
- **Investment in R&D** - India has not invested enough in the national research and development (R&D) effort.
- As per data collated by the World Bank, India has been able to allocate only 0.66% of GDP (2018) towards R&D, while the world average is 2.63%.
- **Manufacturing capabilities** - Composite combat and manufacturing capabilities have not been reviewed and strengthened appropriately.

- India missed the industrial design and manufacturing bus, a national competence demonstrated by nations like South Korea and China, over the last five decades.
- **Technological advances** - India is yet to acquire a profile in the manufacture of the semiconductor chip which is the new currency of national prosperity and military power.

What lies ahead?

- There are some promising green shoots regarding the 155-mm artillery guns being designed and manufactured in the country.
- For a meaningful indigenisation and credible aatmanirbharta (self-reliance), a conducive ecosystem with sustained funding is the need of the hour.
- The techno-strategic landscape of semiconductor industry must be tilted to favour India.

Quick facts

DefExpo 2022

- DefExpo 2022 was the 12th and largest-ever defence exhibition with the theme – '**Path to Pride'**.
- It was launched at the Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre in **Gujarat's Gandhinagar**.
- This is the first defence expo where **only Indian companies** are participating and it features only Made in India equipment.
- The expo is being attended by 53 friendly countries from Africa.
- For the first time, an investor outreach event **'Invest for Defence'** was organised bringing together businesses and investors.
- **Key highlights of the DefExpo 2022**
  - Launching of the Mission DefSpace
  - Laying foundation of the Deesa airfield
  - Unveiling of the HTT-40 indigenous trainer aircraft designed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited
- On the sidelines of the expo, African nations took part in the 2nd India Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD) in Gandhinagar.

References

1. The Indian Express| What India needs to do to plug its defence gap
2. Business Today| DefExpo 2022
3. PIB| DefExpo 2022 propels 'Aatmanirbharta' in defence to next level



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