Defence & Security · GS - III

“The Indian Air Force faces a widening gap between its sanctioned and actual fighter squadron strength.” Examine the reasons for this gap and suggest measures to address it while also strengthening indigenous capability.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
DAILY PRACTICE 19/11/2026	GS - III	Defence & Security

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Gap: about 30 squadrons against 42 sanctioned. Causes: MiG retirements, slow procurement, Tejas engine delays, weak domestic industrial base. Measures: the MRFA deal with local manufacturing, faster LCA and AMCA, engine co-development, procurement reform.

Model Answer

The IAF is sanctioned 42 fighter squadrons to deter a two-front threat, but it fields only around 30. The dispute over how many Rafales are active shows how closely the size of the fleet is now being watched.

Reasons for the gap:

- **Old fleets retiring:** The MiG-21 has been phased out, and the Jaguar and MiG-29 fleets are reaching the end of their service lives.
- **Slow procurement:** The original MMRCA tender for 126 jets ended in just 36 Rafales, and the follow-on MRFA process has taken years.
- **Indigenous delays:** Delays in GE F404 engine deliveries have held up deliveries of the Tejas Mk1A.
- **Limited capacity:** HAL’s production lines are small, and India still cannot make its own fighter jet engines.

Measures:

- **Faster MRFA:** Close the deal for 114 Rafales with a high share of manufacturing in India, so it bridges the gap now and builds local capability.
- **Indigenous programmes:** Speed up Tejas Mk1A, LCA Mk2 and AMCA, bringing private industry in through the AMCA model.
- **Engines:** Co-develop engines with partners such as Safran or GE.
- **Process reform:** Run DAP procurement on fixed timelines.

Conclusion: India needs imports to fill the gap in the near term and indigenous jets for long-term self-reliance, along with credible public communication to counter disinformation.

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