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SAF-Blended Aviation Fuel Brought Under ATF Control Order

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The Government of India has amended the Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) (Regulation of Marketing) Order, 2001 to bring Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)-blended ATF under its regulatory ambit, marking a key step toward cleaner aviation and energy transition.

Background and Context

India's aviation sector is one of the fastest growing globally and contributes significantly to carbon emissions, with fuel consumption being a major source. In line with global commitments to reduce emissions and promote sustainable fuels, there has been a push to integrate alternative fuels like SAF and ethanol-based blends into aviation. The amendment provides a legal and regulatory framework for such blended fuels, which were earlier not explicitly covered.

Key Provision of the Amendment

The recent notification expands the definition of Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) to include fuel blended with Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and synthetic hydrocarbons. This effectively brings SAF-blended fuel under the ATF Control Order, ensuring that its production, storage, distribution, and marketing are governed by existing regulatory mechanisms.

The amendment has been issued by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, which empowers the government to regulate critical commodities in the national interest.

Objectives of the Move

The decision aims to:

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Promote cleaner and sustainable aviation fuel alternatives

Reduce dependence on crude oil imports

Lower greenhouse gas emissions from the aviation sector

Provide regulatory clarity and standardisation for blended aviation fuels

Support India's transition toward a low-carbon economy

About Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)

SAF is a next-generation biofuel produced from renewable sources such as:

Agricultural residues

Waste oils and biomass

Ethanol (via Alcohol-to-Jet pathway)

It can be blended with conventional ATF and used in existing aircraft engines without major modifications, making it a viable transitional fuel for decarbonising aviation.

India's SAF Roadmap and Targets

India is preparing for phased adoption of SAF in line with global commitments. Indicative targets include:

1% SAF blending by 2027

2% by 2028

5% by 2030

These targets are aligned with the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) under the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which becomes mandatory from 2027.

Significance for Economy and Environment

This reform has multi-dimensional importance:

Energy Security: Reduces dependence on imported crude oil

Environmental Sustainability: Helps in reducing aviation emissions

Industrial Growth: Boosts biofuel and ethanol industries

Farmer Income: Creates demand for agricultural feedstock

Global Competitiveness: Aligns India with international aviation standards

Legal and Regulatory Framework

Governed under: Essential Commodities Act, 1955

Regulated via: ATF (Regulation of Marketing) Order, 2001

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Amendment ensures SAF-blended fuel is treated as a regulated commodity

Challenges and Concerns:

Technological limitations in SAF production at scale

High cost of production compared to conventional fuel

Need for robust testing and safety standards in aviation

Lack of immediate mandatory blending targets for domestic flights

Conclusion

The inclusion of SAF-blended fuel under the ATF Control Order is a forward-looking policy reform that strengthens India's regulatory framework for sustainable aviation. It reflects a balanced approach between environmental commitments, energy security, and aviation sector growth, while laying the groundwork for large-scale adoption of cleaner fuels.