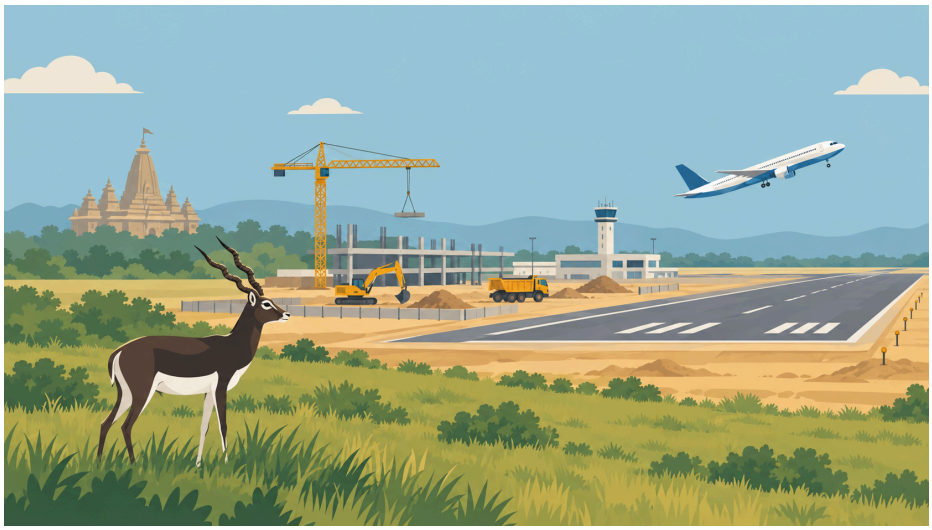
Ujjain Airport Expansion: Green Nod Deferred as EAC Seeks Faunal Study, Public-Hearing Answers



Original symbolic graphic: pcsmantra.com

Why in News

An **Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC, Infrastructure-2)** of the Union Environment Ministry has **deferred its decision** on the upgrade and expansion of the **Ujjain (Datana) airport**, citing inadequate responses to public-hearing concerns, the **absence of a detailed faunal study** and an incomplete assessment of the project's impact on local ecology - and sought additional details from the **Airports Authority of India (AAI)**. The ~**Rs 250-crore** project is to be ready before the **2028 Simhastha Kumbh**.

The Project

- **Expansion:** the existing runway (**1,077 m x 23 m**) extended to **1,800 m x 45 m** for ATR-72 and Q400 aircraft; a new **4,060 sq m terminal** (peak-hour capacity 450 passengers), apron, isolation bay, ATC tower and fire station.
- **Capacity estimate:** 20 scheduled commercial flights a day initially; ~7,300 aircraft movements and ~5,43,500 passengers a year.
- **Land:** the MP government will acquire and hand over ~**241 acres** in addition to the existing airstrip, which is currently used for chartered operations.
- **Purpose:** connectivity for the crores of pilgrims visiting the Mahakaleshwar temple and the religious-tourism circuit; an AAI-MP government MoU was signed on 1 November 2025.

The EAC's Objections

- **Schedule-I species dispute:** AAI said no Schedule-I species were present in the 10-km buffer; the **Ujjain DFO reported the presence of the Blackbuck, a Schedule-I species**. The EAC directed a detailed fauna survey and a **site-specific wildlife conservation plan** in consultation with the forest department.
- **Public hearing ignored:** at the 18 September hearing, locals and project-affected persons raised compensation, approach-road and agricultural-access issues - the EAC found these were not "addressed/replied properly"; it now wants a detailed report with budgetary provisions and a time-bound action plan.

- **DGCA distance rule:** ToR compliance remains unshown - civil aviation guidelines generally restrict a new greenfield airport within an **aerial distance of 150 km** of an existing civilian airport, but proposals may be approved by the Central Government case by case after examining their impact on the existing airport; Indore is ~65 km away by road. AAI's position is that this is an upgrade (the MoU refers to sub-80-seater ATR-72 operations), not a greenfield airport.
- **Other:** a revised Environmental Management Plan, a detailed tree survey and a compensatory plantation proposal with identified land.

Why It Matters

- **GS-III Environment/Infra:** a live example of the EAC's role under the EIA Notification 2006, the value of public hearings and the development-conservation balance.
- **The Simhastha 2028 race:** religious-tourism infrastructure versus process compliance - deadlines do not dilute compliance.
- **Wildlife protection:** the Blackbuck is in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 - missing it in a survey is a serious compliance failure.

Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. The Blackbuck is listed in which Schedule of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972?

(a) Schedule II

(b) Schedule III

(c) Schedule I

(d) Schedule V

Answer and Explanation

Answer: (c) Schedule I - the highest protection status; the Ujjain DFO reported its presence in the project area.

Q2. Within what aerial distance of an existing civilian airport does a greenfield airport proposal require examination of its impact on the existing airport and case-by-case Central Government approval?

(a) 75 km

(b) 100 km

(c) 150 km

(d) 200 km

Answer and Explanation

Answer: (c) 150 km. This is not an absolute ban; the policy provides for case-by-case Central Government approval.

Mains Practice Question

Q: "Environmental appraisal is not an obstacle to development but a guarantee of its quality." Comment in the context of the EAC's intervention in the Ujjain airport expansion. (250 words)

Outline: Introduction - the proposal and the EAC's deferral; the value of process - EIA 2006, public hearings, ToR compliance; the conservation dimension - Schedule-I species, faunal surveys, compensatory plantation; the development case - Simhastha 2028, connectivity; conclusion - time-bound compliance can serve both goals.

FAQ

Short answer: The EAC deferred clearance for the ~Rs 250-crore Ujjain (Datana) airport expansion: inadequate public-hearing responses, an incomplete faunal study (the DFO reported Blackbuck presence), unproven DGCA distance-rule compliance; a revised EMP and tree survey have been sought.

Q: Why did the EAC defer clearance?

Three main reasons: (1) AAI claimed no Schedule-I species, while the DFO reported the Blackbuck; (2) the 18 September public-hearing issues (compensation, approach road, farm access) were not properly answered; (3) ToR conditions - notably the DGCA 150-km rule - remain unproven.

Q: What does the project involve?

A 1,800 m x 45 m runway (ATR-72/Q400), a 4,060 sq m terminal (450 peak-hour passengers), apron and ATC tower; ~241 acres of additional land; capacity of ~5,43,500 passengers a year; target - before the 2028 Simhastha.

Q: What happens next?

AAI must submit a detailed fauna survey, a wildlife conservation plan in consultation with the forest department, a time-bound action plan (with budget) for public-hearing issues, a revised EMP and a tree survey with compensatory plantation; only then will appraisal proceed.

Sources

- Indian Express (15/16 November 2026): Ujjain airport upgrade faces environmental concerns; EAC defers nod
- EaseMyPrep: panel defers clearance over faunal study, ecology gaps
- Note: the EAC minutes are cited as quoted in the IE report; the original minutes were not independently verified