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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Standards, Quality Control Orders and the Make-in-India Balance

THE HINDU

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Standards, Quality Control Orders and the Make-in-India Balance

 **The Hindu** 28 June 2026 **GS3**

Source: ujyari.com — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Quality Control Orders keep out shoddy imports but can also raise input costs for small manufacturers. How should India set standards that protect consumers without strangling MSME supply chains?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Hindu](#)

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WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

The **Transition Facilitation (Quality Control) Order, 2026**, notified by **DPIIT** under the **BIS Act, 2016** and effective **June 25, 2026**, has reopened a sharp economic-policy question: how far should India push **Quality Control Orders (QCOs)**? For an aspirant, this is a textbook **GS3** trade-off, standards that **protect consumers and curb sub-standard imports** on one side, and **input costs and MSME supply chains** on the other. With roughly 770 products now under QCOs, the calibration debate is exactly the kind of balance the examiner rewards.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

QCOs mandate (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/mandate/>) **BIS certification** and the **ISI mark**, raising quality and blocking cheap, unsafe imports, advancing **Make in India**. But when they cover **raw materials and intermediates**, they raise **input costs** and disrupt **MSME supply chains**, and risk **WTO-TBT** scrutiny as disguised protection. The new **Transition Facilitation QCO, 2026** seeks a risk-based balance. The principle is **calibration**, not blanket tightening.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
Quality Control Order (QCO)	Makes BIS certification mandatory for a product	Raises quality, blocks unsafe imports
BIS Act, 2016	Legal basis for standards and the ISI mark	Statutory (https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/statutory/) backbone of QCOs
Non-tariff barrier	Standards used as a trade instrument	Can shade into protectionism
WTO-TBT Agreement	Standards must not disguise trade restrictions	Compliance test for QCOs
Transition Facilitation QCO, 2026	Risk-based, permission-based input route	Eases compliance for MSMEs

THE ANALYSIS: WHEN STANDARDS HELP AND WHEN THEY HURT

- 1 **QCOs genuinely protect.** Mandatory BIS conformity lifts product quality, safeguards consumers and stops a flood of cheap, unsafe imports, real public goods.
- 2 **Inputs are the pressure point.** When QCOs cover raw materials and intermediates, MSMEs dependent on imported components face higher costs, certification delays and disruption.
- 3 **The protectionism risk is real.** Standards can shield inefficient domestic producers and invite WTO scrutiny under the TBT Agreement if they look like disguised trade barriers.
- 4 **Calibration is the answer.** The Transition Facilitation QCO, 2026 signals the right instinct, a risk-based route that keeps inputs flowing while preserving the BIS quality framework.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

BIS Act, 2016 (Bureau of Indian Standards as the National Standards Body); QCOs issued by the Central Government, often through **DPIIT** (Ministry of Commerce and Industry). **Marks: ISI mark** (product certification); **BIS Standard Mark**. **Scale: roughly 770 products under about 190 QCOs, up from around 100 products under 14 QCOs a decade ago.** **New measure: Transition Facilitation (Quality Control) Order, 2026, effective June 25, 2026, risk-based and permission-based, valid five years.**

Trade rule: WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), standards must not be disguised restrictions. **Policy frame: Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, complemented by PLI schemes.**

THE DEBATE

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Argument for strong QCOs: They protect consumers from unsafe products, stop dumping of sub-standard imports, push domestic producers up the quality ladder, and serve national self-reliance. Quality is non-negotiable.

Argument for restraint: QCOs on inputs raise costs, delay production and disrupt MSME supply chains; they can become disguised protectionism, invite WTO disputes, and shield inefficiency rather than serve consumers.

The balanced verdict: Both have force, so the answer is **calibration**. **Tighten** standards on finished consumer goods where safety is paramount; **ease and phase** them on critical inputs and intermediates with transition windows; **build domestic testing and certification capacity**; and ensure **WTO-TBT compliance**. The Transition Facilitation QCO, 2026 is a step in this direction.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

A policy good for one objective (consumer safety) can be bad for another (MSME competitiveness) one link down the chain. The strong answer does not stop at the headline benefit; it asks who bears the cost at the next stage, here, the small manufacturer buying QCO-covered inputs, and then designs around it (calibrate (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/calibrate/>) by product stage). This “first benefit, second-order cost” reflex elevates answers across trade, regulation and industrial policy.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

QCO on finished goods -> safer products + fewer shoddy imports -> consumer gain. But QCO on raw materials -> higher input cost + certification delay -> MSME supply chain hit + WTO-TBT risk. The fix: calibrate by stage + transition windows (Transition Facilitation QCO 2026) + more testing capacity -> quality without choking MSMEs.

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Distinguish finished goods from critical inputs**, tightening the former and easing the latter.
- ② **Phase QCOs with transition windows** so MSMEs can adapt without sudden supply shocks.
- ③ **Expand BIS testing and certification capacity** so compliance is fast and affordable.
- ④ **Ensure WTO-TBT compliance** so standards protect consumers, not inefficient producers.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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“Quality Control Orders are both a consumer-protection tool and a non-tariff trade instrument.” Critically examine how India can calibrate them to serve Make in India without harming MSMEs. (250 words)

“A Quality Control Order is a public good when it raises quality and a liability when it raises costs; the art is calibration, quality without choking the small manufacturer.”

BIS Act 2016 · ISI mark and Standard Mark · DPIIT · roughly 770 products under about 190 QCOs · Transition Facilitation QCO 2026 (June 25, 2026) · WTO-TBT Agreement · Make in India · PLI.

When a standard protects consumers but burdens small producers, whose interest should the regulator weigh first, and how is the balance struck transparently?

Connects to GS3 PYQs on industrial policy, non-tariff barriers and Make in India; probable forward question is the calibration framing above.

static GS3 on industrial policy, standards, trade and the MSME sector.

Sources: *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com>), *PIB* (<https://pib.gov.in>), *BIS* (<https://www.bis.gov.in>)

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KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

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Quality Control Orders raise product quality and curb sub-standard imports, but they must be calibrated so they protect consumers and domestic manufacturing without choking MSME access to inputs and disrupting supply chains.

 **SUPPORTING**

- QCOs mandate BIS certification and the ISI mark, lifting product quality and blocking cheap, unsafe imports, advancing consumer safety and Make in India.
- When QCOs cover raw materials and intermediates, they raise input costs and can disrupt supply chains for MSMEs that depend on imported components.
- The Transition Facilitation Quality Control Order, 2026 (effective June 25, 2026) is an attempt to balance compliance with supply-chain resilience through risk-based, permission-based routes.

 **COUNTER**

Some argue QCOs risk becoming disguised protectionism, raising costs, inviting WTO scrutiny under the TBT Agreement, and shielding inefficient domestic producers rather than genuinely protecting consumers.

 **WAY FORWARD**

Calibrate QCOs by distinguishing finished goods from critical inputs, phase them with transition windows, expand testing and certification capacity, and ensure WTO-TBT compliance so quality rises without strangling MSMEs.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

"Quality Control Orders are both a consumer-protection tool and a non-tariff trade instrument."
Critically examine how India can calibrate them to serve Make in India without harming MSMEs. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Standards can protect consumers or shelter producers, and often a single instrument does both. Quality Control Orders sit precisely on this fault line, between quality and cost.

BODY

A Quality Control Order, issued under the BIS Act, 2016, makes conformity to an Indian Standard and BIS certification mandatory for a product, so it must carry the ISI or Standard Mark before sale or import. The case for QCOs is strong: they lift product quality, protect consumers from unsafe goods, curb a flood of cheap sub-standard imports, and support Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat.

India has expanded their reach sharply, from a handful of products a decade ago to roughly 770 products under about 190 QCOs. The difficulty appears when QCOs cover raw materials and intermediates.

MSMEs that rely on imported inputs face higher costs, certification delays and supply-chain disruption, and standards can shade into disguised protectionism, attracting WTO scrutiny under the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement. The Transition Facilitation Quality Control Order, 2026, effective June 25, 2026, responds with a risk-based, permission-based route that lets compliant manufacturers keep sourcing inputs while staying within the BIS system.

The principle should be calibration: tighten standards on finished consumer goods, ease and phase them on critical inputs, and build domestic testing capacity so compliance is feasible.

CONCLUSION

QCOs are a legitimate tool when they raise quality and protect consumers, and a liability when they raise costs and shield inefficiency. The art is calibration: quality without choking the small manufacturer.


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