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The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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Page 01 :GS II : International Relations

The bilateral relationship between India and Italy has experienced a significant upward trajectory, culminating in the elevation of their ties to a **'Special Strategic Partnership'** during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Rome. Amid ongoing global geopolitical volatility in Ukraine and West Asia, this development highlights growing convergence on regional security, economic integration, and defense industrial cooperation between South Asia and Southern Europe.

Key Highlights & Pillars of the Agreement

i. Strategic & Diplomatic Elevation

- **Special Strategic Partnership:** Upgrading ties signifies a deeper political commitment, moving beyond transactional trade to long-term geopolitical and security alignment.
- **Global Conflict Stance:** Both nations emphasized continuous consultation on the Ukraine and West Asia crises. India reiterated its foundational foreign policy stance: resolving hostilities strictly through **"dialogue and diplomacy."**
- **Indo-Pacific Alignment:** Reaffirming commitment to a "free, open, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific" anchored in international law, specifically the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.
- **Maritime Security:** Expressed critical concern over the Gulf situation, explicitly calling for the protection of **freedom of navigation** and restoring global trade flows through the **Strait of Hormuz**.

ii. Defense & Security Cooperation

- **Defense Industrial Road Map:** A dedicated roadmap was sealed to promote co-development, co-production, and technology transfers in defense equipment, aligning with India's Aatmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliance) goals.
- **Financial Crime & Enforcement:** Signed an institutional MoU between the **Directorate of Enforcement (ED)** of India and the Italian Corps of the **Guardia di Finanza** to counter money laundering, financial fraud, and cross-border economic offenses.

India, Italy seal defence pact, elevate their bilateral ties to a 'special strategic partnership'

Kallol Bhattacharjee
 NEW DELHI

India and Italy have been in continuous contact over the conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, reiterating his call for "dialogue and diplomacy" to resolve the festering wars.

Delivering a press statement in Rome at the end of his multi-nation Europe trip, Mr. Modi described India-Italy relation as a "win-win partnership", and welcomed the upgrade of bilateral ties to the level of "Special Strategic Partnership".

"We have remained in continuous contact over Ukraine, West Asia, and other areas of hostilities.

India has a clear position that all problems should be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy," Mr. Modi said in his press statement. "I am happy that we are upgrading our ties to the level of Special Strategic Partnership," he said.

The Ministry of External Affairs said that the Special Strategic Partnership will lead to strengthened cooperation in trade, technology, defence, clean energy and innovation as well as in the field of mobility of skilled and non-skilled workers through safe and secure channels.

Agriculture research

The two sides also sealed a "Defence Industrial Road Map", an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in critical minerals, and another agreement for cooperation between the Italian Corps of



Sweet gift: Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifts 'Melody' toffees to Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in Rome on Wednesday. ANI

the Guardia di Finanza and the Directorate of Enforcement.

A Joint Statement issued on the occasion of Mr. Modi's visit announced that the two sides have signed an agreement on agriculture and agricultural research that will connect Ministries and institutions of India and Italy.

The two sides also expressed commitment "to a free, open, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific, in line with international law, including United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)."

On the Gulf situation, they called for "freedom of navigation and the resumption of global flows through Strait of Hormuz".

In a significant push, ahead of the India-Africa Forum Summit-4, the two

sides said they have agreed work on selected projects trilaterally in Africa.

In this regard, the Joint Statement said, "Recognising the strategic priority both countries attach to Africa, the two Prime Ministers agreed to work together in trilateral initiatives with African partners in areas such as Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), agriculture, education, healthcare, artificial intelligence, connectivity and infrastructure and renewable energy in line with India's development partnership in Africa and Italy's Mattei Plan."

Mr. Modi was conferred with the Agricola Medal for 2026 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, at the FAO headquarters in Rome.

iii. **Economic, Tech & Resource Bilateralism**

- **Critical Minerals MoU:** A vital agreement securing cooperation in the supply chain of critical minerals (such as lithium, cobalt, etc.), which are essential for green energy transitions and high-tech manufacturing.
- **Mobility & Migration:** Prioritizing safe, legal, and secure channels for the mobility of both skilled and non-skilled Indian workers into Italy, addressing Italy's labor shortages while protecting workers' rights.
- **Agriculture & Research:** An agreement connecting agricultural ministries and research institutions to boost yield efficiencies, climate-resilient farming, and food security technologies.

iv. **Trilateral Cooperation in Africa**

- **Convergence of Visions:** Jointly integrating India's Africa development framework with Italy's **Mattei Plan** (Italy's strategic energy and development policy for Africa).
- **Key Focus Areas:** Undertaking trilateral projects in Africa focusing on **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**, healthcare, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and education.

Personal Milestone

- **FAO Agricola Medal 2026:** Prime Minister Modi was conferred with the prestigious Agricola Medal by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Rome, recognizing his leadership in food security, agricultural development, and poverty alleviation.

Conclusion

The upgrade to a 'Special Strategic Partnership' marks the final shedding of past diplomatic frictions (such as the Enrica Lexie/Italian marines case) and sets a forward-looking agenda. By tying defense industrial roadmaps to critical mineral security and expanding their footprint into Africa via trilateral frameworks, New Delhi and Rome are building a resilient, multi-layered alliance. This partnership not only strengthens India's geopolitical leverage in Europe but also establishes a reliable anchor for maritime and economic stability across the Indo-Mediterranean corridor.

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: "The elevation of India-Italy ties into a 'Special Strategic Partnership' reflects the emergence of new middle-power alignments in a multipolar world." Discuss. **(150 Words)**

Page 01:GS III : Indian Economy / Prelims Exam

The Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) measures the collective and individual performance of production in eight vital infrastructure sectors of the Indian economy. In the latest official data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India's core sector growth quickened marginally to **1.7% in April**, up from a revised 1.2% in March. This modest recovery was primarily driven by manufacturing and construction-linked segments like steel and cement, alongside a pickup in electricity generation, even as hydrocarbon sectors faced continued contraction.

Core Sector Performance: Point-by-Point Breakdown

i. The Gainers (Positive Growth)

- **Cement (9.4% Growth):** Hit a three-month high. This sharp jump indicates a robust revival in domestic construction, housing, and infrastructure projects.
- **Steel (6.2% Growth):** Maintained strong momentum, further supporting capital expenditure (CapEx) and industrial manufacturing activity.
- **Electricity (4.1% Growth):** Touched a three-month high, reflecting rising industrial demand and summer power requirements across the country.

ii. The Draggers (Contraction/Negative Growth)

- **Fertilizers (-8.6% Contraction):** Although still in the negative zone, it showed a massive recovery compared to the staggering ~25% contraction witnessed in March.
- **Crude Oil (-3.9% Contraction):** Marked the **eighth consecutive month of contraction**, highlighting India's structural challenges in boosting domestic oil exploration and heavy reliance on imports.
- **Natural Gas (-4.3% Contraction):** Slipped back into negative territory after a brief expansion in March that had been triggered by West Asian energy supply anxieties.

iii. Data Quality & Revisions Note

- **Significant Upward Revisions:** The data showcased major revisions by the Ministry. March's core sector growth was sharply revised upward to **1.2%** from an initial estimate of a **0.4% contraction**. Such revisions underscore the importance of relying on final data over preliminary monthly trends for long-term economic policymaking.

Steel, cement help quicken April core sector growth to 1.7%; crude oil, gas contract

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Growth in activity in the eight core sectors of the economy quickened marginally to 1.7% this April, up from 1.2% in March, official data released on Wednesday showed.

Data on the Index of Eight Core Industries released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry saw a significant revision of the growth rate for March – now coming in at 1.2% compared with the preliminary contraction of 0.4% that had originally been reported for the month.

In a signal that construction activity might again be picking up, the steel and cement sectors saw relatively robust growth in April. The steel sector saw growth come in at 6.2% in April, compared with a newly revised growth of 7.7% in March. The preliminary March growth figure for the sector was 2.2%.

Similarly, the cement sector saw growth quicken to a three-month high of 9.4% in April. Here, too, the growth rate for March was revised upwards to 4.7% from the original 4%.

The domestic crude oil sector contracted 3.9% in April, marking the eighth consecutive month of contraction.

The natural gas sector, too, again slumped into a contraction of 4.3% in April after having briefly come back into positive territory in March due to the energy crisis brought on by the war in West Asia.

The fertilizer sector contracted 8.6% in April. This was a much better performance than the contraction of nearly 25% in March. The electricity sector grew at a three-month high of 4.1% in April.

Period	Growth Rate (%)
April 25	1.2
Oct. 25	0.1
April 26*	1.7

*Provisional

Core Concepts

For the civil services exam, you must remember the structural composition and weightages of the Index of Eight Core Industries:

- **Released by:** Office of the Economic Adviser, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- **Significance:** These eight industries comprise **40.27% of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP)**, making it a crucial lead indicator of broader industrial health.
- **Decreasing Order of Weightage (The "Chronology" Rule for Prelims):**
 1. **Refinery Products** (Highest Weightage ~28.04%)
 2. **Electricity** (~19.85%)
 3. **Steel** (~17.92%)
 4. **Coal** (~10.33%)
 5. **Crude Oil** (~8.98%)
 6. **Natural Gas** (~6.88%)
 7. **Cement** (~5.37%)
 8. **Fertilizers** (Lowest Weightage ~2.63%)

Conclusion

The April core sector data presents a deeply fragmented picture of the Indian economy. On one hand, the expansion in cement, steel, and electricity indicates that government-led infrastructure spending and capital creation remain resilient. On the other hand, the persistent slump in domestic crude oil and natural gas emphasizes India's vulnerability to global energy supply chains and domestic exploration bottlenecks. To transition from a marginal 1.7% growth to a sustained high-growth trajectory, India needs structural reforms in the upstream hydrocarbon sector alongside a faster stabilization of the rural-driven fertilizer industry.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI), consider the following statements:

1. The Index of Eight Core Industries is released by the Ministry of Finance.
2. The eight core industries together constitute more than 40% weight in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
3. Refinery products have the highest weightage among the eight core industries.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: The recent core sector data reflects a fragmented pattern of industrial growth in India. Examine the factors responsible for divergent trends across sectors. **(150 Words)**

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Page 07:GS III : Science & Tech / Prelims Exam

Scientists have discovered a previously unknown, rare, cage-like crystal—a type-I clathrate—inside red trinitite, a glassy crust formed during the world's first-ever nuclear test ("Trinity") in New Mexico in 1945. Published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), this discovery marks the first time a clathrate has been identified among the solid-state leftovers of a nuclear explosion, revealing how extreme anthropogenic environments function as natural laboratories for creating novel matter.

Key Highlights of the Discovery

- **The Material (Red Trinitite):** Unlike regular pale-green trinitite formed from melted desert sand, red trinitite is a rare variety tinted by copper and other metals from the vaporized test tower wiring and instrumentation.
- **The Structure (Clathrate):** It is a type-I clathrate crystal characterized by a framework of silicon atoms forming microscopic polyhedral "cages" that physically trap other element ions (calcium, copper, and iron) inside.
- **Formation Environment:** The crystal is metastable, meaning it could only form under transient, extreme thermodynamics—temperatures exceeding **1,500 °C** and pressures up to **8 Gigapascals (GPa)**—which were instantly "frozen" into place by rapid cooling (quenching).

Technical Profiling: Clathrates vs. Quasicrystals

The study specifically checked if this new clathrate was structural parent to the **quasicrystal** discovered in the same red trinitite back in 2021. The comparative findings are critical for materials science:


- **Quasicrystals:** Possess an orderly, highly complex atomic pattern that **never repeats periodically** (once thought impossible in nature).
- **The Structural Delink:** Supercomputer simulations proved that while a clathrate lattice remains stable at low copper concentrations (10–11%), it destabilizes and falls apart at high copper concentrations like those found in the Trinity quasicrystal.
- **Conclusion:** The two distinct structures formed during the same microscopic fraction of a second but belong to entirely separate structural families, leaving the natural origin of non-repeating structures an open scientific mystery.

UPSC Relevance & Civil Services Dimensions

1. Applied Materials Science & Technological Applications

Clathrates are highly valued by materials scientists for their unique guest-host structure. Understanding these nuclear edge cases can optimize:

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New crystal found in the detritus of the first-ever nuclear blast

Vasudevan Mukunth

On July 16, 1945, the U.S.'s "Trinity" nuclear test in New Mexico changed history. The explosion released energy equivalent to 21,000 tons of TNT, vaporised a steel tower, and melted the surrounding desert sand into a glassy green crust called trinitite. Decades later, this mineral still holds secrets.

In a new study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, scientists from the University of Firenze, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Carnegie Mellon University, and Princeton University have said they have found a rare, cage-like crystal — called a clathrate — in the trinitite.

The researchers, led by Luca Hindli and Paul Steinhardt, were motivated by the discovery in 2021 of a quasicrystal in red trinitite — a specific variety of the glass tinted by copper from the test tower's wiring. Quasicrystals have ordered but non-repeating atomic patterns that scientists once thought to be impossible in nature. Because both the quasicrystal and the newly discovered clathrate were found in similar copper-rich droplets, the team wanted to know if these two rare forms of matter could be related. In other words, they wanted to check if the extreme conditions in the nuclear blast could have been a natural laboratory that created materials impossible to synthesize using conventional laboratory methods.

To find the new crystal, the team examined a sample of red trinitite collected shortly after the 1945 test. They used high-resolution nano-CT scans to peer inside the glass, where they identified small drops of metal.

They identified one promising candidate, a grain just 10µm across. Then they determined the arrangement of its atoms and its chemical makeup using advanced instruments. The team also used supercomputer simulations to test its stability and its potential relationship to other rare materials. This is how the team discovered a previously unknown calcium-copper-silicon crystal. They said it is a type I clathrate, which is characterised by a framework of silicon atoms forming small cages that trap other elements inside.

This is the first time a clathrate has been identified among the solid-state products of a nuclear explosion. According to the study paper, the newfound crystal is metastable: meaning it could only form under the extreme, fast-changing temperatures and pressures of the Trinity test — conditions reaching over 1,500 °C and pressures up to 8 gigapascals — and then frozen into place by cooling rapidly.

The researchers also checked whether the Trinity quasicrystal could have been derived from the clathrate structure. Their computer models showed that while a clathrate framework would indeed be stable with a small amount of copper, it would fall apart when the copper content reached the high levels found in the Trinity quasicrystal. In other words, the two materials formed in the same event but belong to separate structural families. Per the study, extreme environments can shape matter in ways that challenge scientists' understanding of chemistry and could pave the way for creating new synthetic materials that mimic these high-energy conditions.

The researchers wrote in the paper that their work, by ruling out a connection between clathrates and quasicrystals, also deepens the mystery of where and how complex, non-repeating can structures form in nature.

- **Energy Storage:** Using the nano-cages to efficiently trap and store lithium ions in next-generation lithium-ion batteries.
- **Quantum Computing & Solar Power:** Intentionally "doping" silicon clathrate frameworks with specific elements to tailor tailored electrical, magnetic, or catalytic properties for quantum components and photovoltaic solar cells.
- **Thermoelectrics:** Developing materials that can directly harvest waste heat and turn it into electricity.

2. Strategic Defense & Nuclear Forensic Monitoring

- **Clandestine Test Detection:** The unique pressure-temperature signatures preserved in these minerals act like a physical "black box" or archive of a blast. Detecting such specific shock-formed phases can help international agencies analyze and verify unauthorized or secret nuclear detonations globally.

3. Earth & Planetary Sciences

- **Simulating Extreme Cosmos:** These high-energy anthropogenic events act as terrestrial analogues for planetary impacts or asteroid collisions, expanding our core understanding of mineral evolution far away from traditional chemical equilibrium.

Conclusion

The discovery of a unique type-I clathrate in Trinity's debris underscores that extreme, transient events open chemical pathways completely inaccessible to conventional laboratory synthesis. Beyond upending traditional crystalline architecture, this finding bridges historical nuclear history with progressive material engineering—paving the way for synthetically designing advanced materials by mimicking high-energy, non-equilibrium thermodynamic environments.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: "Red trinitite," recently mentioned in scientific research, is best described as:

- (a) A rare meteorite mineral found in Antarctica
- (b) A radioactive mineral formed in deep ocean trenches
- (c) A glassy residue formed after the Trinity nuclear test in 1945
- (d) A naturally occurring silicon-rich crystal in deserts

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Extreme anthropogenic environments can function as laboratories for the creation of novel materials. Discuss in the context of the recent clathrate discovery in red trinitite. **(150 Words)**

The recent "cockroaches" remark by Chief Justice Surya Kant and subsequent clarifications have reignited the debate surrounding the legal and ethical boundaries of judicial utterances in India. This analysis explores the institutional limits of judges speaking from the bench, examining the fine line between rigorous questioning and intemperate remarks, and how these comments impact public perception in the era of live-streaming and real-time news cycles.

Core Themes & Content Outline

• The Dual Nature of Bench Remarks:

- The Testing Question: Unscripted, rigorous questioning used to test the legal strength of a lawyer's argument (e.g., Justice Frankfurter in *Brown v. Board of Education*).
- The Intemperate Remark: Scathing, harsh, or dehumanizing language directed at individuals, groups, or institutions that crosses ethical boundaries.

• The Conflict:

- Judicial remarks now travel instantly via live-streaming to the public.
- This collapses the distinction between a judge's casual oral observation and the court's official, binding judgment.

• Established Standards:

- The judiciary is bound by institutional guidelines (Restatement of Values of Judicial Life, 1997) and case laws (*Vijayabhaskar Case, 2021*) to maintain dignity and restraint.

• The Aftermath Pattern:

- When an intemperate remark causes public outrage, judges often issue a "retreat"—either by claiming misreporting or narrowing the scope of the

Oral remarks and institutional limits

Chief Justice's 'cockroaches' remark from the bench, and the clarification that followed, have revived a question the Supreme Court has tried to settle twice: the standard the court has set out asks the public to read bench remarks as distinct from the formal opinion, and asks judges to keep that distinction from collapsing

LETTER & SPIRIT

V. Venkatesan

Chief Justice Surya Kant's remarks from the bench on May 15 and the clarification that followed the next day have revived a question Indian law has tried to settle twice. When a judge speaks from the bench and the speech wounds, what standard governs? Hearing applications relating to the designation of senior advocates, the Chief Justice remarked that "there are youngsters like cockroaches" and that some advocates were "parasites of society." The clarification confined the criticism to fake-degree holding designers. The clarification has not closed the controversy.

The court has named the convention twice. The first was the Restatement of Values of Judicial Life, adopted by the Full Court on May 7, 1997. The second was *Chief Election Commissioner vs M.R. Vijayabhaskar*, decided by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice M.R. Shah on May 6, 2021. A century before either, Benjamin Cardozo, in his *Storrs Lectures* at Yale in 1921, named the standard that constrains all judicial utterance. The judge, Cardozo wrote, "is to draw his inspiration from consecrated principles. He is not to yield to spasmodic sentiment, to vague and unregulated benevolence. He is to exercise a discretion informed by tradition, methodized by analogy, disciplined by system, and subordinated to the primordial necessity of order in the social life."

The Vijayabhaskar standard

The trigger for *Vijayabhaskar* lay in the Madras High Court. In April 2021, during the second wave of COVID-19, the Madras High Court was hearing a petition on COVID protocols at a Karur polling booth, with Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee presiding. The Bench, exasperated at the Election Commission for permitting large political rallies during the Assembly elections then under way, remarked that the Commission was "singularly and responsibly" for the situation and that Commission officers "should be put up for murder charges probably." The remarks were not in the formal order but were widely reported. The Election Commission moved the Supreme Court for a direction restraining the media from reporting oral observations of judges.

Justice Chandrachud refused that restraint. The judgment did three things. It deflected bench questioning as a form that provides "clarity to the judges" and lets lawyers develop arguments "with a sense of creativity founded on a spontaneity of thought." It cautioned against scathing language directed at persons or institutions, calling the Madras High Court's metaphor "inappropriate" and the remarks "barbaric." And it held, as the doctrinal centrepiece, that "the formal opinion of a judicial institution is reflected through its judgments and orders, not its oral observations during the hearing." Two faces of the bench remark were thus named by the court itself: the question that tests and the language that wounds. The same standard, drawn from Cardozo and codified in Item 8 of the 1997 Restatement, applies to both.

The bench question that tests

The first face is the bench question that tests an argument. The judge states a position she may not hold, to see how the lawyer defends against it. The form is



THE GIST

▼ Bench questions are meant to test arguments and aid judicial reasoning, but "intemperate remarks" and "scathing language" that wound individuals or institutions cross a recognised judicial standard.

▼ Drawing on Cardozo, the 1997 Restatement of Values of Judicial Life, and *Vijayabhaskar*, the article distinguishes between the "bench question that tests" and the "language that wounds."

▼ As oral observations now travel instantly into the public sphere, clarifications that narrow or deny controversial remarks leave "the wound on the record and the standard unanswered."

GTTV IMAGES

unscripted; the function is rigorous. The judgment is the considered position; the bench question is the testing that precedes it. Three instances show the form at work. During the second round of hearings in *Brown vs Board of Education* before the United States Supreme Court, Justice Felix Frankfurter asked Thurgood Marshall what he meant by saying the Constitution required "equal" treatment in schools. Marshall answered: "Equal means getting the same thing, at the same time, and in the same place." The bench question went to the heart of the matter. The answer entered the American civil rights doctrine.

On September 12, 2023, the Israeli Supreme Court sat as a 5-justice panel to hear petitions against an amendment that stripped the courts of their power to review government decisions for reasonableness. President Esther Hayut told government counsel from the bench: "We are not concerned with our prestige but with the vital interests of the public." She pressed the government on whether reasonableness could survive as a legal obligation if no judge could enforce it. The questioning was widely read as foreshadowing the 87 majority that struck down the law in January 2024.

In April 2023, hearing the marriage equality petitions in *Supriyo vs Union of India*, Chief Justice Chandrachud told Solicitor General Tuskar Mehta that "there is no absolute concept of a man or an absolute concept of a woman at all... the very notion of a man and a woman is not an absolute based on genitals." The exchange was widely read as signalling that the bench would read same-sex unions into the Special Marriage Act, 1954. The judgment delivered six months later went the other way. Chief Justice Chandrachud himself was in the minority. The bench question had done its work of testing. The considered position lay elsewhere.

The intemperate remark

The second face is the intemperate remark. The standard against "scathing language" is most strained when the language reaches for the dehumanizing. In December 2015, hearing *Fisher vs University of Texas* at Austin on race in university admissions, Justice Antonin Scalia observed from the bench that there were those who contended that African-American students did better at "a slower track school" than at competitive universities. The remark went to the empirical question of whether affirmative action helped its intended beneficiaries. The language he used to put the question carried its own weight. The remark was widely condemned as racist. Justice Scalia did not retreat. He died two months later, leaving the remark on the record.

On March 1, 2021, hearing the bail plea of a government employee accused of raping a school student in Maharashtra, Chief Justice S.A. Bobde asked his counsel: "Will you marry her?" The accused's lawyer informed the court that his client was already married. The Chief Justice withdrew the suggestion. A week later, he said the remark had been "completely misreported"; he had asked whether the accused was going to marry, not directed him to do so.

Hearing a PIL on urban housing for the poor in February 2025, Justice B.R. Gavai, who would assume office as Chief Justice three months later, wondered aloud whether freebies were producing "a class of parasites." That he was urging the homeless to be drawn into the mainstream did not redeem the epithet. Justice Surya Kant's remarks of May 15 belong to the same category and have followed the same arc: utterance, criticism, clarification confining the scope of what was said.

The same standard applies off the bench. In July 2016, Justice Ruth Baker Ginsburg of the United States Supreme Court called Donald Trump, then the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, "a faker" in media interviews, and said she did not want to think about his winning the White House. After Mr. Trump called for her resignation, she issued a statement: "On reflection, my recent remarks in response to press inquiries were ill-advised and I regret making them. Judges should avoid commenting on a candidate for public office. In the future I will be more circumspect." Item 8 of the 1997 Restatement, which directs an Indian judge not to "enter into a public debate or express his views in public on political matters or on matters that are pending or are likely to arise for judicial determination," would have reached the same conclusion in fewer words.

A pattern runs through the intemperate remarks. Each was followed, where it was followed at all, by a retreat that did not match what had been said. Scalia did not retreat. Justice Bobde said the remark had been misreported. Chief Justice Surya Kant said the criticism had been narrower than reported. Only Ginsburg, in withdrawing, acknowledged the standard she had crossed. The retreat that names the rule is the rarer kind. The retreat that denies the speech is the more common one.

The standard *Vijayabhaskar* identified has not changed. What has changed is the audience. Bench remarks now travel from the courtroom to the news cycle in real time, before the formal opinion of the court is written. The discipline Cardozo named, and Item 8 codified, now operates in public. The clarification that narrows or denies controversial remarks leaves "the wound on the record and the standard unanswered. A clarification that named the rule is what *Vijayabhaskar* asks of the bench. The first occasion to apply it has come and gone. A second is now in play. (V. Venkatesan is a journalist and legal researcher)

Daily News Analysis

comment—rather than directly acknowledging a breach of the judicial standard.

Key Judicial Standards & Legal Frameworks

- **Restatement of Values of Judicial Life (1997):**
 - Adopted by the Supreme Court Full Court to serve as an ethical guide.
 - **Item 8:** Explicitly bars judges from entering public debates or expressing views on political matters or sub-judice (pending) cases.
- **The Vijayabhaskar Standard (Chief Election Commission v. M.R. Vijayabhaskar, 2021):**
 - Authored by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud following the Madras High Court’s oral remark that EC officials "should be put up for murder charges" during COVID-19.
 - The Ruling: Refused to ban media reporting of oral remarks, defending bench questioning as essential for legal creativity and clarity.
 - The Doctrine: Firmly established that **the formal opinion of the court is reflected solely through its written judgments and orders, not its oral observations.**
- **The Cardozo Principle (Benjamin Cardozo, 1921):**
 - A globally recognized standard stating that a judge's discretion must be informed by tradition, disciplined by system, and insulated from "spasmodic sentiment" or personal biases.

Case Studies of Oral Remarks: Global and Domestic

Case / Incident	Judge / Court	Nature of Remark	Outcome / Final Stand
Senior Advocate Designation Case (2026)	Chief Justice Surya Kant	Referred to certain young/fake advocates as "cockroaches" and "parasites."	Issued a clarification narrowing the criticism only to fake-degree holders.
Supriyo v. Union of India (2023)	CJI D.Y. Chandrachud	Remarked that the notion of a man/woman is not absolute based on genitals.	The oral remark signaled a pro-marriage equality stance, but the final written judgment went the other way.
Rape Case Bail Plea (2021)	CJI S.A. Bobde	Asked a rape accused, "Will you marry her?"	Heavily criticized; later claimed the remark was completely misreported by the media.
Fisher v. University of Texas (2015)	Justice Antonin Scalia (US SC)	Suggested African-American students might do better at "slower-track" schools.	Widely condemned as racist; the judge did not retreat or clarify before his death.
Political Interview	Justice Ruth Bader	Called Donald Trump a "faker" in a	Issued a formal statement of regret,

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Case / Incident	Judge / Court	Nature of Remark	Outcome / Final Stand
(2016)	Ginsburg (US SC)	press interview.	admitting the remarks were "ill-advised."

UPSC Relevance & Main Exam Takeaways

- **GS Paper II: Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Judiciary:**
 - **Freedom of Speech vs. Judicial Restraint:** While Article 19(1)(a) protects speech, judges accept a self-imposed limitation to preserve institutional neutrality.
 - **Impact of Technology:** Live-streaming of court proceedings promotes transparency but demands a higher degree of verbal discipline from judges, as loose remarks can erode public faith in the judiciary.
 - **The "Wound on Record":** Clarifications that merely deny or reshape the context of a harmful remark fail to uphold the Vijayabhaskar standard. True institutional accountability requires judges to respect the boundaries of legal prose over personal outbursts.

Conclusion

Oral observations are indispensable tools for judicial dynamic testing, allowing courts to dissect arguments before arriving at a balanced conclusion. However, when these remarks devolve into intemperate or dehumanizing language, they strain the institutional limits of the judiciary. In an era of immediate public broadcast, judges must strictly maintain Cardozo's ideal of a disciplined, system-subordinated utterance, ensuring that the distinction between a courtroom question and a binding legal opinion never collapses.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: The judgment in Chief Election Commission v. M.R. Vijayabhaskar (2021) is significant because it:

- (a) Allowed prior censorship of court reporting
- (b) Held that oral observations alone constitute binding law
- (c) Clarified that binding judicial opinions are reflected in written judgments and orders
- (d) Prohibited live-streaming of court proceedings

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: "Judicial restraint is as important as judicial independence in a constitutional democracy." Discuss in the context of recent debates over oral observations by judges. **(150 Words)**

Page 12 GS II : International Relations / Prelims Exam

Amid escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia and threats to traditional maritime choke points (like the Strait of Hormuz), the Australian High Commissioner to India, Philip Green, highlighted a projected surge in Australian Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and critical mineral supplies to India. This shift leverages a crisis-free Indian Ocean route to bolster India's energy security and green transition.

Key Pillars of Analysis

1. Energy Security & Geopolitical Realignment

- **Mitigating Choke Point Risks:** Currently, the bulk of India's LNG imports originate from West Asia, arriving at ports on India's west coast. This route is highly vulnerable to regional conflicts and disruption at the **Strait of Hormuz**.
- **The Indian Ocean Advantage:** The maritime route from Australia's gas fields directly across the Indian Ocean to India's east coast (e.g., Andhra Pradesh) is structurally free of major strategic choke points, ensuring uninterrupted supply chains.
- **Fueling Eastern India:** Enhanced LNG supplies are uniquely positioned to power the economic expansion, industrial clusters, and domestic energy grids of India's eastern seaboard.

2. ECTA and Booming Trade Relations

The India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) has acted as a massive catalyst for trade, showing lopsided benefits for Indian manufacturing and agriculture:

- **Overall Export Growth:** Indian exports to Australia surged by **200% over the last five years**, compared to just 40% growth with the rest of the world.
- **Sectoral Wins for India:**
 - Car exports up by **85%**

Australian LNG supplies to India will surge, says Green

Shipments could reach via the Indian Ocean route that is free of choke points, says Australian High Commissioner; lithium, copper may follow

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Amid the global energy shortage triggered by the West Asia crisis and tensions around the Strait of Hormuz, enhanced LNG supplies from Australia could become a viable alternative to bridge India's energy demand-supply gap, Australian High Commissioner to India Philip Green has said.

In an exclusive interaction with *The Hindu* in Vijayawada, Mr. Green said Australia's proximity to India's east coast and a crisis-free maritime route made Australian LNG well-suited to support eastern India's growing energy needs and green steel production.

At present, most LNG used for industrial and domestic needs in India comes from West Asian countries through ports on India's west coast.

"I can see a future where Australia increases LNG supplies to India," Mr. Green said, noting that Australia's major gas fields are located across the Indian Ocean from India's southern State, Andhra Pradesh. While LNG cargoes from Australia to India had already begun, supplies could become "much more substantial" in the future, particularly for eastern India.



Philip Green

He added that maritime routes between Australia and India remain free and supply chains intact.

Australia's metallurgical coal exports for Indian steel-making and imports of processed petroleum products from India are continuing and uninterrupted.

Mr. Green said that Australia currently exports LNG mainly to East Asian markets such as Japan, Korea and Singapore. The Indian Ocean route offers India a supply chain free from strategic choke points, he said.

ECTA-led surge

Trade between India and Australia is growing strongly and is expected to expand further, according to Mr. Green.

Indian exports to Australia have grown by 200% in the last five years, compared with 40% growth in exports to the rest of the world. "India is profiting

five times more in trade with Australia than with the rest of the world," Mr. Green said. Since the implementation of the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), Indian textile exports to Australia have risen 25%, agricultural exports 50%, and car exports 85%.

Australia is also aiming to play a major role in supplying critical minerals such as lithium and copper for the clean energy sector. The country produces nearly half of the world's lithium and already exports considerable quantities of copper to India.

Mr. Green said India's growing electric vehicle (EV) and battery industries will require much larger lithium supplies, making Australia a natural partner.

Australia is working with Indian government agencies and companies to build a direct lithium supply chain, including investments and offtake agreements in Australian lithium mines. He added that India must remain proactive in securing Australian lithium amid rising global competition from Europe, North America and East Asia.

"Indian consumers need to be active and hungry in a competitive global market looking to source more Australian lithium," he said.

- Agricultural exports up by **50%**
- Textile exports up by **25%**
- **Interdependence:** While India increases its manufacturing exports, Australia continues to be a steady supplier of metallurgical coal for Indian steel-making, while importing processed petroleum products from Indian refineries.

3. Critical Minerals and the Green Transition

- **Lithium & EV Ecosystem:** Australia produces nearly 50% of the world's lithium. India's booming Electric Vehicle (EV) and battery manufacturing sectors represent a massive, long-term demand shock that Australia is uniquely positioned to fill.
- **Direct Supply Chains:** Both nations are actively collaborating to move beyond spot-market buying by establishing direct supply lines, including Indian state/private investments and **offtake agreements** directly in Australian lithium mines.
- **Global Competition:** The High Commissioner noted that India faces stiff competition from Europe, North America, and East Asia, meaning Indian firms must remain aggressive and proactive ("hungry") to lock down these critical resources.

Mains Value Addition Points

- **Geopolitics of Energy:** Use this as a case study for "Energy Diplomacy" and "Supply Chain Resilience" under the Indo-Pacific framework.
- **Green Steel:** Note how Australian LNG is slated to help transition India's heavy carbon-emitting steel sector toward cleaner, gas-based "green steel" production.
- **China Factor (Implicit):** Diversifying critical mineral supply chains away from dominant players (like China) toward trusted partners like Australia is a core component of India's economic security strategy.

Conclusion

The evolving trade dynamic between India and Australia marks a transition from a purely transactional trading partnership to a deeply strategic, resilient economic alliance. By securing a choke-point-free energy corridor in the Indian Ocean and embedding itself into Australia's critical minerals pipeline, India can effectively insulate its manufacturing and clean energy sectors from West Asian volatility while aggressively pursuing its net-zero goals.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: The strategic importance of Australia for India's energy security lies primarily in:

- (a) Its control over the Strait of Hormuz
- (b) Availability of a choke-point-free Indian Ocean maritime route
- (c) Its dominance in crude oil exports to India
- (d) Its membership in OPEC

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Critical minerals are emerging as the backbone of the global green transition. Discuss the opportunities and challenges for India in securing these resources through partnerships with countries like Australia. **(250 Words)**



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Preparing India for a credible digital Census

The house listing phase of the 2027 Census is now progressing in some States and the work in other States will be taken up soon. The questionnaire for this phase was pre-tested last year. It was reported that the inclusion of questions on caste has delayed the pre-testing of the questionnaire for the population enumeration phase of the Census. Field testing of the schedules is essential to ensure that the concepts and definitions are easily understood by the enumerators and respondents.

The question on caste is being included in the Census for the first time since Independence. The only recent experiences on the issues relating to enumeration of caste are from the surveys in Bihar and Karnataka. I am sure that the Census organisation would have conducted extensive research on the issues and possible solutions, and the pre-testing would help streamline the questions and instructions. The experience of Karnataka and Bihar suggests that, whatever the results, there will be communities that are not ready to accept their numbers.

The population figures from the 2027 Census will be used for the next delimitation of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly constituencies. Neither the Constitution nor any other law talks about whether the Census has to count people on *de jure* or *de facto* basis. Census on *de jure* basis would mean that people have to be counted at the place where they reside. On the other hand, a *de facto* census would count people at the place where they are present during the Census.

The method used

The Indian Census has been following an extended *de facto* method. People found at their usual/normal place of residence when the enumerator visits the household, as well as members who are absent at that time but have stayed there for at least one night during the Census enumeration period, which normally lasts 20 days, are also enumerated. Also included are visitors who stayed with the household throughout the entire period of Census enumeration period. A household is defined to include all members, even if unrelated, who partake food from a common kitchen. Thus, household help living with household and paying guests should be enumerated there, if they have food from the same kitchen.

This enumeration process implies that the number of voters in an area may not correspond to the population enumerated there. A six-month residence is required for registration as a voter. Further, the voters' list would include those living abroad (non-resident Indians, or NRIs) who chose to register as a voter, whereas they are not part of the census at all. According to the website of the Ministry of External Affairs, there are about 1.58



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Retired officer from the Indian Statistical Service

crore NRIs living abroad. This is more than 1% of the population of the country. If they were all counted in the Census in one State, it would get at least five Lok Sabha seats in the next delimitation.

While the NRIs may be from across the country, some States have proportionately more NRIs than others. Kerala, Gujarat, Punjab, Telangana and Tamil Nadu are known to have a significant number of people living abroad. The Kerala Migration Survey 2023 has estimated that about 22 lakh people from the State are living/working abroad. Not including them in the population of the State would result in the loss of one Lok Sabha seat. Some other States may also be similarly affected.

Some countries collect data on non-residents in the census by enumerating family members, if any, living abroad. This process cannot collect information on those households that have migrated abroad with all their members. Still, it would be a useful starting point and would provide better data for delimitation purposes. Therefore, I suggest pre-testing an appropriately worded question on NRIs.

The problem areas

The next Census is unique because the entire data collection process is planned to be carried out using mobile electronic devices, mostly smartphones. This can save time for the computerisation of data. Consistency checks on responses during data collection can result in improved quality of data and faster processing.

However, one has to allow for a significantly large portion of enumerators who are not savvy with smartphones, and tablets. During the recent Socio Economic and Caste Survey in Karnataka, there were reports of enumerators finding it difficult to handle the equipment for the survey. During the planning for the 2021 Census, it was indicated that enumerators would have the option to collect data using printed paper schedules, which could later be transferred to the electronic database from home. It is highly probable that a family member or a student of the teacher appointed as the enumerator may assist with this work. This could lead to accountability issues and may also compromise the confidentiality of the data. Therefore, a mechanism to detect and control data-entry errors is essential. There will also be an option for respondents to self-enumerate using a computer or smartphone as provided in the house listing phase.

The questions in the population enumeration stage are more complex when compared to those in the house-listing phase. Many of the questions require a thorough understanding of the instructions that even many enumerators find difficult. For example, the explanation of disability in the 2011 Census ran to about six printed pages. Even the seemingly simple

question, "Have you worked at any time during the last year?" was accompanied by more than two pages explaining what constitutes 'work'. The follow-up questions on industry, occupation, and related matters are also not easy for most people to understand.

It is too naive to expect that the respondents would read all the instructions before clicking on an item in the drop down menu. The three million plus enumerators may not equally understand the concepts, definitions and the need to ask the questions in an appropriate manner. The self enumeration facility can become worse unless the questions are well worded and explanations are given within the question. It is difficult to achieve this without significant simplification of the concepts and definitions.

Guard against respondent fatigue

Including too many questions in the online schedule in an attempt to obtain better responses can also lead to respondent fatigue, as the form has to be completed for every individual in a household. The possibility of respondents deliberately providing incorrect answers to certain questions in order to avoid follow-up questions cannot be ruled out.

Post-enumeration surveys from past censuses have indicated that distant relatives of the head of the household and unrelated persons, such as domestic helpers living with the household, have higher rates of omission. In a self-enumeration system, the chances of missing such persons are even greater. There is also the possibility of including children who are living in hostels and are therefore not eligible to be enumerated as part of the household. Better structuring of the questions may help ensure more accurate enumeration of such persons. For example, questions such as, "Is the person currently present in the house and, if not, was he or she present at any time after February 9 or likely to return before February 28?" (assuming that the census enumeration takes place during that period as in the past censuses), could be asked for every individual. Similarly, questions such as "Is there any other relative of the head of the household, or any unrelated person such as a servant, helper, or nurse, who shares meals from the same kitchen and lives with the household?" may also be included. While such measures may not ensure completely error-free enumeration, they could help reduce omissions and improve accuracy.

The possibility of fraudulent enumerations in some areas or by some groups using the self enumeration facility cannot be ruled out. The memory of cancelling the Census in some areas in 2001 is still fresh. The organisation needs to be vigilant and steps to prevent such incidents need to be field tested.

It requires accuracy, safeguards, training and careful planning

GS Paper II: Governance & Polity

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question: The credibility of a Census depends not merely on technology, but on institutional preparedness and public trust. Discuss in the context of India's proposed digital Census. (250 Words)

Context :With the house-listing phase of the **2027 Census** underway, India is transitioning to its first-ever entirely digital census. However, this transition intersects with complex structural shifts—including the inclusion of a **caste-based count** for the first time since Independence and the impending **delimitation exercise**—which demand meticulous field-testing to prevent systemic errors.

Key Pillars of Analysis

1. The Geopolitics of Counting: De Jure vs. De Facto & Delimitation

The upcoming census figures will directly determine the redrawing of Lok Sabha and State Assembly boundaries (delimitation). The methodology chosen introduces a massive variable regarding political representation:

- **The Extended De Facto Method:** India counts individuals where they are found or usually reside during a 20-day window. It excludes Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) who live abroad but remain registered voters.
- **The NRI Disenfranchisement Risk:** There are an estimated 1.58 crore NRIs globally (over 1% of India's population).
- **State-Level Impact:** States with high outward migration (e.g., Kerala, Gujarat, Punjab, Telangana, Tamil Nadu) face losing political weight. For instance, the Kerala Migration Survey 2023 estimates 22 lakh Keralites live abroad; omitting them could cost the state at least one Lok Sabha seat.
- **Proposed Fix:** India should field-test an appropriately worded question to capture data on family members living abroad through resident households, similar to global practices.

2. The Tech Barrier: Digital Divides and Data Vulnerabilities

Moving the entire census apparatus to smartphones, tablets, and self-enumeration apps offers faster processing, but introduces ground-level operational risks:

- **Enumerator Illiteracy in Tech:** A large segment of the 3 million+ primary school teachers and government staff acting as enumerators struggle with digital hardware, as observed during socio-economic surveys in Karnataka.
- **Surrogate Data Entry & Security Risks:** To cope, enumerators might rely on family members or students to input data at home from paper sheets. This raises massive **accountability issues** and threatens **data confidentiality**.
- **Fraudulent Enumeration:** Self-enumeration portals are vulnerable to organized, fraudulent data inflation by certain interest groups trying to artificially boost community numbers.

3. Conceptual Complexity vs. Self-Enumeration

The population enumeration phase asks highly nuanced questions that are difficult to translate into simple digital drop-down menus:

- **The Definition Barrier:** In past censuses, explaining parameters like "disability" spanned six pages, while clarifying what legally constitutes "work" took over two pages.
- **Respondent Fatigue:** Long, complex digital forms for every household member induce fatigue. To skip tedious follow-up questions (such as precise industrial or occupational classifications), respondents frequently provide deliberately incorrect answers.
- **Omission of Marginalized Individuals:** Past data shows that live-in domestic helpers, paying guests, and distant relatives are the most frequently omitted members. Conversely, children living away in hostels are often incorrectly double-counted.

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4. The Caste Enumeration Conundrum

- **First Time Since Independence:** Including a question on caste complicates the pre-testing phase of population enumeration.
- **Social Friction:** Micro-level data from recent caste surveys in Bihar and Karnataka prove that regardless of how scientific the methodology is, certain community groups will refuse to accept the final numbers if they fall short of expectations, leading to social and political disputes.

Mains Value Addition Points

- **Socio-Demographic Metric:** Use this article to highlight the tension between federal representation and demographic shifts (North vs. South debate on delimitation).
- **Administrative Tech Ethics:** A textbook case study on why digital governance (e-governance) cannot completely bypass structural training and the simplification of administrative language.

Conclusion

A digital census is an administrative milestone that can drastically reduce data processing lags, but its credibility relies entirely on the quality of its inputs. To prevent structural errors from distorting India's political mapping and policy funding for the next few decades, the government must aggressively simplify its digital questionnaires, run extensive field pre-tests, and introduce a transparent verification mechanism to protect data integrity.

