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# Putin, Xi hail 'resilient' relations in talks days after Trump's China visit

Beijing and Moscow have 'continuously deepened our political mutual trust and strategic coordination' with a resilience that remains unyielding, says Chinese President; the leaders have signed a slew of agreements on trade, media and energy

**Agence France-Presse**  
BEIJING

President Xi Jinping hailed China and Russia's "unyielding" ties in talks with Vladimir Putin on Wednesday, as the pair met to underscore their alliance days after Donald Trump's own visit to Beijing.

The two countries' ties have deepened since Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, as Russia has become increasingly dependent on China.

Mr. Putin was received by Mr. Xi outside Beijing's opulent Great Hall of the People in much the same fashion as Mr. Trump last week, complete with



Xi Jinping with Vladimir Putin during a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on Wednesday. REUTERS

chanting children and military fanfare.

But the language was much warmer, with Mr. Xi telling the Russian leader Beijing and Moscow have "continuously deepened

our political mutual trust and strategic coordination with a resilience that remains unyielding", according to Chinese state media.

Opening talks, both were quick to laud their

countries' special ties as they extended their treaty of "friendly cooperation".

Mr. Putin, quoting a Chinese phrase, told Mr. Xi: "A day apart feels like three autumns," adding that relations had reached an "unprecedentedly high level" despite "unfavourable external factors".

In an apparent swipe at the U.S., Mr. Xi warned of "unilateral and hegemonic countercurrents running rampant" in the world.

In contrast to Mr. Trump's visit last week, which yielded little in the way of immediate concrete announcements, Mr. Putin and Mr. Xi signed a slew of agreements on Wednesday on trade, media and ener-

gy. The two leaders will have tea later, at which "the most important issues" such as Ukraine, Iran and relations with the U.S. will be discussed, Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov said.

"Russia and China are actively cooperating in the energy sector... We are ready to continue reliably supplying all these types of fuel to the rapidly growing Chinese market," Mr. Putin said on Wednesday.

Mr. Xi told Mr. Putin on Wednesday that "a comprehensive ceasefire [in Iran] is of utmost urgency, resuming hostilities is even more inadvisable and maintaining negotiations is particularly important".

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Strategic Coordination:** This refers to the synchronization of foreign policy, defense, and economic strategies between two sovereign nations to achieve shared geopolitical goals. In the current context, it signifies Moscow and Beijing acting in tandem on global platforms like the UN to counter Western narratives.
- **Hegemonic Countercurrents:** A conceptual term used in international relations to describe actions by a dominant superpower (often implying the United States) that attempt to unilaterally dictate global norms, trade rules, or security arrangements, often disregarding multipolar interests.
- **Asymmetric Interdependence:** A situation where two countries rely on each other, but the degree of reliance is heavily skewed. Currently, Russia's reliance on China as a market for its energy and a source of technology is much higher than China's reliance on Russia, making Moscow the junior partner in the equation.
- **Comprehensive Ceasefire:** A complete and unconditional halt to all military hostilities across a region (such as the Middle East or Eastern Europe), accompanied by diplomatic negotiations to resolve the underlying political disputes.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Solidification of the Eurasian Axis:** The core thesis of the contemporary geopolitical landscape is the rapid transformation of the Sino-Russian relationship from a marriage of convenience into a deeply entrenched strategic partnership, driven largely by mutual friction with the West.
- **Energy as the Linchpin of Bilateral Ties:** Economic diplomacy has become heavily heavily militarized and resource-driven. The swift signing of trade and energy agreements highlights that natural resources (like oil and gas) are acting as the primary glue sustaining the alliance amid severe external sanctions.
- **Contrasting Diplomatic Modalities:** There is a stark difference in how competing global powers engage. Engagements with Western powers often remain symbolic or transactional, yielding few immediate deliverables, whereas Sino-Russian summits are increasingly characterized by concrete, high-volume trade pacts and unified rhetoric on global conflicts.
- **Joint Shaping of the Global Order:** The narrative extends beyond bilateral trade; it is an attempt to position this alliance as a stabilizing force in global conflict zones (like Iran and Ukraine), challenging the traditional Western monopoly on global conflict resolution.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **The relationship between these two giant neighbors has seen dramatic shifts over the last century, moving from ideological brotherhood to bitter rivalry, and finally to the current strategic alignment.**
  - **The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship**
    - **1950**
  - **Signed shortly after the establishment of the PRC, marking an era of deep ideological, economic, and military cooperation under the banner of global communism.**
  - **The Sino-Soviet Split**
    - **1960s**
- **Ideological differences, border disputes (leading to the 1969 border conflict), and competition for leadership of the communist world severely fractured the relationship, pushing China closer to a tactical normalization with the US in 1972.**
  - **Post-Cold War Normalization**
    - **1989-1991**
  - **Gorbachev's visit to Beijing formally ended the split. Following the collapse of the USSR, the new Russian Federation and China began demilitarizing their border and establishing pragmatic ties.**
    - **Treaty of Good-Neighborliness**
      - **2001**
- **A landmark treaty laying the foundation for modern relations, officially resolving historical border disputes and pledging economic and military cooperation.**
  - **Crimea Annexation and the Pivot to Asia**
    - **2014**
  - **Western sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea forced Moscow to aggressively pivot its energy exports and economic reliance toward Beijing.**
    - **The 'No Limits' Partnership**
      - **2022-Present**
- **Declared weeks before the Ukraine invasion, this phase marks unprecedented political mutual trust, making the two nations a unified bloc against Western global hegemony.**

- **Way Forward**
- **For India - Mastering Strategic Hedging:** New Delhi must continue to compartmentalize its relationships. It must retain its historic defense ties with Russia to ensure continental security (and keep Russia from becoming entirely subservient to China), while simultaneously deepening its maritime partnership with the Quad to deter Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Diversification of Defense Procurement:** To mitigate the risks of Russia's growing technological dependence on China, India must accelerate the indigenization of its defense sector (Atmanirbhar Bharat) and rapidly diversify imports towards France, the US, and Israel.
- **Strengthening Multilateralism:** Middle powers must work together to bolster institutions that do not belong to either the Western or Sino-Russian blocs. Expanding the influence of the Global South through platforms like the G20 ensures that a new bipolar Cold War does not dictate global trade and security norms.
  
- **UPSC Mains:**
- *2023 (GS 2):* "The US is facing an existential threat in the form of a China, that is much more challenging than the erstwhile Soviet Union." Explain.
- *2020 (GS 2):* Critically examine the aims and objectives of SCO. What importance does it hold for India?
- *2019 (GS 2):* "What introduces friction into the ties between India and the United States is that Washington is still unable to find for India a position in its global strategy, which would satisfy India's National self-esteem and ambitions." Explain with suitable examples.
- *2018 (GS 2):* What is the significance of Indo-US defense deals over Indo-Russian defense deals? Discuss with reference to stability in the Indo-Pacific region.



# GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS: SINO-RUSSIAN 'UNYIELDING' ALIGNMENT.



# UPSC C.S.E. IMPLICATIONS & STRATEGIC EQUATION.

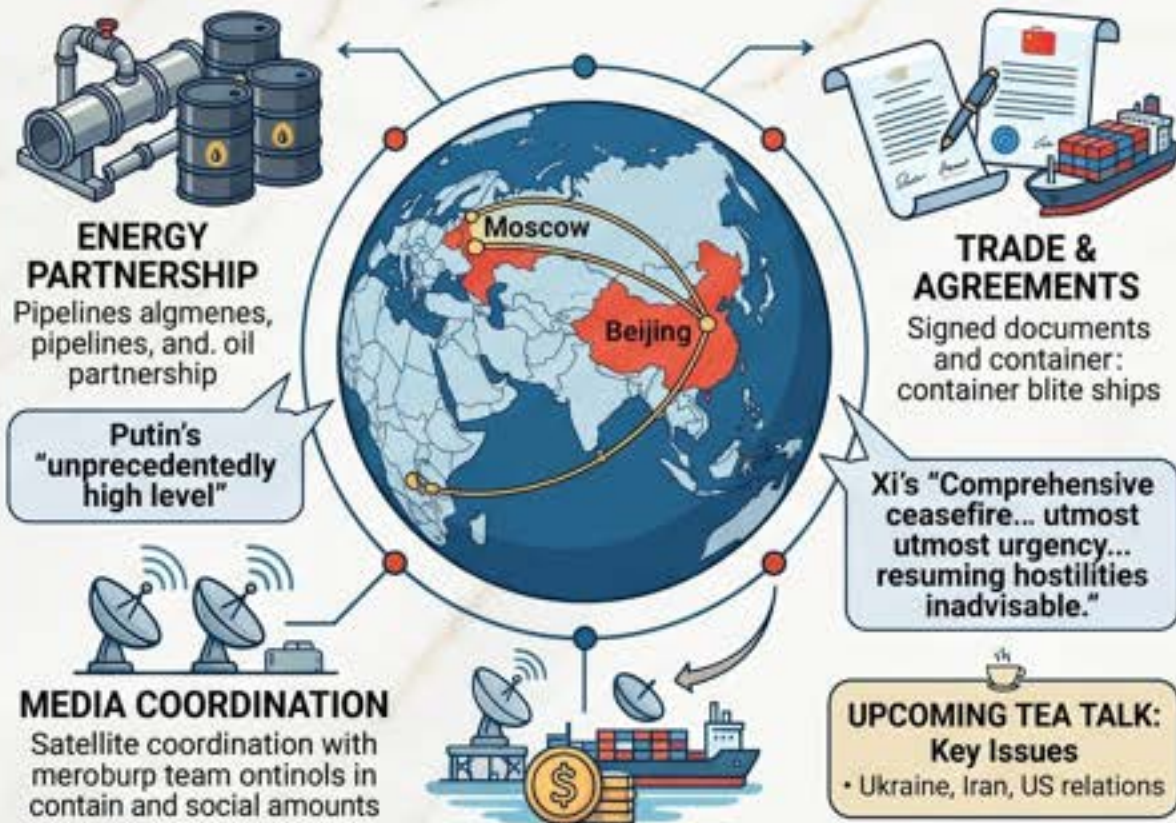
## KEY CONCEPTS

- Unyielding Ties**  
Unyielding ties and sinellant competing and ot countercurrents.
- Hegemonic Countercurrents**  
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- Asymetric Interdependence**  
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- De-dollarization Initiative**  
De-dollarization inil de-dollarization to reoumorations initiative.

## MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACT

<p><b>Social</b> Sociatey of social, and and social smisms</p>	<p><b>Political</b> Governmental, political and political politicas</p>	<p><b>Legal</b> Legal law, ent engage and goveirmanes</p>
<p><b>Ethical</b> Etmicator, condiert and aovenment</p>	<p><b>International</b> Global tcons of international cononment</p>	<p><b>Economic</b> Economic and economic ai economy</p>

## THE GLOBAL PIVOT: STRATEGIC SHIFTS



## INDIA'S STRATEGIC EQUATION

### WAY FORWARD

- Strategic Hedging**  
Strategic hedging and papelines with stasorage to xartinerlrms.
- Defense Diversification**  
Defense challenge on consulting or defense diversification.
- Multilateralism**  
Multilateralism is able to create and doltariem contments.

### UPSC SYLLABUS & PYQs

- GS2 (IR)
  - GS3 (Economy/Security)
  - PSIR Optional
- 2023** US vs China, to marioterly
- 2020** SCO vs vs China: questions
- 2021** US vs China: Intoorans' Previous questions
- 2020** SCO (themes dononralty and PSIR Option- questions

# How States are managing the surging summer power demand

India's electricity demand has surged sharply, with peak demand touching an all-time high of 256.1 GW in April, making it harder for States to manage supply during high-demand hours and exposing them to costly short-term market purchases and stressed distribution networks.

## Why it's big

India's electricity demand has surged earlier than expected this year, with peak demand touching an all-time high of 256.1 gigawatts (GW) on April 25. The country followed up with higher records on May 19 and May 20. Nearly one-third of this peak demand was met through renewable energy (RE) sources. While the national grid held up without any shortage during solar hours, the non-solar hours saw a deficit of 25.4,241 megawatts on the same day.

## What is peak demand?

Peak demand refers to the highest point of electrical power consumed on a grid over a specific period, typically a 15-minute interval. While peak demand is a single instant, it occurs during 2 to 4 hours of higher-than-average demand or 'peak demand period'. Summer months may cause longer peaks from late afternoon to evening hours and then during the night due to cooling loads from air conditioners and coolers. Similarly, winter peaks can last longer in the morning (between 6 a.m. and 10 a.m.) and evening (between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m.) due to increased heating and lighting loads during these hours, particularly in the northern States.

Paying heed to the duration of these peaks is important because even though they occur only for a short period, the grid needs to meet the peak load instantly. In fact, the entire power sector infrastructure (generation, transmission, and distribution capacity) needs to be planned to deal with this peak. But this is easier said than done. Building a system to serve the periods of highest load that last only for a few hours is neither resource-efficient nor economical. If enough capacity is built to meet the peak demand, it will remain underutilised during off-peak hours. On the other hand, if enough capacity is not available to meet the peak demand, then the system will face issues like load-shedding and grid instability.

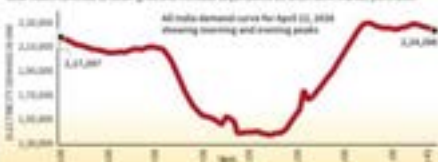
## How do States manage demand?

States meet demand through two mechanisms: contractual supply and power exchange platforms. Contractual supply comprises the long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs) that State distribution companies (DISCOMs) sign with power generators to ensure power supply over several years. This helps the DISCOMs to meet the average demand for their consumers. Almost 80%-90% of the demand in India is being met through contractual supply or bilateral contracts between the DISCOMs and generators. In the event of real-time mismatch or when the contractual supply falls short due to sudden spikes in demand or power plant or transmission failures, DISCOMs turn to the second mechanism - buying power from power exchanges. At present, around 8%-10% of the electricity is traded on the power exchanges.

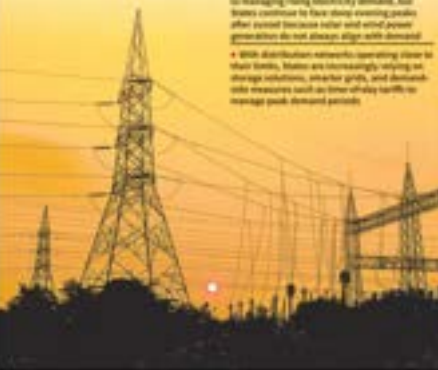
For managing peaks, States often undertake demand-side measures. Most States have relied on advertising urging consumers to reduce usage during peak hours, typically between 9 a.m. and 11 p.m. Delhi has increasingly utilised measures such as time-of-day tariffs

## Stress on the grid

While renewable energy helps States meet daytime demand, steep evening peaks during non-solar hours continue to strain grids and increase dependence on short-term market purchases.



- Renewable energy has become critical to managing rising electricity demand, but States continue to face steep evening peaks after sunset because solar and wind power generation does not always align with demand.
- With distribution networks operating close to their limits, States are increasingly using alternative solutions, such as smart grids, and demand-side measures such as time-of-day tariffs to manage peak demand periods.



electricity charges that vary based on the time of day) and smart metering to flatten evening peaks that are driven by cooling demand.

## What are some challenges faced by States due to rising demand?

A steady growth in household electrification, use of air conditioners, electric vehicle penetration, and agricultural power consumption has been driving the increase in India's electricity demand. In the last 5 years, the country's peak demand has risen by 37% - from 183 GW in December 2020 to over 250 GW in April 2024. This surge has made it tougher for States to build the electricity requirements.

With DISCOMs committed to long-term agreements that are signed at a fixed capacity and price, any shortfall has to be met through power exchanges, which are short-term markets. This exposes the States to price volatility because prices in these markets increase during peak periods. Indian Energy Exchange data shows that electricity prices in the day-ahead market have seen sharp spikes during peak periods, with rates touching the regulatory ceiling of ₹ 30 per kilowatt-hour on several occasions during April and May this year.

Another challenge relates to the inadequacy of the distribution network. Infrastructure expansion and upgrades to

India's power distribution segment often lag demand growth, leading to issues with last-mile delivery of power to the end consumer. Over the last decade, India's generation capacity has increased by 36% (from 303 GW to 532 GW), its transmission lines have expanded by 47% (from 1,41,530 circuit kilometers (km) to 3,03,796 km), and the transformation capacity has increased by 10% (from 6,58,343 megawatt ampere (MVA) to 1,41,67,35 MVA). However, a corresponding expansion in the distribution infrastructure has not happened, and distribution networks continue to face major stress. Recent assessments by the Central Electricity Authority indicate that nearly 12 lakh distribution transformers (DTs) fail annually in India. Some States have low DT failure rates of less than 2%, such as Kerala, while some particularly in the northern States experience DT failure rates as high as 20%. Further, overloading of transformers and feeders, aging equipment, inadequate maintenance continue to compromise last-mile power delivery. Many States experience local outages, especially during peak demand periods, highlighting that their distribution networks are operating close to their limits and need upgradation.

The challenge posed by distribution networks becomes acute for financially stressed States because they are neither able to

procure costly short-term power nor invest in distribution network upgrades. States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar continue to grapple with high losses, aging distribution infrastructure, and overloaded transformers.

## How does RE help?

RE has become critical to the management of rising electricity demand, particularly during summer peak periods. Since solar and wind power plants have low operating costs, higher RE penetration can also reduce overall power purchase costs for DISCOMs.

States with high RE capacity, such as Gujarat and Karnataka, are able to meet daytime peak comfortably as the solar power generation aligns reasonably well with daytime commercial and agricultural demand. But these States face steep evening peaks after sunset, for which they need to increasingly depend on energy storage technologies such as pumped hydro-storage (PHS) and battery energy storage systems (BESS). Similarly, Tamil Nadu, with a high wind capacity, benefits significantly from wind generation during the monsoon months, reducing dependence on thermal power. But the State has to resort to market purchases during periods of low wind output to meet the high evening urban demand.

However, Punjab, which has a meagre RE capacity and a dominant agricultural load during the paddy-sowing season that coincides with the summer peak, has to rely heavily on hydro imports and short-term market purchases.

## What needs to be done?

Despite its growing contribution, RE cannot help in ensuring a reliable round-the-clock power supply because of its variable nature. Since electricity demand and RE power generation do not always align, solar power generation falls sharply after sunset, though electricity demand often remains high during evening hours. Similarly, wind generation is seasonal and highly dependent on monsoon conditions. Because of this, States now face the challenge of managing variability and steep evening demand.

This is where energy storage technologies like BESS and PHS that enhance flexibility become critical for India's power system, as they help to balance the grid when the output generated by RE changes suddenly. PHS is already emerging as a key solution in States like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. At the same time, the grid itself needs to become sturdier and more flexible through stronger transmission networks, upgraded distribution systems, and energy efficiency initiatives.

With Indian States witnessing more peak demand periods, the challenge is shifting from simply generating more electricity to building a system capable of managing power efficiently across regions over periods. This calls for substantial investments in storage solutions, along with adopting more demand-side measures like ToD tariffs and agricultural load scheduling.

(Rishi Garg is a senior policy specialist in the Energy Policy and Regulation group of the Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), a research-based think tank.)

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Peak Demand:** This is the absolute highest point of electricity consumption on a grid during a specific timeframe, usually measured in 15-minute intervals. Think of it like rush hour traffic; while the road is used all day, the infrastructure must be built to handle the 6 p.m. bumper-to-bumper load without collapsing.
- **Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs):** These are long-term contracts (often 15-25 years) between State power distribution companies (DISCOMs) and electricity generators. They lock in prices and capacities, providing stability but reducing flexibility.
- **Power Exchanges:** These are short-term, real-time markets where electricity is traded like stocks. When states face sudden demand spikes that PPAs cannot cover, they buy power here, often at premium, volatile rates.
- **Time-of-Day (ToD) Tariffs:** A pricing mechanism where electricity costs vary based on the time it is consumed. It is designed to nudge consumers to shift non-essential usage away from peak hours (e.g., running washing machines at noon instead of 8 p.m.).
- **Pumped Hydro Storage (PHS) & Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS):** Technologies used to store excess energy. PHS pumps water uphill during low-demand hours to release it through turbines during peaks. BESS uses large-scale batteries to store daytime solar energy for nighttime use.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The discourse on India's energy transition centers on a fundamental shift: the challenge is no longer just about generating enough electricity, but managing *when* it is needed.
- **The Peak Demand Paradox:** Building power plants solely to meet a 3-hour evening peak is economically unviable, as the plants would sit idle for the remaining 21 hours. Yet, failing to meet this peak results in grid instability and blackouts.
- **The Infrastructure Lag:** While India has massively scaled its generation and transmission capacities, local distribution networks lag behind. Overloaded transformers and aging local grids cause frequent local outages, even when there is enough power at the national level.
- **The Renewable Energy (RE) Conundrum:** Solar and wind are excellent for cheap, daytime, or seasonal power. However, their generation profiles do not naturally match human consumption habits. Solar generation drops precisely when evening cooling and lighting demand spikes, creating a heavy reliance on storage or expensive market purchases.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The trajectory of India's power sector reflects the nation's broader developmental journey, moving from localized scarcity to national integration and now, sustainable modernization.
- **Pre-Independence to Early Republic:** Electricity was a luxury, largely confined to urban centers and managed by private licensees. Post-independence, the creation of State Electricity Boards (SEBs) socialized power distribution to drive rural electrification and agriculture.
- **The Reform Era (Electricity Act 2003):** Recognized the inefficiencies of SEBs and mandated the unbundling of generation, transmission, and distribution. This era introduced competition, paved the way for private generators, and established central grid connectivity.
- **The Renewable Push (2010s):** The launch of the National Solar Mission shifted the focus from purely thermal baseloads to integrating green energy, driven by climate commitments.
- **Present Day (Grid Modernization):** We are currently in the phase of transitioning to a "smart grid." With a fully integrated "One Nation, One Grid, One Frequency" system, the focus is now on storage solutions, demand-side management, and financial viability of DISCOMs.

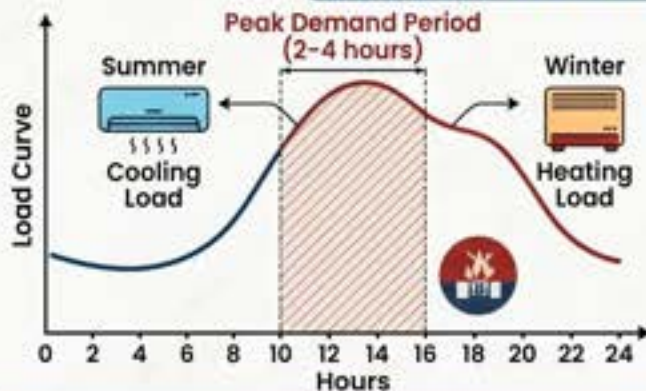
- **Way Forward**

- To secure India's energy future, a multi-pronged approach balancing generation, distribution, and consumption is required:
- **Decentralize and Upgrade Distribution:** Prioritize capital expenditure under schemes like the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) to replace aging transformers and strengthen the last-mile grid.
- **Aggressive Storage Deployment:** Treat BESS and PHS as essential infrastructure. Provide Viability Gap Funding (VGF) for large-scale storage projects to bring down the levelized cost of storage.
- **Behavioral Nudges via Pricing:** Implement smart metering and Time-of-Day tariffs universally, complemented by massive public awareness campaigns so consumers understand how to benefit from off-peak pricing.
- **Depoliticize DISCOMs:** Grant operational and financial autonomy to state regulatory commissions to ensure tariffs reflect the actual cost of supply, replacing cross-subsidies with Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) to the needy.



## COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS: UNPACKING THE SURGE IN INDIA'S POWER DEMAND & GRID PEAK

### DECODING PEAK DEMAND



Peak demand is highest power consumed over a specific period

- Must be met instantly
- Building too much capacity is resource-inefficient
- Peak touched all-time high **256.1 GW** on April 25
- Higher follow-up records are records

### STATE MANAGEMENT & CHALLENGES

#### A SUPPLY MECHANISMS

- Contractual Supply (Long-term, 85-90%)** 85%
- Power Exchanges (Short-term, 10-15%)** 10%
- Demand-Side Management (ToD Tariffs, Smart Meters)**

#### B KEY CHALLENGES

- Ragging transletrom demands from households, ACs, EVs, and agriculture
- Price volatility dor to regulatory ceiling of ₹10/kWh
- Lagging infrastructure expansion s stressed states
- financially stressed states

### THE RENEWABLE ENERGY (RE) PARADOX

DAYTIME	EVENING
<p>High RE contributes comfortably to commercial &amp; agricultural loads</p>	<p>RE downfall after sunset. Dependency on imports, hydro, expensive market purchases</p>
<p>Gujarat &amp; Karnataka daytime alignment in examples</p>	<p>Tamil Nadu wind benefit, but comenaly marke mport, but market purchase need</p>
<p>Punjab's meagre RE capacity and heavy agricultural load</p>	
<p>Non-solar hours saw a <b>2% (4,243 MW) deficit</b></p>	

### WAY FORWARD: BUILDING A RESILIENT, SMART GRID

Substantial investments in storage and distribution are non-negotiable for a efficient grid

- Robust Energy Storage**
  - Pumped Hydro Storage (PHS) (exg. MH, AP, TN, KA)
  - Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) (MH, AP, TN, KA)
- Enhanced Grid Flexibility**
- Strengthened Distribution Network** (upgraded transformer)
- Agricultural Load Scheduling**



# Oral remarks and institutional limits

Chief Justice Roberts' 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

## LETTERS & SPIES

K. NORDMANN

Chief Justice John Roberts' remarks from the bench on May 17 and the clarification that followed the next day have revived a question before the court has tried to settle twice. When a judge speaks from the bench and the speech sounds, what standard governs? Hearing applications relating to the deprivation of some advantages, the Chief Justice concluded that "there are no programmatic considerations" and that while advocates were "permitted all manner" of advocacy. The clarification combined the criteria to take degree-bearing language. The clarification has not closed the controversy.

The court has raised the controversy twice. The first was the *Immigration and Naturalization Act*, adopted by the Full Court on May 1, 1957. The second was *Chief Justice* (concurring) v. *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*, decided by Justice O'Connor and Justice M.J. Sotomayor on May 10, 2011. A contrary belief within the Supreme Court, in its *Immigration and Naturalization Act*, stated the standard that constrains all judicial decisions. The judge, Chief Justice, "is to be free from inspiration from common-law principles. He is not to yield to spontaneous sentiment, to vague and unprincipled intervention, to the exercise of discretion unbridled by tradition, methodized by analogy, disciplinary systems, and subordinated to the practical necessity of order in the social life."

### The *Immigration and Naturalization Act*

The *Immigration and Naturalization Act* was the subject of a case in the Supreme Court in April 2011, during the second term of 2010-11. The *Immigration and Naturalization Act* was being applied in the case of *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*, with Chief Justice John Roberts presiding. The bench, comprised of the Chief Justice, Justice Sotomayor, Justice Kagan, Justice Alito, and Justice Ginsburg, during the hearing, Justice Sotomayor remarked that the Commission was "singularly responsible" for the situation and that Commission officers "should be put up for ready charges publicly." The remarks were not in the formal order but were widely reported. The Chief Justice Commission moved the Supreme Court for a direction restraining the media from reporting and disseminating of judges.

Justice Sotomayor had ordered that notice. The judgment did three things. It defined bench speaking as a form that provides "clarity to the judge" and less lawyer-like arguments "with a more of civility based on a government through." It contained specific writing language directed at persons or institutions, calling the *Immigration and Naturalization Act* "inappropriate" and the remarks "harsh." And it held, as the dissent contended, that "the formal opinion of a judicial institution is subject through its judgments and orders, and its oral observations during the hearing." Two lines of the bench remark were thus stated by the court: "the question that need not be the language that remarks. The same standard, drawn from *Carroll* and applied in *Immigration and Naturalization Act*."

### The bench question that was

The first time the bench question that was an opinion. The judge made a point that may not hold, to see how the lawyer advised against it. The first is



## THE GIST

Bench questions are asked to test arguments and set public meaning, but "informative remarks" and "hearing language" that would indicate a particular view of a particular legal standard.

Drawing on *Carroll*, the 1957 *Immigration and Naturalization Act*, and *Immigration and Naturalization Act*, the bench distinguished between the "bench question that was" and the "language that was."

As oral observations are heard mainly into the public sphere, clarifications that relate to other controversial remarks have "the standard of the record and the standard announced."

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© 2011-2012

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Bench Remarks (Oral Observations):** These are spontaneous comments, questions, or opinions voiced by judges during the hearing of a case. Unlike written judgments, they do not have the force of law, but they significantly shape public perception and courtroom dynamics.
- **Restatement of Values of Judicial Life (1997):** A comprehensive code of judicial ethics adopted by the Supreme Court of India. It serves as a moral compass, detailing how judges should conduct themselves on and off the bench to maintain the dignity of their office.
- **Judicial Propriety:** The standard of conduct that ensures judges act in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary. It demands restraint, especially in speech.
- **Obiter Dicta vs. Formal Opinion:** While a formal opinion (*ratio decidendi*) is the binding legal reasoning of a judgment, oral remarks and passing comments (*obiter dicta*) are non-binding. The legal system strictly separates the two.
- **Socratic Questioning in Law:** A method where judges play devil's advocate, proposing hypothetical or extreme scenarios to test the limits and validity of a lawyer's argument.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The discourse around judicial utterances hinges on balancing the necessity of a free-flowing courtroom with the ethical imperative of judicial restraint.
- **The Dual Nature of Bench Remarks:** Spoken words in a courtroom serve two distinct purposes. On one hand, they are essential tools for testing arguments, helping judges gain clarity and forcing lawyers to refine their legal positions. On the other hand, when these remarks cross the line into intemperate language, they can wound individuals, undermine institutions, and erode public trust.
- **The Supremacy of the Written Judgment:** The formal opinion of a judicial institution is reflected exclusively through its written judgments and orders, never its oral observations. This doctrine protects the institutional voice from being defined by the spontaneous, sometimes flawed, thoughts of individual judges.
- **The Evolution of the Audience:** Historically, courtroom exchanges were confined to those physically present. Today, real-time reporting and live-streaming have transformed the courtroom into a public square. Remarks made to test an argument are often stripped of context and broadcast as the finalized opinion of the court, creating widespread misunderstanding.
- **The Nature of Judicial Retreats:** When judges face backlash for inappropriate remarks, the institutional response is often flawed. Rather than acknowledging a breach of judicial standards, the common practice is to issue clarifications claiming the media misreported the remark. This leaves the underlying ethical standard unaddressed.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The boundaries of judicial speech have been shaped over decades through philosophical reflections, institutional codes, and landmark judicial pronouncements.
- **The Cardozo Standard (1921):** Early modern boundaries were articulated by jurist Benjamin Cardozo. He posited that a judge must draw inspiration from "consecrated principles" rather than yielding to "spasmodic sentiment," emphasizing that judicial discretion must be disciplined and methodical.
- **The 1997 Restatement:** Recognizing the need for a codified ethical framework, the Supreme Court of India adopted the Restatement of Values of Judicial Life. Crucially, Item 8 specifically restricts judges from entering public debates or expressing views on pending political or judicial matters.
- **The Vijayabhaskar Landmark (2021):** The Supreme Court formally addressed the friction between oral remarks and media reporting. While defending the judge's right to ask probing questions to stimulate creative legal thought, the Court sternly cautioned against scathing, inappropriate language directed at individuals or constitutional bodies, cementing the primacy of the written judgment.
- **The Live-Streaming Era (Post-2018):** With the Supreme Court gradually opening its doors to live-streaming and real-time legal journalism, the historical buffer between the courtroom's rough-and-tumble debates and public consumption vanished, making judicial restraint more critical than ever.

- **Way Forward**

- To resolve the tension between open courtroom debate and institutional dignity, several practical steps can be considered.
- **Institutional Sensitization:** The National Judicial Academy should conduct regular sensitization programs for judges on the impact of real-time reporting, emphasizing that in the digital age, oral remarks carry the weight of formal decrees in the public mind.
- **Standardizing Corrections:** The Supreme Court should develop a formal protocol for retracting inappropriate remarks. Instead of issuing defensive clarifications claiming misreporting, the institution must be willing to acknowledge when the standard of propriety has been breached.
- **Media Guidelines:** Without gagging the press, courts can encourage legal journalists to report oral observations strictly with the caveat that these are testing questions, not the final opinion of the court.
- **Strengthening Internal Mechanisms:** While maintaining judicial independence, the collegium and peer-review mechanisms within the judiciary must factor in "judicial temperament" and adherence to the 1997 Restatement when considering judges for elevation.

# JUDICIAL CONDUCT ANALYSIS: BALANCING PROPRIETY & FREE SPEECH

An educational guide by **AXIA IAS ACADEMY**

## THE EVOLUTION OF JUDICIAL STANDARDS



### 1921 Cardozo

- Inspiration from consecrated principles
- disciplined by system



### 1997 Restatement

- No public debate or expressions on political or pending matters



### 2021 Vijayabhaskar Judgment

- Defended bench questioning for clarity, cautioned scathing language



## THE BENCH QUESTION THAT TESTS

- ◆ Function: Rigorous Testing
- ◆ Aids Clarity
- ◆ NOT THE JUDGMENT



## TWO FACES OF BENCH REMARKS

Supriyo: Marriage  
Israel Court



Reasonableness gauge

## THE INTEMPERATE REMARK



- ◆ Language that Wounds
- ◆ Risk of Dehumanizing
- ◆ Examples: Racist, Intemperate suggestion



**THE IMPACT IN THE DIGITAL AGE:**  
REAL-TIME reporting, and social media ticker



## THE PATTERN OF RETREAT

### Acknowledge Standard



Ginsburg statement

Rare retreat naming the rule

### Acknowledge Statement



Ginsburg statement

Rare retreat naming the rule

### Deny Speech/Misreported



Bobde clarification

Common retreat, rule unnamed

### No Retreat



Scalia record

Leaves remarks on record



**AXIA'S TAKE: THE WAY FORWARD** | A proper clarification names the standard, not denies the speech



# SC flags lack of uniform excise laws across States

Lack of a clear definition for liquor 'bottle' has led to 'very deceptive' packaging of cheap alcohol, with liquor passed off as 'juice', says court; some excise laws include sacks and wrappers as 'bottle'

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he Supreme Court on Wednesday sought a response from the Centre and States on a plea that excise laws differ widely from State to State, even on the point of clearly identifying what a liquor "bottle" really looks like.

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant agreed that the lack of a clear, uniform and harmonious definition of the term "bottle" in excise laws across the country has led to a "very deceptive packaging" of cheap alcohol, which is even labelled as "fruit juice". The duplicitous marketing of liquor has led to a dramatic increase in the public consumption.

"There is 'green apple' vodka... This is very deceptive," Chief Justice Kant said. The court issued notice to the Centre and all the States.

 These packages pose various risks, including consumption by juveniles, drinking in a moving vehicle, health risks, increased ease of smuggling, ease of public consumption and environmental risks. Moreover, these [cartons] have attractive packaging with vivid colours, but do not have prominent health warnings

PETITION IN SUPREME COURT



It is alarming that liquor is sold in cartons, clearly intended to mislead consumers, advocate Vipin Nair, representing petitioner-NGO, Community Against Drunken Driving, submitted.

The use of fruit names alongside colour photographs of apples and mangoes on the packaging further reinforces this deception, he added.

The petition said the government had an obligation to protect public

health against the deliberate marketing strategy used by the liquor lobby to pass off alcoholic beverages as fruit juices in order to evade scrutiny by the authorities and target underage consumers.

He said the vague and varied definitions given to "bottle" in State excise laws also aid in deception through inconspicuous packaging of liquor in portable bottles, plastic sachets, and cartons.

"In some State laws, a

bottle includes even a sack or a wrapper. The court has to direct the government to bring in some sort of standardisation," Mr. Nair submitted.

The petition said discretion conferred by the State excise laws to allow varied packaging of liquor was only intended for the sole purpose of raking in revenue, even at the cost of public and environmental health.

"These packages pose various risks, including consumption by juveniles, drinking in a moving vehicle, health risks, increased ease of smuggling, ease of public consumption and environmental risks. Moreover, these [cartons] have attractive packaging with vivid colours, but do not have prominent health warnings like in the case of cigarettes, which would dissuade people from drunken driving and responsible drinking," the petition said.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **State Excise Duty:** A tax levied on the manufacture and sale of alcohol. Under the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution (Entry 51 of the State List), alcohol for human consumption is exclusively a state subject. This gives individual states the power to draft their own definitions, tax rates, and packaging rules.
- **Deceptive Packaging:** A marketing strategy where a product's appearance is intentionally designed to mimic a safer, more common, or entirely different product. For instance, packaging alcoholic beverages in tetra packs with fruit images so they resemble standard fruit juices, confusing consumers and evading casual scrutiny.
- **Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 47):** A constitutional directive obligating the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people, specifically mandating the State to endeavor to bring about prohibition of the consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs which are injurious to health.
- **Harmonization of Laws:** The process of creating uniform legal standards across different jurisdictions. In this context, it refers to establishing a standardized legal definition for a liquor "container" or "bottle" across all Indian states to prevent regulatory loopholes.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The discourse around alcohol regulation is fundamentally a clash between public welfare, corporate marketing, and state revenue. Let us break down the substantive elements of this debate.
- **The Problem of Fragmented Definitions:** Because excise is a state subject, there is no standardized, national definition of what constitutes a liquor "bottle." Some state laws are so vague that a "bottle" legally includes plastic sachets, wrappers, or cardboard cartons. This regulatory arbitrage is actively exploited by manufacturers.
- **Targeting Vulnerable Demographics:** By utilizing deceptive packaging—such as colorful cartons adorned with images of green apples or mangoes—the liquor industry inadvertently or deliberately targets underage consumers. It normalizes alcohol consumption by masking it as an everyday beverage, drastically increasing public consumption.
- **The Revenue vs. Health Paradox:** State governments frequently turn a blind eye to these packaging innovations. Because state exchequers rely heavily on liquor sales for revenue, administrations often grant immense discretion to manufacturers regarding packaging, prioritizing financial inflow over the long-term public health costs associated with alcoholism and drunken driving.
- **Absence of Statutory Warnings:** Unlike tobacco products, which are governed by strict national laws mandating explicit, graphic health warnings, liquor packaging severely lacks prominent deterrents. The aesthetic appeal of the packaging overshadows the inherent health risks.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- Understanding how we arrived at this regulatory fragmentation requires a look back at the historical trajectory of excise laws in the subcontinent.

- **Colonial Era Roots:** The foundation of modern excise laws was laid during British rule (e.g., the Abkari Act). The colonial administration viewed alcohol primarily as a highly lucrative revenue stream. Local brewing was criminalized in favor of centrally taxed, standardized alcohol, setting a precedent for revenue-centric excise policies.

- **Post-Independence Constitutional Debates:** During the drafting of the Constitution, leaders like Mahatma Gandhi strongly advocated for total prohibition. This culminated in Article 47. However, recognizing the financial realities of running state governments, alcohol was placed in the State List, creating a decentralized and often contradictory policy landscape.

- **The Packaging Revolution (1990s-Present):** Traditionally, liquor was sold in standard glass bottles. With the advent of cheap polymers and tetra packaging in the late 20th century, companies shifted to cheaper, unbreakable, and easily transportable materials. State laws failed to update their definitions to keep pace with these material innovations, leading to the current era of "camouflaged" alcohol.

- **Way Forward**

- A balanced, administrative approach is required to solve this multifaceted crisis. Here are pragmatic recommendations.

- **Drafting a Model National Excise Code:** The Union Government, in consultation with the NITI Aayog and state governments, should draft a Model Code that standardizes definitions, container specifications, and marketing norms, which states can voluntarily adopt.

- **Empowering FSSAI:** The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India must mandate clear differentiation in packaging between alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. Strict guidelines should ban the use of fruit imagery and vibrant, kid-friendly aesthetics on liquor containers.

- **Mandatory Health Warnings:** Similar to the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), legislation should be introduced requiring prominent, graphic health warnings on at least 50% of the principal display area of all liquor packaging.

- **Phasing out Harmful Packaging:** States should be incentivized to progressively ban the sale of liquor in plastic sachets and tetra packs, promoting glass or standardized, easily identifiable, and recyclable materials.

# STATE EXCISE REFORM & DECEPTIVE PACKAGING

## A DETAILED CONCEPTUAL & ETHICAL ANALYSIS FOR UPSC CSE

### UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

#### STATE EXCISE DUTY

Tax on alcohol manufacture/sale. A State subject (Seventh Schedule) creates fragmented definitions.

#### DECEPTIVE PACKAGING

Intentional design to mimic safer, common safferation, common products (e.g., vodka tetra packs as apple juice boxes).

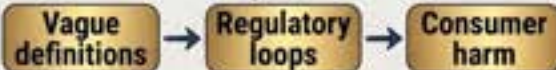
#### VAGUE DEFINITIONS

State laws define "bottle" so loosely it includes plastic sachets, wrappers, and cartons, aiding regulatory arbitrage.

#### Spot the Difference



#### Conceptual Flow



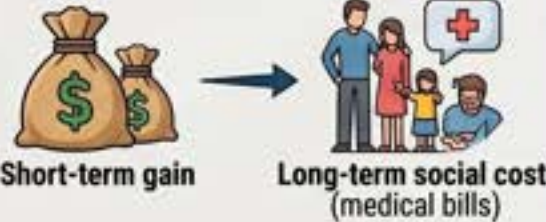
### TENSIONS & PHILOSOPHIES

#### PRIMARY CONFLICTS

- State revenue from excise vs. Public health (Art 47).
- Heavily dependent states face fiscal hurdles to reform.
- State duty to protect public health is primary.

#### UTILITARIAN LOGIC FAILURE

States often prioritize immediate financial gain (for welfare) over long-term diffuse social and health costs (addiction, family crisis).



#### PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

##### KANTIAN ETHICS

Deceptive marketing treats people as a means to an end, violating epistemological transparency.

##### REVENUE vs. WELFARE

States' discretionary power over packaging is often revenue-focused at the cost of public and environmental health.

### IMPLICATIONS, RISKS & CHALLENGES

#### MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACTS

- Social:** Normalized drinking, youth risk, domestic violence.
- Legal:** Conflicts between State List (Excise) and Concurrent List (Food Adulteration, Metrology). Judicial interpretation needed.
- Ethical:** Failure of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).
- Environmental:** Non-biodegradable plastics and tetra packs from litter.

#### SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

- **Policy Friction:** Federalism makes central standards difficult due to state autonomy.
- **Liquor Lobby:** Powerful corporate influence resists reform.
- **Implementation:** Logistic hurdles, old stock clearing, and potential illicit trade.

### WAY FORWARD & DIRECTIVES

#### STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS

- **National Standardization:** Build consensus for uniform packaging definition through Inter-State Council/NITI Aayog. **Harmonized Laws**
- **Empower FSSAI:** Mandate clear differentiation in packaging and ban fruit imagery on liquor containers.
- **Graphic Warnings:** Mandate unmissable, prominent graphic health warnings on packaging (COTPA model).
- **Revenue Diversification:** Shift away from heavy reliance on excise. States must diversify revenue (e.g., GST, Tourism, Tech). (Multiple revenue streams into state coffers).

#### CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATES (Art 47)



# Rajnath holds wide-ranging defence talks in South Korea, pushes strategic cooperation

**Saurabh Trivedi**  
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held comprehensive bilateral discussions with South Korea Minister of National Defence Ahn Gyu-back in Seoul on Wednesday, with both sides agreeing to expand defence cooperation across industry, maritime security, emerging technologies, logistics, and military exchanges.

According to the Defence Ministry, the two Ministers reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral defence ties and reaffirmed their commitment to a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific, highlighting the growing convergence between India's Act East Policy and South Korea's regional stra-



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and South Korean Minister of National Defence Ahn Gyu-back exchange agreements on promoting defence cyber cooperation, in Seoul on Wednesday. ANI

tegic vision. During the discussions, several memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed to deepen cooperation in defence, cybersecurity, and training exchanges between India's National Defence College and the Korea National Defence University, and United Nations peacekeeping opera-

tions, further broadening the scope of the India-South Korea strategic partnership.

Two significant MoUs have been signed on future-oriented projects on self-propelled air defence systems, directed energy weapon systems. Both projects have a strong 'Make in India' focus.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Act East Policy (AEP):** Upgraded from the earlier 'Look East' policy, this is India's diplomatic initiative to foster economic, strategic, and cultural relations with the vast Asia-Pacific region. While 'Look East' was largely economic, 'Act East' integrates a strong security and defence component.
- **Rules-Based Indo-Pacific:** A geopolitical vision championed by democratic nations. It envisions a region where international law (like UNCLOS) dictates maritime behavior, trade flows freely without coercion, and no single hegemon dominates the sea lanes.
- **Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs):** Futuristic military technologies that damage targets with highly focused energy, such as lasers or microwaves, rather than solid projectiles. Think of them as high-tech systems capable of neutralizing drones or incoming missiles instantly.
- **Self-Propelled Air Defence Systems:** Highly mobile, armored vehicles equipped with anti-aircraft guns or surface-to-air missiles. Unlike stationary air defence, these can move alongside mechanized infantry columns to protect them on the battlefield.
- **Defence Indigenization (Make in India):** The strategic push to manufacture defense equipment domestically rather than relying on imports. Co-production with advanced nations like South Korea allows India to absorb complex technologies and build its own defense-industrial base.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis of this geopolitical alignment is that India and South Korea are transitioning from a relationship historically anchored in trade and soft power, to a robust, security-oriented partnership driven by mutual vulnerabilities in the Indo-Pacific.
- A primary pillar of this shift is the move from a "buyer-seller" dynamic to joint research and co-development. Advanced economies often hesitate to share cutting-edge technology, but South Korea's willingness to partner on future-oriented projects—like directed energy weapons and self-propelled systems—demonstrates a high degree of strategic trust. This directly feeds into India's pursuit of strategic autonomy by reducing dependence on traditional arms suppliers like Russia.
- Furthermore, the alignment of India's Act East Policy with South Korea's regional strategies highlights a shared anxiety over shifting power balances in Asia. Both nations recognize that securing sea lanes, enhancing cybersecurity, and participating in joint peacekeeping operations are no longer optional, but essential for maintaining a stable, multipolar Asian order.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The India-South Korea relationship has deep historical roots that have slowly matured into modern strategic diplomacy.
- The earliest connections are cultural, dating back to 48 AD when Princess Suriratna of Ayodhya purportedly traveled to Korea to marry King Suro, establishing a lasting civilizational link. During the anti-colonial struggles of the 20th century, Rabindranath Tagore famously prophesied Korea's resurgence in his poem "Lamp of the East."
- Following independence, India played a pivotal, neutral role during the Korean War (1950-53), chairing the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission and sending medical units. However, during the Cold War, ties remained lukewarm as India leaned non-aligned and South Korea fell firmly into the US camp.
- The modern thaw began with India's economic liberalization and the 'Look East' policy in the 1990s. The relationship gained institutional heft in 2010 when it was elevated to a Strategic Partnership, and then further upgraded to a "Special Strategic Partnership" in 2015. Today, the relationship is defined by advanced defence collaboration and a shared vision for a stable Indo-Pacific.

- **Way Forward**

- To translate diplomatic intent into tangible outcomes, a proactive and multi-pronged approach is necessary.
- First, India must streamline its defense procurement architecture. Establishing single-window clearances for strategic co-production projects under 'Make in India' will build confidence among South Korean defense majors. Second, both nations should upgrade their economic framework. Fast-tracking the review of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is crucial to addressing the existing trade deficit and boosting bilateral commerce, which forms the bedrock of the strategic partnership.
- On the geopolitical front, India and South Korea should institutionalize a '2+2' dialogue (Foreign and Defence Ministers) to ensure continuous alignment on Indo-Pacific security. Furthermore, expanding joint naval exercises and interoperability in maritime domain awareness will physically secure the sea lanes that both economies depend upon. Finally, scaling up R&D investments in emerging technologies will ensure both nations remain at the cutting edge of modern defense capabilities.

# INDIA-SOUTH KOREA STRATEGIC & DEFENCE PARTNERSHIP: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

## BILATERAL DEFENCE TALKS: SEOUL



Defence Ministr.  
Rajnath Singh



Ahn  
Gyu-back



Comprehensive Discussions  
on Key Issues

## NEW AREAS OF COOPERATION



Maritime  
Security



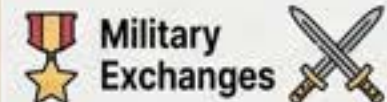
Defence  
Industry



Emerging  
Technologies



Logistics



Military  
Exchanges

## REGIONAL STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE



Act East  
Policy



S. Korea's  
Vision



SHARED  
INDO-PACIFIC  
VISION:

Free, Open, Inclusive,  
Rules-Based Order

## SIGNED MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING (MoUs)



Cybersecurity



NDC-KNDU  
Training



UN Peacekeeping  
Operations



Defence  
Cooperation

## CRITICAL FUTURE-ORIENTED PROJECTS (STRONG 'MAKE IN INDIA' FOCUS)

### A SELF-PROPELLED AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM CO-PRODUCTION



### B DIRECTED ENERGY WEAPON (DEW) SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT



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"These packages pose various risks, including consumption by juveniles, drinking in a moving vehicle, health risks, increased ease of smuggling, ease of public consumption and environmental risks. Moreover, these [cartons] have attractive packaging with vivid colours, but do not have prominent health warnings like in the case of cigarettes, which would dissuade people from drunken driving and responsible drinking," the petition said.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Hydroelectric Projects (HEPs) and Pumped-Storage:** HEPs generate electricity by harnessing the kinetic energy of flowing water. A subset, pumped-storage (like the Tehri project), acts like a giant battery; it pumps water to an upper reservoir during low-demand hours and releases it to generate power during peak demand.
- **Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ):** Under the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986, the government notifies certain areas around protected parks or fragile ecosystems as ESZs to regulate developmental activities. The Bhagirathi ESZ in Uttarakhand restricts heavy construction to preserve the river's pristine flow.
- **Bumper-to-Bumper Dams:** This refers to a cascading series of dams built closely along a river's course. The tailrace (discharge) of one dam leads almost immediately into the reservoir of the next. This disrupts the natural flow, riverine ecology, and sediment transport.
- **Seismic Fragility:** The Himalayas are young, fold mountains formed by the ongoing collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates. This makes the region highly susceptible to earthquakes (falling in Seismic Zones IV and V), rendering massive concrete structures highly vulnerable.
- **Sunk Costs:** An economic principle referring to money that has already been spent and cannot be recovered. In public policy, deciding whether to halt a partially built dam requires weighing the "sunk costs" against the potential future environmental damage.
- **Cloudbursts and Flash Floods:** A cloudburst is an extreme amount of precipitation in a short period, sometimes accompanied by hail and thunder, highly prevalent in the Himalayas. This leads to flash floods—rapid flooding of low-lying areas, which can critically damage hydropower infrastructure.



- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The ongoing discourse regarding Himalayan hydropower presents a critical pivot from aggressive infrastructure expansion to ecological preservation.

- **Primacy of Ecological Carrying Capacity:** The core thesis is that the upper reaches of the Ganga basin (Alaknanda and Bhagirathi) have exceeded their carrying capacity for large infrastructure. The cumulative impact of multiple dams drastically amplifies the region's vulnerability to natural disasters.

- **Inter-Ministerial Consensus on Conservation:** Historically, ministries operate in silos, with the Power Ministry pushing for energy security and the Environment Ministry advocating conservation. A unified stance prioritizing ecology—agreeing to halt new projects—marks a rare, definitive policy shift toward sustainable governance.

- **The Pragmatism of "Substantially Built" Projects:** Halting projects that are 70-80% complete (which represent thousands of crores in public and private investment) is viewed as economically unviable. Permitting a restricted number of advanced-stage projects (e.g., Vishnugad Pipalkoti, Singoli Bhatwari) reflects a pragmatic balance between minimizing stranded assets and preventing future ecological harm.

- **Rejection of the "Unrestricted Development" Model:** By narrowing down dozens of proposed projects and ultimately rejecting new ones, the prevailing policy acknowledges that the economic gains of hydropower are outweighed by the catastrophic costs of disaster recovery, as seen in the Rishiganga and Dharali floods.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- The trajectory of hydropower development in the Himalayas is a textbook case of policy evolution driven by disaster and judicial intervention.
- **The "Urja Pradesh" Vision (Pre-2013):** Post its formation, Uttarakhand sought to capitalize on its vast river network, envisioning itself as the "Energy State" of India. Dozens of projects were sanctioned rapidly, often with fragmented environmental impact assessments.
- **The Turning Point (2013 Kedarnath Disaster):** The devastating floods that claimed thousands of lives forced a systemic reckoning. The Supreme Court intervened, halting new hydel development and ordering an investigation into the role of dams in exacerbating the disaster.
- **The Era of Conflicting Committees (2014-2020):**
  - *Expert Body-I (Ravi Chopra Panel, 2014)* took a strong ecological stance, warning that most projects would cause severe ecological damage.
  - *The Vinod Tare Panel* corroborated this, advising against several projects.
  - *Expert Body-II (B.P. Das Panel, 2020)*, however, took a more permissive, engineering-focused approach, suggesting projects could proceed with design tweaks.
- **Climatic Reminders (2021 & 2025):** The Rishiganga flash flood in 2021 (which severely damaged the Tapovan Vishnugad project) and subsequent disasters like the Dharali floods provided stark reminders of the region's instability, undermining the permissive approach of Expert Body-II.
- **Resolution and Consolidation (Present):** High-level bureaucratic committees (like the Somanathan committee) ultimately synthesized these inputs, leading to the current restrictive policy that caps development to a handful of already advanced projects.
  
- **Way Forward**
- To reconcile the developmental aspirations of the Himalayan states with ecological realities, the following steps are pragmatic:
- **Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES):** The Finance Commission must institutionalize a robust mechanism to financially compensate Himalayan states for keeping their forests intact and rivers free-flowing, offsetting their revenue loss from halted dams.
- **Shift to Micro-Hydel Projects:** Instead of massive reservoirs, the state should pivot to decentralized, micro-hydroelectric run-of-the-river projects (under 25 MW) that cater to local grid needs without altering basin ecology.
- **Ecotourism and Bio-Economy:** Transitioning the local economy from heavy infrastructure dependency to high-value, low-impact sectors like sustainable ecotourism, organic farming, and medicinal herb cultivation.
- **Strengthening Early Warning Systems:** For the 7 allowed projects and existing habitats, deploying advanced Doppler radars, glacial lake monitoring, and automated community sirens to mitigate disaster impact.

# AXIA IAS ACADEMY: A COMPREHENSIVE U-P-S-C ANALYSIS - HIMALAYAN HYDROPOWER VS. GANGATIC ECOLOGY

## PANEL 1: THE CORE SHIFT: Current Ministerial Consensus.

Ministries Unify: No NEW projects

Contrast stand

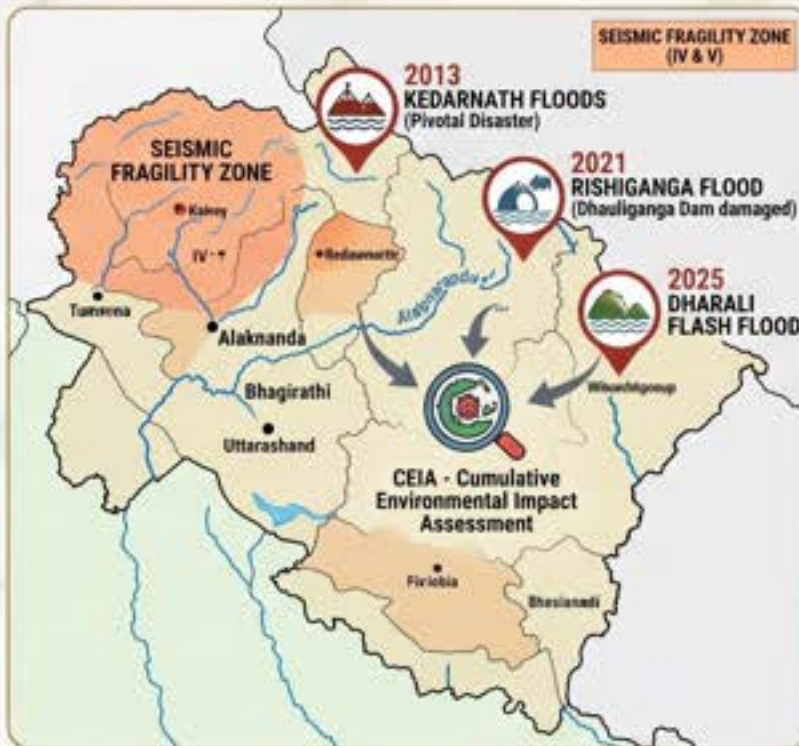
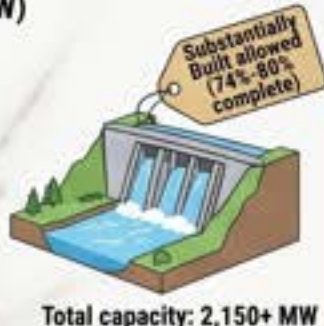


**NO NEW PROJECTS**



### 7 allowed projects and capacities (MW)

- ✔ Tehri pumped-storage (1,000 MW)
- ✔ Tapovan Vishnugad (520 MW - note damaged in 2021)
- ✔ Vishnugad Pipalkoti (444 MW)
- Singoli Bhatwari (99 MW)
- Phata Byung (76 MW)
- Madhmaheshwar & Kailganga-II
- Small projects/w (76 MW)



## PANEL 2: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION TIMELINE.



## PANEL 3: MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACTS.



## PANEL 4: PHILOSOPHICAL & SUSTAINABILITY PILLARS.

### Philosophical Base:

- Precautionary Principle
- Ecocentrism (Aviral Ganga flow)
- Intergenerational Equity



**Stranded Assets**  
(economic risk vs. gain)

### Sustainability:

- Ecological (High - flow preserved)
- Economic (High long-term, low disaster costs)
- Grid Security (Shifting to Solar/Wind, Pumped Storage balancing).







**Intergenerational Equity**

## PANEL 5: UPSC CSE SYLLABUS LINKAGES.

- GS1:** Geography (Drainage, Natural Hazards, Fluvial Landforms, Climate Change). NCERT Linkage: Geo Class 11, Class 12 People and Economy Class 12 Biology Env Issues
- GS2:** Governance (Center-State relations, Administrative issues, Judicial Activism, Regulatory Bodies).
- GS3:** Environment (Conservation, EIA, biodiversity loss, water security); Disaster Management (Hydromet disasters, preparedness, GLOFs); Infrastructure (Energy diversification, dam safety).
- GS4:** Ethics (Corporate Governance vs. Ecological concerns, Case Studies). NCERT Linkage: Class 12 Biology Env Issues
- Essay/Optional:** Relevant for Environment, Geography, and Disaster Management.

## PANEL 6: WAY FORWARD: Sustainable Reforms.

- **Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES):** Local financial benefits for conservation 
- **Shift to Micro-Hydel Projects:** Local power solutions, e-flow preserved 
- **Development of Ecotourism and Bio-Economy:** Organic farming, medicinal herbs, low-impact jobs 
- **Strengthening Early Warning Systems:** Doppler radars, Automated community alerts 

# Taiwan Travelogue wins International Booker

## **Radhika Santhanam**

A story about Taiwanese food and love between two women won the International Booker Prize 2026 on Tuesday.

Taiwanese writer Yǎng Shuāng-zǐ's *Taiwan Travelogue*, translated from the Mandarin Chinese by Lin King, is experimental in form. It contains a scholarly foreword, afterwords, fictional footnotes and real translator's notes.

The novel begins in 1938. Aoyama Chizuko, a Japanese novelist from Nagasaki, arrives in Taiwan, a Japanese colony, on a government-sponsored tour. Disinterested in the official



Writer Yǎng Shuāng-zǐ and translator Lin King pose with the trophies during the award ceremony in London on Tuesday. GETTY IMAGES

events or the imperialist agenda, she instead decides to explore Taiwan through its food, guided by her voracious appetite. She befriends a charming and reserved Taiwanese wo-

man, Chizuru, who serves as both her interpreter and an exceptional cook.

Chizuko becomes deeply fond of her companion, even urging her to break off her engagement, but

Chizuru maintains a distance. Whether she returns Chizuko's feelings is the question that propels the novel forward. Their relationship – shaped by their different class backgrounds, with one woman from the empire and the other from the colony – reflects the complex dynamics of power.

The prize was announced by Natasha Brown, chair of the 2026 judges, at a ceremony at London's Tate Modern on May 19. In announcing it, the committee said, "*Taiwan Travelogue* pulls off an incredible double feat: it succeeds as both a romance and an incisive

postcolonial novel. As judges, we've enjoyed rich discussions about the many layers of this book. It's a captivating, slyly sophisticated novel."

The novel is Yǎng Shuāng-zǐ's first to be translated into English and the first translation from the Mandarin Chinese to win the International Booker Prize. This is also the second year in a row that the independent press, And Other Stories, has taken home the prize, following *Heart Lamp* last year.

Yǎng and King will split the £50,000 prize, which recognises the best fiction translated into English, equally between them.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Postcolonialism:** A theoretical approach in various disciplines that examines the lasting impact of imperialism and colonialism. In literature, it involves writings by people from formerly colonized countries, often exploring themes of identity, power imbalance, and cultural suppression. *Example:* An author from a former colony highlighting indigenous traditions that were erased by imperial rulers.
- **Intersectionality:** A framework for understanding how various social identities—such as gender, race, class, and nationality—overlap and create compounding experiences of discrimination or privilege. *Example:* The power dynamic between two individuals is shaped not just by their romantic connection, but by the fact that one belongs to an imperial power and the other to a subjugated colony.
- **Cultural Diplomacy (Soft Power):** The use of cultural assets—such as literature, art, and cuisine—to foster mutual understanding and influence international relations, circumventing hard political or military power. *Example:* A state-sponsored cultural tour meant to project soft power, which individuals might subvert by exploring grassroots culture like street food instead.
- **Historiographic Metafiction:** A literary style that blends fictional narratives with historical facts, often using experimental formats like faux academic footnotes or translator's notes, to question the reliability of recorded history and who gets to write it.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The conceptual core of this theme revolves around the intersection of personal intimacy and historical geopolitics. The primary thesis is that literature can simultaneously function as an emotional narrative and an incisive political critique.
- **The Personal is Political:** Intimate relationships are never formed in a vacuum. When individuals from opposing sides of a geopolitical divide (colonizer and colonized) interact, their private dynamic inevitably mirrors broader systemic power structures, raising questions about whether true equality can exist in such a context.
- **Subversion Through Culture:** Official imperial or state-sponsored agendas can be actively resisted or bypassed through the exploration of everyday cultural elements, such as indigenous food and local traditions. Food becomes an alternative, democratic pathway to understanding a marginalized community.
- **Democratization of Literature:** The translation of regional languages (like Mandarin) into global lingua francas (like English), often championed by independent presses rather than mainstream conglomerates, is vital. It shifts the global literary center of gravity, allowing subaltern voices to challenge dominant Western-centric historical narratives.



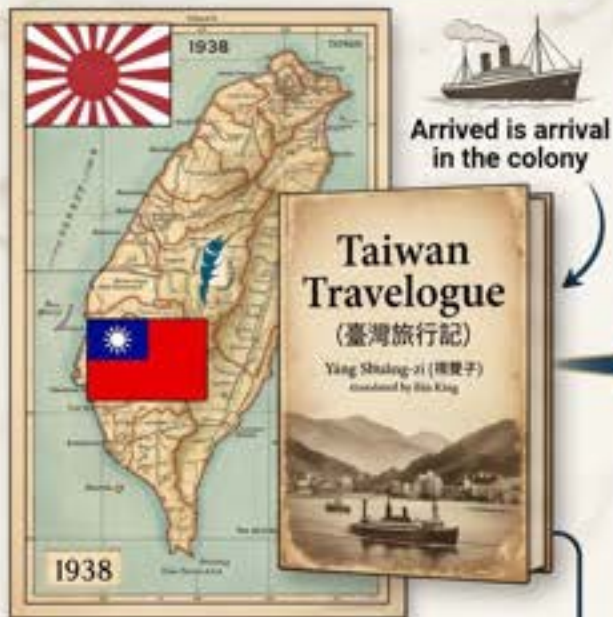
- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
  - The interplay between colonialism, literature, and marginalized identities has evolved significantly over the last century.
  - **The Era of Imperial Dominance (Pre-WWII):** During peak imperialism, colonial powers (such as European nations in Africa/Asia, or Japan in East Asia) used literature and education as tools of cultural assimilation. The colonized were depicted through the "orientalist" lens—exoticized or portrayed as needing civilization.
  - **Post-War Decolonization and Voice:** As nations gained independence in the mid-20th century, a surge of postcolonial literature emerged. Writers began reclaiming their histories, though these works were often heavily male-dominated and focused strictly on the political struggle against the colonizer.
  - **The Intersectional Turn (Late 20th Century):** The focus shifted inward, examining social hierarchies within the colonized societies themselves. Themes of gender, queer identities, and class differences began to surface, highlighting that oppression was multi-layered.
  - **The Era of Global Translation (Present):** Today, international literary awards actively seek to dismantle language barriers. There is a concerted effort to recognize translated works, emphasizing that world literature must include non-Anglophone experiences, especially those blending experimental formats with marginalized queer and indigenous narratives.



ESTD : 2024

UNVEILING TAIWAN TRAVELOGUE: A CULINARY JOURNEY INTO POSTCOLONIALISM & INTERSECTIONALITY

NOVEL PROFILE & HISTORICAL CONTEXT

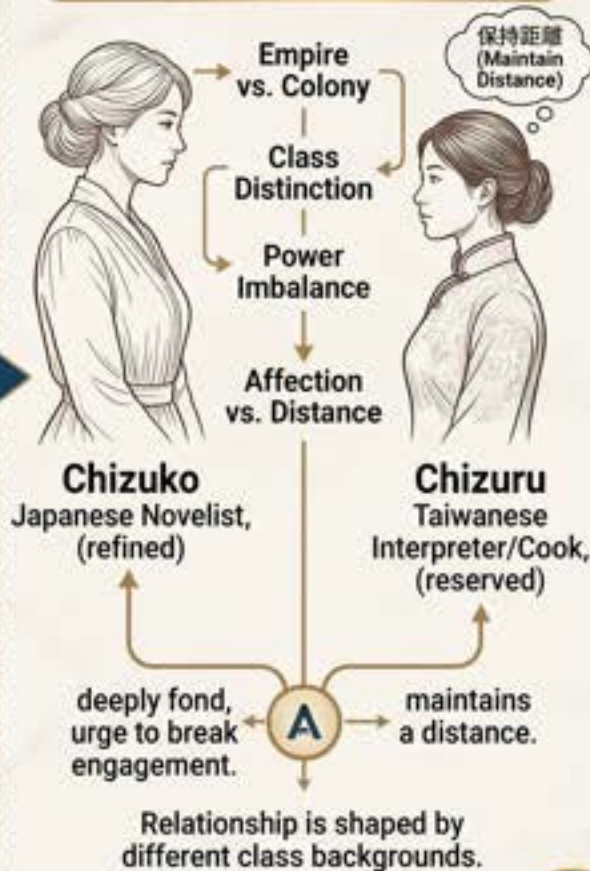


Arrived is arrival in the colony

EXPERIMENTAL FORM

- Scholarly Foreword
- Afterwords
- Fictional Footnotes
- Real Translator's Notes

COMPLEX CHARACTER DYNAMICS & POWER



CULINARY RESISTANCE & SUBVERSION



CRITICAL ACCLAIM & LITERARY MERIT

International Booker Prize 2026

MAY 19, 2026

Tate Modern (London)

“T pulls off an incredible double feat: it succeeds as both a romance and an incisive postcolonial novel. It’s a captivating, slyly sophisticated novel.”  
– Natasha Brown, Prize Judges Chair

- First from Mandarin Chinese
- Second in a row for *And Other Stories*

Heart Lamp from last year



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

Kalpal 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 Maree 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.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Special Strategic Partnership:** This is a tier of bilateral relations indicating a high degree of mutual trust, aligned geopolitical goals, and deep cooperation across sensitive sectors like defense, intelligence, and advanced technology. *Example:* India holds this status with nations like Japan and Russia, and bringing Italy into this fold signifies Europe's growing importance in India's strategic calculus.
- **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea):** Often called the "constitution of the oceans," it establishes a comprehensive legal framework governing all marine and maritime activities. Support for UNCLOS is diplomatic shorthand for opposing aggressive territorial claims, particularly in the South China Sea.
- **Mattei Plan:** Italy's strategic foreign policy initiative aimed at Africa, focusing on energy cooperation, economic development, and curbing irregular migration through capacity building.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** Foundational digital systems that enable identity, payments, and data sharing at a population scale. *Example:* India's Aadhaar, UPI, and DigiLocker.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A crucial maritime chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, through which a significant portion of the world's petroleum passes.
- **Agricola Medal:** An honor conferred by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to recognize exceptional contributions to global food security, poverty alleviation, and sustainable agriculture.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core philosophy driving this bilateral upgrade is a mutual recognition of shifting global power centers. Both nations are moving beyond transactional diplomacy to establish a long-term, structurally sound alliance.
- **Geopolitical Convergence:** There is a strong alignment in ensuring a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific. Both nations share anxieties about supply chain disruptions caused by conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia, advocating heavily for "dialogue and diplomacy" as the primary tools for conflict resolution.
- **Defense and Economic Symbiosis:** Moving away from a traditional "buyer-seller" relationship, the focus is now on a Defense Industrial Road Map. This involves co-development and co-production of military hardware, dovetailing with India's "Make in India" initiative and Italy's advanced defense manufacturing capabilities.
- **Collaborative Footprint in Africa:** A standout substantive element is the decision to pool resources in Africa. By combining India's expertise in DPI, healthcare, and agriculture with Italy's financial and strategic bandwidth under the Mattei Plan, both nations aim to offer African countries a viable alternative to predatory lending models.
- **Institutional Frameworks for Mobility:** The creation of safe, legal channels for the mobility of skilled and non-skilled workers addresses Italy's demographic challenges (an aging population) while providing employment avenues for India's demographic dividend.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The trajectory of India-Italy relations is a fascinating study in diplomatic resilience, demonstrating how nations can navigate deep valleys to reach new strategic peaks.
- **Ancient and Colonial Ties:** Interactions date back to the Roman Empire, evidenced by Roman coins found in southern India, highlighting robust ancient maritime trade.
- **Post-Independence Era (1947–2000s):** Diplomatic relations were established in 1947. While economic ties grew steadily, political engagement was relatively low-profile during the Cold War, as India led the Non-Aligned Movement and Italy was a core NATO member.
- **The Diplomatic Freeze (2012–2015):** Bilateral ties hit their lowest point following the *Enrica Lexie* incident, where two Italian marines were accused of killing Indian fishermen off the coast of Kerala. This led to a severe diplomatic standoff, legal battles in international tribunals, and Italy blocking India's entry into the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).
- **The Thaw and Resurgence (2017–Present):** Following the resolution of the marines issue at the Permanent Court of Arbitration, relations began to thaw. The real momentum picked up post-2020, driven by shared concerns over Chinese hegemony, culminating in back-to-back leadership summits, Italy joining the India-led Global Biofuels Alliance, and the eventual elevation to a Special Strategic Partnership.

- **Way Forward**

- To maximize the potential of this upgraded partnership, policy planners should consider the following actionable steps.
- **Operationalizing IMEC:** Both countries must champion the swift execution of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Italy serves as the natural European anchor for this corridor, which would drastically reduce transit times and boost trade volumes.
- **Fast-tracking Defense Tech Transfer:** The government should set up a dedicated India-Italy defense task force, involving private sector giants from both sides, to clear bureaucratic hurdles and begin joint production of maritime patrol equipment and aerospace components.
- **Structuring the Africa Trilateral:** Establish a formal steering committee comprising Indian, Italian, and African Union diplomats to identify three flagship pilot projects (e.g., setting up a digital payment infrastructure in a specific African nation) to prove the viability of the Mattei-DPI fusion.
- **Green Hydrogen and Renewables:** Expand the clean energy cooperation to focus heavily on green hydrogen production and storage technologies, leveraging Italy's engineering prowess to meet India's ambitious renewable energy targets.

# THE INDIA-ITALY SPECIAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: A COMPREHENSIVE UPSC ANALYSIS



## Geo-Strategic Realignment

### CALL FOR DIALOGUE & DIPLOMACY

- Conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia



Strait of Hormuz



- Special Strategic Partnership

## Cooperation Pillars

### CORE COOPERATION SECTORS

**Defence Industrial Road Map**  
Co-production of military hardware concept

**Security Synergy**  
Directorate of Enforcement and Italian Guardia di Finanza cooperation

**Migration Pathways**  
Skilled / non-skilled mobility flow concept

**Clean Energy**  
Renewable energy tech with green hydrogen tanks

PM Modi awarded Agricola Medal (2026)  
FAO Headqrs, Rome

## Innovations

### UNIQUE INNOVATIONS & GLOBAL IMPACT

- TRILATERAL COOPERATION IN AFRICA

India's Development Partnership + Italy's Mattei Plan

Sectors: DPI, Ag, Edu, Health, AI, Renewables



## Geopolitics

### INDO-PACIFIC & MARITIME ORDER

- Free, Open, Rules-based
- Commitment to UNCLOS
- Freedom of Navigation



## Evolution & Dimensions

### HISTORICAL EVOLUTION & MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS



- Dimensions:**
  - Social: (Diaspora, Mobility)
  - Political: (Multipolarity)
  - Legal: (UNCLOS)
  - Ethical: (Diplomacy over war)
  - Economic (Ag tech, Green tech)



## UPSC Syllabus

### UPSC CSE SYLLABUS LINKAGES

- GS II:** International Relations, - Bilateral relations  
- Global groupings
- GS III:** Defence tech, science, organized crime, ag economics
- Essay:** Foreign policy evolution
- Ethics:** Dialogue over war

**KEY CHALLENGES:**

- Implementation Deficit
- China Factor
- Trade Asymmetry

## Way Forward

### WAY FORWARD & PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

- Actionable roadmap:**
  - Operate IMEC corridor
  - Green Hydrogen
  - Fast-track Defense
- Key terms:**
  - Pragmatic Realism
  - Strategic Autonomy
  - Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam



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

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
NEW DELHI

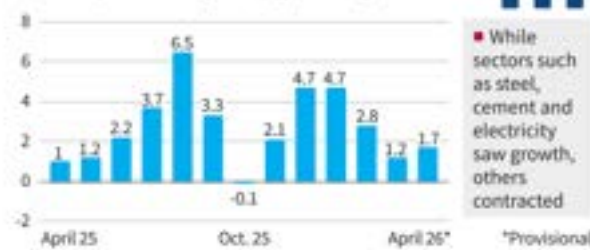
Growth in activity in the eight core sectors of the economy quickened marginally to 1.7% this April, up from 1.2% in March, official data released on Wednesday showed.

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

## Slight uptick

The chart shows the overall core sector growth rates compared with a year-ago period. Figures in %



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.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI):** A monthly production index compiled by the Office of the Economic Adviser (OEA), Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT). It measures the combined and individual performance of production in eight foundational sectors: Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel, Cement, and Electricity.
- **Index of Industrial Production (IIP):** A broader composite indicator that measures changes in the volume of production of a basket of industrial products over a specific period. The eight core industries constitute **40.27%** of the weight of items included in the IIP, making the ICI a crucial lead indicator.
- **Base Effect:** This refers to the impact of the corresponding period of the previous year on the current year's growth figures. For instance, if production was abnormally low last year due to a shock, a normal production level this year will mathematically appear as a massive growth percentage.
- **Data Revision:** Macroeconomic data is often released in stages—provisional, revised, and final. This happens because preliminary data relies on a smaller sample of reporting factories, which is later updated as more comprehensive data flows in. Frequent or massive revisions can sometimes point to data collection lags.
- **Multiplier Effect:** When an increase in spending produces an increase in national income and consumption greater than the initial amount spent. For example, growth in steel and cement has a high multiplier effect because it stimulates construction, real estate, and massive job creation.

- **Core Dynamics and Sectoral Interplay**

- When observing the health of foundational industries, it becomes evident that the economy does not move in a single, unified direction. Different sectors respond to distinct domestic and global stimuli.
- **The Infrastructure Push:** Sectors like steel and cement are directly tied to capital expenditure (CapEx). When these sectors show robust growth, it usually indicates a strong pipeline of infrastructure projects (highways, ports, real estate). This acts as the heavy-lifting engine for broader economic expansion, creating jobs and driving demand.
- **The Energy Bottleneck:** Domestic crude oil and natural gas frequently experience sluggishness or contraction. This highlights a structural vulnerability: India's high import dependency for energy. Contractions here often reflect aging domestic oil wells, lack of major new discoveries, and the complex geopolitics of energy pricing that can deter domestic capital investment.
- **The Agricultural Lifeline:** The fertilizer sector operates on a different rhythm, heavily dictated by monsoons, global supply chains of raw materials (like potash), and government subsidy cycles. Fluctuations here are direct indicators of agrarian input health.
- **Utility Demand:** Electricity generation serves as a proxy for both industrial activity and domestic consumption. Consistent growth in this sector is a prerequisite for sustaining broader economic momentum.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The strategic importance of core industries in India traces back to the early days of independence and has evolved through distinct economic eras.

- **The Mahalanobis Era (1950s - 1980s):** The Second Five-Year Plan fundamentally shaped India's core sectors. Inspired by the Soviet model, the government focused heavily on capital goods and heavy industries (steel plants like Bhilai, Durgapur, Rourkela) under public sector dominance. These were seen as the "commanding heights of the economy."

- **Liberalization and De-licensing (1991 Onwards):** The New Economic Policy dismantled the License Raj, opening sectors like steel, cement, and electricity to private and foreign investment. This led to massive capacity expansion, modernization, and improved efficiency, shifting the government's role from producer to regulator.

- **Statistical Evolution (2017):** To better reflect the changing structure of the economy, the base year for both IIP and ICI was updated from 2004-05 to 2011-12. This revision allowed for a more accurate capture of modern industrial realities and improved the quality of macroeconomic tracking.

- **Way Forward**

- To ensure resilient and sustainable industrial growth, policy interventions must be multifaceted.

- **Modernizing Data Architecture:** The statistical machinery must be upgraded using digital trails (GST networks, digital power meters) to ensure real-time, accurate data capture, minimizing disruptive retrospective revisions.

- **Incentivizing Green Capital:** The government should expand Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes to cover "green" transitions in core sectors, such as subsidizing green hydrogen use in steel plants or carbon-capture in cement factories.

- **Energy Security Diversification:** To combat the chronic drag of domestic crude oil, investments must aggressively pivot towards deep-water exploration, strategic petroleum reserves, and accelerating the shift to renewable energy grids.

- **Circular Economy Integration:** Policies must enforce the use of scrap steel and fly ash (in cement) to reduce the reliance on fresh mining, thereby addressing both resource depletion and environmental degradation.

# COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS: INDIA'S EIGHT CORE INDUSTRIES (ICI)

## Historical Context & Significance

**Mahalanobis Era to Present**

**Key policy shifts**

- Comando Heights to Liberalization
- Liberalization - Clasing Shander

**2022**

**Present**

**Base Year Change from (2011-12)**

**Comando Heights**

**Regulatory Shift**

- Regulatory shift from comando heights to (2011-12)
- Regulatory of trofaction




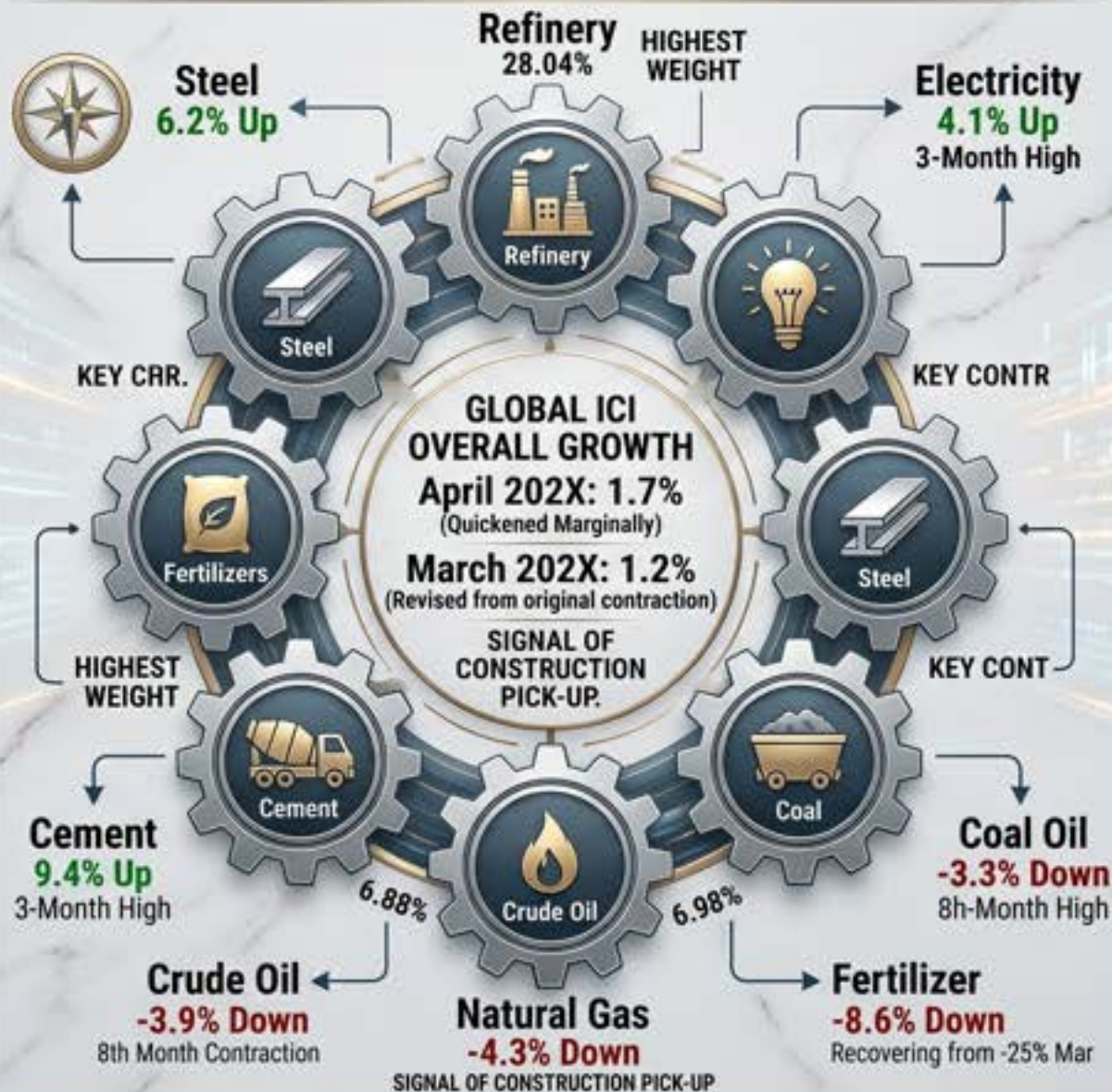

## UPSC Syllabus & NCERT Linkages

**GS3** Industrial Growth, Cap-Ex, Employment

**GS1** Natural Resources

**GS4** Environmental Ethics

**Class 10-12 Geography & Class 11-12 Economics**

## Multidimensional Analysis



**Economic**

- Multiplier effect
- Rconomorcnetrics & mitperations

**Social**

- Job Creation
- Pertonvernance
- Intionalization

**Political**

- Governance metric

**Ethical**

- Land/Displacement

**Legal**

- MMDR Act
- Land/Displacement
- Clearances

**International**

- Geopolitics
- Exports
- Exports

## Challenges & Way Forward



**Challenges**

- Data Lags
- Structural Bottlenecks
- Geopolitical Risk
- Transition Risk

**Way Forward**

- Green Industrial Policy
- Modernized Data
- Energy Diversification
- Circular Economy

• INFRASTRUCTURE

## Behind Kerala govt's scrapping of SilverLine

Shaju Philip

Thiruvananthapuram, May 20

THE CONGRESS-led United Democratic Front (UDF) Cabinet on Wednesday decided to denotify the semi-high-speed rail project, SilverLine, mooted by the previous Left government. Chief Minister V D Satheshan said the government was not opposed to the high-speed rail project, but that the project was "an environmental disaster and financially unviable".

"UDF had studied the project and found there was not even a detailed project report. The land acquired by the government was not denotified. This has caused problems for the people living in the project area," he said.

The Rs 6,000-crore project was envisaged to run between Thiruvananthapuram and the northwestern district of Kasargod to reduce the existing travel time from 12 hours to four hours. A high-speed transport system has long been a crucial need, given Kerala's geography and population density.

### The project

The project was slated to be executed by Kerala Rail Development Corporation Corporation Ltd, or K Rail, a joint venture registered by the Kerala state government and Indian Railways in a 51:49 equity partnership. K Rail was specifically formed to develop railway infrastructure in Kerala. In 2021, the state Cabinet gave sanction and a token allocation of Rs 2,000 crore from the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board.

The 530 km standard-gauge line was planned to run parallel to the existing railway line and mostly on earth-bank embankments. The trains were expected to run at a maximum speed of 200 km, and a nine-car rake would carry 675 passengers in two classes. The

### • THE ALTERNATIVE

- In January 2024, the UDF government greenlighted a Regional Rapid Transit System as a practical and viable alternative to SilverLine.
- The UDF government said an MoU would be signed with the Centre once it gave its in-principle approval.

stretch would have 11 stations en route.

### Opposition to the project

For the project, 1,362 hectares that would have to be acquired for the railway line, including 1,096 ha from private parties. Widespread protests erupted across the state, supported by the Congress and the BJP, with critics raising concerns about the large-scale displacement of families and potential environmental damage resulting from the project.

Activists claimed that the proposed alignment would cut through wetlands, paddy fields, and ecologically sensitive zones, while opposition leaders warned of potential financial losses. The Railways concurred with the latter view, questioning its viability in Kerala, where the six-lane national highway development is under way. It ultimately did not give its sanction for the project, saying the project would affect the expansion plans of the existing railway tracks.

Satheshan justified the denotification, saying the project was abandoned and re-negotiations could be carried out regarding the lands notified for acquisition. The state had abandoned the project, while the Centre did not give its approval, he added.





- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Semi-High-Speed Rail (SHSR):** This refers to passenger rail systems operating at speeds significantly faster than conventional trains (typically between 160 km/h and 200 km/h) but falling short of true high-speed rail (which exceeds 250 km/h). They are often viewed as a pragmatic middle ground, offering faster transit without the exorbitant costs of bullet trains.
- **Standard Gauge vs. Broad Gauge:** India's existing railway network is predominantly Broad Gauge (1676 mm). However, modern rapid transit and global high-speed systems use Standard Gauge (1435 mm). Building a new standard-gauge line means the new trains cannot seamlessly transition onto the existing national network, requiring entirely separate infrastructure.
- **Earthen Embankments:** These are elevated platforms created by heavily compacting soil and rock, used to carry railway tracks over low-lying areas or wetlands. While cost-effective compared to concrete pillars, they act as massive physical barriers that can severely disrupt natural water drainage and local ecosystems.
- **Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS):** A dedicated, high-speed, high-capacity commuter service connecting regional nodes. Unlike traditional rail, it acts as a bridge between metro systems (which serve inner cities) and national railways, focusing on fast, point-to-point regional connectivity.
- **Eminent Domain and Denotification:** Eminent domain is the inherent power of the state to acquire private property for public use, provided fair compensation is given. Denotification is the legal reversal of this process— withdrawing the initial acquisition order and returning the land rights to the original owners, often happening when projects are scrapped.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The debate around mega-transport projects in densely populated, ecologically sensitive regions rests on several competing arguments:
- **The Developmental and Economic Imperative:** Proponents argue that linear geography and high population density necessitate high-speed mass transit. Reducing travel times across a state by more than half can exponentially increase economic productivity, integrate labor markets, and reduce the heavy congestion and carbon footprint associated with highway transport.
- **The Challenge of Financial Viability:** Critics counter that these projects demand colossal capital, often requiring tens of thousands of crores in borrowing from international agencies. For states already grappling with fiscal deficits, funding a standalone standard-gauge corridor with uncertain ridership projections risks pushing the regional economy into a severe debt trap.
- **Ecological Fragmentation:** Building continuous rail corridors, especially on earthen embankments through wetlands, paddy fields, and floodplains, creates severe ecological roadblocks. Environmentalists point out that such structures obstruct hydrological flows, exacerbating flood risks and destroying the delicate balance of local biodiversity.
- **The Human Cost of Displacement:** Large-scale infrastructure requires vast tracts of land. The acquisition process inevitably displaces thousands of families, disrupts traditional livelihoods, and triggers widespread social unrest, leading to a breakdown in trust between the state and its citizens.
- **Federal Friction and Policy Disruption:** Infrastructure projects often require joint ventures between State governments and the Union Government. Misaligned political priorities, changing state regimes, and delayed central approvals frequently lead to projects being stalled or scrapped entirely, resulting in massive sunk costs and developmental stagnation.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The tension between infrastructure expansion and socio-environmental realities has evolved significantly over the decades:
- **The Extractive Era (Pre-Independence):** Early railway expansion was driven purely by colonial administrative and economic interests—moving troops and extracting resources to ports. Environmental impact or the rights of the displaced native populations were entirely absent from the planning calculus.
- **The Nation-Building Phase (Post-1947 to 1980s):** Infrastructure was viewed as the temple of modern India. The focus was on unifying the nation and industrializing. Land was acquired swiftly under the archaic Land Acquisition Act of 1894, which heavily favored the state. Displacement was viewed as an unfortunate but necessary sacrifice for the greater national good.
- **The Era of Rights and Safeguards (1990s to 2013):** Economic liberalization brought public-private partnerships (PPPs) and international funding, which introduced global environmental standards. Deepening democracy and active civil society movements (like the Narmada Bachao Andolan) highlighted the immense social costs of mega-projects, culminating in the progressive Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (LARR).
- **The Modern Conundrum (Present Day):** Today, there is a hyper-focus on cutting-edge modernization (bullet trains, dedicated freight corridors). However, administrators now face an empowered citizenry, stringent environmental regulations, and the undeniable realities of climate change. Projects in ecologically fragile zones face intense, immediate scrutiny, forcing a constant tightrope walk between growth and conservation.

# MEGA-TRANSPORT CORRIDORS: A COMPREHENSIVE UPIPSSCE-ANALYSIS

Balancing Development, Ecology, and Federalism.

### KEY TERMS

Glossary

- SHSR**  
Train, poles in emission a train, direction of SHSR. Examples: orange, omomum.
- Gauge**  
Cross-section diaction on example crossented track.
- Embankment**  
Natural flow disiation disruption theruplics diarus where natural flow litterer.
- RRTS**  
Regional map, modernization, inoves:  
• Regional domain & therapies
- Eminent Domain**  
Examons onfirmarnde and inlent damhan scale and wibe economic connection.

### MAIN ARGUMENTS

Balancing development vs costs

Balancing development vs costs

### HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Timeline

- Pre-Independence**  
old steam  
Federal Independence  
• Prescentratic natural resource.
- Post-1947**  
Nation-building  
• new tracks, new tracks  
Nation-building new tracks
- Standard Gauge & LARR 2013**  
LAW  
Law-section miliation  
• Cross-section coetution, law
- Present Day Modernization**  
Federalism  
• Ciomesison  
• Climate icons

### LOGICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

Utilitarianism VS Rights-Based  
Ecological Modernization VS Deep Ecology  
Intergenerational Equity

### NEW FEATURES

Innovation

- Elevated Viaducts replacing Embankments
- Value Capture Financing (VCF)  
Ditagr as optioroch city md city blocks

### SUSTAINABILITY

Long-term viability

### CHALLENGES

Obstacles

- Bureaucratic Delays
- Stakeholder Resistance
- Political Friction
- Technological Isolation

### MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

- Social**  
• Socialt radices  
• Political-gestnet engagement
- Legal**  
• Politie negotieon  
• Eadica econatocis reotmentists
- Ethical**  
• Politie reeseative curvenalists  
• Nationl conwants
- Political**  
• Covporet arting impositocis  
• Federecises international priants
- International**  
• Economi cawerentist economic  
• Internationals and neccesities students
- Economic**  
• Economic economics  
• Proficiency acreshial and economics

Sercuic, political, Ethical, measurement, and investments

### LINKAGES WITH NCERTS

- Chapter 3 Drainage**  
• Linkages Cherters of Transport Unasport
- Chapter 7 Federalism**  
• Chibages i Enspors of Federalise Federalism
- Chapter 10 Transport**  
• Linkages Transport • Faaniamus of inosport
- Chapter 6 Social Movements**  
• Linkags awel ineresst • Cospen of Social Movements

### LINKAGES WITH UPSC CSE SYLLABUS

<b>GS Papers 1-4</b>	<b>GS Papers 1-3</b>
• Specific terms • Specific syllabus • Specific terms terms • Anelance terms	• Ethics and anononims • Specific cvasions • Specific engineering
<b>GS Papers 2-2</b>	<b>Essay</b>
• Specific syllabus • Specific syllabus • Seactims	• Ethics awerissem • Ethics • Optional
<b>GS Papers 3-4</b>	<b>Optionals</b>
• Specific syllabus • Econonics i coluotus • Ifritcal forms • Econiclets	• Specific regional syllabus • Outarde ceterities • Optionals teritons

### BEST LINKAGES WITH SYLLABUS, PHILOSOPHY & EPISTEMOLOGY

GS 3 EIA vs. Infra

Thoughtful quote development

“How do we know development? A thoughtful that accowance affect know we heal shade and development.”

### WAY FORWARD

Reforms & Solutions

- Upgradation over Greenfield
- Independent EIAs
- Stakeholdership not just compensation
- Integrated Multi-Modal planning

### ALL PREVIOUS YEAR'S UPSC QUESTIONS

2022

- Q.1. Discuss the National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP) and its implications for the development of Indian cities. (2022)
- Q.2. Discuss the National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP) and its implications for the development of Indian cities. (2022)
- Q.3. Discuss the National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP) and its implications for the development of Indian cities. (2022)

2021

- Q.1. Discuss the National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP) and its implications for the development of Indian cities. (2021)
- Q.2. Discuss the National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP) and its implications for the development of Indian cities. (2021)
- Q.3. Discuss the National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP) and its implications for the development of Indian cities. (2021)

### MODEL ANSWERS FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS

National Urban Transport Policy

**Intro**

Introduction a clewstrate in 2015 (2015) answer National Urban Transport Policy. This state can obvier bascom-ine vide of acvitive population. 280 years have off and total answer on the national Soctem Transport Policy.

**Body**

1. Create National Urban transport policy, after six month a each state on mho indipandly answers thure an affore off as before, gronowme without of bestment transport oens.
2. Enforce imares houn an-ten demand of Culture, transmissio in area (transportation) and our job-otonal nature and regional nature, waterways, air-roads, both aware use also management (transport) too.
3. Creative Area, value-adding, our use position, feeling and welfare an health-able make (transport) making these benefits.

**Conclusion**

The best idea with an are, progress, time, energy, cost, and income and thinking, attention, and best approval.

# SC rejects plea against caste count in census

It is not within the top court's domain to decide if caste enumeration should necessarily be part of Census 2027, says CJ; until 2011, the Census included only Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he Supreme Court on Wednesday said there was nothing wrong in the government of the day ascertaining caste as part of the nationwide Census exercise.

"Any government of the day must know how many people are backward and how many need welfare. This is a matter of policy," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, said.

The top court was responding to a plea filed by petitioner-in-person Sudhakar Gummula that caste enumeration should not be made part of Census 2027.

## Misuse of data

"There are endless possibilities of politicians and corporate entities misusing

Any government of the day must know how many people are backward and how many need welfare. This is a matter of policy.

**SURYA KANT**  
Chief Justice of India



the caste data. There is no justification for gathering such a large tract of data on caste," Mr. Gummula submitted.

The Chief Justice said it was not within the court's domain to decide whether a caste enumeration should necessarily be a part of Census 2027 or not.

"This issue exclusively comes within the policy domain," the CJ said before the court dismissed the petition.

The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs had de-

ecided to include caste enumeration in Census 2027 at a meeting held in April 2025.

Since then, caste enumeration has emerged as a major feature of the Census.

## Two phases

Until the 2011 Census, the exercise had included the systematic enumeration of only Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The government had said on the floor of Parliament about the incorpora-

tion of the caste enumeration in the second phase of Census 2027.

The first phase involved the collection of the House Listing Operation (HLO) information regarding housing conditions, assets, amenities and so on of each household.

## 'Integration instrument'

The second phase, Population Enumeration, would involve the collection of demographic, socio-economic, cultural and other details.

Former Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar had said that "thoughtfully collected caste data would be an instrument of integration, like an MRI of the body".

The last comprehensive nationwide caste Census was conducted in colonial India in 1931.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Caste Enumeration/Census:** This refers to the systematic collection of population data categorized by specific caste identities, extending beyond the traditionally enumerated Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) to include Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and general categories.
- **Policy Domain vs. Judicial Review:** The "policy domain" encompasses decisions made by the executive branch of government regarding administration and governance. Courts typically exercise judicial restraint here, intervening only if a policy violates constitutional provisions or fundamental rights.
- **House Listing Operation (HLO):** The preliminary phase of a decadal Census. It involves mapping physical infrastructure, housing conditions, household amenities (like water and electricity), and assets. It provides a baseline for understanding the material living conditions of citizens.
- **Population Enumeration:** The second phase of the Census where enumerators collect detailed demographic, socio-cultural, and economic data of individuals, such as age, sex, marital status, religion, mother tongue, and occupation.
- **Socio-Economic Data as an 'Integration Instrument':** A conceptual viewpoint where detailed demographic data is used not to divide people, but to diagnose systemic inequalities—much like a medical scan—so that targeted welfare can integrate marginalized groups into the mainstream economy.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The debate around incorporating caste into a nationwide demographic exercise revolves around a tension between effective governance and the risk of social polarization.
- **The Imperative for Targeted Welfare:** The primary argument in favor of caste enumeration is the necessity for empirical data. To fulfill the constitutional mandate of uplifting socially and educationally backward classes, the state must know exactly who these groups are, their population size, and their current socio-economic realities. Operating without this data is akin to prescribing medicine without a diagnosis.
- **Separation of Powers:** The judiciary often maintains that deciding what data to collect for governance is strictly an executive prerogative. Whether an enumeration exercise includes specific demographic markers is a matter of state policy, outside the scope of judicial interference unless it breaches constitutional rights.
- **Concerns of Misuse and Polarization:** On the flip side, critics argue that collecting such granular data opens a Pandora's box. There are profound apprehensions that political entities will misuse this data for hyper-local vote-bank engineering. Furthermore, corporate entities could exploit micro-demographic data for targeted commercial exploitation, raising severe privacy concerns.
- **The Threat of Cementing Divisions:** A deeply philosophical counterargument suggests that officially categorizing citizens by caste inadvertently validates and cements a hierarchical system that the Constitution ultimately seeks to eradicate.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- To understand the current discourse, we must trace how the state has historically approached demographic data collection.
- **The Colonial Precedent (1881–1931):** The British administration initiated the first synchronous Census in 1881. Until 1931, these exercises comprehensively recorded the caste of the population. This period saw caste boundaries rigidify as communities vied for social mobility and state patronage based on census classifications.
- **Post-Independence Shift (1951 onwards):** Driven by the vision of a modern, casteless society, the independent Indian state made a conscious policy shift. From the 1951 Census onward, the enumeration of caste was restricted strictly to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to facilitate constitutionally mandated political reservations.
- **The Mandal Commission Era (1980s):** When the Mandal Commission recommended reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs), it had to rely on extrapolations from the 1931 Census data. This highlighted a glaring data deficit in Indian policymaking, sparking initial demands for a renewed caste census.
- **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC 2011):** The government attempted a parallel exercise to collect socio-economic and caste data. While the economic deprivation data was used to target welfare schemes (like Ayushman Bharat), the caste data was largely withheld due to massive methodological errors and millions of unclassified caste names.

- **Way Forward**

- To navigate the complexities of this issue, a balanced, forward-looking approach is required:
- **Establish a Standardized Taxonomy:** Before any nationwide enumeration, the government must constitute an expert sociological committee to standardize caste and sub-caste nomenclatures, eliminating the chaos of millions of unclassified entries seen in 2011.
- **Legislate Iron-clad Data Protection:** A specialized statutory framework must be enacted specifically governing census data. This framework must mandate strict anonymization protocols before data is shared across government departments or analyzed, preventing political or corporate profiling.
- **Shift Focus to Intersectional Deprivation:** Policymakers must focus on the intersection of caste with economic indicators. The data should be utilized to strictly enforce the "creamy layer" concept, ensuring that affirmative action reaches the absolute poorest within marginalized communities.
- **Depoliticize the Discourse:** State institutions must communicate the intent of the data collection transparently—framing it strictly as a socio-economic diagnostic tool for policy formulation, rather than a political scorecard for electoral arithmetic.

# SUPREME COURT RULING ON CASTE ENUMERATION IN CENSUS 2027: UPSC COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

## JUDICIAL PREROGATIVE: A POLICY DOMAIN



“Any government must know how many backward people need welfare. This is a matter of policy.”

Chief Justice

### KEY TERMS

**Caste Enumeration:** Caste enumeration people need welfare. This is a matter

**HLO:** Caste enumeration of connexious and donants

**Distributive Justice:** distributive and mother justice



## THE CORE DEBATE

### TARGETED WELFARE - PROS



Determine Backwardness

Optimize Welfare Delivery

Efficient Policy Foundation

Quantifiable Data for Upliftment

### DATA MISUSE - CONS



Political Vote-Bank Engineering

Corporate Surveillance

Privacy Concerns

Deepening Social Divisions



Colonial  
(1931 Last Full)

1951-2011:  
(SC/ST Only)

April 2025:  
Cabinet Decision

Census 2027

## TWO PHASES OF CENSUS 2027

### PHASE 1: HOUSE LISTING OPERATION (HLO)

- Houses & assets
- Amenities
- Mapping living conditions

### PHASE 2: POPULATION ENUMERATION

- People, Charts
- Detailed socio-economic and caste info added

## MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACT

### SOCIAL

Empowerment vs Polarization - GS1)

### POLITICAL

Vote Banks vs Targeted Campaigns - GS2)

### ECONOMIC

Optimal Resource Allocation - GS2/3)

### ETHICAL

Affirmative Action vs Deepening Divisions - GS4)

### LEGAL

Review of Reservation Policies - GS2)

### INTERNATIONAL

Global Comparative Affirmative Action)

## UPSC SYLLABUS LINKAGES

- Strong GS1-4: Entarioation
- GS1-2: Politicians
- GS1-3: Reasonative Remtin
- Corporate Social Divisions
- International-Affirmative
- GS1-4: Government & Porulation

## NCERT CONNECTS

- Chapter 1: I/SE Textbook Language I/ection - Ernest RIV
- Chapter 2: IC Intropaters and Sturlent - Chapter II

## WAY FORWARD

- Expert Committees:** Expert expert recommendtants
- Strong Data Protection:** Frepanae and Data rncuding
- Focus on Intersectionality:** Compratan ntersections



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