



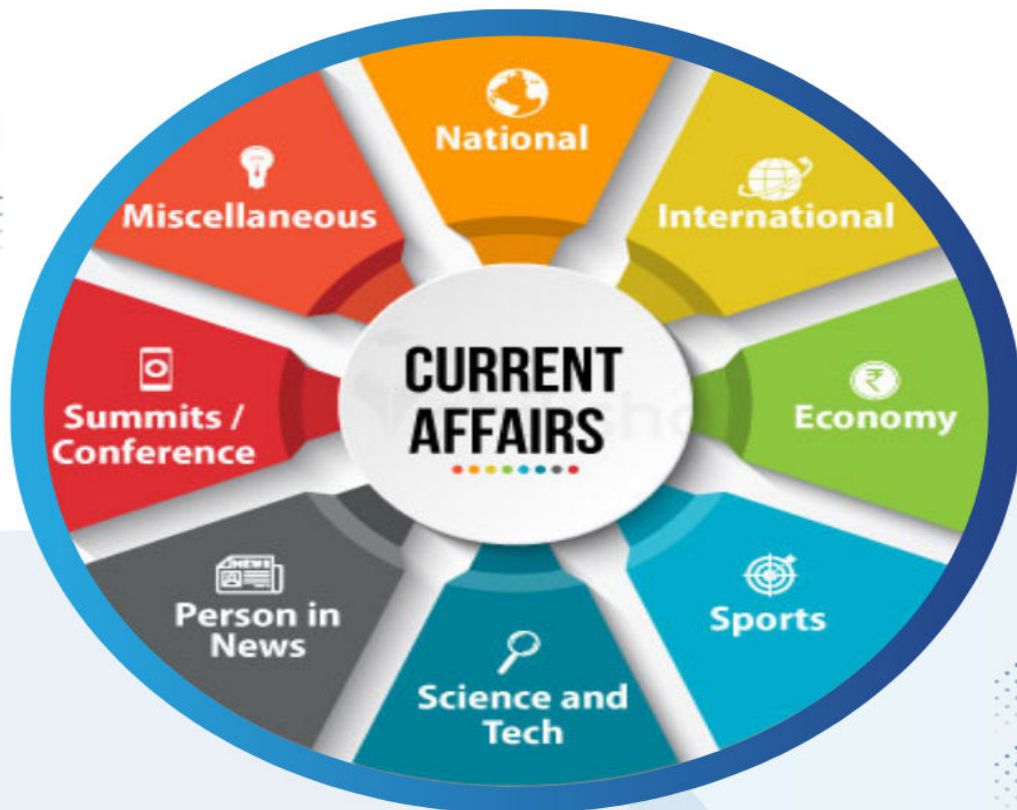
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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 21/05/2026 (THURSDAY)



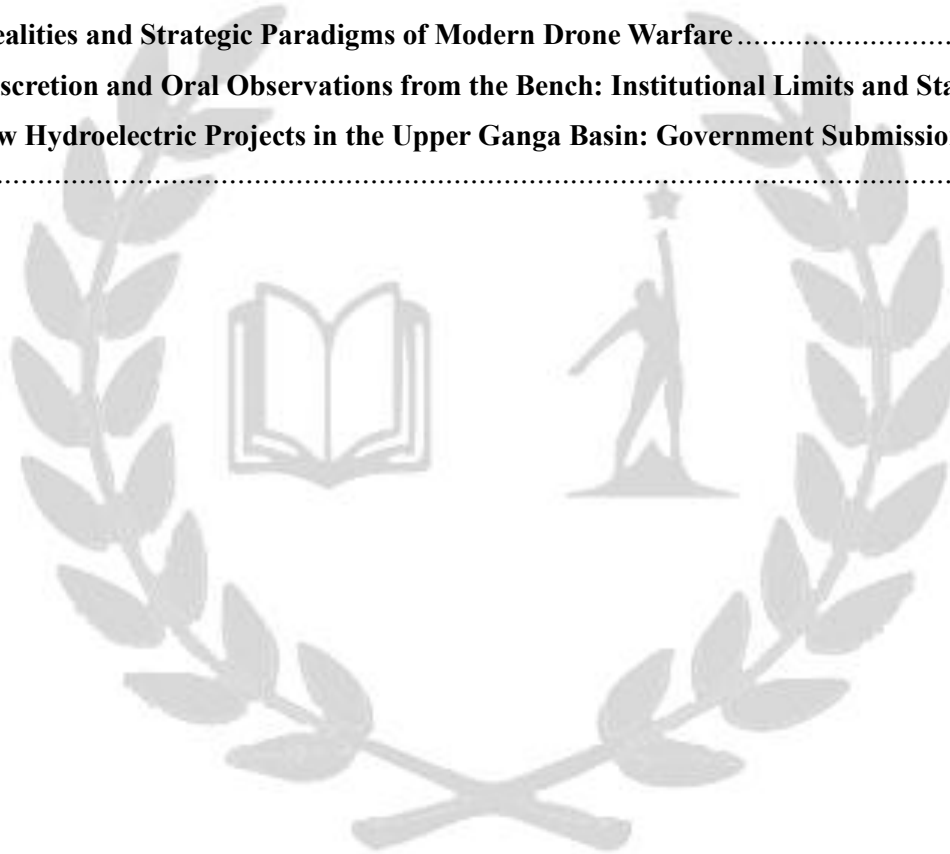
 **9972258970 & 9740702455**

**#317/A SKB Arcade, D. Subbaiah Road,
Ramaswamy Circle, Mysuru-570004**



Table of Contents

1. Caste Enumeration in Census: Supreme Court Judgment and Implications.....	2
2. Elevation of India-Italy Relations to a Special Strategic Partnership	3
3. Blueprint for Development in 'Naxal-Free' Bastar: Transition from Security to Ideological Victory.....	5
4. India's Pitch to US Nuclear Mission: Scaling Capacity and Small Modular Reactors	6
5. Internal Rifts in Ladakh Leadership and Scheduled Dialogue with the Centre.....	8
6. Ground Truthing and Legal Safeguards for Maharashtra's Wetlands.....	9
7. Crisis in Cuttack's Silver Filigree Industry: Raw Material and Regulatory Challenges	11
8. Coercive Diplomacy and the Manipulation of Shared Risk in International Relations	13
9. Reproductive Autonomy vs. Statutory Limits: The Judicial Push for Abortion Law Reform.....	14
10. Tactical Realities and Strategic Paradigms of Modern Drone Warfare	16
11. Judicial Discretion and Oral Observations from the Bench: Institutional Limits and Standards	17
12. Ban on New Hydroelectric Projects in the Upper Ganga Basin: Government Submission to the Supreme Court	19



VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. Caste Enumeration in Census: Supreme Court Judgment and Implications

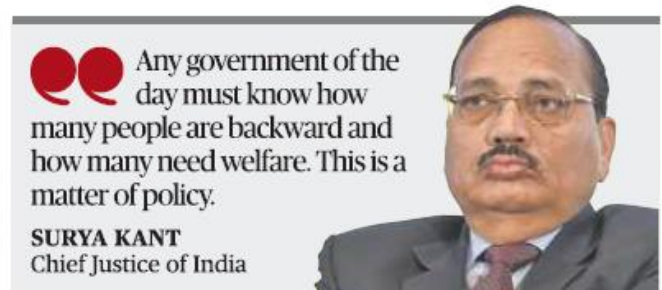
- **Judicial Affirmation of Policy Domain:** The Supreme Court of India dismissed a plea challenging the inclusion of caste enumeration in Census 2027, explicitly ruling that determining whether to collect caste data falls strictly within the policy domain of the executive and outside the judiciary's purview.
- **Data-Driven Governance and Welfare:** Chief Justice of India Surya Kant emphasized that ascertaining caste data is vital for governance, stating that the government of the day must possess accurate metrics on backwardness to design, target, and implement effective welfare schemes.
- **Shift from Historical Precedent:** Moving away from the post-independence practice where the census systematically enumerated only Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), Census 2027 marks the first time since the 1931 colonial census that a comprehensive, nationwide caste count is integrated into the general enumeration.
- **Two-Phase Census Architecture:** The ongoing Census 2027 framework splits data collection into two operational segments: Phase I covers the House Listing Operation (HLO) focusing on assets and housing conditions, while Phase II encompasses Population Enumeration, which now integrates socio-economic, demographic, and caste-specific metrics.
- **Instrument of Socio-Economic Integration:** The inclusion of caste data, backed by a April 2025 Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs decision, is conceptualized not as a divisive measure but as a diagnostic tool—akin to an "MRI of the social body"—to map inequality accurately and foster national integration through targeted affirmative action.

Key Definitions

- **Caste Census / Enumeration:** The systematic collection, classification, and analysis of demographic data regarding the population distribution of all caste groups, particularly Other Backward Classes (OBCs), in addition to SCs and STs.
- **Policy Domain:** A sphere of governance where decisions are purely executive and political prerogatives, guided by governance needs rather than constitutional or legal mandates, making them largely immune to judicial interference unless they violate fundamental rights.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 246 & Seventh Schedule:** The Census is a Union Subject listed at Entry 69 of List I (Union List) of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India, granting exclusive legislative and executive competence to the Central Government.
- **The Census Act, 1948:** This legislation provides the legal framework for conducting the census. Section 3 of the Act empowers the Central Government to declare its intention to take a census whenever it considers it necessary.
- **Article 15(4) and 16(4):** These constitutional provisions enable the State to make special provisions and reservations for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes of citizens, a process requiring quantifiable data to withstand judicial scrutiny.





- **Article 340:** Provides for the appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes, emphasizing the state's constitutional obligation to identify and uplift marginalized groups.

Key Additional Points

- **The Petitioner's Argument:** The plea raised significant concerns regarding the potential misuse of large-scale caste data by political entities for electoral polarization and by corporate bodies for commercial targeting, arguing that gathering such data lacked justification.
- **Historical Context:** While a Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) was conducted in 2011, its raw caste data was never officially published by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment due to operational errors, classification anomalies, and political sensitivities.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's validation reinforces the principle of separation of powers, leaving the complex architecture of demographic data collection to executive discretion. While challenges regarding data privacy, political weaponization, and administrative errors persist, a transparently conducted caste census serves as a crucial diagnostic tool. It transitions affirmative action from political rhetoric to an empirical science, ensuring that state-led welfare aligns with contemporary socio-economic realities.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance and Polity):** Functions and responsibilities of the Union, Separation of Powers between organs of the state, Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States, and mechanisms governing the protection and betterment of these backward classes.
- **GS Paper I (Indian Society):** Caste system, social empowerment, and the dynamics of diversity and social stratification in contemporary India.

2. Elevation of India-Italy Relations to a Special Strategic Partnership

- **Strategic Upgrade of Bilateral Ties:** India and Italy have formally elevated their bilateral relationship to a "Special Strategic Partnership" during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit to Rome, reflecting a higher institutional commitment and deeper geopolitical convergence amidst shifting global alignments.
- **Defence Industrial Roadmap and Co-Production:** A foundational cornerstone of this upgrade is the adoption of a Defence Industrial Roadmap that transitions the relationship from a buyer-seller dynamic to one focused on the technological co-design, co-development, and co-production of military platforms, specifically targeting helicopters, naval assets, marine armament, and electronic warfare systems.
- **Ambitious Trade and Economic Targets:** To enhance economic resilience and build robust supply chains, both nations set an ambitious target to expand bilateral trade to €20 billion by 2029, agreeing to maximize the institutional frameworks under the proposed India-EU Free Trade Agreement and promote deeper integration between small and medium enterprises (SMEs).





- **Technological Innovation and Critical Minerals:** The partnership establishes an India-Italy Innovation Centre to bridge startups, academic research, and advanced industries, backed by a newly signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Critical Minerals designed to secure supply chains for cutting-edge sectors like semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and space exploration.
- **Geopolitical Convergence and Connectivity:** The two democracies reinforced their shared commitment to the implementation of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), agreed to launch a new structured maritime security dialogue to ensure freedom of navigation, and jointly advocated for "dialogue and diplomacy" as the sole mechanisms to resolve active hostilities in West Asia and Ukraine.

Key Definitions

- **Special Strategic Partnership:** A high-level diplomatic classification indicating that two nations share vital long-term political, security, economic, and technological interests, requiring structured ministerial-level tracking and regular leadership summits.
- **Co-Development and Co-Production:** An advanced defense cooperation model where partner nations jointly invest capital, intellectual property, and industrial capacity to design and manufacture military hardware, rather than engaging in direct off-the-shelf procurement.

Institutional and Legal Frameworks

- **Joint Strategic Action Plan (2025–2029):** The foundational roadmap governing the functional expansion of bilateral ties across priority pillars. To ensure its systematic execution, both leaders established a dedicated Foreign Ministers-led mechanism tasked with periodic monitoring and strategic guidance.
- **Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement:** Signed previously to ensure safe and legal migration channels, this framework was bolstered during the current summit by targeted mechanisms facilitating the streamlined mobility of students, STEM researchers, and healthcare professionals, including Indian nurses, to Italy.
- **Joint Initiative to Counter Financing of Terrorism:** A collaborative security mechanism adopted in late 2025 to disrupt cross-border terror financial networks, requiring coordinated enforcement at multilateral tracking bodies like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the United Nations.

Key Additional Points

- **The Africa Dimension:** Given Italy's strategic focus via its Mattei Plan and India's historical footprints, both nations agreed to collaborate on trilateral developmental projects across Africa, emphasizing healthcare, renewable clean energy, and digital public infrastructure.
- **Connectivity Benchmarks:** Recognizing the geopolitical vulnerabilities in global choke points, the joint declaration specifically demanded the protection of freedom of navigation and uninterrupted commerce through critical channels, explicitly referencing the Strait of Hormuz.

Conclusion

The transformation of India-Italy ties into a Special Strategic Partnership signifies Rome's recognition of New Delhi as an indispensable anchor of security and economic scale in the Indo-Pacific, while allowing India to secure critical European technology and defense alternatives. By cementing defense industrial co-production, expanding trade targets to €20 billion, and driving multi-modal connectivity projects like the



IMEC, both nations are establishing a resilient, democratic axis capable of navigating contemporary supply-chain disruptions and complex fragmentations in global governance.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's diaspora and strategic security.
- **GS Paper III (Security and Economy):** Security challenges and their management in border and maritime areas; Technology indigenisation and the "Make in India" initiative within the domestic defense manufacturing ecosystem.

3. Blueprint for Development in 'Naxal-Free' Bastar: Transition from Security to Ideological Victory

- **Strategic Declaration of 'Naxal Mukta Bharat':** Union Home Minister Amit Shah visited Chhattisgarh's Bastar region to mark the symbolic conclusion of the "Naxal Mukta Bharat" mission, following the Central Government's March 31 operational deadline for eliminating Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) across India.
- **Paradigm Shift from Security to Ideology:** The security establishment has emphasized that while armed insurgencies have been neutralized, the long-term challenge requires countering the underlying Maoist ideology, warning against disguised ideological threats attempting to disrupt post-conflict regional stability.
- **Infrastructure and Social Compensation Blueprint:** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has initiated a targeted five-year development plan to compensate for fifty years of infrastructural deficits in Bastar, fast-tracking essential amenities including roads, rural banking, postal networks, electricity, and food security.
- **Rehabilitation and Civic Reintegration:** The state has adopted a compassionate rehabilitation policy to peacefully integrate over 3,000 surrendered Naxals into mainstream society, aiming to provide livelihood opportunities, social security, and an environment to live with dignity.
- **Infrastructural Transformation of Security Hubs:** Under the newly launched Veer Shaheed Gundadhur Seva Dera initiative, approximately one-third of the 200 operational security and police camps in Bastar are being converted into public service, governance delivery, and livelihood training centres.



Key Definitions

- **Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) / Naxalism:** An armed agrarian insurgent movement inspired by Maoist political ideology that seeks to overthrow the established state through violent protracted people's warfare, historically concentrated in India's tribal and forested regions.
- **Central Zonal Council (CZC):** A statutory inter-state forum established under the States Reorganisation Act, 1946, comprising Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, designed to foster cooperative federalism and coordinate regional security and development.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 244 and the Fifth Schedule:** Grants special constitutional protection and administrative autonomy to Scheduled Areas inhabited by tribal populations, ensuring that tribal land rights, cultures, and local governance are safeguarded against exploitation.
- **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967:** The primary anti-terror legislation used by the Union and State governments to ban front organizations of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and prosecute individuals engaged in funding or executing LWE violence.
- **Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996:** A crucial legislative tool for empowering local tribal Gram Sabhas with self-governance rights over minor forest produce, land alienation prevention, and local dispute resolution, acting as an institutional antidote to alienation.

Key Additional Points

- **Historical Conflict Benchmarks:** The Bastar region was long considered the epicenter of LWE, witnessing devastating insurgent strikes such as the 2010 Tadmetla ambush (76 security personnel killed) and the 2013 Jheeram Valley attack on political leadership.
- **Evolution of State Counter-Strategy:** The state's operational doctrine evolved from controversial civil militia experiments like Salwa Judum (banned by the Supreme Court in 2011 due to human rights violations) to the modern SAMADHAN doctrine, which balances robust policing with community development.

Conclusion

The formal declaration of a Naxal-free India marks a historic milestone in internal security management, transitioning Bastar from an active conflict zone to an area focused on comprehensive governance. True stability, however, depends on executing the five-year development blueprint efficiently. By converting police camps into public service delivery kiosks and ensuring legal rights under PESA, the state can address structural alienation, rendering extremist ideologies obsolete and cementing the socio-economic integration of tribal heartlands.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Internal Security):** Linkages between development and spread of extremism; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security; Challenges to internal security through communication networks.
- **GS Paper II (Governance and Polity):** Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies (Zonal Councils); Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population and the performance of these schemes.

4. India's Pitch to US Nuclear Mission: Scaling Capacity and Small Modular Reactors

- **Bilateral Engagement and US Nuclear Mission:** A high-powered American nuclear delegation visited India following landmark domestic legislative reforms aimed at opening up India's tightly regulated civil nuclear energy sector to private and external participants.
- **Twin-Pronged Indian Strategy:** New Delhi communicated two clear strategic objectives to the visiting delegation: aggressively scaling up nuclear energy to enhance base-load electricity capacity, and progressively adopting Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) to modernize the clean energy mix.
- **Consolidation of PHWR Fleet:** Alongside newer technologies, India is doubling down on its domestic civil nuclear program centered on its traditional mainstay—Pressurised Heavy Water



Reactors (PHWRs)—and remains open to international collaboration to scale up projects using this technology.

- **Enhanced Role for the Private Sector:** The continuous policy shift leverages recent legal changes to allow private sector entities a stepped-up role in nuclear plant operations, moving beyond manufacturing components to active involvement in energy generation and management.
- **Objectives of the US Executive Mission:** The American delegation's brief involves assessing the reshaped Indian nuclear energy landscape, conveying the commercial and technological interest of the US nuclear industry, and coordinating inter-governmental messaging on emerging commercial opportunities.

Key Definitions



- **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs):** Advanced nuclear reactors that have a power generation capacity of up to 300 MW(e) per unit, which is about one-third of the generating capacity of traditional nuclear power reactors, and are physically smaller, allowing for factory fabrication and modular transport.
- **Base-Load Capacity:** The minimum amount of electric power that a utility delivery system must consistently generate and provide to an electrical grid over a given period to meet continuous, uninterrupted consumer demand.

India's pitch to US nuclear mission: Scale up capacity, small modular reactors key



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **The Atomic Energy Act, 1962:** The primary legal framework governing nuclear energy in India. Recent legislative amendments and policy implementations seek to ease restrictions on private sector participation, which was historically limited to public sector undertakings (PSUs) like Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL).
- **Seventh Schedule (Entry 6 of List I):** "Atomic energy and mineral resources necessary for its production" falls exclusively under the Union List of the Constitution of India, giving the Central Government absolute legislative and executive jurisdiction.
- **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA), 2010:** A critical legal statute regulating compensation for nuclear damage. Its provisions regarding supplier liability (Section 17) have historically been a point of intense negotiation with international vendors, including those from the United States.

Key Additional Points

- **Strategic Autonomy in Clean Energy:** Expanding nuclear capabilities is central to India's climate commitments of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, providing a reliable alternative to intermittent renewable sources like solar and wind.
- **India-US Civil Nuclear Deal Legacy:** This engagement builds on the historical foundation of the 2008 123 Agreement (Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal), adapting it to contemporary requirements like modular energy systems and private capital integration.

Conclusion

The interaction between India and the US nuclear executive mission underscores a transformative shift in India's atomic energy architecture. By blending its time-tested PHWR infrastructure with modern Small



Modular Reactors and welcoming private operational partnerships, India is addressing long-standing capital and technology bottlenecks. If backed by clear regulatory guidelines and resolved liability frameworks, this strategy will establish nuclear power as an indispensable, zero-carbon pillar of India's long-term energy security.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Technology and Economy):** Infrastructure: Energy; Science and Technology-developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.
- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies of developed countries on India's strategic sectors.

5. Internal Rifts in Ladakh Leadership and Scheduled Dialogue with the Centre

- **Widening Leadership Fault Lines:** Ahead of high-stakes talks with the Union Government's High Powered Committee (HPC), the Apex Body, Leh (ABL) accepted the long-pending resignation of its founding chairman, Thupstan Chhewang, exposing internal rifts that have structurally weakened the region's unified negotiating front.
- **Ideological Disagreement on Mandate:** The internal split emerged over the inclusion of local socio-economic issues, specifically civil society's strong opposition to the proposed privatization of the Ladakh Power Development Department (LPDD) through a joint venture with the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) featuring a 49%:51% equity split.
- **Core Demands of the Joint Alliance:** Despite internal friction, the core agenda of the unified alliance between the ABL and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) remains anchored on a four-point charter: absolute statehood for Ladakh, constitutional safeguards under the Sixth Schedule, separate Lok Sabha seats for Leh and Kargil, and dedicated job reservations for local youth.
- **Impact of New Political Alignments:** The emergence of alternative political entities, such as the Voice of Buddhist Ladakh (VBL), has fragmented the narrative, with accusations from mainstream civil society that such groups act as administrative proxies designed to dilute the bargaining leverage of traditional regional representatives.
- **Strategic Advantage for the Centre:** Political analysts and local leaders note that internal leadership disputes, polarization along sub-regional lines, and disagreements over negotiating limits give the Union Ministry of Home Affairs a clear upper hand in directing the terms of the dialogue.



Key Definitions

- **Apex Body, Leh (ABL) & Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA):** Conglomerates of distinct socio-religious, political, and trade organizations representing the Buddhist-majority Leh and Muslim-majority Kargil districts, respectively, formed to collectively negotiate Ladakh's post-Article 370 constitutional future.



- **High Powered Committee (HPC):** A dedicated inter-ministerial negotiating body constituted by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, headed by the Minister of State for Home, tasked with addressing the constitutional, cultural, linguistic, and territorial anxieties of Ladakh's population.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 239A of the Constitution:** The legal enabling provision under which the Union Territory of Ladakh was established via the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. Unlike Puducherry, Ladakh was created as a Union Territory without a legislative assembly, centralizing administrative authority under a Lieutenant Governor.
- **The Sixth Schedule (Articles 244(2) and 275(1)):** A constitutional framework providing for the creation of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) with distinct legislative, judicial, and administrative powers to protect tribal cultures and lands. Over 90% of Ladakh's population is classified as Scheduled Tribe (ST), forming the basis of their demand for this protection.
- **Article 3 of the Constitution:** Grants Parliament exclusive unilateral power to form new States or Union Territories, alter areas, or change boundaries, which underpins the legal framework governing Ladakh's ongoing demand for full statehood.

Key Additional Points

- **The Privatization Debate:** Civil society arguments state that converting the LPDD into a majority-owned central PSU (51% REC share) will increase power tariffs, worsen regional unemployment, and threaten strategic security interests due to Ladakh's sensitive frontier geography.
- **Historical Conflict Context:** The dialogue takes place against a backdrop of prolonged civil unrest, including violent protests in September 2025 in Leh that resulted in four deaths during police actions, highlighting the deep-seated public anxiety over demographic and cultural preservation.

Conclusion

The internal friction within the leadership of Leh and Kargil underscores the challenges of sustaining a diverse political front during protracted constitutional negotiations. While the immediate administrative disagreements regarding asset privatization and leadership changes may temporarily give the Union Government an upper hand, a lasting resolution requires a sustainable approach. The Centre must balance its strategic security requirements in a sensitive border region with the legitimate democratic aspirations of Ladakh's tribal population, ensuring that institutional growth does not come at the cost of local trust.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity and Governance):** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, details of the Sixth Schedule, and the administrative architecture of Union Territories.
- **GS Paper III (Internal Security):** Security implications of political instability in border regions and the management of sensitive frontier territories.

6. Ground Truthing and Legal Safeguards for Maharashtra's Wetlands

- **Comprehensive Mapping Milestone:** The National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM) has concluded the scientific documentation and field verification of 23,415 wetlands across Maharashtra, establishing a vital administrative baseline to formally notify and accord them statutory safeguards.



- **Spatial Distribution and Density Hubs:** Data from the NCSCM dashboard reveals that Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (5,196) and Nagpur (5,086) divisions hold the highest concentration of wetlands in the state, while Ahmednagar leads at the district level with 1,596 distinct water bodies.
- **The Imperative of Ground Truthing:** The extensive verification process reconciles remote-sensing satellite data with actual on-site ecological realities, validating precise boundaries, environmental health, and current land-use patterns to prevent errors prior to formal legal notification.
- **Judicial Mandate Driving Momentum:** While the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) initiated the updated National Wetland Atlas in 2020, Maharashtra's mapping gathered critical speed only after definitive intervention by the Supreme Court and public interest litigation from environmental groups.
- **Mitigating Encroachment and Reclamation:** Formally notifying these 23,415 water bodies changes their administrative status from unprotected, vacant lands—frequently vulnerable to debris dumping, real estate encroachment, and infrastructure reclamation—to ecologically sensitive zones under strict conservation laws.

Key Definitions

- **Ground Truthing:** The empirical process of performing physical, on-site field verification to confirm the existence, exact geographical boundaries, and ecological status of a landscape features previously identified via satellite imagery.
- **Wetland Reclamation:** The socio-economic process of converting a natural wetland or water body into dry solid land through infilling with debris, soil, or industrial waste, typically driven by urban expansion or infrastructure projects.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017:** Enacted under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, these rules provide the regulatory framework for prohibiting harmful operations such as industrial setting, solid waste dumping, and untreated effluent discharge within notified wetlands.
- **Article 48A (Directive Principles of State Policy):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** Obligates every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures.

Key Additional Points

- **Institutional Support:** The mapping exercise was spearheaded by the NCSCM, a specialized autonomous research institution operating under the aegis of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- **Urban Wetland Vulnerability:** The documentation successfully captured critical and highly threatened water systems across industrial and urban coastal belts, including 247 wetlands in Thane, 1,093 in Raigad, and 247 across Mumbai City and its suburban districts.



Conclusion

The successful documentation of over 23,000 wetlands in Maharashtra marks a transition from passive environmental monitoring to proactive statutory governance. By bridging the gap between satellite observation and ground reality, this exercise provides the state with an airtight legal mechanism to halt systemic encroachment. Preserving these decentralized aquatic ecosystems is essential to securing climate resilience, sustaining urban flood mitigation networks, and safeguarding regional biodiversity against rapid infrastructure expansion.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Environment and Ecology):** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; institutional frameworks like the Wetlands Rules, 2017.
- **GS Paper II (Polity and Governance):** Role of the judiciary (Supreme Court) in environmental governance, and the functioning of autonomous scientific bodies under Union Ministries.

7. Crisis in Cuttack's Silver Filigree Industry: Raw Material and Regulatory Challenges

- **Compounding Economic and Regulatory Pressures:** The Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged silver filigree craft of Cuttack (Odisha), locally known as *Rupa Tarakasi*, is facing an existential crisis driven by an increase in domestic silver prices and recent central restrictions on raw material imports.
- **Sharp Rise in Silver Tariffs and Import Controls:** The Central Government raised the customs duty on gold and silver imports from 6% to 15% and placed silver imports for domestic consumption under the "restricted" category, mandating prior government approval and channelization exclusively through designated agencies.
- **Industrial Demand and Market Destabilization:** Global silver prices have surged by over 200% since January 2025, driven by global supply deficits and rising industrial demand from clean technology sectors like solar photovoltaics, electric vehicles (EVs), and semiconductors, pricing out traditional handicraft artisans.
- **Severe Operational and Artisan Attrition:** Increased raw material costs have doubled the retail prices of finished filigree products, leading to a steep drop in festive and corporate orders. Consequently, the active artisan population in Cuttack has declined from 3,000 in 1996 to just about 500.
- **Threat to Historical and Cultural Heritage:** *Rupa Tarakasi* is a heritage craft dating back to the 12th century that received patronage during the Mughal era. The current economic downturn, compounded by the proliferation of cheap, duplicate machine-made filigree, is driving the younger generation away from this traditional livelihood.

Key Definitions

- **Rupa Tarakasi (Silver Filigree):** A delicate form of metal handicraft where silver bricks are beaten and drawn into extremely thin, fine wires or foils (*tara*) and systematically twisted to create intricate decorative patterns and jewelry (*kasi*).
- **Restricted Category Imports:** An import control classification managed by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) where goods cannot be imported freely; they require a specific import license, prior administrative approval, or must be channelized strictly through state-nominated banks and bullion exchanges.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999:**

The statutory framework under which Cuttack's *Rupa Tarakasi* was officially granted a GI tag in March 2024. This legal mechanism protects against unauthorized use of the geographical name but does not offer economic insulation from raw material price shocks.



- **Article 43 (Directive Principles of State Policy):**

Mandates that the State shall endeavor to promote cottage industries on an individual or cooperative basis in rural and semi-urban areas, reflecting a constitutional obligation to protect traditional artisans.

- **Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992:** Employs the legal mechanisms used by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to alter customs tariffs, adjust import duties, and impose restricted category conditions on commodities like precious metals to manage macroeconomic balances.

Key Additional Points

- **The Premium Burden on Artisans:** Forcing silver imports through nominated agencies such as RBI-approved banks or DGFT-cleared entities creates a system where raw material access carries high domestic premiums, disproportionately affecting micro-workshops that process small monthly volumes.
- **Inter-Sectoral Resource Competition:** The crisis highlights a modern macroeconomic challenge where green energy transitions (solar panels) and high-tech manufacturing (semiconductors) consume heavy volumes of precious metals, outcompeting and disrupting traditional, low-capital cultural industries.

Conclusion

The distress within Cuttack's silver filigree sector illustrates the vulnerability of traditional Indian handicrafts to global commodity shifts and domestic fiscal policies. While raising import duties and restricting bullion flows may serve macroeconomic or trade-balancing goals, it inadvertently harms micro-scale heritage crafts. To preserve *Rupa Tarakasi*, the state needs to intervene with targeted support, such as setting up dedicated raw material banks to provide silver at subsidized, steady rates to registered GI artisans, alongside implementing strict anti-counterfeiting laws to halt machine-made duplicates.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I (Indian Culture):** Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature, and Architecture from ancient to modern times, specifically traditional Indian crafts and heritage livelihoods.
- **GS Paper III (Indian Economy & Technology):** Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth, intellectual property rights (GI tags), and the impact of clean-technology supply chains on traditional sectors.



8. Coercive Diplomacy and the Manipulation of Shared Risk in International Relations

- **Thomas Schelling's Paradox of Coercion:** Grounded in game theory, strategic interactions in high-stakes conflicts are governed not by the blunt application of superior military force, but by the "manipulation of shared risk"—shaping an adversary's perception of danger, narrowing their exit options, and forcing them to calculate tolerable limits before compromising.
- **Flaws of Disproportional Punishment:** Implementing severe military punishment without offering a credible, face-saving political exit fails to break an adversary's political will. Instead of compelling capitulation, it hardens resistance, locks both sides into cycles of escalation, and forces the weaker state to weaponize asymmetric leverage to inflict reputational and economic costs.
- **The Strait of Hormuz as a Geopolitical Hostage:** Strategically weaker in conventional military terms, Iran effectively leverages the Strait of Hormuz not merely as a shipping lane, but as a "hostage" to manipulate global economic risk, forcing major powers to balance the military advantages of escalation against catastrophic disruption to global energy markets.
- **Historical Benchmarks of Risk Management:** Historical conflicts demonstrate that successful coercion requires managing risk rather than relying on overwhelming power. The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis was resolved through mutual, dignified de-escalation, while the 1990–91 Gulf War failed to secure lasting peace because it lacked a sustainable post-war exit strategy, leaving structural regional conflicts unresolved.
- **Strategic Lessons from the 1999 Kargil Conflict:** Closer to home, the Kargil conflict serves as an example of asymmetric risk management. Pakistan attempted to leverage nuclear escalation to internationalize a territorial incursion, but India's combination of calibrated military action and intense diplomatic pressure successfully contained the conflict, making the risks of further escalation intolerable for Islamabad.



Key Definitions

- **Coercive Diplomacy / Bargaining:** A diplomatic strategy that relies on the threat or limited application of military, economic, or political force to persuade an adversary to stop or undo an aggressive action, rather than engaging in full-scale, uninhibited warfare.
- **Asymmetric Leverage:** The strategic capability of a conventionally weaker actor to use unconventional methods, geographical chokepoints, or political vulnerabilities to neutralize, disrupt, or impose disproportionate costs on a militarily superior adversary.

Geopolitical Doctrines and Strategic Frameworks

- **The Strategy of Conflict (1960):** The foundational strategic text by Nobel Laureate Thomas Schelling outlining how deterrence, brinkmanship, and the threat of mutual destruction serve as communication mechanisms in international relations, shifting the focus from military capability to psychological manipulation.
- **Credible Exit Options (Off-Ramps):** A core requirement in modern strategic doctrine dictating that a coercing power must provide its adversary with a politically viable, dignified pathway to de-escalate, ensuring that compliance does not result in total domestic humiliation or systemic regime collapse.



- **Freedom of Navigation Frameworks:** While international laws like the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) guarantee transit rights through international straits, strategic chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz function primarily under power politics, where legal regimes are regularly overshadowed by the threat of asymmetrical disruption.

Key Additional Points

- **The Illusion of Military Superiority:** Relying solely on conventional military dominance often creates a false sense of security. As seen in recent Middle Eastern and European conflicts, superior firepower cannot guarantee compliance if the adversary perceives the conflict as existential and accepts high thresholds of pain.
- **Economic Interdependence as a Weapon:** Modern coercive bargaining increasingly relies on global economic vulnerabilities. The capacity to disrupt global supply chains, energy flows, or maritime trade routes gives regional actors significant geopolitical veto power over far stronger global coalitions.

Conclusion

The structural friction between major global powers and regional states emphasizes that international relations remain governed by the psychology of risk rather than the arithmetic of military hardware. When superior powers apply force without strategic restraint or clear diplomatic off-ramps, coercion becomes a self-defeating trap. For global stability, states must recognize that deterrence requires a careful balance between the capacity to punish and the wisdom to de-escalate. Resolving modern strategic stalemates depends on crafting stable security frameworks that protect mutual dignity and prevent accidental escalation in shared global chokepoints.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's strategic, political, and economic interests; Security implications of global conflicts on India's energy security and maritime trade routes.
- **GS Paper III (Internal Security & Defence):** Strategic doctrines, asymmetric warfare, border management lessons from the Kargil Conflict, and the role of maritime security in maintaining national sovereignty.

9. Reproductive Autonomy vs. Statutory Limits: The Judicial Push for Abortion Law Reform

- **Judicial Overriding of Statutory Gestational Ceilings:** Affirming the supremacy of constitutional rights over legislative mandates, the Supreme Court of India dismissed a curative petition from AIIMS and authorized a 15-year-old minor rape survivor to terminate her 30-week pregnancy, bypassing the standard 24-week statutory ceiling.
- **Call to Eliminate Time Barriers for Minor Survivors:** Chief Justice of India Surya Kant directed the Union Government to amend the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act to entirely remove the upper gestational time limit for terminating unwanted pregnancies resulting from the rape of a minor.
- **Rejection of State and Medical Paternalism:** The Supreme Court explicitly ruled that neither medical institutions nor the State possess the authority to override a survivor's decisional freedom, declaring that the final choice to continue or terminate a pregnancy rests solely with the survivor and her guardians.



- **Recognition of Systemic Barriers and Stigma:** The judgment highlighted that minor rape victims face unique structural obstacles—such as trauma-induced dissociation, intense social stigma, and fear of disclosure—which frequently lead to delayed detection and reporting of pregnancies after statutory deadlines have expired.
- **Integration of Philosophical Anti-Natalist Perspectives:** The legal discourse incorporated progressive humanitarian ethics, recognizing that forcing an individual to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term transforms the "right to life" into an institutionalized obligation to reproduce human suffering, violating basic principles of care.



Key Definitions

- **Reproductive Autonomy:** The inalienable constitutional right of an individual to make personal choices regarding their fertility, contraception, and termination of pregnancy free from state coercion, medical paternalism, or social interference.
- **Curative Petition:** The final constitutional remedy available in the Supreme Court of India to review its own judgment after the dismissal of a review petition, designed to prevent a miscarriage of justice under the court's inherent powers.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21 of the Constitution:** The fundamental right guaranteeing life and personal liberty. The Supreme Court has repeatedly expanded its scope to include bodily integrity, dignity, privacy, and reproductive choice as inseparable components of personhood.
- **Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Act, 2021:** The statutory framework regulating abortions. It permits termination up to 20 weeks with one doctor's opinion, and up to 24 weeks for special categories (minors, rape survivors) with two doctors' opinions, restricting post-24-week terminations strictly to severe fetal abnormalities.
- **Article 142 of the Constitution:** Grants the Supreme Court plenary power to pass any decree or order necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it, providing the constitutional base to bypass statutory ceilings in exceptional humanitarian cases.

Key Additional Points

- **The "Child-Child" Dilemma:** Medical specialists from AIIMS initially opposed the high-risk, late-term procedure, framing the issue as a conflict between two children (the minor mother and the advanced fetus), which the Court ultimately resolved by prioritizing the living victim's future well-being.
- **Proposed Penal and Fiscal Sanctions:** Alongside MTP reforms, the Bench recommended tightening penal laws to mandate that trials for sexual offenses against minors be completed within one week, alongside provisions to transfer the asset property of convicted abusers directly to victims as compensation.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's decisive ruling signals a shift from a provider-centric, state-regulated abortion model to a rights-based framework anchored in constitutional personhood. By utilizing Article 142 to override the 24-week statutory ceiling for a minor survivor, the judiciary exposed the rigid limitations of the MTP Act.



True reproductive justice requires legislative action; the Union Government must remove arbitrary temporal cutoffs for survivors of sexual violence, ensuring that procedural deadlines do not compound the trauma of the most vulnerable citizens.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity and Governance):** Structure, organization, and functioning of the Judiciary; Mechanisms, laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections (women and children); Issues arising out of the design and implementation of policies.
- **GS Paper I (Social Issues):** Issues related to women, social empowerment, and changing ethical and societal paradigms in contemporary India.

10. Tactical Realities and Strategic Paradigms of Modern Drone Warfare

- **Asymmetric Lessons from Operation Sindoor:** The four-day military conflict between India and Pakistan in May 2025 underscored the tactical shift toward non-contact warfare, where cheap, mass-producible small Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and loitering munitions were deployed to saturate and exhaust sophisticated, high-cost air defense frameworks.
- **Evolutionary Technology vs. Revolutionary Domain:** Contrary to popular strategic assertions, the rapid proliferation of low-altitude drones does not constitute a brand-new "air littoral" domain of warfare; rather, it represents an evolutionary expansion of low-level assets operating within existing airspace boundaries, fundamentally reshaping ground combat dynamics rather than conventional air superiority.
- **Expansion of Kinetic Warfare Inland:** Advanced tactics—such as containerized long-range drone placement deep inside sovereign territories—have effectively extended the kinetic battlefield hundreds of kilometers behind forward border lines, mimicking the borderless, anytime-anywhere threat vectors typically associated with cross-border cyberattacks.
- **Transition and Autonomous AI Integration:** The transition of unmanned flight from human-controlled platforms to fully autonomous drone networks driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI) poses structural challenges to traditional rules of engagement, raising critical global ethical, legal, and operational dilemmas regarding machines making lethal, independent decisions.
- **The Economics of Counter-UAS (CUAS) Grids:** Traditional kinetic interceptors are economically unsustainable against saturation tactics due to extreme cost-to-kill ratios. This fiscal imbalance is driving global defense investments toward Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs), such as tactical lasers, which lower the engagement cost to just a few dollars per shot.

Key Definitions

- **Loitering Munition (Kamikaze Drone):** A category of weapon systems configured to hold position over a target area for an extended period, locate an objective via onboard sensors, and execute a precision strike by crashing directly into the asset.
- **Drone Swarm:** A networked collection of multiple autonomous aerial systems that communicate with each other using swarm intelligence to collectively coordinate maneuvers, share sensor data, and overwhelm hostile air defense nodes through sheer numerical mass.



Constitutional, Statutory, and Administrative Frameworks

- **Union List (Seventh Schedule, Entries 1 & 2):** Defense of India and the regulation of the armed forces fall entirely within the executive and legislative competence of the Central Government under the Constitution of India, enabling nationwide defense procurement and strategy.
- **The Aircraft Act, 1934:** The statutory legal instrument modified by the Ministry of Civil Aviation via the Drone Rules to regulate the manufacturing, importation, registration, and domestic operation of civilian and dual-use remotely piloted aircraft systems within Indian airspace.
- **UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW):** The multilateral international forum currently reviewing the operational, legal, and humanitarian aspects of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) to establish international boundaries for AI-led combat operations.



Key Additional Points

- **Sudarshan Chakra Mission 2035:** Formally announced by the Union Government in August 2025, this initiative aims to establish an interlocked, multi-layered, AI-enabled terrestrial and space-based national defense shield by 2035 to safeguard strategic, civilian, and industrial assets.
- **Global Counter-Drone Architectures:** To secure expansive land borders, international blocks are exploring layered, collaborative tracking meshworks—such as the European Union's "Drone-Wall" initiative and the United States' space-integrated "Golden Dome" system.

Conclusion

The operational outcomes of Operation Sindoor clearly demonstrate that the age of drone warfare has moved beyond speculative tech hype into a permanent feature of modern hybrid conflicts. While low-cost UAVs cannot replace the necessity of manned fighters for establishing overall air superiority, their capacity to disrupt rear logistics and drain defense supplies requires a complete overhaul of domestic defense design. India's long-term security depends on successfully executing the Sudarshan Chakra Mission by 2035. This transition demands sustained budgetary allocations, faster domestic public-private research into directed energy systems, and an integrated air-and-space command to secure sovereign skies against distributed, low-altitude threats.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Internal Security and Technology):** Role of non-state actors in creating internal security challenges; security challenges in border areas and their management; awareness in fields of IT, Space, Computers, and Robotics; indigenization of technology.
- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's strategic security interests and regional balance of power.

11. Judicial Discretion and Oral Observations from the Bench: Institutional Limits and Standards

- **The Contradiction of Oral Remarks:** Recent controversial analogies used during proceedings—such as referring to unauthorized practitioners as "cockroaches" or "parasites"—have renewed debate on judicial speech standards, emphasizing the gap between spontaneous oral statements and considered legal decrees.



- **The Vijayabhaskar Precedent:** In the *Chief Election Commissioner v. M.R. Vijayabhaskar* (2021) case, the Supreme Court established the core principle that the official, binding voice of a judicial body is expressed solely through its formal written judgments and orders, rather than through temporary oral observations made during arguments.
- **Testing Arguments vs. Inflicting Harm:** Legal principles draw a sharp line between two types of judicial speech: the unscripted, rigorous "bench question that tests" an argument's validity (essential for refining constitutional doctrines), and "intemperate remarks" that humiliate or dehumanize individuals and public institutions.
- **Instant Media Impact and Public Accountability:** Digital court reporting and live-streaming have fundamentally altered how judicial speech is received. Oral statements now enter the public domain and news cycles instantly, meaning that subsequent narrow clarifications or retractions rarely undo the initial public impact or institutional friction.
- **Adherence to Internal Codes of Ethics:** Both domestic and international standards demand that judicial speech remain disciplined. Codified frameworks explicitly restrict judges from using severe language or engaging in public political debates on active or impending legal disputes.

Key Definitions

- **Oral Observations:** Informal, spontaneous comments, questions, or analogies expressed by a judge from the bench during a hearing, which serve to test legal arguments but carry no precedential weight or statutory authority.
- **Restatement of Values of Judicial Life:** A code of judicial ethics adopted by the Full Court of the Supreme Court of India in 1997, serving as an internal guide to regulate the public conduct, independence, and professional dignity of the judiciary.

Constitutional, Legal, and Institutional Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(a) and Open Court Proceedings:** While the public has a right to know what happens in court, the judiciary maintains that real-time reporting must balance the need for media freedom with the preservation of an individual's reputation and institutional dignity.
- **Item 8 of the 1997 Restatement:** Directs that an Indian judge should avoid entering into public debates or expressing personal opinions on political issues or matters pending judicial determination, ensuring that the appearance of neutrality is maintained.
- **The Cardozo Standard (1921):** A widely cited legal principle stating that a judge's discretion must be informed by tradition, guided by analogy, disciplined by system, and subordinated to the primordial necessity of social order, rather than yielding to spontaneous sentiment.



Key Additional Points

- **The Purpose of Spontaneous Questioning:** Spontaneous dialogue can be highly productive; historically, probing bench questions have pushed counsel to sharpen vague legal terms into enduring civil rights principles during major constitutional cases.



- **Limitations of Post-Remark Clarifications:** When intemperate remarks occur, subsequent explanations often narrow the scope of the statement rather than addressing the breach of standard, leaving the problematic language on the record without a clear resolution.

Conclusion

The friction caused by unfiltered judicial remarks highlights the need for greater self-restraint in an era of live-streamed proceedings and immediate digital communication. While the *Vijayabhaskar* standard correctly insulates the formal written record from oral digressions, it does not completely shield the court from reputational harm. For the judiciary to retain public trust, judges must ensure that the spontaneous process of testing arguments does not cross into damaging rhetoric, upholding the institutional dignity required by their office.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity and Governance):** Structure, organization, and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary; Judicial conduct, accountability, and independence; Separation of powers between organs of the state; Effect of media and technology on institutional transparency.
- **GS Paper IV (Ethics and Integrity):** Professional ethics, code of conduct for high constitutional authorities, judicial rectitude, and the use of appropriate, dignified language in public office.

12. Ban on New Hydroelectric Projects in the Upper Ganga Basin: Government Submission to the Supreme Court

- **Unified Ministerial Consensus on Conservation:** In a common affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court, the Union Ministries of Environment, Jal Shakti, and Power presented a unified, restrictive policy stance, declaring that no new hydroelectric projects will be permitted in the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi river basins in the upper reaches of the Ganga in Uttarakhand.
- **Exemption for Seven Legacy Projects:** The policy restriction excludes seven specific projects that are either already commissioned or substantially built (ranging between 74% and 80% completion), which represent a collective power generation capacity of over 2,150 MW and substantial public and private capital investment.
- **Rejection of Intermediate Committee Recommendations:** The Central Government hardened its stance by declining to clear even a trimmed list of five projects—including Bowala Nandprayag and Devsari—which had been shortlisted for clearance by a high-level committee chaired by Cabinet Secretary T.V. Somanathan in late 2024.
- **Compounding Ecological and Seismic Vulnerabilities:** The Centre's policy shift is driven by the recognized cumulative impact of "bumper-to-bumper" dam construction, extreme seismic fragility of the young fold mountains, and recurring extreme weather events, including the 2013 Kedarnath tragedy and the Dharali flash floods of August 2025.
- **Resolution of Decadal Expert Body Disagreements:** The absolute ban effectively resolves a ten-year administrative conflict between multiple expert panels, moving away from the permissive, development-oriented view of Expert Body-II (Das Committee) to align with the ecologically defensive warnings of Expert Body-I (Ravi Chopra Committee).





Key Definitions

- **Upper Ganga Basin:** The initial catchments and geographic reaches of the Ganga River system located within the high-altitude zones of Uttarakhand, primarily fed by the Alaknanda, Bhagirathi, Mandakini, and Dhauliganga river subsystems.
- **Bumper-to-Bumper Dams:** An engineering approach where multiple hydroelectric projects are built in close succession along a river, where the tailrace waters of an upstream dam flow directly into the reservoir of the downstream dam, leaving minimal natural, uninterrupted river flow.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** The foundational statutory framework under which the Central Government regulates developmental projects in ecologically fragile regions and notifies Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) to restrict industrial operations.
- **Article 48A (Directive Principles of State Policy):** Directs that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country, providing the constitutional basis for restrictive eco-policies.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** Places a constitutional obligation on every citizen of India, including administrative authorities, to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.

Key Additional Points

- **The Sunk Cost Rationale:** The seven exempted projects, including the 1,000 MW Tehri pumped-storage plant and the 520 MW Tapovan Vishnugad plant, were allowed to continue because they have already absorbed significant capital, do not fall within the Bhagirathi Eco-Sensitive Zone, and were not flagged by initial regulatory bodies.
- **The Role of Judicial Oversight:** The current affidavit is the direct result of a continuous legal pipeline triggered by the Supreme Court's 2013 post-disaster directives, which ordered the executive to examine how unchecked hydel development amplified natural flash floods.

Conclusion

The Union Government's joint affidavit marks a significant shift toward ecological prioritisation over unmitigated energy infrastructure expansion in the fragile Himalayan ecosystem. By enforcing a complete ban on new hydel projects in the upper Ganga basin, the state acknowledges the limits of carrying capacity in a seismically active terrain prone to cloudbursts and glacial lake outbursts. While safeguarding the seven near-complete projects protects state and private capital from becoming stranded assets, the permanent freeze on future dam licenses establishes a vital precedent for sustainable, disaster-resilient mountain governance.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Environment and Disaster Management):** Conservation, environmental degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); Disaster and disaster management, specifically flash floods, landslides, and cloudbursts in mountainous terrains.
- **GS Paper II (Polity and Governance):** Separation of powers between the Judiciary and the Executive; Policy formulation and implementation challenges arising out of inter-ministerial coordination and expert committee recommendations.