

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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The discovery of new botanical species regularly highlights the profound ecological richness and unexplored biodiversity hotspots remaining in India. Recently, researchers from the Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) identified a new plant species, *Begonia rajvikramanii*, from the evergreen forests of Rosemala in the Kollam district of Kerala. This finding adds significant value to the floral taxonomy of the Western Ghats, a globally recognized biodiversity hotspot.

Keralam researchers discover new *Begonia* species on cliffs

The Hindu Bureau

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Researchers have identified a new species of the genus *Begonia* from the Western Ghats region in Kollam district of Kerala.

A research team of the Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) in Thiruvananthapuram spotted the plant during an exploration for collecting wild ornamental plants from the evergreen forests of Rosemala in Kollam.

The discovery has been reported at a time when the ghats region is back in the news in connection with the State government's recommendations regarding Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA).



Begonia rajvikramanii

They named the species *Begonia rajvikramanii* after R. Raj Vikraman, former Head of the Garden Management Division, JNTBGRI, in recognition of his contributions to the development of the JNTBGRI

garden and the management of ex-situ plant conservation programmes at the institute.

A paper on the discovery and the plant's identification as a new species by E.S. Santhosh Kumar, S.M. Shareef, P.P. Anusha and Rejitha Joseph of JNTBGRI has been published in the latest issue of *Phytotaxa*.

The plant was found growing on wet rocky cliffs. "This new species is currently known only from its type locality at Rosemala. It grows in wet habitats, particularly on rocky cliffs and road-cut walls, at elevations of approximately 200 metres-350 metres," the paper said.

Its flowering and fruiting occurs between August and April.

Key Analytical Dimensions

- **Taxonomic Significance:** The newly discovered species belongs to the genus *Begonia* and has been formally published in the international taxonomic journal *Phytotaxa*. It was identified by a research team comprising E.S. Santhosh Kumar, S.M. Shareef, P.P. Anusha, and Rejitha Joseph.
- **Habitat and Distribution:** *Begonia rajvikramanii* is currently endemic to its type locality at Rosemala. It thrives in wet, specialized microclimates, specifically growing on wet rocky cliffs and road-cut walls at elevations ranging between 200 and 350 meters, with its flowering and fruiting cycle spanning August to April.
- **Conservation and Naming Tribute:** The plant is named in honor of R. Raj Vikraman, former Head of the Garden Management Division at JNTBGRI, recognizing his dedicated contributions to ex-situ plant conservation and garden development.
- **Policy Context:** The discovery comes at a crucial juncture when the Western Ghats are heavily debated regarding policy measures, land use, and the state government's recommendations on Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA), emphasizing the urgent need to protect fragile habitats from unmonitored anthropogenic pressures.

Related Static Dimension (UPSC Syllabus Connect)

- **Environment and Ecology (GS Paper III):** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment, and biodiversity richness.
- **Geography (GS Paper I):** Physical geography of India, unique ecosystems of the Western Ghats, endemic species, and wet evergreen forest distributions.

Conclusion

The documentation of *Begonia rajvikramanii* underscores the critical importance of continuous taxonomical explorations and intensive field research in protected areas. As pressures on the Western Ghats mount due to infrastructure projects and developmental debates, integrating rigorous ecological insights into regional planning is vital to ensure that vulnerable, localized flora survive for posterity.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: With reference to *Begonia rajvikramanii*, consider the following statements:

1. It has been reported from the Western Ghats of Kerala.
2. It is currently known to be endemic to its type locality.
3. It is primarily found in dry deciduous forests.
4. It grows on wet rocky cliffs and road-cut walls.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: The Western Ghats are characterized by high ecological heterogeneity and species endemism. Explain how variations in altitude, rainfall and microhabitats contribute to this biodiversity. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

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The upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31), scheduled to be held in Antalya, Türkiye, brings a unique co-presidency arrangement between Australia and Türkiye. Both nations are heavy consumers and major exporters of fossil fuels, creating a complex backdrop for international climate negotiations. As extreme weather events intensify globally, pressure is mounting on the joint presidencies to embed definitive fossil-fuel transition roadmaps and actionable climate finance into the core agenda.

COP31 hosts Australia and Türkiye face the fossil-fuel question

There is likely to be pressure on the COP31 presidencies to include fossil fuel language as part of the agenda. The catastrophic floods in Nepal on August 26 and the damage they wrought are also set to add momentum to both mitigation action, including the language surrounding fossil fuels at COP31

Rishika Pardikar
TRABZON, TÜRKİYE

The next United Nations climate change conference, COP31, will be held in Antalya in Türkiye in November this year. Türkiye will be hosting the event, with its Minister of Environment Murat Kurum serving as COP31 President. Australia will oversee the negotiations process, with its Minister for Climate Change and Energy Chris Bowen as the Vice-President of COP31.

This is a novel arrangement – a result of both Australia and Türkiye not being willing to concede their demand to host, and where both countries share crucial responsibilities. In previous editions, the COP's physical host has differed from the President only for logistical reasons.

A pre-COP event will be held in Fiji on October 5-8, where Pacific Island countries and Australia will discuss preparations for the main event, including what to negotiate. These pre-COPs are a routine affair before the annual summits.

Domestic fossil reliance

Both Türkiye and Australia are heavy users of fossil fuels. Australia is the world's third-largest fossil fuels exporter, after Russia and the U.S. Domestically, Australia as well as Türkiye rely on coal, gas, and oil to generate respectively around 90% and 80% of their energy needs. Three weeks ago, Australia also came under fire from climate groups for approving the expansion of a coal mine.

The primary goal at COP31 is a target to electrify industry and vehicles and in turn "to raise the share of final energy demand met by electricity from just over 20% today to 35% by 2035".

'Oceans and Seas' are also a priority agenda: Türkiye hosted a 'Blue Dialogue' on September 10-11 whose focus was on protecting marine resources.

However, none of the themes listed as a priority for the event make direct reference to transitioning away from fossil fuels.

That said, various industries in Australia, including iron-ore mining, are trying to decarbonise by investing in hybrid or electric heavy machinery. Local governments are also pushing for electric vehicles (EVs), which recently overtook petrol car sales for the first time in Australia.

Türkiye, on the other hand, is working to augment recycling and so eventually reduce methane emissions. In fact, the country has listed "zero waste and a circular economy" on the COP31 priority list. The fortunes of a local EV brand,



An oil rig is visible in the distance near Cape Town harbour. ALPHA PERSPECTIVE/UNSPASH

Togg, has ballooned so much that the government hopes it will herald a new era in the automobiles market.

Loss and damage financing

At the COP30 in Belém, Brazil, last year, the European Union pushed for a "fossil fuel roadmap" to help countries worldwide transition away from fossil fuels. While many countries supported the call, observers have said it took the focus away from developing countries' calls to triple adaptation finance and developed countries' resistance to that.

That said, most countries involved in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) did not oppose the call for the "fossil fuel road map" at COP30.

India did not oppose either, on the condition that it incorporate the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and that countries are not expected to follow uniform energy transition pathways. Beyond the UNFCCC framework as well, and partly because of the slow pace of negotiations at the COP summits, there have been calls for concrete action to transition away from fossil fuels. In April this year, the first conference on "Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels" was held in Santa Marta in Colombia, co-hosted by Colombia and the Netherlands.

The second conference is scheduled

for 2027, to be co-hosted by Tuvalu and Ireland.

Given such momentum, there is likely to be pressure on the COP31 Presidencies to include fossil fuel language as part of the agenda. The catastrophic floods in Nepal on August 26, boosted no doubt by climate change, and the damage they wrought are also set to add momentum to both mitigation action, including the language surrounding fossil fuels at COP31, and to loss and damage financing. But as with their not mentioning the transition away from fossil fuels, the joint Australia-Türkiye presidencies have also included no loss and damage financing, or even the broader climate finance question, among the priority topics.

"We know there are strong views on all sides of this topic," the Türkiye Presidency said in response to questions from the author about whether this will change. "We will create space for Parties to discuss the transition and listen carefully to the positions they bring forward to see what we can agree by consensus. But listening to Parties' views on negotiations does not mean we are standing still. We are taking the next logical steps in the energy transition by making electrification the flagship thematic priority of the COP31 Presidency's Action Agenda, because electrifying buildings, transport and industry is key to reducing emissions and

should be accompanied by complementary efforts to expand renewable energy.

Likewise, the reply said on mitigation financing: "we have been clear that we need to close the climate finance chasm, and we are holding donors to the financial commitments made at past COPs, while also introducing innovative new mechanisms, such as the 'Climate Implementation Bridge', to address the gap between ambitious climate plans and the finance needed to make them a reality."

The Australian Presidency did not respond.

Countries participating at COPs can propose new agenda items for consideration during negotiations. For example, the European Union introduced the "road map" in the formal negotiations agenda at the last minute at COP30. That said, it remains to be seen whether countries will do so at COP31, and if so what the items will be – and ultimately how the event's two fossil fuel-heavy stewards will navigate negotiations.

The author was in Türkiye September 8-13 at the invitation of the government for a COP31-themed media tour. She also visited Australia in October 2025 on a similar official tour.

(Rishika Pardikar is a freelance journalist. rishika.s.pardikar@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Australia and Türkiye are heavy users of fossil fuels; both countries rely on coal, gas, and oil to generate respectively around 90% and 80% of their domestic energy needs; Australia is the world's third-largest fossil fuels exporter

The primary goal at COP31 is a target to electrify industry and vehicles and in turn 'to raise the share of final energy demand met by electricity from just over 20% today to 35% by 2035'; 'Oceans and Seas' are also a priority agenda

At COP30, the EU advocated a global 'fossil fuel roadmap' to guide the transition away from fossil fuels; critics said it diverted attention from developing nations' demand for tripling adaptation finance

Key Analytical Dimensions

- **Novel Governance Structure:** For the first time, a COP summit features split responsibilities, where Türkiye serves as the physical host and President (focusing on the action agenda, circular economy, and zero waste), while Australia oversees the official negotiations process as Vice-President.
- **Domestic Energy Reliance vs. Global Targets:** Both co-hosts heavily rely on fossil fuels for domestic energy (Türkiye and Australia rely on coal, gas, and oil for roughly 80% and 90% of their needs, respectively). Australia is also one of the world's leading fossil fuel exporters. Consequently, their primary highlighted mitigation goal centers on industrial and vehicular electrification—targeting an increase in final energy demand met by electricity to 35% by 2035—rather than an explicit phase-out text.
- **Exclusion of Contentious Issues:** Current priority themes set by the COP31 leadership omit explicit references to transitioning away from fossil fuels, loss and damage financing, or broader adaptation finance. This has drawn scrutiny from climate vulnerable nations and civil society groups.
- **External Pressures and Catalysts:** Recent climate-induced catastrophes, such as severe flooding in Nepal, alongside broader international dialogues (like Colombia-Netherlands co-hosted conferences on moving away from fossil fuels), are driving intense stakeholder pressure to introduce stringent mitigation language from the floor during negotiations.

Related Static Dimension (UPSC Syllabus Connect)

- **Environment and Ecology (GS Paper III):** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, climate change treaties, international conventions, and institutional frameworks (UNFCCC, COP summits).
- **International Relations (GS Paper II):** Important international institutions, agencies, and fora—their structure, mandate, and the politics of global climate negotiations, including the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR).

Conclusion

The success of COP31 will ultimately depend on how effectively its heavy-fossil-fuel stewards navigate conflicting domestic interests and global demands for equity. While initiatives centered on electrification and zero waste provide pragmatic steps toward emission reduction, failing to address core financial gaps and clear fossil-fuel phase-out timelines risks deepening the trust deficit between developed economies and climate-vulnerable developing nations.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: With reference to COP31, consider the following statements:

1. COP31 is associated with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
2. The conference is scheduled to be held in Antalya, Türkiye.
3. The COP process primarily deals with international cooperation on climate change.
4. Decisions adopted at COPs automatically become legally binding domestic laws in every participating country.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: Climate negotiations increasingly involve a tension between domestic energy interests and global decarbonisation objectives. Discuss with reference to fossil-fuel-dependent economies. **Marks, 150 Words)**

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The United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the **Declaration on Sea Level Rise** by consensus marks a historic milestone in international climate governance. With global mean sea levels rising at an accelerating rate of 4 to 5 mm per year, low-lying island nations face an unprecedented existential threat. This four-page political pact provides critical legal safeguards, ensuring that nations losing physical territory to the ocean do not lose their international legal identity, maritime zones, or citizens' rights.

Key Analytical Dimensions

- **Preservation of Statehood and Sovereignty:**

The most significant provision affirms a "presumption in favor of continued statehood" for severely threatened nations like Fiji, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Even if rising waters completely submerge their habitable land, these countries will retain their sovereign rights, institutional existence, and United Nations membership.

- **Stability of Maritime Zones:** Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a nation's maritime boundaries (such as Exclusive Economic Zones) are measured from its coastline.

The Declaration guarantees that these maritime zones will remain defined as originally established, preventing retreating coastlines from shrinking a nation's valuable ocean and resource rights.

- **Framework for Structured Action:** The pact organizes international cooperation across four key pillars: (i) science and data collection, (ii) adaptation and financing, (iii) socio-economic development, livelihoods, and early-warning systems, and (iv) addressing the complex legal consequences of sea-level rise.

- **People-Centred and Cultural Protections:** Beyond legal technicalities, the Declaration explicitly mandates that responses to rising seas must protect cultural heritage, incorporate community involvement, and safeguard the nationality and economic rights of displaced populations.

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WHAT IS IT?

UN Sea Level Declaration

Vasudevan Mukunth

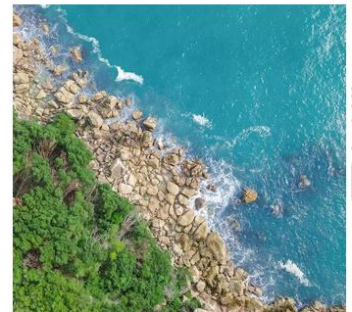
On September 24, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Declaration on Sea Level Rise by consensus.

Perhaps its most important provision concerns international law. The Declaration affirms that low-lying countries especially threatened by rising seas, such as Fiji, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, will continue to retain their statehood, sovereign rights, and UN membership. It also says maritime zones will continue to be defined in line with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, even if rising waters cause coastlines to retreat further inland.

The Declaration arose from a high-level meeting in 2024 and which member countries had since negotiated under a mandate calling for an action-oriented agreement. Spanning four pages, the Declaration organises action around (i) science and data, (ii) adaptation and financing, (iii) livelihoods, socio-economic development, data-sharing, and early-warnings, and (iv) the legal consequences of sea-level rise.

It also calls on countries to respond to sea-level rise in a way that addresses livelihoods and cultural heritage and with the involvement of affected communities.

The world's low-lying island states — which have organised themselves as the Alliance of Small Island States in international fora, including the COP



The current global mean sea-level rise is 4-5 mm/year. LOOK UP LOOK DOWN

PHOTOGRAPHY/UNSPLASH

climate talks — need these assurances because the seas surrounding them threaten to swallow most or all of their habitable territory in the coming decades. If they do, the Declaration will ensure their citizens continue to retain their nationality and economic rights.

The pact also commits UN member countries to continue to engage on issues related to sea-level rise, including a high-level meeting before the 84th session of the General Assembly ends.

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Related Static Dimension (UPSC Syllabus Connect)

- **Environment and Ecology (GS Paper III):** Conservation, environmental degradation, impact of climate change on vulnerable ecosystems, and international climate agreements.
- **International Relations (GS Paper II):** Important international institutions, agencies, and fora—their mandate and role in shaping global legal frameworks (UNCLOS, UNGA resolutions).

Conclusion

While the UN Declaration on Sea Level Rise successfully resolves the legal vacuum surrounding the status of "drowning states," it remains a political commitment rather than a legally binding treaty. Moving forward, the international community must bridge the vast adaptation finance gap and convert these critical legal protections into binding instruments and tangible financial support, ensuring that vulnerable island nations are protected both in law and in reality.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: With reference to the implications of sea-level rise for island states, consider the following statements:

1. Loss of habitable territory does not necessarily imply automatic extinction of a state's international legal personality.
2. Sea-level rise can create questions regarding the continuity of maritime entitlements.
3. Climate-induced displacement can raise questions concerning nationality and protection of affected populations.
4. A state's membership of the United Nations automatically ceases if its territory becomes uninhabitable.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Sea-level rise is no longer merely an environmental concern; it is increasingly a question of sovereignty, statehood and international law. Discuss. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

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The recent internal friction within the Election Commission of India (ECI), where two Election Commissioners recorded multiple formal objections against decisions by the Chief Election Commissioner, has exposed deep administrative fractures. Centered primarily on the sweeping execution of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), the controversy highlights systemic vulnerabilities in institutional autonomy, democratic transparency, and the procedural integrity of India's electoral machinery.

Key Analytical Dimensions

- **Internal Dissent and Administrative Centralization:** Disclosures revealed that Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi raised numerous formal objections regarding unilateral decision-making, unauthorized changes to voter registration forms, and the secretive centralisation of the electoral database through IT platforms, which bypassed statutory decentralised safeguards.
- **Flaws in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR):** The nationwide implementation of the SIR has resulted in the deletion of over 13 crore names from draft rolls. Critics and internal dissenters note that the exercise unfairly shifts the burden of proof onto the voter, disenfranchising genuine electors and causing immense administrative chaos across multiple states.
- **Judicial Retrospect and Accountability:** The judiciary's initial reluctance to halt the mass revision allowed sweeping deletions to become irreversible facts on the ground. Subsequent tribunal restorations of wrongfully deleted voters and software-induced exclusions underscore the severe real-world fallout of unreasoned mass purges.
- **Superficial Damage Control:** The ECI's subsequent press notes and administrative concessions—such as scheduling agenda circulations or minor special enrollment drives—fail to address core accountability questions, including who authorized mass appeals against judicial inclusion or oversaw systemic exclusions.

Related Static Dimension (UPSC Syllabus Connect)

- **Polity and Governance (GS Paper II):** Appointment and statutory framework of Constitutional Bodies (Election Commission of India);

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In need of an overhaul

ECI's response is mere damage control, the SIR's ill-effects must be undone

The Election Commission of India's (ECI) press note on Saturday, following revelations that Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi had recorded 14 objections to decisions under Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, reads like damage control to manage perceptions. It concedes their complaints, but only administrative ones. Agenda will be circulated before meetings, and the minutes afterwards, while officers' foreign trips will require the ECI's approval. It also implicitly admits the flawed implementation of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are to launch a "special drive" to enrol anyone "whose name has got left out". But there is no remorse for an exercise that struck lakhs of genuine electors off the rolls in West Bengal and has marauded from State to State. Those deleted are simply asked to reapply as though they were new applicants. There is no answer to Mr. Sandhu's question on who authorised 16.1 lakh appeals to remove voters whom judicial officers had included in West Bengal.

India's institutions have largely held, except in dark periods such as the Emergency, when an executive emboldened by legislative strength ran roughshod over the Constitution and a shamelessly permissive judiciary let it do so via *ADM Jabalpur*. The ECI under Mr. Kumar has overseen the removal of more than 13 crore names from draft rolls through the SIR which, as this daily has repeatedly argued, shifts the onus of enrolment from the state to the elector, deletes names before it verifies and imposes onerous conditions for re-entry. It got away with this because the Supreme Court declined for months to decide whether the exercise was constitutional. When it finally ruled on May 27, the SIR was already a settled fact in Bihar, West Bengal and other Phase 2 States. The judgment, reminiscent of *ADM Jabalpur*'s deference to the state, engaged the SIR in theory and not in practice. It read a provision for exceptional, targeted revisions as a licence for a State-wide sweep. While it assured voters already on the rolls that they were still presumed eligible, the SIR made them prove it all over again. And it brushed aside its 1995 ruling that every removal must be individually reasoned. Events since then indicate the damage done – over nine in 10 appeals decided by West Bengal's tribunals have restored deleted voters months after the Assembly polls; and in one third of Delhi's seats, the draft rolls have fewer electors than those who voted in 2025. The ECI's press note changes very little. The ECI must be reconstituted by a selection committee that does not give the government an overriding majority. Anything less would be a travesty of institutional democracy.

Daily News Analysis

separation of powers, checks and balances; accountability and transparency in public institutions.

- **Representation of People Act:** Provisions relating to electoral registration, deletion, maintenance of electoral rolls, and the statutory obligations of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs).

Conclusion

The growing trust deficit surrounding the ECI threatens the foundational credibility of Indian democracy. To restore public confidence and protect constitutional sanctity, structural reforms are imperative—starting with a truly independent selection committee for the ECI that ensures structural balance and prevents executive overreach in institutional appointments.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: "The credibility of an electoral process depends not only on the conduct of polling but also on the integrity of electoral rolls." Discuss. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Recent high-profile incidents of sexual violence in public spaces have reignited public outrage and brought the safety of women back to the forefront of national discourse. While successive legislative amendments since 2012 have introduced stringent penalties and mandated strict investigation timelines, data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reveals a deeply troubling reality: a massive backlog in the criminal justice system, protracted trials, and persistently low conviction rates within the same year.

Long wait for justice as pendencies in rape cases mount

Rape cases have remained steady since 2018, but pendency has grown, with less than 2% ending in conviction in the same year as the trial

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

The gang-rape of a 17-year-old girl on September 21 by three men who posed as police personnel at Astha Kunj Park near Kalkaji Mandir in South-east Delhi and social media videos from Bihar's Janui and Samastipur showing harassment of girls, have once again raised concerns about women's safety in public spaces and the need for prompt and stringent preventive and punitive measures.

Legislative changes over the years, especially since the 2012 Nirbhaya rape case in Delhi, have introduced tougher punishments and set timelines for disposal of rape cases.

However, an analysis of rape cases from the reports of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows that the country still has a long way to go in ensuring justice in a time-bound manner. (This analysis does not include rape cases filed under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, which are reported separately by the NCRB).

The country's conviction rate of less than 30% of rape cases is already low, and analysis showed that even for those cases that result in conviction, the wait is usually long.

Chart 1 shows the number of cases of rape registered every year since 2018. This translates to an average of 84 cases per day and nearly three cases per hour.

Further data show that roughly 2% of the cases that were sent to trial ended in conviction within the same year.

This is quite low even if one were to assume that the cases that went to trial towards the end of the year could spill over to the subsequent year despite following legal mandated deadlines.

Though the number of new cases has fairly remained the same,

the pendency in the courts has consistently grown over the years, as shown in **Chart 2**.

Chart 3 illustrates how only a small fraction of cases entering the system result in conviction after trial within the same year. The chart shows data for 2024, the latest year for which the NCRB has released the data.

Nearly 40,000 cases were taken up for investigation in 2024, which included the 29,536 rape cases reported that year. The rest were predominantly cases pending from the previous year and a handful of cases that were reopened.

Of these cases in the investigation pool, about 25,000 (63%) were chargesheeted, while the rest ended up in the categories of pending police investigation, transfer of the case to another investigative agency, or disposal by the police if they found that the investigation did not warrant further proceedings.

Trial backlog

When the chargesheeted cases went to trial, they added to the lakhs of cases that were already in the trial backlog, bringing the total rape cases in the trial pool to 2,06,777 cases. Nearly 90% of these remained pending at the end of the year.

Of the rest of the 20,587 cases disposed of by the judiciary, nearly 68% were acquittals, 8% were discharged, and the remaining 24% ended up in convictions.

Only 421 of those cases resulted in convictions – which is just 2% of those taken up for trial that year and less than 1.5% of the total rape cases filed that year.

A look at the previous years also revealed similar patterns.

In 2023, only 2.3% of cases that went to trial ended up in conviction, while these figures for 2022 and 2021 respectively were 1.9% and 1.2%, which emphasise the need for additional measures beyond the legislative amendments to ensure time-bound delivery of justice.

Elusive justice

The data for the charts were sourced from National Crime Records Bureau's annual Crime In India reports



Demanding safety: A college student holds a placard during a solidarity march demanding police action and better safety for women following the alleged gang-rape of a girl, in New Delhi, on September 23. REUTERS

CHART 1: Nearly 30,000 cases of rape were reported in India since 2018, averaging to around 80 rape cases a day

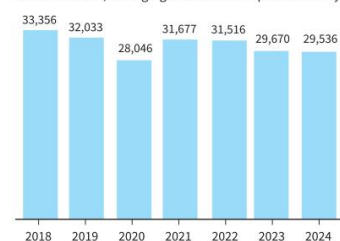


CHART 2: Status of rape cases that went to trial at the end of each year. Values above bars are cases pending trial

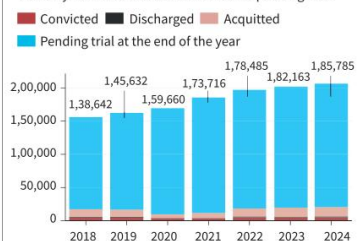
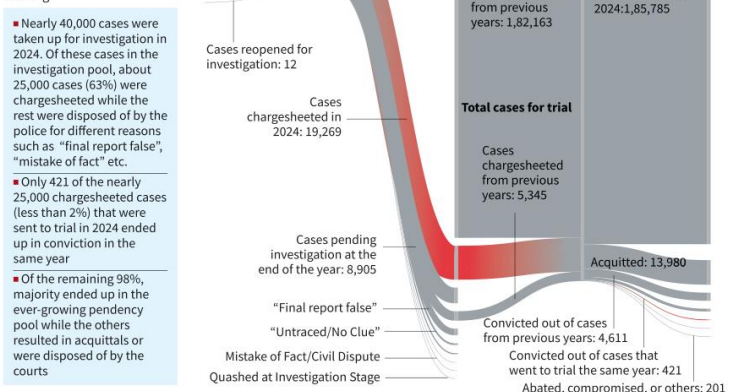


CHART 3: This shows how rape cases investigated in 2024 moved from the police to the judiciary, with many adding to the pendency backlog



Key Analytical Dimensions

- **Persistent Inflow of Cases:** National data demonstrates that the registration of rape cases has remained relatively steady since 2018, averaging roughly 84 cases per day. This high volume underscores a pervasive systemic challenge regarding public safety and the social climate for women.
- **The Investigation Pipeline:** While police investigation pools show high chargesheeting rates (averaging over 80%), thousands of cases remain tied up in investigative delays or administrative transfers before ever reaching a court.
- **Mounting Trial Backlog:** The primary bottleneck exists within the judiciary. Out of hundreds of thousands of cases active in the trial pool annually, nearly 90% remain pending at the end of each year. Less than 2% of cases that enter trial successfully conclude with a conviction within the same calendar year, illustrating how legal timelines are routinely breached.
- **Structural Limitations of Fast-Track Mechanisms:** Despite the establishment of Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs), chronic shortages of judicial personnel, infrastructural deficits, frequent adjournments, and complex evidentiary procedures prevent swift justice delivery, leading to delayed accountability and extended trauma for victims.

Related Static Dimension (UPSC Syllabus Connect)

- **Governance and Social Justice (GS Paper II):** Mechanisms, laws, institutions, and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections (women); issues arising out of the design and implementation of policies.
- **Indian Judiciary and Criminal Justice System (GS Paper II):** Structure, organization, and functioning of the judiciary; criminal law reforms (Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita - BNSS), issues of judicial pendency, case backlog, and speedy justice.

Conclusion

Stringent penal laws alone are insufficient to deter crimes against women if the criminal justice machinery remains bogged down by monumental backlogs and delayed trials. Ensuring swift punitive action requires a multi-pronged overhaul—strengthening forensic infrastructure, expanding judicial capacity, and ensuring strict adherence to mandated investigation and trial timelines so that justice delayed does not translate to justice denied.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question "The effectiveness of criminal law depends as much on the capacity of justice-delivery institutions as on the severity of punishment." Discuss with reference to crimes against women. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

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Recent revelations regarding internal friction within the Election Commission of India (ECI) over centralized software architectures, alleged unilateral rule changes, and voter deletions have reignited a critical constitutional debate. Beyond administrative disputes, these events highlight the vulnerability of the citizen's franchise, prompting renewed calls to elevate the 'right to vote' from a statutory guarantee under the Representation of the People Act to an inviolable fundamental right under the Constitution.

Should voting be a fundamental right?

A recent *Indian Express* report revealed an unprecedented rift within the EC over alleged unilateral changes to rules, voter additions/deletions, and centralised data access, prompting a re-examination of the argument that the 'right to vote' ought to be elevated from a statutory guarantee to a fundamental one

LETTER & SPIRIT

Kartik Singh

In September 23, an *Indian Express* investigation revealed an unprecedented rift within the three-member Election Commission of India (EC), with Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi recording 14 objections over 10 months against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, regarding alleged unilateral changes to rules, voter additions/deletions, and centralised data access, without the Commission's full approval.

The report also found that 97 eligible voters from Goa were excluded from the electoral roll after the centralised ECINet software prevented ground-level Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) from reversing decisions. More concerning, the consequences extend beyond the loss of voting rights. Reportedly, several State schemes use electoral rolls to establish eligibility, including the Goa Mediclaim Scheme. The scheme covers super-specialty treatments unavailable in government hospitals, such as dialysis, angioplasty, open heart surgery, transplants, chemotherapy and cochlear implants, and is available only to State voters. This issue has once again cast a spotlight on the 'right to vote', the foundational processes of India's electoral machinery, and the genesis of India's 'universal adult suffrage' (UAS).

What shaped adult suffrage in India? India's constitutional promise of the 'right to vote' differs significantly from that of many Western democracies. Reflecting the flawed belief, espoused by thinkers like J.S. Mill, that voting should be reserved for the 'enlightened', countries like the U.K. initially restricted the franchise to male property owners. Universal male suffrage emerged only in 1918, and women were granted the 'right to vote' a decade later in 1928. In the U.S., although the 15th and 19th Amendments extended voting rights to African Americans (1870) and women (1920), systemic barriers such as poll taxes and literacy tests continued to disenfranchise many for decades thereafter.

In sharp contrast, India's choice of immediate, universal inclusion ensured 'democratic equality' from the outset, bypassing the prolonged and often violent struggles seen elsewhere. Article 326 of the Constitution granted every adult citizen the 'right to vote', regardless of gender, caste, religion, education, or property. This commitment to a robust, inclusive democracy found further constitutional reinforcement in a series of Supreme Court judgments, notably starting with *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973), which established democracy as part of the 'basic structure' doctrine. For this ideal to function meaningfully, people should be able to freely decide the fate of their government.

This inclusive vision was operationalised through two key laws: the Representation of the People Act, 1950, which governs the preparation and revision of electoral rolls; and the 1951 Act, which regulates election conduct, candidature, and electoral offences. The EC has repeatedly introduced administrative innovations to realise this 'constitutional promise'.

Notably, then Chief Election Commissioner Sukumar Sen, faced with the task of enrolling 173 million largely illiterate voters, turned a logistical hurdle into a democratic breakthrough by



Enabling democracy: Courts have regarded the right to vote as an inseparable part of democracy, as it enables citizens to shape governance. R. ASHOK

introducing election symbols, making UAS practically accessible. In India, the EC has the responsibility to reach the last citizen, wherever they may be, to actualise their 'right to elect'.

What is the legal status of right to vote? The legal status of the 'right to vote' in India has long been debated, and whether it is classified as a statutory, constitutional, or fundamental right determines how easily it can be changed, how it is enforced, and the level of legal protection it receives. Although Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and K.T. Shah proposed including it in the Constitution's fundamental rights part, the Constituent Assembly's Advisory Committee ultimately rejected the idea. Importantly, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India* (2006) held that the 'right to elect' is a statutory right under Section 62 of the RPA, 1951, and not a fundamental or constitutional right.

Though a two-judge Bench in *Rajbala v. State of Haryana* described the 'right to vote' as a constitutional right in 2015, the larger bench ruling in *Kuldip Nayar* prevails. Again, in *Anoop Barman v. Union of India* (2023), the top court declined to pronounce on the issue, noting that it had already been settled by the five-judge Bench in the *Kuldip Nayar* judgment. However, in his dissent, Justice Ajay Rastogi asserted that the 'right to vote' is an expression of Article 19(a) and reflects the essence of Article 21. Yet, as this view remains a minority opinion, the 'right to elect' continues to be recognised as a statutory right.

Nevertheless, even though it is not a fundamental right, courts have regarded the 'right to vote' as an inseparable part of democracy, anchoring their reasoning in the idea that it enables citizens to shape governance, making it a 'democratic imperative' vital to the Indian republic's survival.

Why do we need accurate poll rolls?

Free and fair elections rest on accurate electoral rolls under the RPA, 1950.

Inaccuracies – such as mass omissions, ineligible inclusions, duplicates, or incorrect entries – undermine the 'one person, one vote' principle by enabling impersonation, disenfranchisement, or

dilution of votes, ultimately distorting the people's mandate. Therefore, the EC is empowered under Section 21 of the 1950 Act to prepare and revise these rolls to ensure integrity. The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 lays down how the EC must transact its business. Section 17 requires the Commission's business to be conducted in accordance with the Act, while Section 18 provides that its procedure and allocation of business may be regulated by unanimous decision. It further requires business to be transacted as far as possible unanimously, but where the CEC and other Commissioners differ, the matter is decided by majority.

Deriving its authority from Article 324, the EC serves as the constitutional guardian of elections, with powers of superintendence, direction, and control. A key duty is preparing accurate electoral rolls, guided by Section 19 of the RPA, 1950, which mandates that any citizen aged 18 or above, 'ordinarily resident' in a constituency and not disqualified, is entitled to be registered. 'Ordinary resident' implies a genuine, continuous presence, not a temporary stay. While discrepancies may arise, courts have consistently held that only substantial and systemic errors that demonstrably 'materially affected' the election outcome can compromise the sanctity of the electoral roll. Minor mistakes or isolated disenfranchisement are insufficient.

Yet the recent Goa episode complicates this comfortable 'substantial versus isolated' binary that courts have relied on. The *Indian Express* report revealed that 97 eligible voters were dropped from the rolls, not through electoral fraud but because the ECINet software architecture itself denied EROs the authority to reverse erroneous deletions. What makes the episode damning is not merely the exclusion, but the apparent unresponsiveness that followed. The EROs reportedly flagged the anomalies to the Commission by email, yet the corrections were not restored. This is not the isolated clerical error that courts have historically forgiven; it is a systemic failure baked into the software's design, compounded by administrative inertia.

While the right to inclusion or

THE GIST

India's choice of immediate, universal adult suffrage ensured democratic equality from the outset. Article 326 of the Constitution granted every adult citizen the 'right to vote'.

An *Indian Express* report revealed that 97 eligible voters from Goa were dropped from the rolls because the ECINet software denied EROs the authority to reverse erroneous deletions. This is not an isolated clerical error, but a systemic failure, compounded by administrative inertia.

If the body constitutionally tasked with safeguarding the voting rights can be riven by disputes over unilateral action, leaving the citizen's only recourse to the EC's internal correction mechanisms, or to a statutory right that the Parliament could dilute at will, is precarious.

What lies ahead?

The revelations against the EC lend fresh urgency to the argument that the 'right to vote' ought to be elevated from a statutory guarantee to a fundamental one. If the body constitutionally tasked with safeguarding the franchise can itself be riven by disputes over unilateral action, leaving the citizen's only recourse to the EC's internal correction mechanisms, or to a statutory right that the Parliament could dilute at will, is precarious.

Many scholars argue that the 'right to vote' cannot be regarded as merely a statutory right, as it flows from Article 326, and any legislation regulating it must conform to the parameters prescribed by Articles 325 and 326. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the legislature does not impose irrational or unreasonable restrictions on the 'right to vote', particularly since 'free and fair elections' and 'democracy' are basic features of the Constitution.

Justice Rastogi's dissent in *Anoop Barman*, over the legal status of the 'right to vote', offers doctrinal ground for a larger Bench to revisit the question that the majority in *Kuldip Nayar* considered settled.

Elevating the 'right to vote' to fundamental status would not diminish the EC's authority to purify rolls; it would instead subject that authority to the heightened standard of judicial review reserved for fundamental rights, ensuring that the drive to centralise electoral administration is always weighed against, rather than allowed to override, the citizen's claim to be counted. In a democracy where software now mediates the relationship between the voter and the ballot, the constitutional status of the 'right to vote' can no longer remain a matter of legislative grace. (Kartik Singh is a lawyer based in New Delhi.)

Key Analytical Dimensions

- Historical Evolution of Universal Adult Suffrage:** Unlike Western democracies—where the franchise was historically restricted by property, gender, or race and won through prolonged struggles—Independent India established immediate Universal Adult Suffrage via Article 326 of the Constitution, ensuring democratic equality from inception.
- Current Legal Status and Judicial Precedents:** Constitution Bench rulings, notably *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India* (2006), established that the right to vote is a statutory right under Section 62 of the RPA, 1951, rather than a fundamental right.

Daily News Analysis

Although courts treat it as an essential democratic imperative, its statutory nature leaves it susceptible to legislative modification.

- **Systemic Failures and Administrative Bottlenecks:** Recent controversies, such as automated software glitches preventing local Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) from reversing erroneous voter deletions, demonstrate that technical centralization can result in systemic disenfranchisement. Furthermore, the loss of voter registration often cuts access to vital state welfare schemes tied to electoral rolls.
- **The Case for Fundamental Status:** Elevating the right to vote to Part III of the Constitution would subject administrative roll purges and legislative restrictions to strict judicial review under fundamental rights, ensuring that technological or bureaucratic overreach cannot override a citizen's constitutional voice.

Related Static Dimension (UPSC Syllabus Connect)

- **Indian Constitution and Polity (GS Paper II):** Salient features of the Indian Constitution; comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with other countries; Representation of the People Act; role and statutory framework of constitutional bodies (ECI).
- **Fundamental Rights & Basic Structure Doctrine (GS Paper II):** Evolution, judicial interpretation, and the scope of fundamental rights and basic features of the Constitution.

Conclusion

As technology increasingly mediates the relationship between the citizen and the ballot, treating the franchise as a matter of legislative grace is increasingly untenable. Re-evaluating the legal standing of the right to vote through a larger constitutional bench would provide the ultimate judicial shield against administrative disenfranchisement, safeguarding the foundational integrity of Indian democracy.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question "Universal adult franchise was a foundational commitment of the Indian Constitution rather than a gradual expansion of political rights." Discuss. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

The paradox of de-Sinification in global production

SpaceX's reported efforts, in July 2026, to remove Chinese-made components from its supply chain capture a new phase in the restructuring of global production. The challenge is no longer simply where a product is assembled. It is increasingly about what lies several layers beneath the final manufacturer – and whether firms can identify, replace and verify suppliers embedded deep within complex production networks. Moving a factory may be relatively straightforward; removing an industrial ecosystem from the production process is not.

The other side of de-Sinification

Here lies a less noticed paradox. The ecosystem problem is not confined to foreign firms seeking to reduce their exposure to China. Chinese companies expanding overseas increasingly confront it from the opposite direction. While foreign firms struggle to disentangle themselves from Chinese suppliers and capabilities, Chinese firms must decide how much of the industrial ecosystem that supports their competitiveness at home can be carried abroad and how much must be recreated locally.

This difficulty is compounded by the fact that China's industrial ecosystem is not standing still. Even as foreign firms seek to reduce their dependence on China, China is building capabilities in areas where it has historically relied heavily on foreign technology. Memory-chip maker CXMT is illustrative. It has emerged as the world's fourth-largest producer of DRAM chips, although it continues to trail global leaders in advanced memory technologies and remains dependent on access to foreign chipmaking equipment. Attempts to reduce exposure to China are therefore taking place against a moving target: Chinese firms are simultaneously working to reduce their own external dependencies.

The reverse challenge becomes visible when Chinese manufacturers venture overseas. They too confront a form of de-Sinification, although from the opposite direction. Their internationalisation increasingly involves more than establishing final-assembly plants. The



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De-Sinification is reshaping factories, but industrial ecosystems remain harder to move

competitiveness of companies such as BYD and Xpeng rests partly on dense networks of component makers, engineering capabilities and production relationships developed within China. Moving a factory abroad therefore creates a choice: take existing suppliers along, cultivate new local suppliers, or combine the two. Each route carries different costs – and produces a different degree of genuine localisation.

The challenge beyond factories

BYD's expansion in Europe illustrates one response. As it builds manufacturing capacity in Hungary, the company is also developing relationships with European suppliers. Xpeng has chosen another route, contracting Canadian automotive supplier Magna to assemble its vehicles in Austria. The two approaches differ, but they expose the same underlying problem: producing outside China is easier than reproducing outside China, the ecosystem that made production in China efficient in the first place.

What makes these ecosystems difficult to unwind or reproduce is that they consist of more than identifiable suppliers. They embody accumulated relationships between firms, specialised skills, tooling and production knowledge, logistics networks, and the ability of suppliers to respond quickly when designs or production volumes change. Many of these advantages are built through repeated interaction rather than formal contracts. This is why replacing an individual Chinese supplier does not necessarily eliminate dependence on the wider Chinese production system – and why transplanting a Chinese factory abroad does not automatically transplant the capabilities surrounding it.

Seen from this perspective, de-Sinification has a less obvious, two-sided character. Foreign firms attempting to reduce their exposure to China confront the depth of China's integration into their production networks. Chinese firms going global confront the difficulty of reproducing abroad the ecosystem on which their competitiveness depends. One side is trying to

disentangle itself from an ecosystem; the other is trying to make that ecosystem portable. Both discover that changing the location of production is easier than changing the capabilities and relationships that sustain it.

What India needs to note, must build

This distinction matters particularly for India. The reorganisation of production is already creating openings. Japan's TDK has expanded its battery production in Haryana, deepening an Indian manufacturing base that it has been developing as part of its broader China-plus-one strategy. Murata Manufacturing, another Japanese electronic-component maker, is expanding its manufacturing presence in India. These investments show that India is beginning to receive parts of production ecosystems previously concentrated in China. But making the most of this opening requires more than attracting individual factories. India needs domestic suppliers capable of meeting demanding cost, quality and delivery standards, alongside reliable logistics, skilled workers and access to critical inputs. The test is whether new investments progressively deepen linkages with Indian firms and bring specialised capabilities and intermediate production into the domestic economy. The same principle should inform Chinese investment: its value should be judged partly by the capabilities and supplier networks it develops locally. India's opportunity is to convert the movement of factories into the gradual accumulation of an industrial ecosystem of its own.

The emerging geography of global production will therefore be shaped by more than decisions over where to locate factories. It will depend on whether the ecosystems behind those factories can be dismantled, transferred or rebuilt. De-Sinification may be visible in new factory locations and investment announcements, but its real test lies deeper within the production system. Factories can cross borders relatively quickly; industrial ecosystems, built through accumulated capabilities and relationships, are far less mobile.

GS Paper III: Indian Economy

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: "Factories can relocate faster than industrial ecosystems."
Explain the significance of this statement in the context of global supply-chain restructuring and India's manufacturing ambitions. **15Marks, 250 Words)**

Context

The global restructuring of production networks is moving beyond the simple relocation of final-assembly plants to a far more complex challenge: unravelling and rebuilding deep-seated industrial ecosystems. Recent moves by global firms—such as SpaceX removing Chinese components from its supply chain—illustrate that decoupling from China is constrained by the depth of embedded supplier networks. Concurrently, Chinese multinationals expanding abroad face a reverse challenge of reproducing their domestic ecosystem overseas, offering critical strategic lessons for India's manufacturing ambitions.

Key Analytical Dimensions

Aim, Think & Achieve

- **The Industrial Ecosystem Trap:** Global production depends on more than physical factories; it relies on accumulated relationships, specialised skills, tooling knowledge, and agile logistics networks built over decades. Consequently, replacing an individual supplier or moving a plant does not easily eliminate dependence on China's integrated industrial base.
- **The Two-Sided Nature of De-Sinification:** While Western firms struggle to disentangle themselves from Chinese capabilities, Chinese firms (such as automakers BYD and Xpeng) face the difficulty of carrying their competitive domestic supplier networks overseas. Their varying strategies—such as sourcing local European suppliers or utilizing contract manufacturers—reveal that producing outside China is far easier than reproducing China's operational efficiency.
- **China's Moving Target:** Decoupling efforts are complicated by China's simultaneous push to eliminate its own external vulnerabilities, as seen in domestic advancements in memory-chip manufacturing (e.g., CXMT) even amidst ongoing technological restrictions.
- **Implications for India's Manufacturing Strategy:** The China-plus-one strategy has brought vital investments to India (such as TDK and Murata expanding battery and component manufacturing in Haryana).

Daily News Analysis

However, true industrial upgrading requires India to go beyond attracting isolated assembly plants and focus on building deep domestic supplier networks, specialized skills, and intermediate production capabilities.

Related Static Dimension (UPSC Syllabus Connect)

- **Indian Economy (GS Paper III):** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; manufacturing sector growth, Make in India initiative, supply chain resilience, and integration into global value chains (GVCs).
- **International Relations / Global Trade (GS Paper II):** Global groupings, economic realignments, and the impact of great power technological competition on developing economies.

Conclusion

The evolving geography of global production proves that while factories can cross borders relatively quickly, industrial ecosystems are deeply immobile. For India, successfully capitalizing on de-Sinification and the China-plus-one pivot requires fostering a robust domestic manufacturing ecosystem rather than mere factory relocation, ensuring that foreign and domestic investments deeply integrate local supplier networks and technical capabilities.

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