

In India, voting cannot remain merely a statutory right

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

1. Why is the Right to Vote Not Considered a Fundamental Right?

- The Supreme Court **has consistently held that the right to vote is a statutory right, not a fundamental right.**
- The **Constitution does not explicitly include the right to vote under Part III** (Fundamental Rights).
- The **right to vote is primarily governed by the Representation of the People Acts, 1950 and 1951.**
- **Parliament can prescribe qualifications, disqualifications, and electoral procedures.**
- **Major judgments reaffirming this view include N.P. Ponnuswami (1952), Jyoti Basu (1982), and Kuldip Nayar (2006).**

2. How Has the Supreme Court Constitutionalised the Voting Process?

- In Association for Democratic Reforms case (2002), **voters' right to know candidates' criminal, financial, and educational details was recognised under Article 19(1)(a).**
- The **PUCL v. Union of India case (2003) held that the freedom to make an informed voting choice is a fundamental right.**
- The **NOTA judgment (2013) recognised the right to reject all candidates as protected political expression.**
- The Court extended the secrecy of the ballot even to NOTA voters.
- These **judgments gave constitutional protection**

to several aspects of voting, despite voting itself remaining statutory.

3. What Constitutional Provisions Support Voting Rights?

- **Article 326 provides for universal adult suffrage** for Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections.
- **Every citizen aged 18 years or above is entitled to be registered as an elector,** subject to limited disqualifications.
- **Democracy is part of the Constitution's Basic Structure,** as held in Kesavananda Bharati case (1973).
- **Free and fair elections were recognised as an essential feature of democracy** in Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain case (1975).
- The **Representation of the People Acts** operationalise the constitutional mandate of Article 326.

4. Why Is There a Demand to Recognise Voting as a Fundamental Right?

- The **right to know, informed choice, ballot secrecy, and NOTA already enjoy constitutional protection.**
- This **creates a constitutional anomaly, as the act of voting itself remains only a statutory right.**
- In Anoop Baranwal case (2023), Justice Ajay Rastogi supported recognising voting as a fundamental right.
- **Recognising the core right to vote as a fundamental right is argued to be consistent with democratic principles** while allowing Parliament to regulate election procedures.

AI governance and a voice for the Global South

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 3
Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

1. What were the key objectives of the India AI Impact Summit 2026?

- India **hosted the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in February 2026.**
- The **Summit placed the needs and challenges of the Global South** at the centre of AI discussions.
- It **focused on real-world harms, equity, and inclusion** in AI governance.
- The **Summit marked a shift** from earlier AI summits that emphasised catastrophic and existential AI risks.
- **Previous AI Safety Summits** were held at **Bletchley Park (U.K., 2023), Seoul (2024), and Paris (2025).**

2. Why has India's AI strategy raised concerns?

- India **increasingly projected itself as a "middle power"** instead of a Global South leader.
- India **joined Pax Silica**, aligning with the U.S.-led semiconductor supply chain.

Pax Silica is a U.S.-led international initiative that aims to build secure, resilient, and trusted supply chains for semiconductors, AI infrastructure, critical minerals, and other advanced technologies among partner countries.

- As part of the arrangement, **India adopted a pro-innovation regulatory approach.**
- This **shift has raised concerns about strategic autonomy in AI policy.**
- The **U.S. has shown limited support for global multilateral AI governance, creating uncertainty** for partner countries.

3. What challenges does India face in AI development?

- India **risks becoming mainly a consumer of foreign AI technologies.**
- **AI development may lead to the extraction of Indian data, labour, minerals, and natural resources.**
- **Land acquisition for data centres has displaced communities** and triggered protests.
- **India continues to lag in developing foundational AI models** and advanced semiconductor manufacturing.

- **Limited investment and capital remain major constraints** on building a strong domestic AI ecosystem.

4. How can India strengthen AI leadership in the Global South?

- The **UN Global Dialogue on AI in Geneva (6–7 July 2026)** provides an opportunity to shape global AI governance.
- **India can promote AI development based on public purpose, user safety, and strategic autonomy.**
- It **can advocate international norms that strengthen local AI ecosystems** in Global South countries.
- **India can encourage cooperation through shared data, computing resources, interoperable standards, and governance frameworks.**
- **Greater collaboration among Global South countries can help balance the influence of global Big Tech** and ensure equitable sharing of AI benefits.

How can El Niño affect India's economy?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Indian and World Geography-Physical, Social, Economic Geography of India and the World.

Mains: General Studies - 2

Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

1. What is the issue?

- The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** has forecast **below-normal rainfall** for July after a **40% rainfall deficit** in June.
- A potential **Super El Niño** has raised concerns over a **weak southwest monsoon.**
- A poor monsoon could adversely affect **agriculture, water availability, and economic growth.**
- It may also lead to **higher food inflation** and reduced rural incomes.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) is the **nodal agency** under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** responsible for weather forecasting, climate monitoring, and issuing meteorological warnings in India.

Super El Niño is an **exceptionally strong El Niño event** marked by unusually high sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, often causing severe global weather disruptions.

2. How can El Niño affect India's economy?

- **Lower agricultural output**, especially during the **kharif season**.
- **Decline in rural incomes** and reduced demand for goods such as **tractors, two-wheelers**, and housing.
- **Rise in food prices**, increasing overall **inflation**.
- Lower **GDP growth** due to weaker agricultural and rural economic activity.
- Higher **food imports** and release of **buffer stocks**, increasing pressure on the **Current Account Deficit (CAD)**.
- Possible decline in **agricultural exports** due to lower production.

El Niño is a **periodic warming of sea surface temperatures** in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean that weakens the Indian **Southwest Monsoon** and influences global weather patterns.

Current Account Deficit (CAD) is a situation where a country's **imports of goods, services, and transfers exceed its exports**, leading to a net outflow of foreign exchange.

3. Why is El Niño a major concern for India?

- Nearly **46% of India's workforce** depends on **agriculture**.
- Around **315 districts** are vulnerable to poor monsoons, with **111 districts** having inadequate irrigation.
- Several major droughts, including **1972, 1982, 2009, and 2015**, occurred during **El Niño** years.

- Low **reservoir storage levels** increase the risk of water shortages.
- Consecutive years of weak monsoons can severely impact **food security** and **farmer livelihoods**.

4. What measures can reduce the impact of El Niño?

- Expand **irrigation infrastructure** to reduce dependence on rainfall.
- Promote **drought-resistant** and **high-yielding crop varieties**.
- Strengthen **water storage** and efficient water management systems.
- Ensure timely availability of **fertilisers**, **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** support, and **buffer stocks**.
- Shift from **crop insurance** alone to **risk reduction** through greater public investment in climate-resilient agriculture.

Can Bar Associations stop lawyers from defending an accused?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2
Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

1. What is the issue?

- Some Bar Associations pass resolutions asking lawyers **not to represent certain accused persons**.
- The issue raises questions about the right to **legal representation and fair trial**.
- It concerns the balance between **public sentiment and the administration of justice**.
- The matter has been settled through **Supreme Court rulings and professional ethics rules**.

Bar Association is a voluntary body of practising advocates in a court or region representing professional interests.

2. What is the legal position?

- In **A.S. Mohammed Rafi v. State of Tamil Nadu (2011)**, the Supreme Court held such Bar resolutions to be illegal and unconstitutional.
- Every **accused person has the right to be defended**, regardless of the nature of the alleged crime.
- Under the **Bar Council of India (BCI) Rules**, an advocate is generally expected to accept a brief in courts where they practise.
- An individual lawyer may refuse a case for **valid personal reasons**, but a collective boycott is not permitted.

A.S. Mohammed Rafi v. State of Tamil Nadu (2011) was a Supreme Court judgment declaring Bar Association resolutions against defending accused persons as unconstitutional.

Bar Council of India (BCI) is the statutory body established under the Advocates Act, 1961 to regulate the legal profession in India.

- **The Advocates Act, 1961** and BCI Rules regulate professional conduct of advocates.
- **State Bar Councils** can take disciplinary action against those enforcing unlawful collective boycotts.

The Advocates Act, 1961 is a law enacted by Parliament to **regulate the legal profession**, establish the **Bar Council of India** and **State Bar Councils**, and prescribe standards of professional conduct for advocates.

KEYWORDS

3. Why is the issue important?

- It protects the **Right to Fair Trial** under **Article 21**.
- **Article 22(1)** guarantees the right of an arrested person to consult and be defended by a lawyer of their choice.
- Denial of legal representation **weakens the rule of law and the justice system**.
- It ensures that **courts decide guilt or innocence**, not public pressure or professional boycotts.

Fair Trial is a constitutional guarantee that legal proceedings must be conducted impartially and with adequate opportunity for defence.

4. What are the constitutional and institutional safeguards?

- **Article 21** - Protects life and personal liberty, including a fair trial.
- **Article 22(1)** - Guarantees legal representation to arrested persons.
- **Article 39A** - Directs the State to ensure equal justice and free legal aid.

Sagar Mein Yog (SMY)

- In line with the International Day of Yoga, the **Government of India launched Sagar Mein Yog (SMY) to promote the mental and physical well-being of Indian seafarers**.
- The **programme is implemented by the Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA) through a 10-module online Learning Management System (LMS) course and is mandatory for seafarers holding a valid Continuous Discharge Certificate (CDC)**.
- The **curriculum was developed in collaboration with the National Union of Seafarers of India (NUSI)** and mental health experts to improve stress management, resilience, and operational safety.
- **Sagar Mein Samman is a complementary maritime welfare initiative that promotes gender inclusivity, safe workplaces, and equal career opportunities for women seafarers**

INS Mahendragiri



- **Project 17A** is the Indian Navy's programme for constructing seven indigenous Nilgiri-class stealth guided-missile frigates.
- **INS Mahendragiri** is the sixth indigenous Nilgiri-class stealth guided-missile frigate built under Project 17A.
- It has been designed by the Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau (WDB) and built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai.
- The frigate incorporates advanced stealth features, reduced radar signature, high automation, and is powered by a Combined Diesel or Gas (CODOG) propulsion system.
- **INS Mahendragiri** is equipped for anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine warfare, with advanced missile systems, electronic warfare capabilities, and an integrated combat management system.
- The seven Project 17A frigates are named after major Indian mountain ranges: **INS Nilgiri**, **INS Udaygiri**, **INS Himgiri**, **INS Taragiri**, **INS Dunagiri**, **INS Mahendragiri**, and **INS Vindhyagiri**.

Vikram-1



- **Vikram-1** is India's first privately developed orbital-class rocket, developed by Skyroot Aerospace.
- It is a **four-stage launch vehicle** with the first three stages powered by solid fuel, while the fourth stage uses hypergolic liquid-fuelled Raman engines.
- The rocket is built using an all-carbon composite structure and incorporates 3D-printed engines and indigenous propulsion technologies for lightweight, cost-effective launches.
- **Vikram-1** is designed to place up to **350 kg** into **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** and **260 kg** into **Sun-Synchronous Orbit (SSO)**, targeting the small satellite launch market.
- Its maiden mission, **Mission Aagaman**, is scheduled to launch from the **Satish Dhawan Space Centre** during the **12 July–4 August 2026** launch window, marking India's first private orbital launch attempt.
- The payload includes a diamond jewellery creation on an aluminium base plate and a miniaturised India-shaped artwork.

Quasar

- A **Quasar (Quasi-Stellar Object)** is the **extremely bright core of a distant active galaxy**, powered by a **supermassive black hole** at its centre.
- It is formed when gas and dust falling into the black hole release enormous amounts of **gravitational energy** as radiation, making quasars among the **brightest objects in the Universe**.
- Quasars can outshine their host galaxies and emit energy across the **electromagnetic spectrum**, including **radio, visible, ultraviolet, X-rays, and gamma rays**.
- Since their light takes billions of years to reach Earth, quasars serve as important probes for studying the **early Universe**, the **formation of galaxies**, and the **growth of supermassive black holes**.
- Recently, the **European Space Agency's (ESA) Euclid Space Telescope** discovered the **oldest known quasars**, dating back to when the **Universe was about 670 million years old**, providing new insights into the **Epoch of Reionisation**.

Places in News

Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary

- **Kerala** has sought the **Union Government's approval** to amend the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, to exclude **human settlements** from the **Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary** for better management of **human-wildlife conflict** while compensating with alternate forest land.
- **Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary** (also known as **Dr. Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary**) is located in **Ernakulam district, Kerala**, on the **northern bank of the Periyar River**, at the foothills of the **Western Ghats**.
- It is **Kerala's first bird sanctuary**, established in **1983**, following the recommendation of renowned ornithologist **Dr. Salim Ali**, who described it as the **richest bird habitat in Peninsular India**.
- Spread over about **25 sq. km**, it comprises **tropical evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist deciduous, and riparian forests**, supporting diverse habitats.
- The sanctuary is home to over **300 species of birds**, including **Malabar Grey Hornbill, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Malabar Trogon, and White-bellied Treepie**, along with several endemic species.
- Besides birds, it also supports **mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, and fishes**, making it an important biodiversity hotspot in the **Western Ghats**.



Species in News

Bonnet Macaque (Macaca radiata)

- The **Bonnet Macaque** is an **Old World monkey** endemic to **southern India**, commonly found in forests, agricultural landscapes, and urban areas.
- It is named after the **bonnet-like whorl of hair** on its head and is an **arboreal and terrestrial, omnivorous, and highly social** primate.
- Its distribution extends across the States of **Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh**, and parts of **Maharashtra**.
- It plays an important **ecological role** in **seed dispersal** and maintaining forest ecosystems but faces threats from **habitat loss, road kills, and human-wildlife conflict**.
- **IUCN Red List Status: Vulnerable.**

