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PrepAlpine

Email: info@PrepAlpine.com

Website: PrepAlpine.com

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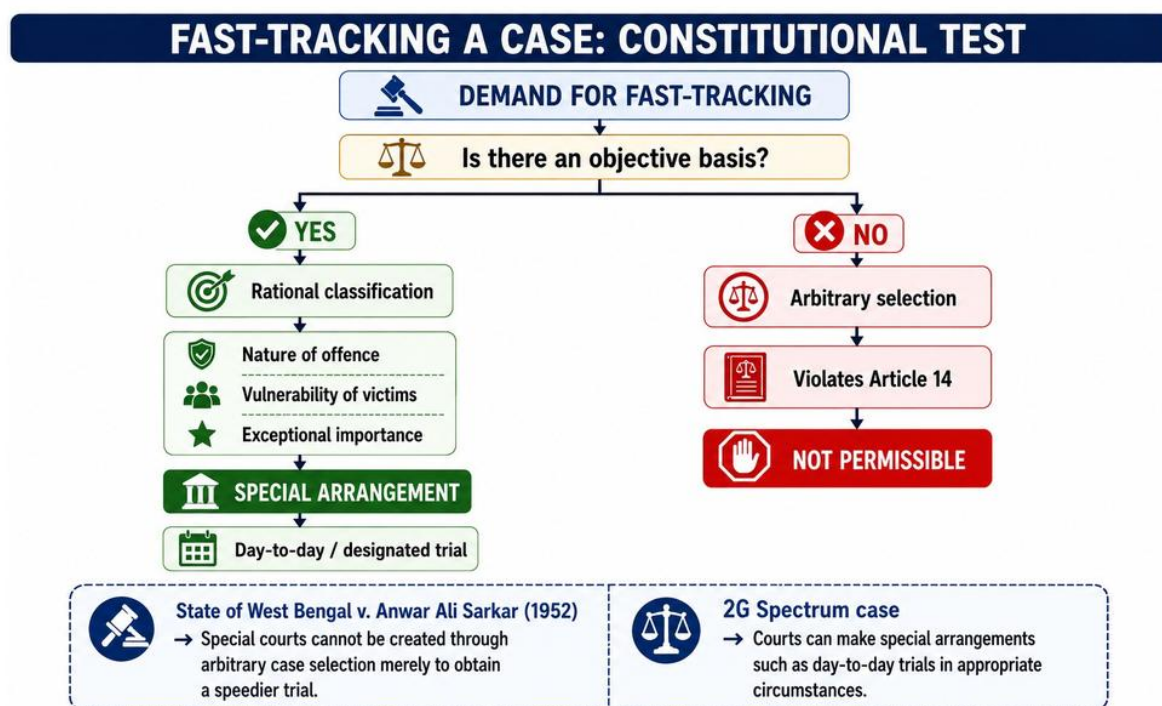
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GS Paper II: Polity

1. Fast-Track Courts in India – Judicial Reforms & Access to Justice

a. Introduction

The proposal to establish Fast-Track Courts (FTCs) for paper-leak cases has renewed debate over whether specialised courts can effectively address judicial delays and under what circumstances cases may be fast-tracked.



b. Key Institutional Framework:

- India has no single central legislation governing FTCs.
- The 14th Finance Commission (2015–20) recommended FTCs for heinous crimes, long-pending property disputes and cases involving vulnerable groups.
- In 2019, the Union government launched the Fast Track Special Courts (FTSC) Scheme, particularly for rape and POCSO Act cases, with support from the Nirbhaya Fund.
- As of January 2026, 862 regular FTCs and 774 FTSCs, including 398 exclusive POCSO courts, were functioning.
- FTSCs dispose of roughly 9.5 cases per month, compared with about 3.3 cases in comparable regular trial courts. Yet over 2.4 lakh cases remained pending in FTSCs at the end of 2023.

c. Can Fast-Tracking Be Ordered for Particular Cases?

Fast-tracking cannot be based merely on political or public demand for a quick verdict. The classification of cases must satisfy Article 14.

In *State of West Bengal v. Anwar Ali Sarkar* (1952), the Supreme Court held that the government cannot arbitrarily select cases for special courts merely for the objective of a “speedier trial”. There must be a rational and objective basis for classification, such as the nature of the offence or vulnerability of victims.

However, special arrangements for particular categories or exceptionally important cases are possible. Courts themselves have sometimes directed day-to-day or specially designated trials, as occurred in the 2G spectrum case.

d. Why FTCs are useful

- **Prioritisation of socially sensitive cases:** Particularly useful for sexual offences, crimes against children and other cases requiring urgent adjudication.
- **Higher disposal capacity:** Dedicated courts can process cases faster than ordinary courts burdened with diverse litigation.
- **Victim-centric justice:** Reducing prolonged trials limits trauma and uncertainty, especially for vulnerable victims.
- **Deterrence and public confidence:** Timely adjudication can strengthen credibility of the criminal-justice system.

e. Why fast-track courts alone cannot solve judicial delays

- **Pendency can simply shift:** Creating a separate court does not eliminate the underlying volume of litigation; large caseloads have already accumulated within FTSCs.
- **Shortage of judges:** Merely designating an existing court as “fast-track” without providing additional judicial officers produces limited improvement.
- **Entire justice chain matters:** Delays arise from poor investigation, forensic bottlenecks, witness availability, repeated adjournments and inadequate prosecution—not simply from courtroom functioning.
- **Infrastructure constraints:** Dedicated courtrooms, prosecutors, support staff, digital systems and forensic facilities must accompany specialised courts.
- **Speed versus due process:** Excessive emphasis on numerical disposal targets can potentially compromise fair-trial safeguards.
- **No universal judicial deadline:** In *P. Ramachandra Rao v. State of Karnataka* (2002), the Supreme Court held that prescribing rigid outer time limits for concluding all criminal proceedings is neither feasible nor judicially appropriate.

Thus, “fast-track” cannot mean “short-cut justice”. Judicial efficiency must remain compatible with procedural fairness.

f. Way Forward

- Create FTCs on the basis of objective caseload and vulnerability criteria, rather than episodic political or public pressure.
- Appoint additional judges and dedicated prosecutors instead of merely redesignating existing courts.
- Strengthen the entire criminal-justice pipeline through better investigation, forensic capacity and witness management.
- Expand e-courts, digital case management and data-driven allocation of cases.
- Periodically evaluate FTCs on both disposal rates and quality of justice, including reversal rates and pendency.

Conclusion

Fast-track courts are best understood as a targeted case-management mechanism, not a structural cure for judicial pendency. Sustainable speedy justice requires simultaneous reform of courts, investigation, prosecution, forensics and judicial capacity.

GS Paper II: Current Affairs

2. Reclaiming Urban Footpaths: Pedestrian Rights vs Street Vendors' Livelihood

a. Introduction

Following judicial recognition of safe, obstruction-free footpaths as integral to citizens' rights, Bengaluru launched a "Safe Footpath" drive that removed thousands of street vendors and encroachments. The action has raised concerns over compliance with the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014.



b. Why was the Street Vendors Act, 2014 enacted?

Street vending is a legitimate economic activity and an important source of urban informal employment. Historically, vendors were frequently subjected to arbitrary eviction by municipal authorities and police.

The Act therefore attempts to reconcile two legitimate claims:

Pedestrians' right to safe public spaces ↔ Vendors' right to livelihood

It neither grants vendors an unrestricted right over public land nor allows municipalities to remove them arbitrarily.

c. Institutional Mechanism under the Act

The Town Vending Committee (TVC) is the cornerstone of the regulatory framework.

- It includes municipal officials, police, planning authorities, resident representatives and street vendors.
- Street vendors must constitute at least 40% of its membership, ensuring participatory decision-making.

- The TVC conducts a survey of existing vendors, following which eligible vendors receive Certificates of Vending.
- It facilitates identification of vending and no-vending zones and regulates relocation where necessary.
- Importantly, existing vendors should ordinarily not be evicted or relocated before completion of the survey and issuance of vending certificates.

Thus, the Act shifts urban governance from an “eviction approach” to a “regulation and accommodation approach.”

d. Why reclaiming footpaths is necessary

- **Pedestrian safety:** Encroached pavements force pedestrians onto roads, increasing accident risks.
- **Accessibility:** Children, elderly persons and persons with disabilities particularly require unobstructed pedestrian infrastructure.
- **Right to mobility:** Walkable public spaces are integral to equitable access to the city.
- **Sustainable cities:** Walking and public transport are central to reducing congestion, pollution and automobile dependence.

e. Why eviction-centric approaches are problematic

- **Livelihood implications:** Street vending supports a large section of the urban poor with limited access to formal employment.
- **Procedural illegality:** Evictions without surveys, vending certificates and TVC-led planning can undermine statutory safeguards.
- **False binary of competing rights:** Pedestrian rights and livelihood rights need not be treated as mutually exclusive. Urban planning should accommodate both.
- **Exclusionary urbanisation:** Treating informal workers merely as “encroachers” ignores their contribution to affordable food, retail and neighbourhood economies.
- **Weak urban planning:** Persistent footpath conflicts often reflect inadequate vending-zone planning, poor street design and weak municipal capacity rather than vending alone.

f. Why Bengaluru's drive faces scrutiny:

The controversy is not principally over the objective of clearing footpaths, but over the process adopted. Vendors were reportedly removed before the institutional mechanisms envisaged under the 2014 Act—including an effective TVC-led survey and identification of vending/no-vending zones—were fully operational.

g. Way Forward

- Adopt “design before eviction”: map pedestrian movement and vending activity before enforcement.
- Constitute functional Town Vending Committees and complete periodic vendor surveys.
- Develop scientifically planned vending, restricted-vending and no-vending zones based on street carrying capacity.
- Provide relocation within economically viable areas where vending genuinely obstructs essential pedestrian movement.
- Integrate street vendors into master plans, transport hubs and neighbourhood planning, rather than treating them as an afterthought.

- Combine enforcement with universal-design footpaths, ensuring accessibility for elderly and disabled citizens.

Conclusion

The issue is not “footpaths versus livelihoods”, but how scarce urban public space is governed. The Street Vendors Act embodies a model of rights-based and participatory urban governance, where pedestrian accessibility must be secured without converting legitimate regulation into arbitrary livelihood displacement.

Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

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While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

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The formatting combines:

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- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

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4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

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