

1. US Sanctions on a UN Expert

Background: US Sanctions on a UN Expert



In July 2025, the United States imposed sanctions on Francesca Albanese, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for human rights in the Palestinian territories. The US accused her of “unabashed antisemitism,” “support for terrorism,” and showing “open contempt” for the US, Israel, and Western nations.

Who Is Francesca Albanese?

- Profession: International lawyer and affiliate scholar at Georgetown University’s Institute for the Study of International Migration.
- UN Role: Appointed in May 2022 as the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the territories occupied since 1967.
- Publications: Co author of *Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (2020) and numerous articles on Palestine and UNRWA.

Albanese’s Criticism of Israel

- Genocide Allegations: In a July 3, 2025 UN Human Rights Council address, she called Israel’s conduct in Gaza “one of the cruellest genocides in modern history” and described conditions there as “apocalyptic.”
- Support for ICC Warrants: She publicly backed International Criminal Court arrest warrants against Israeli leaders Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant for alleged war crimes in Gaza.

Role of a UN Special Rapporteur

- Mandate: An independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council under its 1993 resolution to monitor and report on human rights violations in specific situations.
- Duties: Conduct site visits, engage with governments and civil society, and submit annual public reports to the Human Rights Council.

What Is the International Criminal Court (ICC)?

- Established: By the Rome Statute, effective July 1, 2002.
- Purpose: Prosecuting genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression.
- Jurisdiction: Only court that can try individuals for these international crimes; it has charged Israeli officials for alleged denial of essentials to Gaza’s population.

US Objections and Legal Basis for Sanctions

- Sovereignty Concerns: The US and Israel are not parties to the Rome Statute. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Albanese’s work with the ICC infringed on their sovereignty.

- Allegations: Rubio accused her of antisemitism, supporting terrorism, and sending “threatening letters” to American companies.
- Executive Order 14203: Signed February 6, 2025 by President Trump, it allows sanctions against anyone aiding ICC efforts to investigate or prosecute “protected persons” without their nation’s consent.

Controversy and Reactions

- Previous Sanctions: Last month, the Trump administration targeted four ICC judges under the same executive order.
- UN and Human Rights Community: Many see the US move as an attack on independent human rights monitoring and on the ICC’s authority.

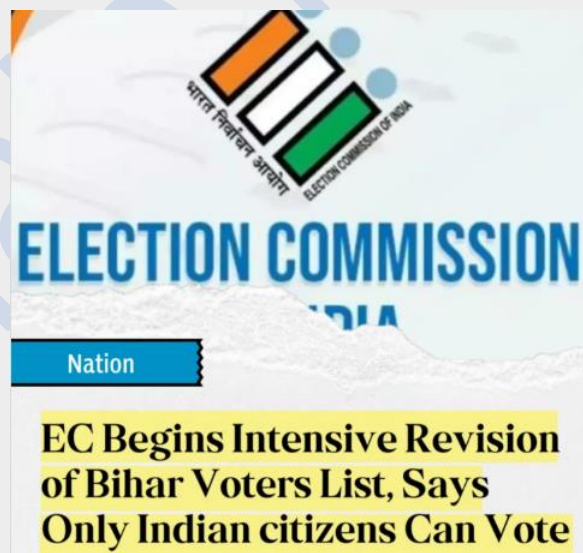
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

2. Why Is the Election Commission Revising Electoral Rolls?

Introduction

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is currently carrying out a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, starting with Bihar, ahead of its Assembly elections. The move has sparked controversy and confusion, particularly because even existing voters (enrolled after 2003) are being asked to provide proof of their date and place of birth — a step never required before.



What Are Electoral Roll Revisions?

1. Intensive Revision

- What it is: A complete, fresh list of voters is prepared through door-to-door visits.
- When it’s done: Before major elections or when current rolls are outdated or inaccurate.

2. Summary Revision

- What it is: A routine annual update using the existing roll; voters can apply for changes.
- No house visits involved.

3. Special Revision

- What it is: Used in exceptional cases, like legal or administrative issues.
- Can use either method above or a mix of both.

Why Is It Called a “Special Intensive Revision”?

This SIR is a hybrid:

- It uses house-to-house verification (intensive method),
- While also relying on the existing rolls (summary method).

The new twist?

- People must show documentary proof at the time of verification, which is a first.

Why Bihar and Why Now?

- Not just Bihar: The ECI plans to revise rolls nationwide — this is the first full verification in over 20 years.
- Why Bihar first? Assembly elections are coming up before November 2025.
- What prompted it?
 - o Massive changes in the voter list due to urbanisation and migration.
 - o Complaints of duplicate or fraudulent entries.
 - o Allegations from political parties — like Rahul Gandhi's claim about roll manipulation in Maharashtra.

History of Electoral Roll Revisions in India

The ECI has done intensive revisions in many years:

1952-56, 1957, 1961, 1965, 1966, 1983-84, 1987-89, 1992, 1993, 1995, 2002, 2003, and 2004.

Early Years: Fixing Errors

- First elections (1951-52) had lots of mistakes, especially excluding women who refused to give their names.
- Political parties were inexperienced and unhelpful.
- The ECI adopted a phased approach to revise rolls gradually.

Mid 20th Century: Reorganisation & Migration

- Reorganisation of states in 1956 and delimitation (changing constituency boundaries) led to more revisions.
- By the 1980s, focus shifted to preventing foreign nationals from being included.
- Complaints from border states, especially in the Northeast, led to new safeguards.

Key Safeguard Introduced: Due Process

- Names on the roll can't be deleted without due process.
- The burden of proof lies on the person objecting — not on the voter.

1990s: Modernisation

- In 1993, Electors Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) were introduced.
- Revisions helped collect photo data, but that wasn't their main purpose.

From Intensive to Summary Revisions

- As the rolls became more accurate and administration costs rose, the ECI switched to summary revisions as the norm.
- But when issues like demographic shifts or political complaints arise, the ECI still returns to intensive methods, adjusting them to suit the current needs.

Conclusion: What Makes the Current SIR Controversial?

- For the first time, even existing voters are being asked to show birth-related documents.

- Critics fear this may lead to mass disenfranchisement, especially among the poor who may only have Aadhaar.
- The Supreme Court has not stopped the exercise but advised the ECI to accept multiple IDs like Aadhaar, Voter ID, and ration card for verification.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

3. Why Has the World Court Issued Arrest Warrants for Taliban Leaders?

Introduction



On July 8, 2025, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Haibatullah Akhundzada (Taliban Supreme Leader) and Abdul Hakim Haqqani (Chief Justice of Taliban's Islamic Emirate).

They are accused of crimes against humanity — specifically, persecuting women, girls, and others who do not follow the Taliban's gender rules.

What Are the Charges Against the Taliban

Leaders?

According to the ICC:

- The Taliban leaders either ordered, encouraged, or supported persecution based on gender and political views.
- Victims include:
 - o Girls and women
 - o LGBTQIA+ individuals
 - o People who supported women's rights

The ICC says they were "severely deprived" of:

- Education
- Privacy
- Family life
- Freedom of movement
- Freedom of expression, thought, and religion

What Has the Taliban Done?

Since taking control in August 2021, the Taliban has:

- Banned girls from secondary schools and universities
- Restricted women's movement and speech
- Punished people for not conforming to strict gender rules

In August 2024, the Taliban issued a 144-page "morality law" which:

- Requires women to cover their entire bodies

- Bans women from singing or speaking publicly
- Forbids men and women from looking at each other in public
- Criminalises LGBTQIA+ identity

The United Nations has called this "gender apartheid".

What Is the ICC and What Does It Do?

- The International Criminal Court (ICC) is based in The Hague, Netherlands.
- It was created by the Rome Statute (1998) and started working in 2002.
- It investigates and tries individuals (not governments) for:
 - o Genocide
 - o Crimes against humanity
 - o War crimes
 - o Aggression

Note: This is different from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which handles disputes between countries, not individuals.

What Is a 'Crime Against Humanity' Under ICC Law?

Under Article 7 of the Rome Statute:

- Crimes against humanity include large-scale or systematic attacks on civilians.
- These include persecution based on gender, religion, race, political beliefs, etc.
- The ICC has jurisdiction over Afghanistan since the country joined the Rome Statute in 2003.

What Happened So Far in This Case?

- On January 23, 2025, the ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan applied for arrest warrants.
- His office gathered evidence like:
 - o Witness testimonies
 - o Official Taliban decrees
 - o Statements by Taliban leaders
 - o Audio-visual material
- The ICC found enough proof that persecution began after August 15, 2021 (Taliban takeover).
- The Pre-Trial Chamber approved the request and issued arrest warrants on July 8, 2025.

How Have the Taliban Responded?

Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid responded on X (Twitter):

"We do not recognise any organisation called the International Court, nor are we committed to it in any way."

- The arrest is unlikely to happen soon.
- Haibatullah Akhundzada remains extremely reclusive, rarely appearing in public.

In September 2024, countries like Canada, Australia, Germany, and the Netherlands tried to take the Taliban to the ICJ over gender discrimination — but that case has seen little progress.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

4. Supreme Court on Bihar Voter List Revision: Consider Aadhaar, EPIC, Ration Card

What Did the Court Say?



Recently, the Supreme Court asked the Election Commission (EC) to accept Aadhaar, Voter ID (EPIC), and ration card as valid identity documents for voter verification during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Bihar.

The court noted that the EC's current list of 11 documents is not exhaustive and that these three commonly available IDs should also be considered.

No Stay on the Process, But Questions Raised

- The court did not stop the voter revision drive in Bihar.
- It scheduled the next hearing for July 28, before the draft voter list is released in August.
- It questioned the nature of the SIR, noting that it was unclear — not exactly a “summary” or a “special” revision as defined by law.
- Justice Dhulia called the matter crucial for democracy, as it relates directly to the right to vote.

Debate Over Aadhaar's Role

- The EC argued that Aadhaar is not proof of citizenship, and it is even issued to non-citizens living in India.
- However, the judges disagreed, saying Aadhaar is a primary identity document in most government procedures.
- Justice Dhulia pointed out the contradiction: a caste certificate is accepted, but not Aadhaar?
- Justice Bagchi added that none of the EC's 11 accepted documents prove citizenship, yet Aadhaar is more widely used.

EC's View: Revision Is Necessary and Tech-Enabled

- Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, representing the EC, said the last such revision in Bihar was in 2003.
- He shared that over 5.5 crore entries (60%) have already been verified, and half have been uploaded on the EC's new digital platform, ECI Net.
- The system is designed to avoid repeating the process, except for adding new names.

Petitioners' Concerns: Citizenship Screening in Disguise

- Senior lawyers like Kapil Sibal and A.M. Singhvi argued that the SIR is being used for citizenship verification, which is not the EC's role — it lies with the Union Home Ministry.
- They called the process discriminatory, especially for the poor and vulnerable.
- Mr. Sibal cited Bihar data:
 - o 87% have Aadhaar,
 - o but only 14% have matriculation certificates and just 2% have passports.
- He warned that many may lose their right to vote just because they lack documents beyond Aadhaar.

Timing and Intent Questioned

- Justice Bagchi criticized the tight timelines — citizens are expected to complete formalities within short deadlines.

- He also questioned why the SIR was launched first in Bihar, a state headed for elections, despite being called a nationwide revision.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express & The Hindu

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