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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Spectacle of Shame: On Parading the Accused

INDIAN EXPRESS

10 June 2026

POLITY

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The Spectacle of Shame: On Parading the Accused

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GS2
GS4

 Source: ujjyari.com — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs


INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Publicly displaying an arrested person can satisfy a public appetite for visible action, but it punishes before guilt is proven. Where is the line between deterrence and the dignity of the accused?"

 Source: [Original editorial](#)
[The Indian Express](#)


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HOW

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

When a High Court condemns police for **publicly displaying detainees** for photographs and social media, it puts a recurring practice on trial: the **parading of the accused**. For an aspirant, this is a rare and valuable **GS2 (governance, rights, policing)** and **GS4 (ethics in public administration)** lead. The core question is simple but searching: can the state punish through humiliation a person who has not been convicted of anything?

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Publicly **parading arrested persons** for cameras has **no statutory basis** and violates the **presumption of innocence** and the **dignity** guaranteed by **Article 21**. An accused is not a convict; punishment cannot precede conviction. The instinct to “look tough” substitutes spectacle for justice and can prejudice trials. The answer is **due process, restraint and accountability**, not new law but enforcement of the existing one.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

PRINCIPLE	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
Presumption of innocence	Accused is innocent until proven guilty	Punishment cannot precede conviction
Human dignity	An inviolable core of Article 21	Public humiliation violates it
Due process	The lawful path of arrest and trial	A parade has no legal sanction
Police as trustees	Power held in trust, used with restraint	Spectacle is a misuse of power

THE ANALYSIS: WHY THE SPECTACLE FAILS THE TEST

- 1 **An accused is not a convict.** Guilt is for a court to decide after a fair trial; parading inverts the presumption of innocence.
- 2 **Dignity is non-negotiable.** The Supreme Court has held dignity to be an inviolable part of Article 21; deliberate humiliation breaches it.
- 3 **There is no legal sanction.** The law prescribes how an accused is arrested and tried; it nowhere authorises a parade for publicity.
- 4 **It harms justice itself.** Public spectacle can prejudice the trial and erodes the rule of law it pretends to uphold.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty, including dignity); **Article 22** (protection against arbitrary arrest); **Article 14** (equality and non-arbitrariness). **Doctrine:** the **presumption of innocence**; the right to a **fair trial**; dignity as inviolable (Maneka Gandhi line of reasoning). **Safeguards:** **D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997)** arrest guidelines; statutory procedure under the criminal codes; National and State Human Rights Commissions. **Ethics frame:** the police as **trustees of power**; the values of restraint, fairness, empathy and accountability. **Concept:** “media trial” and pre-judgment versus due process.

THE DEBATE

Argument for tough display: Visible, hard policing deters crime and reassures a public frustrated by slow justice; showing the accused signals action.

Argument against parading: It punishes before guilt is proven, violates dignity, lacks legal sanction, and can prejudice the trial.

The balanced verdict: Deterrence comes from the **certainty and speed of lawful justice**, not from spectacle. The state can be firm on crime while being scrupulous about the rights of the accused; toughness and dignity are not in conflict when the law is followed.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

A weak answer treats public displays as harmless or even useful. The strong answer asks what the act actually achieves: it satisfies a desire to see punishment, but it delivers neither a conviction nor a deterrent, and it costs the system its legitimacy. The move is to test a practice against principle (innocence, dignity, due process) rather than against public mood. The same lens applies to media trials, encounter killings and “instant justice.”

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Public impatience with slow justice -> pressure to "look tough" -> parading the accused. But accused is not a convict + dignity under Article 21 + no legal sanction -> punishment before conviction, prejudiced trial. The correction: due process + restraint + accountability + speedy lawful trial -> real deterrence with dignity intact.

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Enforce existing law and court directions** against custodial humiliation.
- ② **Issue clear police standing orders** prohibiting parading and unauthorised display.
- ③ **Train officers in rights-based policing** and the ethics of power held in trust.
- ④ **Hold violations accountable** through departmental and human-rights mechanisms.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

“The public parading of the accused violates the presumption of innocence and human dignity under Article 21.” Critically examine, with reference to the ethical duties of the police. (250 words)

“A society is judged by how it treats those it accuses, not only those it acquits; the spectacle of shame defends no law.”

Article 21 (dignity) · Article 22 · presumption of innocence · D.K. Basu guidelines (1997) · fair-trial rights · NHRC.

Where is the line between deterrence and the dignity of an accused who has not been convicted?

Connects to GS4 PYQs on the ethical use of authority and GS2 on the protection of rights; a probable question is the dignity-versus-deterrence framing above.

today’s Supreme Court Article 21 article (right to travel abroad not absolute); static GS2 on Fundamental Rights and GS4 on integrity and the ethical use of power.

Sources: Indian Express, Supreme Court of India, NHRC

Source: The Spectacle of Shame: On Parading the Accused — Ujivari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

The practice of publicly parading or displaying arrested persons for cameras has no statutory basis and violates the dignity and presumption of innocence guaranteed by Article 21; it converts policing into spectacle and must be replaced by due process and restraint.

✓ SUPPORTING

- An arrested person is an accused, not a convict; the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial mean punishment cannot precede conviction.
- Human dignity is an inviolable part of Article 21, and public humiliation inflicts a punishment the law never sanctioned.

- Parading bypasses due process, prejudices trials, and substitutes a performance of toughness for genuine investigation and justice.

COUNTER

Some argue that visible, tough policing deters crime and reassures a public frustrated by slow justice, and that displaying the accused signals action.

WAY FORWARD

Enforce existing law and court directions against custodial humiliation, issue clear police standing orders, train officers in rights-based policing, and hold violations accountable, so that deterrence comes from certainty of justice, not spectacle.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"The public parading of the accused violates the presumption of innocence and human dignity under Article 21." Critically examine, with reference to the ethical duties of the police. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Every so often, images appear of arrested persons being publicly displayed before cameras, hands bound, faces exposed. It looks like decisive policing.

In law and in ethics, it is the opposite.

BODY

The first principle is the presumption of innocence: a person who is arrested is an accused, not a convict, and guilt is to be determined by a court after a fair trial. Public parading inverts this, inflicting shame and punishment before any finding of guilt.

The second principle is human dignity, which the Supreme Court has repeatedly held to be an inviolable core of the right to life under Article 21; deliberate public humiliation violates it directly. The third is due process: the law prescribes how an accused is to be arrested, produced before a magistrate and tried,

and it nowhere authorises a parade for publicity.

Courts, including High Courts, have condemned such displays as lacking statutory backing and as a misuse of police power. The instinct behind the practice, to be seen acting tough and to reassure a public impatient with slow justice, is understandable but misguided: deterrence flows from the certainty and speed of lawful justice, not from a televised spectacle that can prejudice the very trial it pre-empts. Ethically, the police hold power in trust and owe every person, including the accused, the duties of restraint, fairness and respect for dignity. The remedy is not new law but the enforcement of existing law and court directions: clear standing orders against custodial humiliation, rights-based training, and accountability for officers who turn an arrest into a show.

CONCLUSION

A society is judged by how it treats those accused of wrongdoing, not only the innocent. Policing earns trust through fairness and results, never through the spectacle of shame.

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