Zero FIR: The Distance from Filing a Complaint to Justice

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Mains: GS-II: Access to justice, police and protection of vulnerable sections



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Why in the News

A legal commentary published on 2 November 2026 raised the question of why, even after the **Zero FIR** facility, the process of justice remains difficult for a person who has suffered sexual violence. The subject came up again in the current affairs discussion of 6 November, but it should not be taken as a new law that came into force that day. The core issue is the real barriers of investigation, support and repeated travel beyond the facility of registering a complaint.

What Is Zero FIR

FIR is the initial stage of recording information about a cognisable offence in the formal record of the police. In a **cognisable offence**, the police may have the power under law to arrest without a warrant and to investigate. Registration of information does not mean the allegation is proved.

Under the Zero FIR arrangement, even if the offence took place in the area of another police station, information about it can be recorded at the nearest police station. Later the

case is sent to the police station with the proper jurisdiction. The purpose of this facility is to save the victim from being turned away from a police station merely because of boundary area.

What Section 173 of the BNSS Says

Section 173 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 provides for giving information about a cognisable offence to a police officer independent of the area of the place of offence. The information can be given orally or by electronic communication. Oral information is written down and the person giving it signs.

For information given by electronic communication to be taken on record, there is a condition of the **signature of the informant within three days**. So merely sending a message and completing all legal formalities should not be treated as the same. This position has been clarified in a parliamentary reply of the Ministry of Home Affairs of 11 August 2026.

Zero FIR and e-FIR are different things: the first is linked to removing the barrier of territorial jurisdiction; the second to the electronic medium of giving information. Both can be together in one case, but they are not synonyms.

What Barriers Remain After the Complaint Is Registered

- **Distance and cost:** When the case moves to another area, repeated travel, loss of wages and living expenses.
- **Procedural burden:** Telling the same experience many times, contacting different officers and unclear information about progress.
- **Safety and confidentiality:** Threats, social pressure and fear of identity being revealed.
- **Support:** Lack of legal counselling, psychological support, translation and disability-friendly facilities.

These are administrative and social barriers. Removing them does not mean giving up a fair investigation or the legal rights of the accused, but making the process just for both sides and accessible to the victim.

Direction of Reform

Coordinated service: There should be a clearly responsible officer for contact among the nearest police station, the investigating police station and support organisations. After transfer, the victim should not have to begin again.

Less unnecessary travel: Where the law permits, secure technical means and local support should be used for statements and other processes. A universal claim that every process can be done from home cannot be made.

Accountability: A clear record of registration of the complaint, transfer and the status of further action should be available. Respectful communication and confidentiality should get importance in police training.

Importance for the Exam

In this subject, the gap between the availability of law and its real use is important. In an answer, merely mentioning the section is not enough; travel cost, institutional coordination, gender sensitivity and legal aid should be joined. Do not present the facility of jurisdiction as a substitute for the end of police investigation or conviction.

Mains Practice Question

Zero FIR is an important step towards access to justice, but merely registering a complaint is not a guarantee of victim-centred justice. Discuss. (250 words, 15 marks)

Answer Outline

Introduction: Introduce the facility of an FIR independent of territorial jurisdiction and Section 173.

Main Body: State the distance from complaint to investigation and the challenges of cost, confidentiality, safety and support. Keep the distinction between Zero FIR and e-FIR.

Conclusion: Suggest a coordinated, accessible and respectful process along with a fair investigation.

Sources

- 2 November: Procedural barriers that remain even after Zero FIR
- Ministry of Home Affairs: Parliamentary reply on Section 173 and electronic information
- India Code: Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023