

# CURRENT AFFAIRS

## UPSC CSE 2026



DAILY CURRENT  
AFFAIRS NOTES

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### The India-New Zealand FTA — unlocking growth

- From both sides, there have been firsts, with India extending duty concessions on apples and New Zealand offering India the widest service access so far in sectors such as IT, education, fintech, telecom, tourism and construction.
- Duty-free intermediate inputs such as wooden logs, coking coal, metal waste and scrap would lower manufacturing costs for final products, especially in steel, engineering goods and construction.
- Inclusion of an annex on health and traditional medicine services creates new opportunities for India's pharmaceutical and health-care sectors, giving an edge over competitors such as China and the European Union. It would also reinforce India's growing role as a global health partner.
- Agriculture, a sensitive area in trade negotiations, has been handled with balance.
- The FTA envisages value chain development through knowledge transfers and agri-technology collaboration on apples, kiwifruit, and honey.
- FTAs often remain underused due to awareness gaps, compliance challenges, and non-tariff barriers (NTBs).
- The India-New Zealand FTA includes provisions to address technical barriers to trade through regulatory cooperation, streamlined customs procedures and transparency.

### Prioritising cleft care as a health issue

- India, despite recording the highest number of cleft births globally, has no national epidemiological data on cleft lip/palate.
- Cleft lip/palate is a facial birth defect that occurs when tissues and structures do not fuse during pregnancy due to genetic factors or maternal nutrition deficiencies.
- It leaves newborns with a gap in the upper lip and the roof of the mouth.
- The World Health Organization has formally recognised craniofacial anomaly in the Global Burden of Disease initiative. This recognition has led the NITI Aayog to initiate conversations around birth defects.
- The National Birth Defect Awareness Month was launched in 2024 with the theme 'Breaking Barriers: inclusive support for children with birth defects'.

### Law on 'suspension of sentence'

- A three-judge vacation bench of the Supreme Court stayed the Delhi High Court's judgment suspending the life sentence of Kuldeep Singh Sengar and granting him bail pending appeal in the 2017 Unnao rape case.

#### Background of the Case

- The case relates to allegations that in 2017, the survivor, then a minor, was raped by the then-sitting MLA at his residence. Amid allegations of police inaction and intimidation, the probe was transferred to the CBI in 2018.
- The trial was shifted to Delhi pursuant to Supreme Court directions.
- The trial court convicted Sengar and he was sentenced to imprisonment for the remainder of his natural life.

#### Suspension of Sentence: Legal Framework

- A conviction displaces the presumption of innocence and renders the sentence operative.
- The conviction remains appealable.
- Under Section 389 of the CrPC, 1973 (now Section 430 of the BNSS, 2023), a convict may seek suspension of execution of sentence and bail. Suspension of sentence halts only the punishment and not the finding of guilt.
- It is a discretionary judicial power.

#### When Courts Suspend a Sentence

- The law distinguishes between fixed-term sentences and life imprisonment.
- In **Bhagwan Rama Shinde Gosai vs. State of Gujarat (1999)**, the SC held that suspension in fixed-term sentences should be exercised liberally. In serious offences punishable with life imprisonment, suspension is an exception.
- In **Shivani Tyagi vs. State of Uttar Pradesh (2024)**, the SC reiterated the need for an objective assessment of gravity and desirability of bail.

#### High Court's Reasoning

- The High Court focused on conviction under Section 5(c) of the POCSO Act. Section 5(c) deals with aggravated penetrative sexual assault by a public servant. The POCSO Act does not define "public servant".
- Under Section 2(2) of the POCSO Act, meanings are drawn from the IPC, CrPC, JJ Act, or IT Act.
- Only the IPC, under Section 21, defines "public servant", excluding elected legislators.
- Relying on R.S. Nayak vs. A.R. Antulay (1984), the HC held that an MLA is not a public servant. This differed from the trial court, which relied on the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 definition.
- The HC held, prima facie, that Section 5(c) POCSO and Section 376(2)(b) IPC were inapplicable.

- This formed the **basis for suspending the sentence and granting bail**.
- The HC also noted **over seven years of imprisonment**, relying on **Kashmira Singh vs. State of Punjab (1977)**.

#### Survivor Protection and Threat Perception

- The survivor cited **systemic intimidation, custodial death of her father, police callousness**, and the **2019 truck-car accident**. The HC noted that the SC had granted **CRPF protection in 2019**.
- The HC held that suspension could not be denied solely on apprehension of failure of **protective forces**.

#### Concerns Raised

- The suspension of a **life sentence** raises **serious concerns**.
- The HC's interpretation creates an anomaly where lower officials qualify as **public servants** but an **MLA** does not.
- This ambiguity in the **POCSO framework** was flagged by the SC bench.
- The HC accorded **insufficient weight** to the **object and intent** of the **POCSO Act**.
- Offences under **Section 5(c)** involve **direct abuse of children**, causing **severe trauma**.

#### Relevant Supreme Court Precedents

- **Attorney General for India vs. Satish (2021)**: SC rejected a narrow interpretation of **sexual assault** under **POCSO**.
- In **Independent Thought vs. Union of India (2017)**, the SC read down **Exception 2 to Section 375 IPC**.
- These rulings affirm that **child-protection laws** require **purposive interpretation**.

#### Errors in Granting Suspension

- The HC did not examine whether the convict had a **fair chance of acquittal**.
- In **Chhotelal Yadav vs. State of Jharkhand (2025)**, the SC held that suspension in **life imprisonment cases** requires showing **palpable or gross error**.
- In **Shivani Tyagi vs. State of Uttar Pradesh (2024)**, the SC clarified that **long incarceration alone** cannot justify suspension.
- In **Jamna Lal vs. State of Rajasthan (2025)**, the SC set aside suspension in a **POCSO conviction**.

#### What Is Next

- The case highlights limits of a statutory framework defining **authority** narrowly. The limitation is **legislatively inherited**, not judicially created.
- The case exposes systemic barriers faced by survivors. It raises concerns regarding **Article 14** and **equal protection of laws**.

#### India is now the fourth largest economy: Centre

- With **GDP valued at \$4.18 trillion**, India has surpassed Japan and is poised to **displace Germany** from the **third rank** with a **projected GDP of \$7.3 trillion by 2030**.
- India has surpassed Japan to become the **world's fourth largest economy** with a size of **\$4.18 trillion**.
- India is also the **world's fastest-growing major economy**.
- The U.S. is the **world's largest economy**, and China occupies the **second spot**.
- The **World Bank** has projected a **6.5% growth in 2026**.

#### HAL enters civil market with Dhruv NG helicopter

- **Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL)** marked a **breakthrough** in India's **civil aviation ecosystem** as the **Dhruv New Generation (NG) helicopter** successfully undertook its **maiden flight** at the **HAL Helicopter Division in Bengaluru**.
- This signals the **PSU's formal entry** into the **civil helicopter market**. HAL received **DGCA certification** for **indigenous manufacturing** of the **Shakti civil engine**, a **first-of-its-kind achievement** in **Indian aviation**.
- This marks the **first aero engine** certified by the **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)** for **indigenous production**.
- The certification represents a **significant leap** in India's **self-reliance** in **critical aviation technologies**.
- The milestone was achieved with the participation of **Safran engines** and close coordination with the **DGCA**.
- Designed and manufactured in **India**, the **5.5-tonne, light twin-engine, multi-role chopper** has been engineered to operate across **diverse terrains**.

#### Himachal apple growers oppose reduced import duty on New Zealand

- **Apple growers in Himachal Pradesh** fear that the Centre's proposal to **slash the import duty** on New Zealand apples from **50% to 25%**. The **reduced duty** would cause a **significant loss of market share** for **Indian apples** and **bring down prices**.
- This could push growers, already struggling with **climate change-induced uncertainties, rising input costs, labour shortages**, and **shrinking margins**, into **deep economic distress**.

- The State produces around **6.5 lakh tonnes of apples every year**, accounting for nearly **25% of India's total apple production**.
- Other major **apple-exporting nations** such as the **U.S., Chile, and Italy**, which together account for over **40% of global apple exports**, are likely to **demand similar concessions**.

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