

# 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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