FINDER
31st December 2025
FORTUNE IAS NEWS DAILY EXPLAINER
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# A multipolar world with bipolar characteristics

**Prelims:** General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

**Mains:** General Studies - 2
Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

## 1.Context

- As 2025 ends, the **US launches its largest Caribbean troop deployment in decades, sending aircraft carriers, jets, ships, submarines, and tens of thousands of soldiers to pressure Venezuela and oust President Nicolás Maduro.**
- **Trump's December 2025 National Security Strategy prioritizes Latin America and the Caribbean** to counter external influences like China.
- Meanwhile, the **US steps back from its post-WWII role as Europe's security guarantor, refusing to bear the burden amid challenges from Russia and China.**
- **Despite Trump's impulsiveness and aggressive actions (bombing six countries), his policy reflects recognition of a shifting global order no longer unipolar, forcing reluctant aggression and focusing on consolidating influence** in the Americas over distant commitments.

## 2. Rise of US, China, and Russia as Global Powers

- After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the US was the only top power. But **that's over now Russia's 2014 Crimea takeover and Ukraine war showed the world is no longer US-ruled alone.**
- **America remains the biggest military and economic power for years ahead**. Now, China and Russia also shape global events as major powers.
- During **the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the US's main enemy; the US allied with China against it.** Today, China is the top US rival.
- **Trump's Make America Great Again ideology sees Russia as part of a shared Christian world,** opening doors for **better US-Russia ties against China.**

## 3. Reigning vs Rising: US-China Power Shift

### China's Economy Beats Old Soviet Peak

- The **Soviet economy hit only 57% of US size in the 1970s before slowing. China's economy is now 66% of US size and growing faster,** building the world's biggest navy.

### US-China Power Clash Coming

- **US (current top power) vs China (rising power) means a long fight for control in Asia and worldwide**, like Germany challenging Britain long ago.

### Russia Weak but Still Strong

- Russia has a small economy and less influence, but huge nukes, land, resources, and readiness to fight keep it a top power.

### Russia Fights Back After 1990s Fall

- Russia weakened in the 1990s, but struck back in the 2008 Georgia war to change Europe's security rules against NATO growth.

### Russia Teams Up with China

- West's sanctions and Ukraine help drive Russia to China. **Both countries are against the rules based order of the USA: Russia wants to fix them, China wants its own rules instead**.

## 4. Fluid Multipolarity: Three Powers Reshape Global Order

- All **three powers (US, China, Russia) know no single center rules anymore,** unlike fixed Cold War blocs, so new global structures are still forming.
- Despite close ties with Beijing, **Russia guards its independence to pursue its own ambitions, creating space for possible US-Russia reset despite Ukraine war obstacles.**

- **US, China, Russia have clashing goals, making multipolarity fluid and unstable,** not like rigid post-WWII order.
- Countries such as India, Japan, Germany, Brazil play both sides amid uncertainty.
- **Trump pushes offshore balancing, cuts Europe burden, reset Russia, focus on Americas vs China**; Russia carves sphere, China eyes Asia hegemony, making Russia the key pivot with bipolar feel.

## The India-New Zealand FTA - unlocking growth

**Prelims:** General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

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Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

### 1.Background

- On December 22, 2025, **PM Modi and PM Luxon announced the India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, signaling India's rising trade confidence**.
- **This follows India's recent FTAs with UK and Oman, showing a global shift to diversify trade** with India.
- Negotiations wrapped in nine months, reflecting strong political will for fair global trade that aids India's domestic and international aims.

### 2. India-NZ FTA: Complementary Gains

- The FTA **prioritises services and labor mobility where India excels, including IT, education, fintech, telecom, tourism, and construction,** New Zealand offers widest access yet.
- India gives duty concessions on apples for the first time; **New Zealand commits $20 billion investment in India over 15 years and removes duties on 100% of its tariff lines.**
- **Mobility for Indian professionals in IT, engineering, healthcare, education; post-study work for students provides stability** amid global policy uncertainties.
- **Duty-free access benefits Indian textiles, apparel, leather, engineering, pharma, farm products;** cheaper inputs like wood, coal, scrap cut manufacturing costs.
- **No dairy/sugar/spice/oil concessions to protect farmers**; agri-tech collaboration on apples/kiwi/honey; health annex boosts India's pharma edge over China/EU.

### 3. Overcoming FTA Utilization Challenges

- **Bilateral trade was $2.4 billion in 2024-25;** expected to double by 2030 after FTA implementation.
- **India utilises only 25% of FTA benefits, vs 70-80% in developed economies**, due to awareness gaps, compliance issues, and non-tariff barriers.
- **Includes provisions for regulatory cooperation, streamlined customs**, and transparency to tackle technical trade barriers.
- **Business associations, large firms, and policymakers must build awareness** and capabilities for effective market access.
- **Expand services trade, skills/education links, mobility provisions,** and leverage diaspora networks.

### 4.Way Forward

- **Build on growing middle class, skilled workers, and reform-driven economy to boost global production/services exports,** aiming for a $7 trillion economy by 2030.
- **Use FTA to integrate Indian firms into worldwide supply chains,** enhancing competitiveness.
- **India now has FTAs with all RCEP members except China,** strengthening regional trade position.
- **Highlight New Zealand's labor mobility/services access as a sign of developed nations'** growing confidence in India.
- **Use this as a model for EU/other deals, balanced agreements protecting interests** while showing stable trade policy.

## Law on 'suspension of sentence'

**Prelims:** General Studies Paper - 1
Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

**Mains:** General Studies - 2
Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries

## 1. Context

- On **December 29**, the **Supreme Court** stayed a **Delhi High Court** order that had **suspended the life sentence** of former MLA **Kuldeep Singh Sengar** and granted him **bail pending appeal** in the **2017 Unnao rape case**.
- The High Court's order (December 23) triggered **public outrage**, given the gravity of the offence and the long struggle of the survivor.
- The case involves the **rape of a minor**, systemic **intimidation**, and serious **institutional failures** during investigation and trial.

## 2. Legal Framework: Suspension of Sentence

- After conviction, the **presumption of innocence ends**, and the sentence becomes operative.
- **However, the conviction remains appealable**, and during the pendency of appellate scrutiny, the convict may seek relief under **Section 389 of the CrPC, 1973** (now **Section 430 of the BNSS, 2023**).
- This provision allows the court to **suspend the execution of the sentence** and grant **consequential bail**, if the convict is in custody, thereby **keeping the sentence in abeyance**.
- For **short-term or fixed-term sentences** suspension is usually granted; for **life imprisonment or grave offences**, it is an **exception**, requiring strict scrutiny.

## 3. High Court's Reasoning

- Under criminal law, **offences committed by persons in positions of trust or authority** are treated as **aggravated offences** and attract **enhanced punishment**, recognising the **abuse of power** and **greater vulnerability of victims**.
- The High Court focused on whether an **MLA qualifies as a "public servant"** under **Section 5(c) of the POCSO Act** (aggravated sexual assault by a public servant).
- Since **POCSO does not define "public servant"**, it borrows definitions from other laws; only the **IPC** defines it, and **elected legislators are excluded**.
- Relying on this, the HC held that **Section 5(c) POCSO was prima facie inapplicable**, weakening the basis for a life sentence.
- The HC also noted that Sengar had **undergone over seven years of imprisonment**, and, **relying on Kashmira Singh vs. State of Punjab (1977)**, observed that **prolonged incarceration could cause injustice if the conviction or sentence were ultimately modified.**
- The HC downplayed **threat perceptions**, stating that suspension cannot be denied merely due to fear of failure of protective mechanisms.

## 4. Concerns and Implications

- The interpretation creates a **serious anomaly**: lower-level officials are treated as **public servants** under POCSO, but **elected MLAs are not**.
- This **restricts the scope of a victim-centric law**, going against the **purposive interpretation** consistently supported by the **Supreme Court** in child protection cases.
- The High Court did not properly examine whether dropping **Section 5(c)** would actually result in **acquittal**, which is a crucial requirement when suspending a **life sentence**.
- The decision did not give enough importance to the **documented history of intimidation, violence, and threats to witnesses**.
- The case exposes deeper issues in the **criminal justice system**, especially the gap between **formal equality under Article 14** and the lived reality of survivors of sexual violence

# The curious case of Tamil Nadu where big debt numbers tell the wrong story

**Prelims:** General Studies Paper - 1
Economic and Social Development-Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector Initiatives, etc.

**Mains:** General Studies - 3
Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

## 1. Debt Context and Comparisons

- Claims that **Tamil Nadu's debt is "alarming"** rely on **absolute numbers**, which can be misleading.
- While **Tamil Nadu's total debt** is now higher than **Uttar Pradesh's**, its **debt-to-gross state domestic product (GSDP) ratio (26.1%)** is **lower than U.P.'s (29.4%)**.

- Tamil Nadu has a **larger economy per capita**, making **absolute comparisons without context weak**.
- Since the **COVID-19 peak**, Tamil Nadu's **debt ratio has been gradually declining**.

## 2. Fiscal Health and Debt Sustainability

- Tamil Nadu spends around **21% of revenue receipts on interest payments**, which is high but **not indicative of a debt trap**.
- The **fiscal deficit** is projected at **3% of GSDP (2025–26)**, within the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) framework**.
- A **fiscal deficit** is the **gap between a government's income and its spending** in a given period, usually a **financial year**.
- Over the long term, **economic growth has exceeded borrowing costs**, helping **stabilise debt levels**.
- **Primary deficits remain low**, reducing risks of an unsustainable debt spiral.
- A primary deficit is the **difference between what a government earns** (not counting interest payments) and **what it spends** on non-interest items.

## 3. Economic Strength and Forward Outlook

- Tamil Nadu sustained **strong real GSDP growth (above 7%)**, even during periods of rising debt.
- The State performs better on **per capita income, urbanisation, human development, and tax capacity**.
- A **capital-heavy budget**, including higher **capital outlays**, infrastructure, and **advanced manufacturing**, shows debt is being used for **future productivity**.
- With **75% of revenue raised internally**, Tamil Nadu reflects **strong fiscal capacity**, though it faces **reduced central transfers**, raising questions of **federal fiscal fairness**.
- **25% comes from its share in central taxes and via grants.**
- Uttar Pradesh, by contrast, depends on the **Centre for over half of its revenue receipts.**
- This reflects **stronger tax bases, higher compliance, and denser economic activity** in Tamil Nadu.

## KEYWORDS

### Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Initiative

- The **Global Burden of Disease (GBD) was initiated in 1990 by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank,** tracks health trends worldwide.
- **Today, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, USA, leads** its production and updates.
- The key measures are
  - **DALY (Disability-Adjusted Life Years), which counts total healthy years lost to illness, disability, or early death.**
  - **YLL (Years of Life Lost) focuses on premature deaths against standard life expectancy.**
  - **YLD (Years Lived with Disability) captures time spent in poor health states.**
- The **latest Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study is GBD 2023, which was officially launched on October 12, 2025, during the World Health Summit** (WHS) in Berlin, Germany.
- The study provides updated global health data through 2023, tracking health loss across 204 countries and territories.

### Ulcerative colitis

- **Ulcerative colitis** is a chronic condition in which the **inner lining of the large intestine (colon) and rectum becomes inflamed**.
- It is a type of **inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)**, with **Crohn's disease** being another major form.
- The **exact cause is unknown**, but the condition is **associated with problems in the immune system**.
- While **stress and certain foods** can **trigger symptoms**, they **do not cause** the disease.
- Ulcerative colitis can occur at **any age**, with peak onset seen between **15–30 years** and again between **50–70 years**.

- The disease usually **starts in the rectum** and may remain confined there or **spread continuously to other parts of the colon**. It **does not skip areas** and can eventually **involve the entire large intestine**.
- Key **risk factors** include a **family history of ulcerative colitis** or the presence of **other autoimmune diseases**.