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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Have Fast-Track Courts Delivered on the Promise of Speedy Justice?

 THE HINDU

31 July 2026

POLITY

GS2

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"If Fast-Track Special Courts mostly reshuffle existing judicial capacity rather than add to it, is proposing new FTSCs for paper-leak cases a genuine reform or a way to appear responsive without committing new resources? How would you tell the difference in practice?"

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

A fast lane built by removing a lane from the highway does not increase the highway's capacity; it just changes whose commute gets shorter and whose gets longer.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Judicial pendency and access-to-justice reforms are a recurring GS2 theme, and this editorial's specific critique, that a reform can look like capacity expansion while actually being capacity reallocation, is exactly the kind of nuanced distinction that separates a strong Mains answer from a descriptive one.

GS Paper 2: Structure, organisation and functioning of the Judiciary; government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services.

For **Prelims**, fix the founding year of Fast-Track Special Courts (2019) and their original primary case categories (rape and POCSO cases), along with the scale comparison between FTSC pendency and total trial-court pendency.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY UPSC TESTS IT
Fast-Track Special Courts (FTSCs)	Courts established in 2019 to expedite specific case categories, initially rape and POCSO cases	Foundational fact for any judicial-reform question involving speedy trial mechanisms
Judicial pendency	The stock of unresolved cases across India's court system at any given time	India's roughly 4.8 crore pending trial-court cases is a headline statistic UPSC frequently references
Capacity reallocation vs. capacity expansion	Reassigning existing judges to a priority category, versus recruiting and infrastructure-building for net new capacity	The precise analytical distinction this editorial draws; a recurring evaluative frame for any "fast-track" reform
Case-category triage	Deliberately prioritising certain case types for faster resolution based on urgency or public-interest stakes	The legitimate justification for FTSCs even if they do not expand aggregate capacity

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Fast-Track Special Courts were established in 2019 as a dedicated mechanism to expedite rape and cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, responding to public concern over slow trial timelines in cases involving sexual violence, particularly against minors. The proposal now under discussion would extend the FTSC model to examination paper-leak cases, likely in response to the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026's stiffened penalty regime and the broader public trust crisis around exam integrity that has generated sustained political attention in 2026.

METRIC	FIGURE
FTSCs established	2019
Original primary categories	Rape cases, POCSO cases
Pending FTSC cases	Approximately 2.45 lakh
Total pending trial-court cases (India)	Approximately 4.8 crore
Proposed new category	Examination paper-leak cases

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The scale problem, stated plainly

Even if every FTSC in the country functioned at maximal efficiency and cleared its full docket, the aggregate reduction in India's judicial pendency would be marginal: 2.45 lakh cases against a total pendency of 4.8 crore represents roughly half a percentage point of the overall backlog. This is not a criticism of FTSCs' value for the specific cases they handle, but a caution against treating FTSC expansion as if it were a systemic fix.

Where the judges actually come from

FTSCs are typically staffed by reassigning existing judicial officers, sometimes newly recruited additional judges, but frequently sitting judges redirected from the general docket, rather than through a proportionate expansion of overall sanctioned judicial strength. This reallocation dynamic means the general docket, everything not designated fast-track, potentially slows further as capacity is redirected, a trade-off rarely made explicit when a new FTSC category is announced with fanfare.

Why the triage can still be justified

None of this means FTSCs are without value. Genuinely time-sensitive case categories, sexual violence against minors given the ongoing trauma of prolonged proceedings, or exam-integrity offences given the public-trust stakes and the practical urgency of resolving cases before subsequent exam cycles are affected, plausibly warrant prioritised resolution even at the cost of somewhat slower general-docket resolution. The question is not whether triage is legitimate, but whether it is honestly presented as triage rather than disguised as capacity reform.

The honesty test for the paper-leak FTSC proposal

If the government proposes FTSCs for paper-leak cases alongside a credible commitment to expand overall judicial sanctioned strength, recruitment, infrastructure, support staff, the reform would represent genuine additional capacity directed at both priority and general cases. If the FTSC announcement stands alone, without accompanying capacity expansion, it should be understood for what it likely is: a reallocation exercise that improves outcomes for one visible case category while imposing a diffuse, less visible cost on everyone else waiting in the general queue.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

When evaluating any “fast-track” or “special mechanism” reform, always ask where the additional capacity comes from. A reform that creates a faster lane for one category of problem is only a net improvement if it adds genuinely new capacity; if it merely reallocates existing, already-scarce capacity, it

is a zero-sum redistribution dressed in the language of reform. This distinction applies far beyond courts, to hospital fast-track wards, expedited government service counters, and any administrative mechanism promising priority processing.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Picture a single, overcrowded highway representing India's total judicial capacity, carrying 4.8 crore vehicles worth of traffic. A small express lane is carved out, not by widening the highway, but by converting one of the existing lanes and redirecting its traffic flow toward vehicles carrying a specific flag, first "sexual violence cases," now proposed also for "exam paper-leak cases." Vehicles in the express lane genuinely move faster. But the highway has not gained a lane; the remaining lanes carrying the other 4.8 crore vehicles now share slightly less capacity than before, a redistribution invisible in any photograph of the fast lane's success.

WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Pair any new FTSC category announcement with a published judicial-strength expansion plan**, distinguishing net new capacity from reassigned capacity, so the trade-off is transparent.
- ❷ **Publish comparative pendency-reduction data** for FTSC categories versus the general docket, to track whether reallocation is producing a hidden slowdown elsewhere.
- ❸ **Prioritise structural judicial capacity expansion**, recruitment, infrastructure, digitisation, as the primary lever for reducing the 4.8-crore aggregate pendency, treating FTSCs as a supplementary triage tool rather than the primary reform.
- ❹ **Establish clear, published criteria for FTSC-eligible case categories**, preventing ad hoc political responsiveness from determining which categories receive fast-track status.
- ❺ **Sunset-review each FTSC category periodically**, assessing whether continued fast-track designation remains justified as case volumes and public-interest urgency evolve.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has tested judicial pendency, access to justice, and court-reform mechanisms as recurring GS2 themes; this editorial's distinction between capacity reallocation and capacity expansion offers a sharper analytical lens than a purely descriptive account of FTSCs.

Practice question: "A fast-track mechanism that reallocates existing judicial capacity is not the same reform as one that expands it." Examine this claim with reference to India's Fast-Track Special Courts and their proposed extension to examination paper-leak cases. (250 words, 15 marks)

Interview angle: If Fast-Track Special Courts mostly reshuffle existing judicial capacity rather than add to it, is proposing new FTSCs for paper-leak cases a genuine reform or a way to appear responsive without committing new resources? How would you tell the difference in practice?

Sources: The Hindu, Department of Justice, National Judicial Data Grid

Source: Have Fast-Track Courts Delivered on the Promise of Speedy Justice? — Ujjayari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

• KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Fast-Track Special Courts, established in 2019 primarily for rape and POCSO cases and now proposed for examination paper-leak cases, have not meaningfully added judicial capacity; they largely reassign existing judges to prioritised case categories, leaving the underlying capacity constraint, 4.8 crore pending trial-court cases against a comparatively small 2.45 lakh pending FTSC caseload, essentially unaddressed.



SUPPORTING

- FTSCs create a politically visible mechanism for demonstrating urgency on a specific case category without the harder, slower work of expanding overall judicial sanctioned strength, court infrastructure and support staff.
- The scale mismatch is stark: 2.45 lakh pending FTSC cases represent a small fraction of the 4.8 crore pending cases across India's trial courts, meaning even fully successful FTSCs cannot meaningfully dent the aggregate pendency problem.
- Reassigning judges to FTSCs necessarily means fewer judges available for the general docket, potentially slowing case resolution for categories not designated as fast-tracked, an opportunity cost rarely acknowledged when a new FTSC category is announced.



COUNTER

Even a capacity-neutral reallocation can be justified if the designated case categories, sexual violence against minors, or now exam-integrity offences with clear public-trust stakes, genuinely warrant prioritised resolution speed over other pending matters, making FTSCs a rational triage mechanism rather than a failed reform.



WAY FORWARD

Treat FTSCs as a legitimate triage tool for genuinely time-sensitive case categories, but pair any new FTSC announcement with a transparent accounting of judicial strength expansion, not reallocation alone, to avoid disguising a zero-sum reshuffle as a capacity reform.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

Examine whether Fast-Track Special Courts have structurally improved judicial capacity in India, or primarily reallocated existing capacity toward politically prioritised case categories. Use this analysis to evaluate the proposal to extend FTSCs to examination paper-leak cases. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Fast-Track Special Courts (FTSCs), established in 2019 primarily to expedite rape and POCSO cases and now proposed as a mechanism for examination paper-leak cases, raise a structural question: do they add net judicial capacity, or do they reallocate existing, already-scarce capacity toward politically prioritised categories?

BODY

The scale of the mismatch is instructive. FTSCs across India carry roughly 2.45 lakh pending cases, a workload dwarfed by the approximately 4.8 crore cases pending across India's trial courts as a whole. This means FTSCs, even functioning at full efficiency, address a small fraction of the pendency problem by design, since they are staffed primarily by judges reassigned from the general docket rather than by newly recruited judicial officers, infrastructure and support staff. The reallocation is not without justification: sexual violence against minors and, now, examination-integrity offences plausibly warrant prioritised resolution given their distinct public-trust and victim-protection stakes.

But treating FTSC expansion as equivalent to judicial capacity reform obscures the opportunity cost: every judge reassigned to a fast-track docket is a judge unavailable for the general caseload, meaning FTSC announcements can create an appearance of responsiveness without addressing the systemic under-resourcing that produces India's enormous case backlog in the first place.

CONCLUSION

FTSCs are best understood as a legitimate but limited triage mechanism, not a scalable solution to judicial pendency; any future FTSC proposal, including for paper-leak cases, should be evaluated on whether it is paired with genuine additional judicial capacity or merely reshuffles an already-strained system.

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