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# **Important Issues of the Day**

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- **Canada-India – Page No.6 , GS 2**
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# India taps alternative crude supplies as conflict in West Asia drags on

Refiners are looking to procure additional cargoes from the U.S., Russia and West Africa to shore up their supplies; refineries have deferred planned maintenance shutdowns to create buffers; analysts warn of rising cost structure of the alternatives

## **Press Trust of India**

NEW DELHI

**I**ndian refiners have begun negotiating for additional crude cargoes from the U.S., Russia and West Africa to ensure supplies remain adequate in the event the West Asia conflict drags on for a longer period, industry officials and analysts said.

Refineries, which convert crude oil into fuels such as petrol and diesel, have deferred planned maintenance shutdowns and are maintaining normal processing rates to create buffers to meet the country's requirement in the near term, they said.

India imports about 88% of its crude oil requirement, with roughly half of those supplies in February passing through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sea lane between Iran and Oman that serves as a key energy transit route for global markets.

The recent military strikes by the U.S. and Israel on Iran, and Tehran's



**Brief window:** The waiver on the sale and delivery of sanctioned Russian oil is valid till April 5, offering India another source. REUTERS

retaliatory attacks on U.S. bases in neighbouring countries as well as Israel, have sharply escalated tensions in the region, leading to a near halt in tanker movements through the strategic waterway.

"Non-strait sources are fully operational and we are sourcing more and more supplies from non-conflict zones," a top oil Ministry source said. "Non-strait sources accounted for 60% of supplies in 2025, which – after the Middle East conflict – climbed to 70%."

Indian refiners are tapping crude from West Africa, Latin America and the U.S., he said, adding that the U.S. Treasury Department issuing a 30-day waiver to allow the sale and delivery of sanctioned Russian oil that has already been loaded on vessels to India has opened up another avenue.

The waiver permits the sale, delivery or discharge of crude oil and petroleum products of Russian origin that were loaded onto vessels on or before March 5, including ships subject to

certain sanctions. The exemption remains valid until April 5, allowing cargoes already in transit to be completed without violating sanctions restrictions.

There are 120 million barrels of Russian crude on the water. Of this, as many as 15 million barrels of Russia-origin crude are sitting on tankers close to India – in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal – while another 7 million Russian crude barrels are idling near Singapore.

Industry sources said Indian refiners have started buying Russian oil. Reliance Industries, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd., and HPCL-Mittal Energy Ltd. have returned to the market to secure Russian cargoes, they said.

The Oil Ministry official said India never stopped buying Russian oil – it imported some 1.04 million bpd (barrels per day) of Russian crude in February. "We are in a very comfortable position as far as crude and finished products are concerned," he said, adding

the combined inventory can meet the country's demand for 50 days.

## **Challenges ahead**

While India may be able to secure adequate physical crude through alternative sources, analysts cautioned that the overall cost structure could worsen due to higher crude prices, increased freight and insurance premiums, and longer shipping routes.

International crude oil prices have jumped to over ₹92 per barrel from around ₹70 when the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on February 28. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices have more than doubled to ₹24-25 per million British thermal unit.

Every ₹10 increase in crude prices could add 20-25 basis points to the consumer price index if passed on to consumers, or widen the fiscal deficit if taxes are cut to neutralise the impact. The immediate impact will be a higher import bill, a widening current account deficit and pressure on the rupee.

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# Cheetahs moving from Kuno to Rajasthan showing 'natural territorial behaviour': NTCA

**Jacob Koshy**  
NEW DELHI

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), a body under the Union Environment Ministry, said on Sunday that cheetahs travelling from the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh to Baran district in Rajasthan were showing "natural territorial behaviour".

This follows media reports since late February that two cheetahs from Kuno had been tracked in the Mangrol range and the Banjh Amla Conservation Reserve of Baran district after travelling 60 km to 70 km from Kuno National Park. The cheetahs, called KP2 and KP3, are among



The cheetahs being tracked are among the first generation of cubs born in India to African cheetahs. ANI

the first generation of cubs born in India to African cheetahs translocated in 2022. Both cheetahs are being tracked round the clock via satellite and are radio-collared. They are being monitored by a joint inter-State team, with field

teams deployed from the Kishanganj and Anta forest ranges in Rajasthan.

"Long-distance dispersal across landscape boundaries is a well-documented, natural territorial behaviour in cheetahs. The Project Cheetah Action

Plan explicitly anticipates and provides for inter-State movement within the Kuno-Gandhi Sagar meta-population landscape," the NTCA noted. "These movements reinforce the strategic rationale for the proposed 17,000-sq. km Kuno-Gandhi Sagar inter-State wildlife corridor spanning seven Rajasthan and eight Madhya Pradesh districts."

Nine cheetahs from Botswana arrived on February 28 as part of the government's Project Cheetah, which aims to reintroduce the species in India after it became extinct in the country in 1952. The animals, six females and three males, were transported by an Indian Air Force car-

go aircraft to Gwalior Air Base and then flown by helicopter to Kuno National Park.

Botswana will become the third African country to send cheetahs to India under the programme, after earlier translocations from Namibia and South Africa since the project began in September 2022. Including the animals from Botswana, 29 adult cheetahs have been translocated from Africa since 2022. Nine of them have died from various causes. Twenty-eight cubs have been born in India and around 12 have died so far. Three adult cheetahs are housed in the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, also in Madhya Pradesh.

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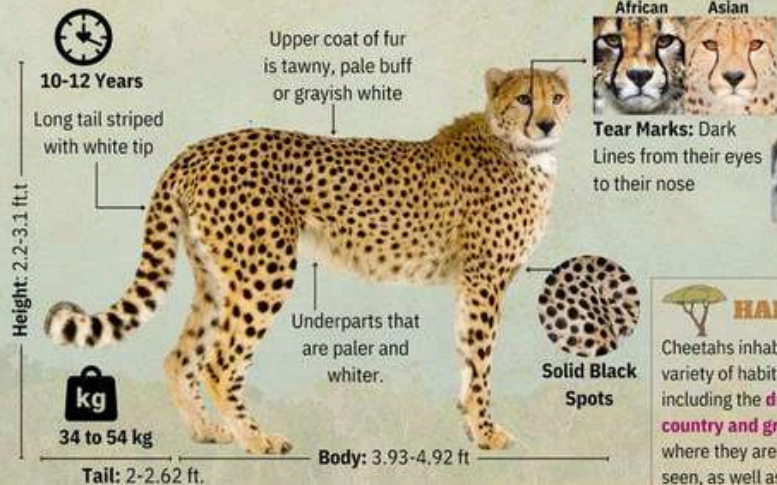
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# CHEETAH

(*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus* and *Acinonyx jubatus jubatus*)

**Fastest mammal on land**, the cheetah can reach speeds of 60 or perhaps even 97 or 113 kilometers/hour over short distances. It usually chases its prey at only about half that speed, however. After a chase, a **cheetah needs half an hour to catch its breath before it can eat.**



Tear Marks: Dark Lines from their eyes to their nose



## HABITAT

Cheetahs inhabit a wide variety of habitats, including the **dry, open country and grasslands** where they are most often seen, as well as areas of **denser vegetation and rocky upland terrain.**



## BEHAVIORS

Cheetahs tend to be **introvert in nature**. They often shows solitary behavior.



## GESTATION

Cheetahs have a gestation period of about **3 months (93 days)**, typically giving birth to **1 to 6 cubs**, (rare instances of up to 8 cubs occur). Usually, **females raise their cubs solo.**



## IUCN STATUS

African Cheetah



Asiatic Cheetah



## APPEARANCE

Male cheetahs are slightly **bigger than females**. They are sexually **dimorphic species** though it is difficult to identify cheetahs' sex by appearance alone.



## GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE

Cheetahs are found across Africa, notably in Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, and Botswana, and have disappeared from 13 countries over the last 50 years. **The Asiatic cheetah, critically endangered, exists only in Iran.** Namibian cheetahs inhabiting grasslands, savannahs, thickets, and mountains.



● Current Range  
○ Historical Range

## THREATS

- Genetic issues
- Habitat Loss
- Conflict with Humans
- Less Food to Eat
- Poaching,
- Illegal wildlife & pet trade

## CONSERVATION

**Cheetah Re-introduction Project:** In India officially began on September 17, 2022, aiming to replenish the cheetah populations that were **declared extinct within the country in 1952**. In 2022, a group of **8 cheetahs**, embarked on a journey from Namibia, ultimately reaching their destination at **Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, India.**



Infographic by Gaurav Sharma

# AFRICAN CHEETAH VS ASIATIC CHEETAH



## AFRICAN CHEETAH

- 🐾 **SCIENTIFIC NAME:**  
Acinonyx Jubatus
- 🐾 **DISTRIBUTION:**  
Across Africa from North-west Africa, East Africa, & Southern Africa
- 🐾 **SIZE:**  
Slightly bigger build with sturdier legs and neck
- 🐾 **SKIN:**  
Light brown to golden brown fur color, thicker than the Asiatic ones
- 🐾 **IUCN RED LIST STATUS:**  
Vulnerable



## ASIATIC CHEETAH

- 🐾 **SCIENTIFIC NAME:**  
Acinonyx Jubatus Venaticus
- 🐾 **DISTRIBUTION:**  
Only 12 Asiatic cheetahs, 9 males, and 3 females are left in Iran
- 🐾 **SIZE:**  
Slightly smaller and slender than the African cheetah
- 🐾 **SKIN:**  
Buff to light fawn color bordering pale yellow skin, has more fur underbelly and back of neck
- 🐾 **IUCN RED LIST STATUS:**  
Critically Endangered



- **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.**
- **It was established in 2005 following the recommendations of the Tiger Task Force.**
- **It was constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it. NTCA was set up under the Chairmanship of the Minister for Environment and Forests.**
- **The Authority will have**
- **eight experts having qualifications in wildlife conservation and welfare tribals,**
- **3 MPs,**
- **The Inspector-General of Forests, in charge of project Tiger, will be ex-officio Member Secretary**
- **Others**
-

## Railways launches app for women staff to report harassment

S. Vijay Kumar  
CHENNAI

The Indian Railways has launched a customised app for women employees to lodge complaints about sexual harassment at workplace.

Sexual Harassment Incident Notification for Empowerment (SHINE) was made operational on the occasion of International Women's Day on Sunday.

This complements existing internal complaints committees under the 1997 Vishakha guidelines and government directives to protect women at the workplace.

With SHINE, women employees can lodge complaints through the Human Resources Management System.

According to railway sources, SHINE also allows reporting incidents or complaints on behalf of outsiders (visitors), contractual staff, students and others who may not have access to the app. It would maintain confidentiality and address issues brought to the notice of the authorities concerned effectively. The app could be accessed via the 'Employee Self Service' system.

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## **Fundamental Rights:**

- **It guarantees all Indians the right to equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State on the basis of gender (Article 15(1)) and special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women (Article 15(3)).**

## **Fundamental Duties:**

- **It ensures that practices derogatory to the dignity of women are prohibited under Article 51 (A).**
- **Vishaka Guidelines were stipulated by the Supreme Court in the Vishaka and others v State of Rajasthan case in 1997, regarding sexual harassment at the workplace.**
- **The Court drew its strength from several provisions of the Constitution, including Article 15 and General Recommendations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which India ratified in 1993.**

## **Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Act**

- **The Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Act or Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition & Redressal) Act was enacted in 2013 to implement the Vishakha guidelines.**
- **The PoSH Act covers concepts of quid pro quo (a favour or advantage granted in return for something), harassment, and hostile work environment as sexual harassment.**
- **Under the Act, an employee is defined not just in accordance with the company law.**
- **All women employees, whether employed regularly, temporarily, contractually, on an ad hoc or daily wage basis, as apprentices or interns, or even without the knowledge of the principal employer, can seek redressal for sexual harassment in the workplace.**
- **Applicability: Public and Private sector, government and non-government sectors and organised and unorganised sectors. Even non-traditional workplaces and places visited by employees for work are covered under the Act.**

## Applicability

- It covers both **public** and **private** sectors, including **non traditional** work place.
- A woman must file a **written complaint** to the committee within **3 to 6** months of a sexual harassment incident.

## Internal Complaint Committees (ICC)

Every employer must constitute an ICC at each office or branch with **10 or more employees**.

- Must be **led by a woman**, include at least two female employees, and a **third party**.
- Has powers **similar to civil court**, and the inquiry process complies with the **“principles of natural justice”**.

Employers should hold regular workshops and awareness programs to educate employees about the Act.



## The Act defines sexual harassment to include:



Unwanted behaviors like physical contact and sexual advances.

A demand or request for sexual favours

Making sexually coloured remarks

Showing pornography



## Local committees

Receiving complaints from small firms (**under 10 employees**) and the informal sector at the **district level**.



## Annual Audit Report

Discussion with the **district officer** regarding **annual** sexual harassment

## Resolution by 2 ways

### Conciliation

Between the complainant and the respondent.



### Inquiry

By Committees and acting on the findings.



## Mains Question

*Despite the enactment of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, incidents of workplace harassment continue to be reported. Examine the challenges in effective implementation of the law and suggest measures to ensure a safer work environment for women in India. (250 words)*

कायस्थल पर महहलाओं के यौन उत्पीड़न (रोकथाम, तनर्षेध और प्रतततोर्ष) अर्धतनयम, 2013 के लागू होने के बावरूद कायस्थलों पर यौन उत्पीड़न की घटनाएँ सामने आती रहती हैं। इस कानून के प्रभावी कियान्वयन में आने वाली चुनौततयों का परीक्षण कीजए तथा भारत में महहलाओं के ललए सुरक्षक्षत काय ावातावरण सुतनजचचतकरने के उपाय सुझाइए।(250शब्द)

# Leprosy

## LEPROSY

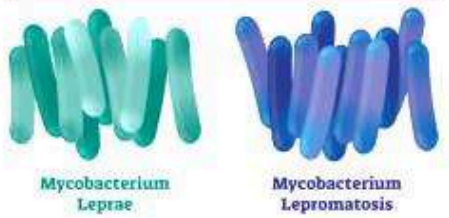


Leprosy Primarily Affects the SKIN and the PERIPHERAL NERVES



It May also Strike the EYES and the Thin Tissue Lining the Inside of the NOSE, KIDNEYS, and MALE REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS

LEPROSY, Also Known as Hansen's Disease (HD), is a Long-Term Infection by the Bacterin *Mycobacterium Leprae* or *Mycobacterium Lepromatosis*



It Usually Takes About 3 TO 5 YEARS for Symptoms to Appear

Some People do not develop Symptoms UNTIL 20 YEARS LATER



Permanent Damage to the Nerves	Permanent Damage to the Legs	Permanent Damage to the Arms
Permanent Damage to the Nose	Disfiguration of the Face	Muscle Weakness Inability to Flex
Blindness or Glaucoma	Kidney Failure	Erectile Dysfunction

- **Leprosy (Hansen's disease) is a chronic infectious disease caused by Mycobacterium leprae. It affects the skin, nerves, eyes, and respiratory tract, leading to ulcers, deformities, and disability if untreated.**

**It spreads through droplets from the nose and mouth during close contact with**

- **untreated individuals.**

**Leprosy is a neglected tropical disease (NTD) which still occurs in more than 120 countries, with around 200 000 new cases reported every year.**

- **Treatment: Leprosy is curable and treatment in the early stages can prevent disability.**
- **In 1982–83, WHO endorsed Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT) (dapsones + rifampicin + clofazimine) as the standard leprosy treatment regimen.**

-

- **Elimination of leprosy as a public health problem (defined as prevalence of less than 1 per 10 000 population) was achieved globally in the year 2000. However, according to the latest WHO Global Leprosy Update, nearly 182,815 new leprosy cases were detected worldwide, with India accounting for 59% of the global burden of newly detected cases.**  
**India achieved “elimination as a public health problem” (i.e. prevalence < 1 per 10,000 population) at the national level in 2005.**
- **As of March 2025, 31 States and 638 districts have achieved a Prevalence Rate <1 per 10,000 population.**
- 
- **Over the years, India’s leprosy prevalence rate has decreased from 57.2 per 10,000 in 1981 to 0.69 per 10,000 in 2014–15 and further to 0.57 in 2024–25.**

## One Nation, One Election — remedy worse than disease

In 2019, Indonesia held a historic one-day election for the President, national and regional legislatures, and local councils. Aimed at cutting costs and simplifying administration, it came at a tragic human cost: nearly 900 poll workers died and over 5,000 fell seriously ill. In 2024, there was again a heavy toll — more than 100 deaths and nearly 15,000 illnesses. In June 2025, the Constitutional Court ruled that national and local elections must be held separately from 2029, two to two-and-a-half years apart, citing voter and administrator overload and the impact on democratic participation.

Supporters of India's 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) proposal argue that synchronising the Lok Sabha (general election) and State Assembly elections would reduce expenditure, limit prolonged security deployments, minimise disruptions caused by the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), and prevent political parties from remaining in constant campaign mode. Indonesia's experience, however, offers a cautionary lesson.

Comparative constitutional practice offers little support for enforced electoral synchronisation. In Canada, federal and provincial elections occur independently. In Australia, synchronisation is impossible: State legislatures serve fixed four-year terms, while the federal House of Representatives has a maximum tenure of three years.

Germany is often misquoted. Its stability arises not from synchronised elections — Länder polls are deliberately staggered — but from the Constructive Vote of No Confidence, which requires the Bundestag to elect a successor before removing a Chancellor.

South Africa and Indonesia use proportional representation, which diffuses political power and protects minority voices. India's first-past-the-post system lacks such safeguards, allowing a national wave to sweep State elections. The United States offers an even weaker analogy: fixed electoral cycles function there because the executive's tenure is insulated from legislative confidence in a presidential system.

### The Constitutional Amendment proposal

The most comprehensive blueprint emerged from the High-Level Committee (2023-24) chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, now taking legislative form in the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024. The proposed Article 82A empowers the President to notify an "appointed date" from which all State Assembly tenures would align with the Lok Sabha's cycle. Assemblies constituted after this date would have their tenure curtailed, even if their five-year term had not expired. The Bill also introduces "unexpired-term elections": if a legislature is dissolved prematurely, the new legislature would serve only the remainder of the original term rather than receiving a fresh mandate. Additionally, it grants the Election Commission of India the authority to recommend deferring State elections if simultaneous conduct proves impracticable. Amendments are proposed to Articles 83, 172, and 327. These changes raise serious constitutional concerns.

India deliberately adopted a parliamentary system where governments survive only as long as they retain legislative confidence. In the Constituent Assembly, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar explained that democracy cannot simultaneously



M.K. Stalin  
is the Chief Minister  
of Tamil Nadu

India's 'One Nation, One Election' proposal gravely undermines federalism, governance, democratic principles and the voter mandate

maximise stability and responsibility. India chose responsibility — continuous executive accountability rather than guaranteed tenure.

Articles 75 and 164 establish the collective responsibility of the executive to the legislature. Articles 83 and 172 prescribe only a maximum tenure of five years for legislatures, not a guaranteed term. Early dissolution is, therefore, not a defect but a democratic safeguard, allowing voters to renew the mandate when confidence collapses. ONOE reverses this logic, treating dissolution as an administrative inconvenience and subtly shifting India toward a quasi-presidential model that weakens legislative accountability.

In *S.R. Bommai vs Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court of India affirmed that federalism is part of the Constitution's basic structure. States are not mere administrative units but possess an independent constitutional identity. Their democratic rhythms may legitimately differ.

ONOE unsettles this principle. It allows State mandates to be truncated not because legislative confidence has collapsed, but to align with the national electoral calendar. If introduced in 2029, a State electing its legislature in 2033 would see its mandate expire in just one year.

By contrast, staggered elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and local bodies create a continuous feedback mechanism, keeping governments attentive to public sentiment. In a system without a right of recall, they serve as the next best instrument of accountability. As James Madison wrote in 'Federalist No. 57', frequent elections ensure governments maintain "immediate dependence on, and sympathy with, the people."

### The problem of 'unexpired-term' elections

The most troubling feature is mid-term elections for unexpired legislative term. The Constitution recognises no concept of a residual mandate. Although the proposed Articles 83(6) and 172(5) claim that a newly elected House would not be a continuation of the previous one, they effectively preserve earlier electoral cycles to maintain synchronisation. This produces several distortions.

First, it devalues the franchise. Mid-cycle elections would produce governments with truncated mandates, reducing elections to provisional exercises and risking deeper voter apathy.

Second, it undermines governance and accountability, as residual-term governments lack incentives for structural reform, encouraging populism and policy drift. Unlike the temporary constraints imposed by the MCC, truncated mandates could weaken governance for years rather than weeks.

Third, it risks creating a "governance dead zone". The Amendment Bill does not specify the minimum duration of an "unexpired term" triggering a mid-term election.

At the State level, deferring elections could prolong President's Rule, conflicting with Article 356(5), which limits it to one year, extendable to three years only during a national emergency with Election Commission of India (ECI) certification.

At the Union level, a caretaker government could remain in office awaiting synchronised elections, potentially breaching Article 85's requirement that Parliament meet every six

months. Such a government cannot present a full Budget under Articles 112-117 and would be limited to a Vote on Account (Article 116), hampering fiscal governance.

Thus the "unexpired-term" mechanism is legally unworkable at the Union level beyond six months and would require sweeping constitutional changes that risk distorting the Constitution's identity and violating the Basic Structure doctrine.

The proposed Article 82A(5) empowers the ECI to recommend deferral of State elections without clear criteria, time limits, or parliamentary oversight, if unable to be conducted simultaneously with the Lok Sabha. Even Article 356 contains safeguards — parliamentary approval and temporal limits. By contrast, Article 82A(5) creates a zone of unguided discretion.

If a State government falls mid-term, the Union government could impose President's Rule and defer elections, effectively governing the State through the Governor. The incoming government, after elections, may inherit only a truncated tenure.

The issue is not whether such abuse is likely, but that the Amendment makes it constitutionally possible. As Alexander Hamilton warned in *Federalist No. 59* (1788), the constitutional possibility of misuse is itself "an unanswerable objection."

In the NJAC case (2015), the Court held that constitutional validity depends on institutional design, not assurances of benign exercise. An amendment that structurally endangers a basic feature is unconstitutional regardless of how power may be used in practice. ONOE risks violating federalism by enabling prolonged unelected State governance in the name of synchronisation.

### The cost argument

The fiscal burden of elections is macro-economically negligible and the figures do not justify a constitutional overhaul of such magnitude.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee estimates show combined Lok Sabha and State Assembly election spending at around ₹4,500 crore (2015-16), about 0.25% of the Union Budget and 0.03% of GDP. PRS data shows Lok Sabha election costs historically ranged from 0.02%-0.05% of GDP (1957-2014). Elections are held in phases (82 days in 2024), allowing the ECI to rotate EVMs, VVPATs, and security forces. Simultaneous polls would remove this flexibility and demand costly new resources, weakening claimed administrative gains.

Is it wise to amend the Constitution and weaken federalism to save fractions of 1% of GDP? Elections are not an overhead to be minimised but the recurring price of self-government, ensuring that power remains answerable to the people.

The Justice Kurian Joseph Committee on Union-State Relations, constituted by the Government of Tamil Nadu, has recommended in Part I of its Report (February 2026) that the Bill should be withdrawn — a stance endorsed by the Tamil Nadu government. The promised benefits of the ONOE proposal are overstated, while its structural harms are profound. It distorts the Constitution's identity and violates the basic structure. India must avoid repeating Indonesia's mistake.

- **In 2019, Indonesia held a historic one-day election for the President, national and regional legislatures, and local councils. Aimed at cutting costs and simplifying administration, it came at a tragic human cost: nearly 900 poll workers died and over 5,000 fell seriously ill. In 2024, there was again a heavy toll — more than 100 deaths and nearly 15,000 illnesses. In June 2025, the Constitutional Court ruled that national and local elections must be held separately from 2029, two to two-and-a-half years apart, citing voter and administrator overload and the impact on democratic participation.**
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- **from which all State Assembly tenures would align with the Lok Sabha’s cycle. Assemblies constituted after this date would have their tenure curtailed, even if their five-year term had not expired.**
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- **The Bill also introduces “unexpired-term elections”: if a legislature is dissolved prematurely, the new legislature would serve only the remainder of the original term rather than receiving a fresh mandate.**

- **Articles 75 and 164 establish the collective responsibility of the executive to the legislature. Articles 83 and 172 prescribe only a maximum tenure of five years for legislatures, not a guaranteed term.**
- **In S.R. Bommai vs Union of India (1994), the Supreme Court of India affirmed that federalism is part of the Constitution's basic structure. States are not mere administrative units but possess an independent constitutional identity. Their democratic rhythms may legitimately differ.**  
**If a State government falls mid-term, the Union government could impose President's Rule and defer**
- **elections, effectively governing the State through the Governor. The incoming government, after elections, may inherit only a truncated tenure.**  
**The issue is not whether such abuse is likely, but that the Amendment makes it constitutionally possible. As Alexander Hamilton warned in Federalist No. 59 (1788), the constitutional possibility of**
- **misuse is itself "an unanswerable objection."**

**Q. With reference to “One Nation, One Election” consider the following statements:** 1. It refers to the idea of holding simultaneous polls for State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha instead of separate and continuous elections. 2. It will help in increasing accountability of the government. 3. Simultaneous elections would require amending Article 83 of the Indian Constitution. **Which of the statements given above is/are correct? [A] 1 only [B] 1 and 3 only [C] 1 and 2 only [D] 1, 2 and 3**

# The new Canada-India economic alignment emerges

Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney concluded a landmark visit to India a week ago (February 27 to March 2, 2026), one that began with direct dialogue with India's business leaders in the financial capital of Mumbai and then shifted to the policy corridors of New Delhi with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The visit was not symbolic. It was commercial. It was forward-looking. It was anchored in the recognition that India's growth story is one of the defining economic realities of our time.

For too long, the Canada-India relationship was defined by episodic tensions and reactive diplomacy. With this visit, political will has been re-established at the highest levels and commercial doors have been opened. But opportunities, however promising, do not convert themselves into jobs, exports, or investment. That will require sustained engagement on both sides.

Big two-way opportunities exist for Canadian and Indian firms. One of the most consequential moments of this visit was the formal signing of the Terms of Reference, which officially relaunched Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations. Both governments have committed to finalising this ambitious agreement by the end of the year and subsequently doubling bilateral trade to \$70 billion by 2030.

This matters for Indian business: a CEPA would reduce barriers for Indian exporters, create clearer rules for Indian investors in Canada, and expand access in sectors that range from technology to pharmaceuticals. It would also give Indian firms a stronger platform into North America through a predictable, rules-based economy. Nevertheless, signing the Terms of Reference is only the starting point, not the finish



**Victor Thomas**

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A reset in Canada-India ties is being driven by economic opportunity and ambition

line. Trade agreements create frameworks but do not automatically generate market share. This new political alignment has established ideal conditions for companies on both sides to form partnerships, invest capital and build joint ventures. Already, it is clear what is possible.

## Energy, minerals synergy, other areas

The historic, Canadian \$2.6-billion, nine-year uranium supply agreement between the Government of India and Cameco demonstrates the level of trust that underpins strategic cooperation. Nuclear energy requires regulatory confidence and long-term commitment, demonstrating that when political leadership aligns with commercial readiness, transformative agreements follow.

Energy and critical minerals remain clear areas of complementarity. Canada is a ready supplier of responsibly produced oil and gas, uranium for clean baseload power, and critical minerals essential for electric vehicles and advanced manufacturing. India's scale and demand provide long-term market certainty.

At the same time, there is a significant opportunity for Indian companies to expand their footprint in Canada.

India's technology sector is globally competitive, with firms such as HCL Technologies recently announcing investments in Canada's innovation ecosystem. Canada offers North American market access, deep Artificial Intelligence (AI) research clusters, stable regulations, and clean energy, making it a natural partner.

In financial services, long-standing joint ventures, such as Sun Life-Aditya Birla, show that cross-border collaboration succeeds when both sides commit long-term. Agriculture presents

another opening. Canada's agri-food exporters can help complement India's food security and sustainability needs.

There is also an enormous opportunity for Canadian institutional investors and pension funds – which have now invested over Canadian \$100 billion in India's infrastructure and real estate development – to further explore venture and public equity offerings. Already, Fairfax India has committed to India's long-term development through significant investment in Bengaluru airport, and Brookfield from telecom towers to renewable energy projects. India's urbanisation, logistics corridors, renewable energy build-out, and industrial parks require consistent capital. Canada can provide it. Conversely, Indian infrastructure and technology firms will find opportunities in Canada's digital infrastructure sectors, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing.

## The next phase

Mr. Carney has also extended an invitation to Mr. Modi to visit Canada, an important signal that this renewed partnership is intended to be sustained and reciprocal. A new window of opportunity has opened. India has trade deals with trusted allies such as Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the European Union, and the United States. Canada continues to diversify its economic partnerships amid geopolitical uncertainty. Closer alignment with India is complementary and strategic in today's geopolitical environment.

This is a defining moment for Canada and India's joint economic futures. It is an opening shaped by a changing world and renewed political resolve. Companies have an opportunity to seize the momentum with action, ambition, and conviction.

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# The need to recognise 'volunteer' care work

**T**he Union Budget 2026-27 proposes to build a 'strong care ecosystem' by training 1.5 lakh multiskilled caregivers in geriatric, core care and allied skills through programmes aligned with the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). As India's care needs expand, such a move is both timely and necessary.

However, the Budget reveals a deeper paradox; even as the state prepares to train a new cadre of certified care professionals, it makes little mention of the five million plus women who already run India's health, nutrition and childcare systems. Our Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), Anganwadi workers and helpers, and mid-day meal workers continue to deliver essential public services every day, yet remain classified as 'volunteers', excluded from the very ecosystem the state now seems determined to strengthen.

### A shadow labour force

From the Anganwadi worker ensuring a child is fed to the ASHA worker tracking a pregnancy in a remote village, these women constitute the backbone of India's welfare architecture. Their work is essential, continuous and indispensable to the state, yet they labour in a deeply precarious space, earning meagre monthly honorariums, without formal contracts, paid leaves or maternity benefits. What little support they receive comes from small and fragmented responses by individual States such as honorarium hikes (which vary from State to State) and gratuity benefits, or coverage under national schemes such as Ayushman Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan. But these piecemeal measures do little to address the contradiction that lies at the core of India's care economy – that the state relies on a vast, feminised shadow labour force of women to deliver essential public services but classifies them as 'honorary workers' to limit



**Renjini Rajagopalan**

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India's so-called 'volunteer' care workers are in reality the permanent pillars of our welfare state

protections typically associated with formal employment.

### A gendered form of work

This contradiction is rooted in deeper structural norms surrounding care. The 'care penalty' in India is not just a sociological concept, it is a statistical reality. Insights from the 2024 Time Use Survey highlighted in the Economic Survey 2025-26 reinforce Indian women's role as primary caregivers, with 41% of females aged 15-59 spending 140 minutes daily on household caregiving, compared to just 21.4% of males at 74 minutes.

This pattern mirrors India's welfare architecture. By outsourcing its care responsibilities to women labelled as 'volunteers', the state draws on long-standing social norms that view care work as an extension of a woman's domestic duty rather than skilled labour deserving fair compensation. Since care is seen as 'natural' to women, it is rendered cheap and informal. This creates a vicious cycle – the less care work is recognised as skilled, the less compulsion there is to pay for it, trapping a predominantly female workforce in insecure employment. Against this background, the recent Budget's emphasis on investing in a new cohort of care workers exposes the absence of clear avenues to integrate its existing workforce; these workers already perform complex, multi-skilled tasks that demand emotional labour, field coordination, and deep knowledge of community dynamics. So why is the state not looking to upgrade and secure the livelihoods of those who already perform such critical work?

India's so-called 'volunteer' care workers are in reality the permanent pillars of our welfare state. The country cannot realise its ambitions to be a global powerhouse for health while the women who sustain such systems

remain underpaid, unprotected and largely invisible. But reimagining India's care economy requires both financial investment and a cultural shift.

### Reimagining the care economy

To begin with, India must move beyond the 'volunteer' label. In the Supreme Court's 2025 ruling in *Dharam Singh & Anr. vs State of U.P. & Anr.*, the Court upheld that work which is recurrent and central to an institution's functioning cannot be treated as temporary indefinitely. For India's cadre of 'volunteer' care workers who perform duties that are indispensable and continuous in nature to the state, this judgment offers a strong basis to demand that their honorary roles be converted into permanent posts.

Combined with the renewed Budgetary focus on skilling, this creates an opportune moment to revisit employment norms governing India's existing care workforce, and nudge the state towards the creation of clear transition

frameworks that help move these workers from honorariums to fair wages and formal contracts. Perhaps the first step could be to extend the proposed NSQF-aligned programmes to ASHA and Anganwadi workers as well.

For years, these workers have mobilised across the country to demand dignity and recognition of their work. It is now past time that the state responds by fulfilling the final two commitments – Reward and Represent – of the International Labour Organisation's 5R Framework for Decent Care Work. Our care workers who perform tirelessly need to be properly compensated and given a genuine voice in employment and policy decisions: in short, a real seat at the table.

*This is the sixth and final article in a curated selection published on the Editorial and Opinion pages, on March 6 and 7, marking International Women's Day.*



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

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