LAKSHYA ACADEMY
Aim, Think & Achieve
www.lakshyaacademy.co I www.lakshyaiasacademy.com

THE HINDU
INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

Daily News Analysis

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

Monday, 09 March, 2026

Edition : International Table of Contents

Page 01 Syllabus : GS III : Indian Economy / Prelims Exam	Regulations to implement new rural job Act yet to be finalised
Page 04 Syllabus : GS II : International Relations	India taps alternative crude supplies as conflict in West Asia drags on
Page 07 Syllabus : GS I : Indian Society / Prelims Exam	Why India's 'leaky pipeline' in research is unlike rest of the world
Page 10 Syllabus : GS II : Indian Polity / Prelims Exam	Why are Finance Commission grants to cities still so limited?
Page 13 Syllabus : GS III : Environment / Prelims Exam	India's renewable transition caught between stranded power and institutional inertia
Page 08 : Editorial Analysis Syllabus : GS II : Indian Polity	One Nation, One Election — remedy worse than disease

Add- 21/B, Om Swati Manor Chs, J.K. Sawant Marg, Opp. Shivaji Natyamandir, Behind Cambridge Showroom, Dadar (West) Mumbai – 400028
Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

Page 01 : GS III : Indian Economy / Prelims Exam

The VB-GRAM G Act, 2025, is designed to align rural employment with the Viksit Bharat @2047 vision. It replaces the demand-driven, safety-net model of MGNREGA with a more structured, asset-oriented, and technologically integrated framework. However, as of March 2026, the transition is facing a "bottleneck" phase where the rules for the 11 key categories of the Act—including social audits and funding formulas—are still under finalization.

Regulations to implement new rural job Act yet to be finalised

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025, has several steps to clear before it can be implemented.

According to sources, the Union Rural Development Ministry is holding weekly consultation meetings with the State governments.

There are several tricky issues that the Centre must navigate, including coming up with a formula for "normative allocation" for the States. The objective parameters for this are yet to be finalised. Under the legislation, these may be prescribed by the Union government.

The Union government has to frame rules under 11 categories, for example on social audit of the scheme.

The new rural employment legislation, which was passed by Parliament within two days of its introduction on December 16 last year, replaces the Congress-led UPA government's flagship scheme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005.

Section 4(5) of the legislation says, "The Central government shall determine the state-wise normative allocation for each financial year, based on objective parameters as may be prescribed by the Central government."

This clause is intended to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources, following complaints from several economically weaker States that they receive a smaller proportion of funds. These objective parameters are yet to be finalised.

Past performance

"Several State governments that were among the best performers under MGNREGA argue that the objective parameters should also take into account their past performance, while other States contend that the parameters should reflect the demand in a State, especially in those with high rates of migration of rural workers," a senior official of the Ministry of Rural Development said.

The legislation requires that all Gram Panchayats be categorised as A, B, or C, based on development parameters.

The Act cites only one example – "proximity to urban areas" – of what these "development parameters" could entail.

The Centre, currently in consultation with the States, is working on framing these parameters.

For the scheme to roll out, State governments must have at least five basic elements in place, a top official said.

Five essential elements

These include ensuring that ongoing work under the old legislation – MGNREGA – is completed.

Second, the States must enrol themselves on DBT Sparsh, a banking platform. For the first time since the launch of the rural employment scheme, the Centre and the States will share the financial burden. West Bengal has not yet enrolled on the platform, according to sources.

Third, the ongoing drive to conduct e-Know Your Customer (EKYC) verification of MGNREGA job cards must be completed.

Finally, State governments must onboard Yuktdhara, a geospatial planning portal that the Centre wants used for preparing the Viksit Gram Panchayat plan, which will function like a master schedule of all works planned for the year.

Sources indicated that the new legislation may not be ready for roll-out by April 1 this year.

From the day the new Act is notified by the Centre – to be treated as the commencement date – the State governments will have six months to implement the scheme.

Rough edges

The Centre has to frame rules under 11 categories before implementation of the VB-G RAM G Act

- According to Section 4(5) of the Act, the Centre will determine State-wise normative allocation based on 'objective parameters'
- Parameters also needed to categorise Gram Panchayats based on development

Aim, Think & Achieve
www.lakshyaacademy.co I www.lakshyaiasacademy.com

Key Pillars of the New Framework

The new legislation introduces several structural changes that differentiate it from its predecessor:

Enhanced Guarantee: It raises the statutory guarantee from 100 days to 125 days of wage employment per rural household.

Funding Shift: It moves from a 100% Central funding of unskilled wages to a 60:40 (Centre-State) cost-sharing model (90:10 for NE and Himalayan states), increasing the fiscal responsibility of State governments.

Agricultural Pause: To prevent labor shortages during peak farming seasons, States can now notify a "pause period" of up to 60 days in a financial year.

Thematic Focus: Works are now consolidated into four priority domains: Water Security, Core Rural Infrastructure, Livelihood Infrastructure, and Climate Resilience.

The "Tricky Issues" in Implementation

The delay in the roll-out, originally expected by April 1, 2026, stems from several contentious areas:

A. The "Normative Allocation" Dilemma

Section 4(5) empowers the Centre to determine state-wise funding based on "objective parameters." This replaces the old "Labour Budget" system.

State Conflict: High-performing states (like Kerala or Tamil Nadu) want past performance to be a criteria.

Migration Concerns: States with high outward migration (like Bihar or Odisha) want the formula to reflect labor demand and distress levels.

B. Categorization of Gram Panchayats

The Act mandates classifying Panchayats into A, B, and C categories based on development parameters. Currently, the only defined criteria is "proximity to urban areas," leaving the Ministry to negotiate more nuanced indicators with the States.

Mandatory Tech-Integration

For a State to transition to the new Act, the Union government has set five non-negotiable prerequisites:

Completion of MGNREGA Backlog: All ongoing works under the old Act must be closed.

DBT Sparsh Enrollment: States must onboard this banking platform for fund sharing. Some states, notably West Bengal, have shown resistance or delays.

E-KYC Completion: Verification of job cards is mandatory to eliminate "ghost" beneficiaries.

Yuktdhara Onboarding: Use of this GIS-based geospatial planning portal (developed by ISRO) is required for the "Viksit Gram Panchayat Plan."

Smart Card Issuance: Eventually replacing physical job cards with tech-enabled smart cards.

LAKSHYA ACADEMY
Aim, Think & Achieve
www.lakshyaacademy.co I www.lakshyaiasacademy.com

Conclusion: A Shift from Welfare to Wealth-Creation

The VB-GRAM G Act represents a shift from "Rights-based Welfare" to "Project-based Development." While the increase to 125 days is a positive step for income security, the transition to a budget-capped "normative allocation" and a 60:40 funding split raises concerns about the fiscal health of poorer states and the potential dilution of the "right to work" on demand. The success of this Mission will depend on how effectively the Centre balances its drive for technological transparency with the ground-level socio-economic realities of rural India.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: The VB-GRAM G Act proposes to consolidate rural development works under which of the following priority domains?

1. Water Security

2. Core Rural Infrastructure

3. Livelihood Infrastructure

4. Climate Resilience

Select the correct answer using the code below:

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2, 3 and 4 only

C. 1, 3 and 4 only

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: D)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Critically analyze how the shift from a demand-driven model under MGNREGA to a normative allocation model under the VB-GRAM G Act may affect rural employment security in India. **(150 Words)**

Page 04 : GS II : International Relations

The military escalation between the U.S., Israel, and Iran in early 2026 has crippled energy movements through the Persian Gulf. For India, which depends on imports for 88% of its crude, this is a direct threat to economic stability. In response, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) has shifted focus toward "non-strait" sources, which now account for 70% of India's oil supply, up from 60% in 2025.

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

Indian 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 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.

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

"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.

Key Strategies for Energy Security

A. The "Russian Oil" Lifeline

Despite previous international pressure and tariffs, the U.S. Treasury (OFAC) has granted India a crucial 30-day waiver (valid until April 5, 2026).

The Waiver: Permits the delivery and discharge of Russian crude loaded on vessels on or before March 5, 2025.

The Volume: Approximately 15 million barrels of Russian oil are currently idling in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, ready for Indian refineries.

Refiner Response: Major players like Reliance Industries (RIL) and HPCL have resumed aggressive spot purchases of Russian Urals to replace lost Gulf volumes.

B. Geographic Diversification

Indian refiners are negotiating additional term contracts and spot cargoes from:

The United States: Emerged as a primary alternative, with supplies routed through the Atlantic.

West Africa & Latin America: Increased intake from Nigeria, Angola, Brazil, and Guyana.

Central Asia: Exploring pipeline and rail-to-ship options to bypass maritime chokepoints.

C. Operational Buffers

Strategic Reserves: India currently holds a total energy buffer of 250 million barrels (onshore tanks, underground caverns, and offshore vessels), sufficient for 74 days of net imports.

Deferred Maintenance: Refineries have postponed "turnarounds" (planned shutdowns) to maintain 100% processing capacity.

Economic Implications & Challenges

While physical supply is currently secure, the "War Premium" is affecting the fiscal math:

Parameter	Before Feb 28 Strikes	Current (March 2026)	Impact
Brent Crude Price	~$70/barrel	$92+/barrel	Widening Fiscal Deficit
LNG Prices	Baseline	Doubled (₹24-25/MMBtu)	Higher Fertilizer Subsidies
Logistics	Standard	Surging Freight/Insurance	Higher Cost-push Inflation

LAKSHYA ACADEMY
Aim, Think & Achieve
www.lakshyaacademy.co I www.lakshyaiasacademy.com

Note: Analysts estimate that every $10 rise in crude oil adds 20–25 basis points to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and significantly pressures the Rupee, which has recently touched the 92/$ mark.

Conclusion: From Safety Net to Strategic Autonomy

India's response to the 2026 West Asia crisis demonstrates a mature energy policy that prioritizes National Interest over alignment with any single power bloc. By leveraging the U.S. waiver on Russian oil while simultaneously increasing U.S. and African imports, India is managing a "tightrope walk." However, a prolonged conflict beyond April 2026 could test the limits of India's fiscal resilience, especially if global prices breach the $100/barrel psychological barrier.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, consider the following statements:

1. It requires verifiable parental consent before processing personal data of children.

2. It prohibits data processing that may cause harmful effects on children.

3. The Act defines a child as a person below 18 years of age.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1, 2 and 3

(d) 1 and 3 only

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: The ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia highlight India's vulnerability to external energy shocks. Discuss the strategies adopted by India to ensure energy security and evaluate their effectiveness. **(150 Words)**

Page 07 : GS I : Indian Society / Prelims Exam

While many Western nations struggle with getting girls to enroll in science, India's "leaky pipeline" is unique and paradoxically starts after women have achieved the highest levels of education. India produces more female STEM graduates than almost any other country, yet this academic success fails to translate into long-term research careers.

Why India's 'leaky pipeline' in research is unlike rest of the world

Most women Ph.D. holders in STEM in India are unable to access long-term research jobs, creating a position gap, where women scientists often have to contend with precarious contractual positions, positions without full-spectrum benefits, promotions or increments, and roles with limited career advancement

Karishma S. Kaushik

Girls and women represent half the population of the world yet their participation in scientific research is lagging. In many countries, this disparate contribution starts as early as school. In the U.S., for example, girls are less likely to take advanced calculus, physics, mathematics, and biology at high school level.

In many other countries, the number of girls opting to major in a science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) subject is significantly lower than that of boys. Women constitute only 35% of STEM graduates across the world and earn only 40% of STEM Ph.Ds. Further, based on data from 146 nations, women scientists comprise only 30% of the STEM workforce, which includes academic jobs and faculty positions.

This systematic loss of women at various stages of STEM education and careers is commonly called the 'leaky pipeline'.

And at first glance, India appears to be an exception.

Where are the 'leaks'?

At the school level, nearly all students have 'science' as a mandatory subject and (at least anecdotally) girls participate in science quizzes, Olympiads, summer schools, hackathons, and hands-on tinkering challenges. After Class 10, the enrolment of girls in the 'science' stream can be as high as 60%, with girls making up 46% of all Class 12 science pass-outs.

In 2025 the Ministry of Education reported that for the first time in over a decade, more girls had cleared their Class 12 examination in science than in the arts stream. This indicated a significant increase in the participation of girls in science education: according to data from 2014, 7.5 lakh more girls graduated from the arts stream than science.

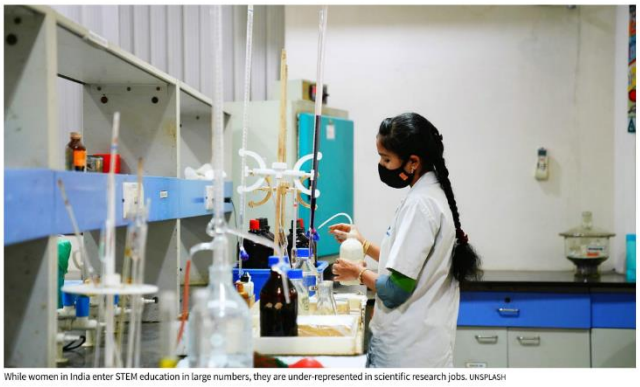
As a result, India boasts the highest percentage of female STEM graduates worldwide, with 43% women science graduates at the bachelor's level and nearly 50% at the Masters and doctoral levels.

But beyond the encouraging statistics, India does have a leaky pipeline for women in STEM – except that it looks different from the rest of the world.

In spite of producing the highest number of female STEM graduates, women constitute only 18% of the research and development workforce in the country.

A Department of Science and Technology report reveals that women constituted less than 30% of scientists in India's national research agencies; the highest representation was in the Indian Council of Medical Research at 29% and the lowest in the Defence Research and Development Organisation at 14%.

Women also make up only 8% of faculty at the Indian Institute of Science Bangalore and 11-13% of scientists at the IITs. While university settings, both government and private, report higher representation, the figures are still lower than 30%.



While women in India enter STEM education in large numbers, they are under-represented in scientific research jobs. UNSPLASH

The typical Indian milieu

What this means is that while women in India enter STEM education in large numbers, they are under-represented in scientific research jobs. This 'leaky pipeline' persists due to a combination of social, structural, and systemic challenges.

In schools, girls in India are often encouraged to pursue science and those interested in science are considered to be 'good' or 'smart' girls, with 'wanting to become a scientist' looked upon favourably by teachers, peers, and parents.

Yet as women advance in their science education – the pursuit of which can require several years of training and commitment – social expectations pose barriers to their career plans. Completing a Ph.D. often coincides with the search for a research job as well as familial directives to 'settle down', bear children, and 'focus' on the household. In India's typical socio-cultural milieu, women often relocate to their husband's place of living, adjust to a new family structure, and handle the larger share of childcare and household responsibilities, all of which pose significant challenges to seeking lucrative scientific research jobs and positions.

The big 'leak' in India's STEM pipeline, as seen by the sharp loss of women scientists during the transition from science education to the research workforce, is a consequence of social, structural, and systemic challenges

Scientific recruitment across government research organisations have strict age cut-offs, especially at entry-level positions, in addition to erratic hiring practices, a dearth of positions, and specific mandates for certain fields of research.

For women, given geographic constraints and familial responsibilities, accessing these long-term jobs means doing so within the age eligibility and in a defined location, factors that result in a limited pool of options.

Academic jobs also don't allow for remote work; while certain roles may allow for flexible and hybrid work models, they typically don't directly involve research or teaching.

Position gap

At the level of the research ecosystem, some of these social and structural challenges are being addressed via special recruitment drives and funding schemes for women scientists. In spite of these measures, institutions lag in ensuring gender parity at the time of recruitment, and gender equity initiatives have either been limited to pilot projects, are not appropriately incentivised, or are associated with minimal accountability.

Consequently, the majority of women Ph.D. holders in STEM in India find themselves unable to access long-term, lucrative and prestigious research jobs. This results in a position gap, where women scientists often have to contend with short-term, contractual, precarious, and unstable positions, such as those found in quasi-academic initiatives, entities funded on grants, fellowships, or 'soft money', positions without full-spectrum benefits, promotions or increments, and roles with limited career advancement.

The big 'leak' in India's STEM pipeline, as seen by the sharp loss of women scientists during the transition from science education to the research workforce, is a consequence of social, structural, and systemic challenges – and is reflected in the position gap that precludes the majority of trained women scientists from long-term and sustained participation in scientific research.

(Karishma S Kaushik is a physician-scientist and scientific consultant. She has recently published a book for girls and women seeking to pursue STEM education and careers. karishmaskaushik@gmail.com)

THE GIST

- In many countries, the number of girls opting to major in a science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) subject is significantly lower than that of boys
- In India, however, after Class 10, the enrolment of girls in the 'science' stream can be as high as 60%, with girls making up 46% of all Class 12 science pass-outs
- In spite of producing the highest number of female STEM graduates, women constitute only 18% of the research and development workforce in the country
- As women advance in their science education, social expectations and systemic challenges pose barriers to their career plans

The Indian Paradox: High Enrollment, Low Employment

The "leaky pipeline" in the West often begins in middle school or high school (the "interest gap"). In India, the leak occurs at the entry point of the workforce (the "position gap").

The Academic Lead: In 2025, for the first time, more girls cleared Class 12 in Science than in Arts. India boasts the world's highest percentage of female STEM graduates at the bachelor's level (43%) and nearly 50% at the Ph.D. level.

The Professional Drop: Despite these numbers, women make up only 18% of the R&D workforce and less than 30% of scientists in national agencies (e.g., DRDO is as low as 14%).

Why the Pipeline Leaks: The "Socio-Structural" Trap

The transition from a Ph.D. to a stable research job is where the system fails Indian women due to three primary "pressures":

A. The Sociocultural Milieu

The "Settle Down" Directive: The completion of a Ph.D. usually coincides with the prime age for marriage and childbearing in India.

The Relocation Constraint: Social norms often require women to move to their husband's city, limiting their ability to apply for prestigious, location-specific research roles in institutes like IISc or IITs.

B. Structural Barriers in Recruitment

Rigid Age Cut-offs: Most government research positions have strict age limits for entry-level scientists. For women who take even a short break for maternity or caregiving, these windows close permanently.

Lack of Flexibility: Scientific research is rarely compatible with remote work, and institutional hiring remains erratic with long gaps between recruitment cycles.

LAKSHYA ACADEMY
Aim, Think & Achieve
www.lakshyaacademy.co I www.lakshyaiasacademy.com

C. The "Position Gap" (Contractualization)

Because of the barriers above, many highly qualified women Ph.D. holders end up in precarious employment:

Short-term, grant-funded fellowships or "soft money" positions.

Roles without full benefits, increments, or a clear path to promotion.

Contractual positions that offer no long-term career security.

Institutional Representation

Representation in premier Indian institutes remains significantly below gender parity:

IISc Bangalore: ~8% female faculty.

IITs: 11–13% female scientists.

ICMR: Relatively better at 29%, but still short of the 50% Ph.D. pipeline.

Conclusion: Moving Beyond Enrollment

The analysis suggests that India's problem isn't aspiration (girls want to be scientists) but absorption. Current government schemes and fellowships often act as "band-aids" rather than structural fixes. For India to truly benefit from its massive pool of female STEM talent, the focus must shift from getting girls into classrooms to keeping women in laboratories through:

Relaxing age criteria for recruitment.

Incentivizing gender parity in faculty hiring.

Formalizing contractual research roles into stable career tracks.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the participation of women in STEM research in India, consider the following institutions:

1. Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

2. Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)

3. Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs)

In which of the above institutions are women scientists currently under-represented?

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: d)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Despite high participation of women in STEM education, their representation in scientific research careers in India remains low. Examine the reasons for this paradox. **(250 words)**

Page 10 : GS II : Indian Polity / Prelims Exam

The 16th Finance Commission (FC) recommendations, as analyzed by Tikender Singh Panwar, highlight a growing tension between India's rapid urbanization and its fiscal architecture. Despite cities generating nearly 67% of India's GDP, the financial "umbilical cord" connecting them to the Centre remains thin and heavily regulated.

Why are Finance Commission grants to cities still so limited?

Can cities plan their future when most funds are tied to Central conditions?

Tikender Singh Panwar

The story so far:
Cities continue to be the excruciating centres of capital accumulation at an unprecedented pace. Around 90% of total government revenue and nearly 67% of the country's GDP is generated through urban centres. Yet the recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission (FC) emphasise that cities must find avenues to increase their own source revenue and expand the tax base, even as the overall devolution of funds to urban local bodies remains limited.

What do the numbers reveal?
Under the 15th FC, urban local bodies received roughly ₹1.2-1.3 lakh crore over five years. India's GDP during that period hovered around ₹200-210 lakh crore. The urban transfer, therefore, amounted to approximately 0.12-0.13% of GDP.

Under the 16th FC, urban local bodies are to receive around ₹3.56 lakh crore between 2026 and 2031. This translates to roughly ₹75,000 crore per year, far from adequate for urban transformation. India's GDP by then is projected at roughly ₹400 lakh crore, which means the ratio remains almost unchanged at roughly 0.13% of GDP.

Another catch is defining the 'urban'. The data is drawn from multiple sources which estimate that the urban population will reach around 41% by 2031. In simple terms, this means that per capita devolution does not change significantly.

The illusion deepens when per capita figures are introduced. India's urban population crossed 470 million around 2020 and is projected to approach or exceed 600 million during the 2026-30 FC cycle. When urban grants are distributed across this expanded demographic base, per capita transfers stagnate and may even decline in real terms.

Another issue concerns the utilisation of funds. Under the 15th FC, total grants to local bodies amounted to around ₹4.36 lakh crore. Yet a substantial portion remained unspent or pending utilisation, estimated at roughly ₹90,000-95,000 crore, including about ₹30,000-35,000 crore meant for urban local bodies.

What are tied grants?
Tied grants for cities refer to funds earmarked for specific sectors such as water supply, sanitation, and wastewater management, etc. Tied grants hamper fiscal autonomy because States – and cities – are required to spend the funds only on these specified categories.

The approach of the 16th FC is even more aggressive, leaving less space for cities to use funds, as they are also subject to performance-based grants, which means the grants will be released only when certain performance criteria are met. These include improving fiscal discipline, ensuring the proper constitution of local bodies through regular elections, publishing provisional and audited accounts in the public domain, and constituting State Finance Commissions.

All of these are reasonable. However, the problem arises when 20% of the funds are linked to additional conditions, failing which cities will not receive that share. The key condition relates to increasing own source revenue (OSR) through property taxes and user charges. The benchmark kept by the FC is to raise ₹1,200 per household through such revenues.

Why does it raise federal concerns?
A sum of ₹10,000 crore is kept for the one-time incentive for peri-urban merger of urban villages with a population of more than one lakh.

This has two major problems. First, urban development is constitutionally a State subject, and a federal intervention to induce such a transition is dangerous, as merging the peripheries of just 10% of urban towns may translate into lopsided urban integration, with the primary aim being to generate own source revenues. Second, in many States, take for example Kerala, where rural local governments function robustly, merging rural areas into urban agglomerations could create administrative and civic complications. The 16th FC also remains largely silent on climate change and pays little attention to the growing pool of cess revenues collected by the Centre and kept outside the divisible pool. These cess collections now amount to around 2.2% of GDP – roughly ₹8.8 lakh crore. Much of this revenue is generated from cities, yet it still does not appear in the OSR.

The 16th FC appears to miss a basic fibre in the entire exercise: "let cities plan their own futures," while the Centre acts as an enabler. After all, it is their money, and they have a legitimate right to its utilisation.

(Tikender Singh Panwar is a member of the Kerala Urban Commission)

THE GIST

- Despite urban centres generating a large share of GDP and government revenue, the devolution of funds to urban local bodies remains limited, with transfers continuing at around 0.13% of GDP.
- The 16th Finance Commission links a portion of urban grants to performance conditions and increasing own source revenue, raising concerns about fiscal autonomy and federal intervention in urban development.

The GDP-Devolution Disconnect

The most striking finding is the stagnation of urban grants relative to the size of the economy.

- **The 0.13% Trap:** Under the 15th FC, urban transfers were roughly 0.12–0.13% of GDP. Despite the 16th FC increasing the absolute amount to ₹3.56 lakh crore (2026–2031), the ratio remains stuck at 0.13% because the projected GDP has also doubled to ₹400 lakh crore.

- **Per Capita Stagnation:** With the urban population expected to hit 600 million during this cycle, the per capita devolution is actually declining in real terms, failing to keep pace with the rising costs of urban infrastructure.

The "Conditionality" Conundrum

The 16th FC has adopted a more aggressive "carrot and stick" approach. While promoting fiscal discipline is logical, the methods raise concerns:

The 20% Performance Link: One-fifth of the funds are now linked to specific performance metrics, primarily Own Source Revenue (OSR).

The ₹1,200 Benchmark: Cities are pressured to collect at least ₹1,200 per household through property taxes and user charges to unlock these funds. Critics argue this forces a "one-size-fits-all" revenue model on diverse urban landscapes.

Tied vs. Untied: Most funds are "tied" to sectors like water, sanitation, and waste management. This prevents cities from addressing local specificities—such as climate resilience or public transport—effectively turning Municipal Commissioners into "project managers" for Central schemes rather than "urban planners."

Federalism and the "Peri-Urban" Push

A controversial feature of the 16th FC is the ₹10,000 crore incentive for merging peri-urban villages (population >1 lakh) into cities.

Jurisdictional Overreach: Since "Urban Development" is a State subject, Central incentives to force mergers are seen as an infringement on federal rights.

The Revenue Motive: Critics argue these mergers are driven more by the desire to expand the tax base (OSR) than by a genuine need for better civic planning, potentially disrupting robust rural governance structures (like those in Kerala).

The "Invisible" Revenue: Cess and Surcharge

A significant reason for the limited grants is that the "divisible pool" (the pot of money shared with states) is shrinking.

The Centre increasingly collects revenue through Cess and Surcharges, which are not shared with states or cities.

This "non-divisible" pool now accounts for roughly 2.2% of GDP (₹8.8 lakh crore). Even though this money is largely generated within cities, it is excluded from the calculations of urban devolution.

Conclusion: Can Cities Plan Their Future?

The editorial suggests that under the current framework, no. The 16th FC treats cities as administrative units for Central targets rather than autonomous political and economic entities. By tying funds to rigid conditions and keeping "cess" revenues out of reach, the system creates a "leaky pipeline" where cities produce the nation's wealth but lack the fiscal autonomy to manage their own growth or climate vulnerabilities.

LAKSHYA ACADEMY Aim, Think & Achieve www.lakshyaacademy.co I www.lakshyaiasacademy.com

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the Finance Commission grants to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), consider the following statements:

1. The Finance Commission recommends the distribution of tax revenues between the Centre and the States.

2. Grants to Urban Local Bodies are routed through State governments.

3. Urban development is listed as a subject in the State List of the Constitution.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: D)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Finance Commission grants to Urban Local Bodies remain limited despite the growing economic importance of cities in India. Examine the reasons and discuss the implications for urban governance. **(250 Words)**

Page : 13 : GS III : Environment / Prelims Exam

The 2026 Bharat Climate Forum has cast a spotlight on a critical paradox in India's green energy journey: while we are world leaders in building renewable plants, we are lagging in operationalizing them. The case of Rajasthan serves as a stark warning of how "institutional inertia" can strand billions in investment and slow the national transition.

India's renewable transition caught between stranded power and institutional inertia

Jagjeet Sareen

India's renewable energy sector is in the midst of an extraordinary build-out. Capacity targets are being met, investments are flowing in, and the country has positioned itself as a global clean-energy leader. But beneath these headline achievements lies a troubling operational reality. Take the example of Rajasthan, where more than 4,000 MW of fully commissioned renewable capacity is unable to evacuate power during peak hours, due to grid congestion.

This issue was highlighted as a priority risk for India's energy transition at the Bharat Climate Forum (BCF) 2026, where policymakers, system planners, developers, and financiers converged on the view that transmission congestion and operational conservatism, rather than generation shortfalls, are now among the most binding constraints to scale.

Rajasthan has approximately 23 GW of commissioned renewable capacity, but the available evacuation margin stands at about 18.9 GW.

If curtailment were distributed proportionately, peak-hour losses would be around 15% - operationally inconvenient, but financially manageable. Instead, the burden falls entirely on projects with Temporary General Network Access (T-GNA), which face 100% shutdowns during peak solar hours, while projects with Permanent GNA continue uninterrupted. This binary approach concentrates financial distress on generators who commissioned projects in good faith, met their timelines, and secured all necessary clearances. More troubling is the persistent under-utilisation of transmission infrastructure itself. High-capacity 765 kV double-circuit corridors, each designed to evacuate around 6,000 MW and costing ₹4,000-5,000 crore, are often operated at 600-1,000 MW. Utilisation levels below 20% are becoming routine. Therefore, several commissioned projects remain connected but unable to inject power due to gaps in associated transmission readiness.

Power it: Rajasthan has 23 GW commissioned renewable capacity but the available evacuation margin is 18.9 GW. REUTERS FILE

Institutional mandate

This brings us to an important question about institutional responsibility. Should the national grid operator's mandate be limited solely to maintaining stability, or does it extend to maximising the utilisation of publicly funded assets within safe operating parameters?

These transmission investments, now exceeding ₹1 lakh crore nationally, are recovered through consumer tariffs. When high-capacity corridors operate far below their design capacity, customers pay for infrastructure that delivers only a fraction of its intended value. At the same time, renewable generation remains stranded, compounding inefficiencies across the power system.

The risks are asymmetrically distributed. Persistent under-utilisation of transmission assets carries limited institutional consequences. There are no automatic utilisation benchmarks, no formal review triggers, and little transparency when performance falls short. Renewable generators, by contrast, absorb the full commercial impact of congestion.

Solutions not deployed

The primary constraints cited in Rajasthan are voltage oscillations and the risk of grid instability. These are real challenges, but they are not insurmountable. Technologies such as STATCOMs, advanced reactive-power devices, and special protection schemes are globally deployed and well understood within India's technical ecosystem.

Many new plants are already equipped with static VAR generators and harmonic filters, yet remain unable to inject power or provide system-support services due to conservative operating envelopes. The key issue is increasingly institutional responsiveness rather than technical feasibility. Months pass sans published deployment timelines, staged mitigation plans or clarity on accountability while thousands of megawatts idle.

No accountability

Grid security is non-negotiable. But when stability becomes the sole metric of performance, the system naturally gravitates toward excessive conservatism. Operating a 765 kV corridor at 15-20% utilisation may be the safest short-term choice, but it is not the most responsible one when evaluated against system cost, consumer interest, and national energy commitments.

Globally, advanced grid operators are moving beyond static security frameworks. They employ dynamic security assessment, real-time contingency management, probabilistic risk evaluation and adaptive line ratings, enabling higher utilisation while maintaining reliability. These approaches require greater operational vigilance - but that is precisely what modern, renewable-heavy grids demand.

A disconnect

There is also a structural misalignment between planning and operations. The Central Transmission Utility plans corridors based on projected renewable capacity. General Network Access is allocated to developers on the assumption that planned transmission will deliver corresponding evacuation capability. Developers invest accordingly.

But when CTU plans for 6,000 MW, allocates GNA on that basis, and Grid India operationally permits only 1,000 MW to flow, the system creates a credibility problem. Planning assumptions and operational realities diverge so sharply that the regulatory compact breaks down.

Developers plan billion-rupee investments based on connectivity approvals and transmission timelines, only to discover physical infrastructure does not translate into usable capacity.

The risk of this mismatch falls almost entirely on generators. Institutions responsible for planning or operations face minimal consequences when actual performance deviates drastically from design intent.

Path forward

Addressing this requires institutional rebalancing, not dilution of grid security.

First, Grid India must be explicitly mandated - and rigorously evaluated - not only to maintain stability but also to maximise asset utilisation within safe operational limits. Performance metrics should include both reliability and efficiency.

Second, curtailment in capacity-constrained regions must be distributed proportionately across all generators, rather than imposed entirely on T-GNA projects. The current binary treatment may align with regulatory categories, but it produces inequitable commercial outcomes.

Third, unused or under-utilised GNA capacity should be dynamically reallocated through transparent, real-time protocols. Where evacuation headroom exists within safe margins, it must be made accessible.

Fourth, when major transmission assets persistently fail to deliver expected usable capacity, formal review mechanisms must be automatically triggered. These reviews should evaluate whether constraints are technical, operational, or the result of delayed system strengthening, and findings should be published. Transparency strengthens public confidence in grid governance.

System that delivers

Rajasthan's congestion and subsequent curtailment crisis is not inevitable. It is the product of institutional choices - about how cautiously we operate, how we allocate responsibility, and how we value public capital. India's clean-energy transition will succeed not merely by building infrastructure at scale, but by ensuring it works efficiently, equitably, and in the interest of consumers.

Stability is foundational. But when stability comes at the cost of chronic asset under-utilisation, stranded renewable capacity, and inequitable risk allocation, the system imposes costs that neither developers nor consumers should be asked to bear indefinitely.

The grid exists to deliver power, not to warehouse it. India's renewable future depends on infrastructure that works, institutions that are accountable, and operational frameworks that balance security with performance.

All three must be in place if the transition is to rest on credible ground.

(Jagjeet Sareen is a Partner and India-Head at Dalberg Advisors. Views expressed are personal)

The Rajasthan Crisis: A Case Study in Stranded Power

Rajasthan's renewable energy landscape currently faces a massive "evacuation gap" that threatens the financial viability of new projects.

The Capacity Mismatch: Rajasthan has 23 GW of commissioned capacity, but the grid can only handle 18.9 GW. This leaves over 4,000 MW of clean power effectively "trapped."

The T-GNA Penalty: Under current rules, the burden of grid congestion is not shared. Projects with Temporary General Network Access (T-GNA) face 100% shutdowns during peak solar hours, while older projects with permanent access continue unaffected.

Asset Under-utilization: High-capacity 765 kV corridors—costing up to ₹5,000 crore each and designed for 6,000 MW—are often operated at just 10-20% capacity (600–1,000 MW) due to operational caution.

Institutional Inertia vs. Technical Feasibility

The editorial argues that the "bottleneck" is no longer technical, but institutional.

Feature	The Reality	The Solution (Globally Used)
Grid Security	Static and hyper-conservative; focuses only on avoiding "voltage oscillations."	Dynamic Security Assessment: Real-time risk evaluation and adaptive line ratings.
Technology	Plants have STATCOMs and harmonic filters, but they aren't fully utilized by the grid.	Active System Support: Allowing renewable plants to provide reactive power services.
Mandate	Grid operators focus solely on Stability.	New mandate should include Stability + Asset Utilization Efficiency.

LAKSHYA ACADEMY
Aim, Think & Achieve
www.lakshyaacademy.co I www.lakshyaiasacademy.com

The Structural Disconnect

There is a breakdown in the "regulatory compact" between the three pillars of power infrastructure:

Planning (CTU): Plans a 6,000 MW "highway."

Investment (Developers): Build plants based on that 6,000 MW promise.

Operations (Grid India): Only allows 1,000 MW to flow for safety reasons.

The Result: Consumers pay for expensive, under-utilized infrastructure through their electricity bills, while developers lose revenue on power they cannot sell.

Proposed Path Forward

To resolve this, the author suggests a four-pronged rebalancing of India's grid governance:

Accountability: Grid operators must be evaluated on how much power they successfully evacuate, not just on avoiding blackouts.

Equity: Curtailment due to congestion should be distributed proportionately across all generators (old and new) to avoid bankrupting newer T-GNA projects.

Dynamic Reallocation: Unused transmission capacity should be traded or reallocated in real-time through transparent digital protocols.

Automatic Reviews: If a major transmission corridor operates below a certain threshold (e.g., 30%) for an extended period, an independent audit should be mandatory to identify and fix the constraint.

Conclusion

India's renewable transition is at a crossroads where Grid Management must evolve as fast as Solar Panel technology. Maintaining grid stability is essential, but using it as a shield for chronic inefficiency wastes public capital and undermines investor confidence. As Jagjeet Sareen concludes: "The grid exists to deliver power, not to warehouse it."

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to renewable energy evacuation in India, consider the following statements:

1. Transmission congestion occurs when power generation capacity exceeds the grid's ability to transmit electricity.

2. Temporary General Network Access (T-GNA) allows renewable energy projects temporary access to the transmission network.

3. Projects with T-GNA receive priority over projects with permanent grid access during congestion.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the concept of "stranded renewable power" and analyze how grid management challenges can undermine India's energy transition goals. **(250 words)**

One Nation, One Election — remedy worse than disease

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

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 miscited. 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 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. 52', 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.

GS Paper II : Indian Polity

UPSC Mains Practice Question: The proposal for One Nation, One Election seeks to synchronise the electoral cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. Examine the constitutional challenges and federal concerns associated with this proposal. **(250 Words)**

Add- 21
Cambri
Con.- 0
G-mail-

Context :

The concept of 'One Nation, One Election' refers to holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies. While the Union government, supported by the Kovind Committee report, advocates for this to reduce costs and "continuous election mode," critics argue it undermines the parliamentary form of government. The author draws a grim parallel with Indonesia's experience (2019 and 2024), where massive logistical pressure led to hundreds of deaths among poll workers, suggesting that the "remedy" of synchronisation may be more harmful than the "disease" of frequent polls.

Key Arguments Against ONOE

1. Lessons from Global Precedents

Indonesia: The 2025 Constitutional Court ruling in Indonesia moved away from synchronised polls due to "voter and administrator overload."

Germany: Often cited by ONOE proponents, but the author clarifies that German *Länder* (State) polls are deliberately staggered to ensure continuous accountability.

Other Federations: In Canada and Australia, federal and provincial elections remain independent to respect the distinct mandates of different levels of government.

2. Erosion of Parliamentary Responsibility

India chose a system of "Responsibility over Stability" (as noted by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar).

Under Articles 75 and 164, the executive is collectively responsible to the legislature. If a government loses confidence, it must fall.

ONOE seeks to guarantee tenure, shifting India toward a quasi-presidential model where the legislature's power to hold the executive accountable is diminished.

LAKSHYA ACADEMY
Aim, Think & Achieve
www.lakshyaacademy.co I www.lakshyaiasacademy.com

3. The "Unexpired Term" Distortion

The proposed Amendment introduces a concept where, if an Assembly is dissolved early, the mid-term election would only be for the remainder of the five-year cycle.

Devaluation of Vote: Voters may feel their mandate is "provisional" if the elected government only has 1 or 2 years left.

Governance Dead Zones: Truncated mandates discourage long-term structural reforms and encourage short-term populism.

4. Impact on Federalism (Basic Structure)

As per the S.R. Bommai case (1994), federalism is a part of the Basic Structure.

States are independent constitutional entities. Forcing them to truncate their terms just to match the national calendar treats them as "administrative units" rather than sovereign democratic tiers.

5. The "Cost" Fallacy

The author argues that election spending (approx. 0.03% of GDP) is macro-economically negligible.

The "cost" of democracy is a recurring price for self-government. Furthermore, simultaneous polls would require a massive, one-time surge in EVMs and security forces, potentially offsetting any perceived savings.

Relevant Constitutional Provisions

Provision	Context in ONOE
Article 83 & 172	Define the 5-year maximum duration of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
Article 85 & 174	Empower the President/Governor to dissolve the House (subject to cabinet advice).
Article 356	Provisions for President's Rule; ONOE might lead to its misuse to align election dates.
Basic Structure	Judicial doctrine (Kesavananda Bharati, 1973) that prevents Parliament from altering the core identity of the Constitution (e.g., Federalism, Parliamentary Democracy).
First-Past-The-Post (FPTP)	India's electoral system where a "national wave" can unfairly wipe out regional issues in simultaneous polls.

Conclusion

The editorial concludes that while ONOE promises efficiency, it risks creating a "governance vacuum" and weakening the feedback loop between the people and the government. By moving toward fixed terms and residual mandates, the proposal threatens the "Responsibility" aspect of Indian democracy. The recent recommendation by the Justice Kurian Joseph Committee (2026) to withdraw the Bill underscores the deep constitutional and federal concerns shared by regional stakeholders. In a diverse federation like India, staggered elections act as a vital instrument of accountability rather than a hurdle to development.

LAKSHYA ACADEMY
Aim, Think & Achieve
www.lakshyaacademy.co I www.lakshyaiasacademy.com