FINDER
09th March 2026
FORTUNE IAS NEWS DAILY EXPLAINER
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One Nation, One Election — remedy worse than disease

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

Mains: General Studies - 2
Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

1. Background

- **Indonesia** held **simultaneous national and local elections in 2019.**
- The process caused **heavy strain**: about 900 poll workers died and over 5,000 fell ill.
- In 2024, the elections again caused over **100 deaths and nearly 15,000 illnesses**.
- In June 2025, Indonesia's **Constitutional Court ordered separate national and local elections** from 2029 due to **administrative overload.**
- This experience is often cited in debates on India's **One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal.**

2. ONOE Proposal in India

- The proposal is based on the **Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024**, following recommendations of the **Ram Nath Kovind Committee (2023-24)**.
- The proposed **Article 82A** allows the **President** to align State Assembly terms with the Lok Sabha election cycle.
- Some State Assemblies may have **shortened tenures** to achieve synchronisation.
- If a **government falls early**, a new legislature will serve only the **remaining term** instead of a full five-year term

3. Key Constitutional Concerns

- India's parliamentary system emphasises **executive accountability** to legislatures, not fixed tenure.
- **Articles 75 and 164** establish **collective responsibility** of governments to legislatures.
- **Articles 83 and 172** provide only a **maximum five-year tenure**, allowing early dissolution as a democratic safeguard.
- ONOE may weaken this design and move India towards a **quasi-presidential system**.
- In **S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994)**, the Supreme Court held that **federalism is part of the Constitution's basic structure.**
- Synchronising elections could shorten **State mandates** and weaken **State autonomy.**
- The Constitution does not recognise residual legislative mandates.
- Mid-cycle elections would **create governments with short tenures,** weakening accountability.
- This may create a **"governance dead zone"** with limited-power caretaker governments.
- At the **Union level**, delayed elections may **conflict with Article 85,** which requires **Parliament to meet every six months.**
- At the **State level,** election delays could **extend President's Rule,** raising concerns under **Article 356.**

5. Cost Argument and Administrative Concerns

- Supporters cite **reduced costs and fewer disruptions** from the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC).**
- Combined Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections cost about **₹4,500 crore in 2015-16**, around **0.25% of the Union Budget and 0.03% of GDP**.
- Elections are held in phases (**82 days in 2024**), allowing the Election Commission to rotate **EVMs, VVPATs and security forces**.

- Simultaneous polls may require **larger resources, reducing administrative flexibility.**
- The **Justice Kurian Joseph Committee (2026),** constituted by the Tamil Nadu government, recommended withdrawing the ONOE Bill due to **risks to federalism.**

The new Canada-India economic alignment emerges

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

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

1.Context

- The **recent visit of Mark Carney, the Prime Minister of Canada**, to India aimed to strengthen economic cooperation between the two countries
- It aimed to **reset Canada–India relations after earlier tensions (**especially diplomatic strains over **the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar).**
- Hardeep Singh Nijjar was a **Canada-based Sikh separatist leader and supporter of the Khalistan movement** who was killed in 2023, triggering diplomatic tensions between India and Canada.

2. Relaunch of the India-Canada Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)

- **India and Canada agreed to relaunch negotiations for the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** by signing the Terms of Reference.
- The agreement **aims to finalize CEPA by the end of the year.**
- Both countries **plan to double bilateral trade to about $70 billion by 2030.**
- The **agreement could reduce trade barriers for Indian exporters and provide clearer investment rules** for Indian firms in Canada.
- It may **expand access to sectors like technology, pharmaceuticals, and services**, while also giving Indian companies a gateway to the North American market.

3. Key Areas of India-Canada Economic Cooperation

- The **$2.6-billion, nine-year uranium supply deal** between India and Cameco reflects strong strategic trust.
- **Canada can supply oil, gas, uranium, and critical minerals**, while India provides large and stable demand for energy and clean technology.
- Companies like HCL Technologies are **investing in Canada's technology and AI ecosystem.**
- **Canadian agri-food exports** can support India's food security.
- Canadian firms like Fairfax India and Brookfield are **investing heavily in India's infrastructure.**

4. Next Phase of India-Canada Relations

- Mark Carney invited **Narendra Modi to visit Canada, signaling stronger ties.**
- The **visit opens new economic opportunities** for both countries.
- India already **has trade ties with major partners like Australia, the UK, the EU, and the US.**
- Canada is **diversifying economic partnerships amid geopolitical uncertainty.**
- Closer cooperation can strengthen India-Canada economic relations in the future

Why did U.S. SC reject Trump's tariffs?

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

Mains: General Studies - 2
Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Background of the Case

- On **February 20**, the **U.S. Supreme Court** ruled that the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 1977** does **not allow the President to impose tariffs**.
- The Court struck down the **reciprocal and drug-trafficking related tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump in 2025**.
- The tariffs included **25% on goods from Canada and Mexico**, **10% on Chinese goods**, and **additional duties on several countries including India**.

- The Court called these tariffs **unconstitutional** because they were imposed using **emergency economic powers not meant for tariffs**.

2. Law Used by Trump to Impose Tariffs

- Trump relied on the **IEEPA (1977)**, which allows the President to **regulate economic transactions during a national emergency** caused by an **external threat**.
- The law originated from the **Trading with the Enemy Act (1917)** which was passed when the U.S. entered the **First World War**, to **regulate trade with enemy nations.**
- Traditionally, IEEPA has been used to:
  - **Freeze foreign assets**
  - **Block financial transfers**
  - **Impose sanctions on hostile states and terrorist groups**
- **Before 2025, it had never been used to impose tariffs.**

3. Why the Supreme Court Struck Down the Tariffs

- The **U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to impose taxes and tariffs**.
- The Court ruled **6-3 rulings** that **IEEPA does not clearly authorize the President to impose tariffs**.
- **Chief Justice John Roberts** stated that such **broad tariff powers require explicit approval from Congress**.
- The judgment emphasised that **unlimited tariff powers cannot be exercised without clear legislative authorization**.

4. Implications and Alternative Options

- The ruling **only blocks the use of IEEPA**, not all presidential tariff powers.
- The administration may still use other laws such as:
  - **Section 122 (Trade Act, 1974)** - allows **tariffs up to 15% for 150 days** to address **balance-of-payments deficits**.
  - **Section 301 (Trade Act, 1974)**- allows tariffs against **unfair trade practices by other countries**.
  - **Section 232 (Trade Expansion Act, 1962)** - permits tariffs for **national security reasons**.
- The ruling **reinforces Congress's central role in tariff policy** and may lead to **greater judicial scrutiny of emergency economic powers in the future**.

Why are Finance Commission grants to cities still so limited?

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

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Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

1. Role of Cities in India's Economy

- **Urban centres generate about 67% of India's GDP** and around **90% of government revenue**.
- Despite this economic importance, **financial transfers to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)** remain **limited**.
- The **16th Finance Commission (FC)** recommends that cities **increase their own source revenue (OSR)** and **expand their tax base**.

2. Finance Commission Transfers to Cities

- Under the **15th Finance Commission**, ULBs received about **₹1.2–1.3 lakh crore over five years**, which was only **0.12 - 0.13% of GDP**.
- The **16th Finance Commission** proposes about **₹3.56 lakh crore (2026–2031)**, roughly **₹75,000 crore per year**.
- Even with this increase, the share remains **around 0.13% of projected GDP**, showing **no significant rise in urban funding**.

3. Issues with Grants and Conditions

- A large portion of previous grants remained **unspent** (around **₹90,000–95,000 crore**, including **₹30,000–35,000 crore for urban local bodies**).
- Many grants are **"tied grants"**, meaning they must be used for **specific sectors like water supply, sanitation, and wastewater management**, limiting **fiscal autonomy**.

- The **16th FC links about 20% of funds to performance-based conditions**, such as:
  - **Improving fiscal discipline**
  - **Regular local body elections**
  - **Publishing audited accounts**
  - **Constituting State Finance Commissions**
- Cities must also raise around **₹1,200 per household through property tax and user charges** to increase their own **source revenue (OSR)**.

4. Federal and Governance Concerns

- A sum of **₹10,000 crore** is kept for the **one-time incentive for peripheral-urban villages merger with a population of more than one lakh.**
- This raises **federal concerns** because **urban development is a State subject** under the Constitution.
- In States like **Kerala**, where **rural local governments are strong**, such mergers could create **administrative and governance challenges**.
- The Commission also **pays little attention to climate change** and ignores the large **cess revenues collected by the Centre (around 2.2% of GDP or ₹8.8 lakh crore)**, much of which comes from cities but **is not shared through the divisible pool**.
- The broader argument is that **cities should have greater autonomy to plan and utilise their resources**, with the **Centre acting as an enabler rather than controlling authority**.

KEYWORDS

Blue Book

- The Blue Books are **confidential security manuals issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) that prescribe security protocols for the President, Vice-President, and Prime Minister of India.**
- It **lays down guidelines regarding Advance Security Liaison (ASL),** convoy arrangements, route sanitization, and contingency planning during VVIP visits.
- It guides the role of state police, Intelligence Bureau, and local administration during such visits.
- Security arrangements for **other protected persons are governed by the 'Yellow Book', titled "Security Arrangements for the Protection of Individuals."**
- Under the **Yellow Book guidelines, security is provided based on threat perception assessed by central security agencies** (primarily the Intelligence Bureau) and **may include Z+, Z, Y+, Y, and X categories,** which can also be extended to certain private individuals (sometimes on a payment basis).

Public Financial Management System (PFMS)

- The Public Financial Management System (PFMS) is a **web-based online platform for fund management and e-payments** to implementing agencies and beneficiaries.
- It was **developed and implemented by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) under the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance.**
- **Launched in 2009 to improve transparency and efficiency in the flow** of government funds and accounting.
- It provides **real-time tracking of funds released under various government schemes** and reporting of expenditure at different levels of programme implementation.

- The **Government of India has mandated PFMS as a single platform for payment,** accounting, reconciliation of government transactions, and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is a **statutory body** under the **Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change**.
- It is established under Section 38L(1) of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** (amended in 2006).
- It aims to **strengthen tiger conservation in India** through oversight, guidelines, and coordination with States.
- NTCA is chaired by the **Union Environment Minister**, with the **Minister of State as Vice-Chairperson,** along with Members of Parliament, secretaries, and other experts.
- It provides **statutory backing to Project Tiger,** a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for in-situ conservation of tigers in designated tiger reserves.
- NTCA ensures:
  - **Approval of tiger conservation plans** by States
  - **Regulation** of tourism and land use in tiger habitats
  - **Conflict resolution** between humans and wildlife
  - **Monitoring** and research on tiger populations and habitats
  - **Capacity building** and local community participation
  - It can also **issue binding directions** to authorities for tiger protection.

National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF)

- NSQF was launched by the **Government of India in 2013** and revised in 2023.
- It is an **outcome- and competency-based framework** that organizes qualifications based on **knowledge, skills, aptitude, responsibility, and learning outcomes**.
- The framework has **eight levels (Level 1-8)** representing increasing complexity of skills, knowledge, and responsibility.
- NSQF integrates **academic education, vocational education, training**, and experiential learning.
- It enables **credit transfer, academic equivalence,** and mobility between vocational and general education.
- The framework supports **multiple entry-multiple exit** and flexible learning pathways.
- It also promotes **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** and industry-linked training through internships and apprenticeships.
- NSQF supports the **Skill India Mission** implemented by the **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).**
- **Major schemes a**ligned with the framework include
  - **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)**, **Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS)**
  - **National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS),** and **Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS)** through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs).