

# Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu not enthusiastic about presidential election

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With a day to go for the Sri Lankan presidential election, the situation does not seem to have generated any buzz among Tamil refugees living in camps across the State.

A cross-section of refugees is of the view that there is virtually little interest in the matter as the refugees are more concerned about their immediate and daily issues.

"Many of us are not even aware that the election is going to take place in Sri Lanka. In fact, we have become more attuned to what is happening here politically," says R. Jayanthan\*, who lives in a camp in Kanniyakumari district.

Jothi\*, a resident of a camp in Pudukottai and a mother of two children, says there has been a sense of longing among her fellow refugees whether



**Different priorities:** The refugees are more concerned about immediate and daily issues. Picture shows refugees at a camp.

there will be a new dawn in their lives – acquiring Indian citizenship.

The plea for Indian citizenship is nothing new, as a substantial section of refugees living in the camps – about 58,000 persons – has been asking for the same. At the same time, 40 persons in one of the camps in Kanniyakumari are said to have obtained all-country passports being issued by the Deputy High Commission of Sri Lanka in Chennai. By obtaining the passports, they

are regarded as Sri Lankan nationals. The refugees are conscious of a host of welfare measures being taken by the Union and State governments. In fact, a woman inmate in Sivaganga district says she has been able to get a master's degree and another degree in teaching "because of the conditions in India - Tamil Nadu".

The refugees also appreciate the State government's scheme to construct new houses, though they feel that the size (320

**A substantial number of refugees living in camps want Indian citizenship**

sq. ft) could be bigger. A resident of a camp in Minnur village in Tirupattur, where a portion of the ceiling plaster in a house was reported to have peeled off, says it has not yet been repaired. However, he is expecting the authorities to set it right.

Notwithstanding the general mood among the refugees vis-à-vis the presidential election, some feel that an arrangement could be made for those willing to take part in the polling process to exercise their franchise. A resident of a camp in Kattumannarkoil says there are at least 40 persons who have the right to vote.

(Names of refugees have been changed to protect their identity)

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## 'One election' plan will be hard to implement

The Union Cabinet's approval of the report submitted by the panel headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind recommending simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and all state Assemblies is at best an attempt by the BJP to build a narrative for the introduction of a presidential system. The Opposition has called it an impractical idea which goes against federal principles, the Constitution and democracy.

The proposal by the panel envisages two-level elections — first, simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies, to be followed by elections to the local self-government bodies, which are also constitutional institutions. This would essentially mean that all the directly elected representative bodies will have a fixed tenure of five years. All the elections will be conducted based on a single electoral roll and a single voter identity card. Should a government fall short of majority, and another government is not formed, then there will be election for the remainder of the term of that body; elections will again be conducted along with the general elections.

The advocates of the "one nation, one election" proposal point out that a single national poll will considerably reduce the expenditure related to elections; it can also obviate policy and governmental paralysis which often hits the decision-making process thanks to one election or the other taking place in one part of the country or the other at any given point of time.

The opponents of the idea, especially those in the Opposition, point out that it militates against the Constitution and the federal principles it promotes as it effectively binds the will of the people of a state to be coterminous with that of the national idea of a Union government. They would argue that cost should not be a concern when it comes to elections as they are the only way to ascertain the will of the people as to who should be at the wheel whether it is a state or the Union government.

The Constituent Assembly had decided on the parliamentary system of governance after thorough deliberations which led the members to conclude that only a parliamentary system would effectively represent the diversity of this nation and will serve national goals better.

However, every live democracy should periodically introspect on the feasibility and utility of the systems it has put in place and look for opportunities to improve or overhaul them. And hence there is no harm in the nation seriously taking up a fixed tenure for legislative bodies in the country.

However, given the well-known positions various parties have taken on the topic, it is highly unlikely that a proposal which requires a series of amendments to the Constitution will pass muster unless the government works with those on the other side of the spectrum. It may be noted that the government does not enjoy the special majority required to pass constitutional amendments in either house of Parliament. If the government is serious about the proposals, it must initiate a national dialogue with an open mind, and with a commitment to go by its results. Attempts to push the proposal through are bound to fail, which was in fact the message the people sent across to the ruling front in the last general elections. The government will also do well to remember that democracy is a costly affair; we have nurtured it through the years, with warts and all. Attempts to tinker with it without a deep understanding of it could prove counter-productive.

# Why 'one nation, one poll' has parties divided

Constitutional Amendments Are A Key Sticking Point In Plan To Implement Proposal. Opposition Argues It Will Bury Local Issues And Undermine No-Confidence Motion

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

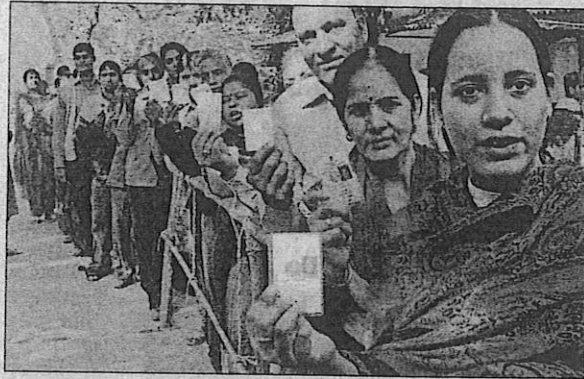
The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the recommendation made by a high level committee on 'one nation one election' (ONOE), moving another step forward in its push for synchronised elections in the country. The committee, headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind, was set up in Sept 2023 to study the feasibility of the proposal, a pet theme of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The proposal is for assembly and Lok Sabha elections to be held simultaneously with voting to urban local bodies and village panchayats to be held within 100 days of the former. Currently, elections to Lok Sabha, state assemblies and urban and rural local bodies are held independently — either after a five-year period, or earlier if a govt is dissolved mid-term.

Among the issues that the Kovind-led committee was tasked to examine were amendments required in the Constitution to hold simultaneous elections, the framework required for synchronisation of elections, and the logistics and manpower needed, including the number of EVMs. The report was submitted to President Droupadi Murmu in March. TOI looks at the arguments in favour of and against ONOE and the recommendations made by the committee.

## Why 'ONOE'?

Between 1951-52, when the first elections were held in the country, and 1967, elections to Parliament and state assemblies were held simultaneously. The pattern of



**PAPERWORK:** File photo of voters showing their photo identity, or EPIC, cards at a polling station. Simultaneous elections would need a single electoral roll and careful weeding out of overlaps between state and parliamentary election rolls

unsynchronised elections that followed has put political parties "in perpetual campaign mode", argue ONOE supporters. Moving back to synchronised elections will allow more time for better governance, they say.

Another argument in support of ONOE is the cost of staggered elections. The ONOE camp calls it a huge drain on the country's resources. According to some reports, Rs 60,000 crore was spent on the 2019 Lok Sabha elections alone.

The Law Commission in 1999 and 2018 reportedly also advocated for a return to synchronised elections, while the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice too, in a report in 2015, had "recommended an alternative and practical method of holding simultaneous elections in two phases".

The Kovind committee also said that simultaneous polls would prevent frequent disruptions caused by multiple elections. It stressed that it could cut down on the cost of conducting multiple elections, reduce voter fa-

tigue and improve turnout by giving migrants the chance of going home only once to cast their vote.

## Arguments Against

Those opposed to ONOE cite key constitutional amendments needed to make it possible as a major hurdle. One of these amendments — to synchronise elections to local bodies with Lok Sabha polls — will need to be ratified by at least half the states, besides requiring clearance by two-thirds majority in Parliament.

The issue of EVM availability has also been highlighted along with questions of availability of sufficient manpower, that is, polling and security staff.

Opposition parties have also raised concerns about local and regional concerns getting subsumed by national issues. Holding all polls simultaneously will also require a lot of manoeuvring, including advancing some elections and delaying some others. Some have doubted the practicality of taking such steps. Opposition parties had also complained that it would undermine the provision of the no-confidence motion as the

fall of a govt would potentially entail mid-term polls.

## Kovind Panel Suggestions

It suggested two key constitutional amendments — the first to alter the duration of state legislatures, and the second to change the duration of municipalities and panchayats. The first needs only parliamentary ratification, the committee says, while the second needs states' ratification.

According to the committee, if a state govt falls midway through its five-year term, one option is that a new govt is formed without fresh polls. That govt's term will end when the next round of ONOE is due. Alternatively, no govt is formed, which would mean the holding of fresh state polls or central rule. The report left that decision to the Election Commission, but clarified that in case fresh elections are held, the newly-elected govt's term will end when ONOE is next due.

In the first phase, the committee recommends conducting Lok Sabha and assembly elections simultaneously. That is to be followed by the second phase, where local body elections, including panchayat and municipality polls, will be held within 100 days of the general elections.

In case the election in a state is not held along with LS polls, EC can seek a change of date for the assembly polls, but the tenure of the state assembly will be less than five years to ensure that the overall schedule stays synchronised.

The panel has also suggested the creation of a common electoral roll for all elections so voters will use the same list for national, state, and local elections, reducing duplication and errors in voter registration.

# In ph-1, all J&K seats recorded higher turnout than in LS polls

## Polling Higher In 3 Of 4 Valley Dists Than In '14 Assembly Elections

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**New Delhi:** All 24 assembly constituencies and seven districts of J&K that went to polls on Wednesday—including Pulwama, Shopian, Kulgam and Doda that have seen terror activities and gun-fights in the recent months—recorded higher turnouts than in Lok Sabha polls held barely four months back. Also, three of the four Valley districts covered in Phase 1—Pulwama, Shopian and Kulgam—saw a jump of around 2 to 12 percentage points in turnouts as compared to 2014 assembly poll.

Overall, the people's participation in J&K phase 1 poll, at slightly over 61.1%, was better than the 60% polling witnessed in 2014 assembly poll and way higher than the corresponding 50.3% turnout in the same districts in the 2024 Lok Sabha poll.

The polling was higher in all four Valley's districts as compared to 2024 LS but slightly lower only in Anantnag when compared to 2014 assembly poll. As regards the three districts of Jammu region that voted—Kishtwar, Doda and Ramban—the polling was higher for all as compared to LS poll but a tad lower in respect of Doda and Ramban ACs, when compared to 2014 assembly poll.

The turnout figures for Wednesday's polling are still provisional. Also, an assemb-

### HIGHEST TURNOUT IN LAST 10 YRS

District-wise comparison of polling in J&K Phase 1 with 2014 assembly polls and 2024 LS polls

District	2014 assembly	2024 Lok Sabha	2024 assembly
<b>Pulwama</b>	44.1	41.6	46.6
<b>Shopian</b>	48.4	43.9	56
<b>Kulgam</b>	59.5	44.8	62.6
<b>Anantnag</b>	60.6	45.4	57.8



District	2014 assembly	2024 Lok Sabha	2024 assembly
<b>Kishtwar</b>	76	66.6	80.1
<b>Doda</b>	73.9	65.8	71.3
<b>Ramban</b>	70.9	61.2	70.6

ly constituency (AC)-wise comparison between 2014 and current assembly election would not be accurate as the constituencies were redrawn in 2022 as part of the delimitation exercise.

Commenting on the improved turnout, chief election commissioner Rajiv Kumar told TOI that the people of J&K have proven right the Urdu couplet recited by him while announcing J&K polls on August 16, which, translated into English, means that

“in the celebration of democracy, your (J&K people's) participation will show the world the story of defeat of mala fide intentions (*napaak iraadon ki shikast*)”.

A comparison of AC-wise turnouts between 2014 Lok Sabha poll and the current election shows that Kulgam AC, where six terrorists were killed in two separate encounters in July, recorded the highest surge of 28.5 percentage points (34.2% to 62.7%). In once terrorist-infested

Anantnag, there was a jump of over 14 percentage points in turnout across both Dooru AC and Srigufwara-Bijbehara AC, 12.1 percentage points in Anantnag AC and 11.8 percentage points each in Anantnag West AC and Shangus-Anantnag East AC.

Pulwama AC and Pampore AC in Pulwama district, where a terror attack on a CRPF convoy in February 2019 had killed 40 personnel, witnessed an improvement of 6-7 percentage points in turnout as compared to 2024 LS poll, even as Tral AC saw a rise of 3 percentage points. Pahalgam AC showed the district's highest jump at 13.6 percentage points.

In terror-hit Shopian, Shopian AC and Zainapora AC saw a turnout increase of 14.4 and 13.2 percentage points respectively over the LS poll.

In Jammu region, Doda AC, Doda West AC and Bhardarwah AC in Doda district, where five soldiers were killed by terrorists in two separate incidents in July, respectively witnessed a 4.3, 6.6 and 4.2 percentage points increase in polling over LS elections. Banihal AC and Ramban AC in Ramban district recorded a surge of 12.3 and 2.9 percentage points respectively. In Kishtwar, Kishtwar AC and Inderwal AC clocked an over 13 percentage point rise each in polling as compared to LS elections.

THE HINDU - TAMIL Dated: 20.09.2024

காஷ்மீர் முதல்கட்ட தேர்தலில்

## 61 சதவீத வாக்குப்பதிவு

▶ தேர்தல் ஆணையம் அறிவிப்பு

● ஜம்மு

ஜம்மு காஷ்மீரில் நடைபெற்ற முதல்கட்ட தேர்தலில் 61 சதவீத வாக்குகள் பதிவாகியுள்ளன.

ஜம்மு காஷ்மீரில் மொத்தம் உள்ள 90 கட்டப்பேரவை தொகுதிகளுக்கு 3 கட்டமாக தேர்தல் நடைபெறுகிறது. இதில், முதல் கட்டமாக 24 தொகுதிகளுக்கு கடந்த 18-ம் தேதி தேர்தல் நடைபெற்றது. காலை 7 மணி முதல் மாலை 6 மணி வரை நடைபெற்ற வாக்குப்பதிவில் மொத்தம் 61 சதவீத வாக்குகள் பதிவாகின.

கிஷ்துவார் மாவட்டத்தில் அதிகபட்சமாக 80.14 சதவீத வாக்குகள் பதிவாகின. அடுத்ததாக, தோடா மாவட்டத்தில் 71.34 சதவீதம், செனாப் பள்ளத்தாக்கில் உள்ள ராம்பன் மாவட்டத்தில் 70.55 சதவீதம் வாக்குப் பதிவு நடந்ததாக தேர்தல் ஆணையம் தெரிவித்துள்ளது. 2-ம் கட்டமாக 26 தொகுதிகளுக்கு செப்.25-ம் தேதியும், 3-ம் கட்டமாக 40 தொகுதிகளுக்கு அக்.1-ம் தேதியும் தேர்தல் நடைபெறுகிறது. வாக்கு எண்ணிக்கை அக்.4-ம் தேதி நடைபெற உள்ளது.