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# Daily **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

 March 09th, 2026

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# 1. Iran clerics choose new Supreme Leader; U.S., Israel strikes set Tehran fuel depots ablaze

## Why in the News?

The article reports on a dramatic and rapid escalation of the conflict in West Asia, marked by two simultaneous, high-stakes developments:

- **Escalation of Military Conflict:** U.S.-backed Israeli air strikes have targeted Iranian oil infrastructure for the first time, hitting fuel depots in Tehran and causing widespread fires. This marks a significant broadening of the conflict beyond drone and missile exchanges.
- **Political Transition in Iran:** Simultaneously, Iran's clerical body (Assembly of Experts) has selected a new Supreme Leader to succeed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was reportedly killed in previous strikes. This transition occurs under the shadow of direct external threats from the U.S. and Israel against the new leadership.



## Background

- **The Conflict's Origin:** The current war was triggered just over a week ago by strikes that killed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's long-time Supreme Leader. This has since escalated into a broader conflict between Iran and Israel.
- **Military Dynamics:** The conflict has so far been characterised by Iran launching drone and missile barrages (including older generations of missiles) against Israel and its allies, while Israel has conducted air strikes, now expanding to include strategic infrastructure like oil facilities.

## Feature

**The current situation is defined by several unique and dangerous features:**

- **Targeting of Economic Infrastructure:** The Israeli strikes on fuel depots in Tehran are a first in this conflict, directly targeting Iran's economic lifeline and civilian infrastructure. This has caused "temporary interruptions" in fuel distribution and created a thick blanket of smoke over the capital.

- **Leadership in Peril:** The new, unnamed Supreme Leader has been chosen in secret but faces immediate threats. U.S. President Donald Trump warned the new leader would not "last long," and Israel has stated it will directly target the new chief and the council that confirmed him.
- **Regional Spillover:** The conflict is no longer bilateral. Nations like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE are actively intercepting attacks and suffering damage, indicating a widening of the war front across West Asia.
- **Propaganda and Posturing:** Both sides are engaging in psychological warfare. Iran claims it can sustain the war for six months and has "advanced" missiles in reserve, while Israel demonstrates its reach by striking Tehran and Beirut simultaneously.

## Challenge

The primary challenges arising from this situation are immense and multifaceted:

### For Iran:

- **Leadership Vulnerability:** Protecting a new, threatened Supreme Leader while maintaining the stability and legitimacy of the regime during a high-intensity conflict.
- **Strategic Response:** Deciding how to retaliate for the strikes on its oil infrastructure without triggering a full-scale, devastating war or further isolating itself.
- **Internal Stability:** Managing public perception and ensuring the continuity of essential services (like fuel) while under direct attack on its capital.

### For Israel and the U.S.

- **Containing the Conflict:** Preventing the war from spiralling into a regional conflagration that could draw in major powers and disrupt the global economy.
- **Deterrence and Succession:** Ensuring that the removal of Iran's leader and the targeting of its infrastructure leads to a change in Iranian behaviour, rather than simply creating a more chaotic and dangerous adversary.

### For Regional States (Gulf nations):

- **Self-Defense vs. Entanglement:** Being forced to defend their own airspace and infrastructure while trying to avoid being dragged directly into the Iran-Israel war as active participants.

## Way Forward

- **Controlled Escalation:** Both sides may continue to exchange calculated blows, targeting strategic infrastructure but avoiding all-out war, while testing the resolve of the new Iranian leadership.
- **Wider Regional War:** The continued targeting of Gulf states could provoke a unified military response from U.S. allies in the region, formally opening a new front against Iran.
- **Internal Iranian Focus:** The new Supreme Leader might prioritise consolidating power internally and deterring external threats through diplomacy or threats, potentially leading to a temporary de-escalation.
- **Miscalculation Leading to Catastrophe:** A successful assassination attempt on the new leader or a strike that causes massive civilian casualties could force an unpredictable and overwhelming Iranian retaliation, plunging the entire region into an uncontrollable war.

## Conclusion

The article depicts a region on the brink of a major transformation. The simultaneous succession of Iran's Supreme Leader and the direct targeting of its economic infrastructure represent a perilous double crisis. The old rules of engagement have been shattered, with the conflict expanding geographically and intensifying strategically. The coming days will be critical, as the newly chosen, unnamed leader of Iran must navigate both internal consolidation and an unprecedented external threat, while Israel and its allies attempt to capitalise on the moment without igniting a war with unpredictable global consequences. The stability of the entire Middle East and global energy markets hangs in the balance.

## 2. Regulations to implement new rural job Act are yet to be finalised

### Why in the News?

The implementation of India's new rural job guarantee law, the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, is facing delays because the crucial regulations needed to put it into effect have not been finalised. With the new Act set to replace the two-decade-old MGNREGA, the central government is locked in consultations with states to resolve several "tricky issues" related to funding formulas and operational rules, making an April 1 rollout unlikely.

### 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



### Background

- **New Legislation:** In December 2025, Parliament passed the Viksit Bharat — Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025 (VB-G RAM G Act). It was introduced and passed in just two days.

- **Replacing MGNREGA:** This new Act replaces the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, which was a flagship scheme of the previous UPA government.
- **Key Changes:** The new law introduces significant changes, including:
  - A new formula for allocating funds to states ("normative allocation").
  - A shared financial burden between the Centre and states (previously, the Centre bore most costs).
  - A requirement for all Gram Panchayats to be categorised based on development parameters.

## Feature

The core feature of the current situation is the transition from an old, established law to a new one, which requires a complete overhaul of operational frameworks. Key features of this transition include:

- **Normative Allocation Formula:** The new law mandates that the Centre prescribe "objective parameters" to determine how funds are distributed among states. This is intended to address complaints from economically weaker states about receiving a smaller share under MGNREGA. However, the parameters themselves are a major point of contention.
- **State vs. State Disagreement:** There is a fundamental disagreement between states on what these parameters should be.
  - High-performing states argue that "past performance" under MGNREGA should be a key factor.
  - States with high migration argue that the formula should reflect the current "demand" for work from rural workers.
- **Panchayat Categorisation:** The Act requires all Gram Panchayats to be graded as A, B, or C based on "development parameters." Currently, the Act only gives one example of such a parameter ("proximity to urban areas"), leaving all other criteria to be defined by the new rules.

## Challenge

The central government faces multiple challenges in framing the rules to implement the Act:

- **Framing 11 Categories of Rules:** The government must create rules across 11 distinct categories, including crucial areas like the social audit of the scheme. This is a complex legislative and administrative task.
- **Defining "Objective Parameters":** The core challenge is creating a consensus-based, objective formula for fund allocation that is seen as fair by all states, balancing the competing demands of performance versus need.
- **Ensuring State Readiness:** The new law cannot be implemented until states complete five essential preparatory tasks. These are:
  - Completing all ongoing work under the old MGNREGA.
  - Enrolling on the DBT Sparsh banking platform (West Bengal has not yet done so).
  - Completing e-KYC verification of all job cards.
  - Integrating with the Yuktdhara geospatial planning portal.
  - (The fifth element is implied to be the overall preparation for the new scheme's master plan).
- **Managing the Transition:** The government must manage the logistical and political challenges of winding down a massive, popular program (MGNREGA) and starting a new one without disrupting the livelihood support for millions of rural workers.

## Way Forward

The immediate way forward involves completing the pending groundwork:

- **Finalising the Rules:** The Union Rural Development Ministry must conclude its weekly consultations with states and finalise the rules, particularly the "objective parameters" for fund allocation and the criteria for categorising Gram Panchayats.
- **Achieving State Compliance:** The Centre needs to bring all states, especially non-compliant ones like West Bengal, onto the DBT Sparsh platform and ensure all other preparatory tasks (e-KYC, Yuktdhara onboarding) are completed nationwide.
- **Notification and Rollout:** Once the rules are framed and states are ready, the Centre will notify the commencement date of the new Act. From that date, states will have a six-month window to fully implement the scheme. Given the current pace, this is unlikely to happen by the original target of April 1.

## Conclusion

The VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, represents a significant shift in India's rural employment policy, but its journey from law to implementation is stuck at a critical juncture. The challenge lies not in the legislation itself, but in the complex and contentious process of writing the rules that will govern it. The central government must navigate conflicting demands from states to devise a fair funding formula, while simultaneously ensuring all states are technically and administratively prepared for the new regime.

## 3. India taps alternative crude supplies as conflict in West Asia drags on

### Why in the News?

India is actively restructuring its oil import strategy in response to the escalating conflict in West Asia. With tanker movements nearly halted through the strategic Strait of Hormuz, Indian refiners are securing alternative crude supplies from the U.S., Russia, and West Africa, and deferring maintenance to build inventory buffers. This proactive shift is critical for the world's third-largest oil importer to ensure energy security amidst regional volatility.

### Background

- **India's Import Dependence:** India is heavily reliant on imports to meet its energy needs, bringing in about 88% of its crude oil requirement.
- **Strategic Vulnerability:** Historically, a significant portion of this oil (roughly half as of February) passes through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway between Iran and Oman that is a critical chokepoint for global energy trade.
- **Trigger for Action:** The recent military escalation, involving U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran and retaliatory attacks by Tehran, has sharply heightened tensions, disrupting tanker movements through this vital sea lane and threatening India's consistent supply of crude.

### Feature

- **Diversification of Sources:** Indian refiners are actively negotiating for additional cargoes from non-conflict zones. The share of supplies from sources outside the Strait of Hormuz has already climbed from 60% in 2025 to 70% currently. Key alternative regions include the U.S., West Africa, and Latin America.
- **Tapping into Stalled Russian Oil:** A temporary 30-day waiver from the U.S. Treasury (valid until April 5) allows India to accept shipments of sanctioned Russian oil that were loaded before March 5. This has opened access to millions of barrels of Russian crude currently idling on tankers near India and Singapore.
- **Operational Adjustments:** To create an immediate buffer, domestic refineries are deferring planned maintenance shutdowns and maintaining normal processing rates. This ensures maximum production of fuels like petrol and diesel to meet demand.
- **Comfortable Inventory:** The government has stated that the combined inventory of crude and finished products can meet the country's demand for 50 days, providing a significant near-term safety net.



## Challenge

- **Rising Cost Structure:** Analysts warn that the overall cost of securing oil is worsening.
- **Higher Crude Prices:** International prices have jumped to over ₹92 per barrel from around ₹70 before the conflict began on February 28.
- **Increased Freight and Insurance:** Longer shipping routes from alternative sources (like the U.S.) and heightened risk in the region are driving up freight rates and insurance premiums.
- **Economic Impact:** A sustained period of high oil prices will have cascading effects on the Indian economy:
  - **Inflation:** A ₹10 increase in crude prices could add 20-25 basis points to the consumer price index (CPI) if the cost is passed on to consumers.
  - **Fiscal Deficit:** To protect consumers, the government might cut taxes on fuel, which would widen the fiscal deficit.
  - **Trade Deficit and Rupee:** A higher import bill will widen the current account deficit and put downward pressure on the Indian rupee.

- **Time-Limited Solution:** The access to stranded Russian oil is only guaranteed until the U.S. waiver expires on April 5, creating a deadline for securing those cargoes.

## Way Forward

India's path forward involves balancing immediate supply security with long-term economic stability:

- **Continue Diversification:** Aggressively pursue and finalise term deals with suppliers in the Americas, Africa, and other stable regions to make the supply shift permanent, not just a temporary fix.
- **Leverage Diplomatic Channels:** Utilise its strategic position to engage with all parties in the conflict to ensure the safe passage of its tankers or advocate for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Monitor and Mitigate Economic Fallout:** The government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will need to closely monitor inflationary pressures and be prepared with measures to stabilise the rupee and manage the fiscal deficit.
- **Strategic Reserve Management:** Prudently manage its strategic petroleum reserves to navigate any extended period of disruption without depleting safety buffers.

## Conclusion

The escalating West Asia conflict has forced India into a rapid and decisive overhaul of its crude oil sourcing strategy. By pivoting towards alternative suppliers, leveraging a temporary waiver for Russian oil, and boosting domestic processing, India has built a 50-day buffer to weather the immediate storm. However, this new approach comes at a high cost. The challenge ahead is not just about securing physical barrels, but managing the profound economic consequences of higher global prices, increased freight, and a structurally more expensive energy import mix. India's ability to navigate this crisis will be a critical test of its energy security and economic resilience.

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

### Why in the News?

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has confirmed that two cheetahs, part of the first generation born in India under the ambitious Project Cheetah, have dispersed from Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh to the Baran district of Rajasthan. This inter-state movement has captured public and media attention, prompting the NTCA to officially clarify that this is a "natural territorial behaviour" and a sign of the project's strategic success, rather than a cause for concern.

### Background

- **Project Cheetah:** Launched in 2022, this is the Indian government's flagship programme to reintroduce cheetahs to the country after the species was officially declared extinct in India in 1952.
- **Translocations:** To establish a population, cheetahs have been translocated from African countries. The first batch arrived from Namibia in September 2022, followed by cheetahs from South Africa. Most recently, on February 28, nine cheetahs arrived from Botswana.
- **Current Population:** Including the new arrivals, 29 adult cheetahs have been translocated from Africa. While nine adults have died, 28 cubs have been born in India (with

around 12 deaths), marking a significant milestone for the project. Some adult cheetahs are housed in Kuno National Park, while three are in the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary.

## Feature

- **The Dispersers:** The cheetahs in question are named KP2 and KP3. They are not newly-imported adults, but rather part of the first generation of cubs born in India to the translocated African cheetahs.
- **The Journey:** Since late February, the two cheetahs have been tracked moving approximately 60-70 km from Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, crossing the state border into the Mangrol range and the Banjh Amla Conservation Reserve in Baran district, Rajasthan.
- **Monitoring:** The animals are equipped with satellite radio-collars and are being tracked 24/7. A joint inter-state team from Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan is monitoring their movement, with field teams deployed on the ground.

## Challenge

- **Ensuring Safety:** The primary concern is the safety of KP2 and KP3 as they navigate outside the protected confines of Kuno National Park. They must be protected from potential poaching, conflicts with humans or livestock, and other dangers in the new landscape.
- **Inter-State Coordination:** The movement requires seamless coordination between the forest departments of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan to ensure the cheetahs are monitored and protected across administrative boundaries. The NTCA is overseeing this joint effort.
- **Public Perception:** Managing media and public narratives is crucial. The NTCA's statement was a proactive effort to frame the dispersal as a positive sign of natural behaviour, rather than cheetahs "escaping" or the project failing.



## Way Forward

- **Continued Monitoring:** The round-the-clock satellite tracking and ground patrolling will continue to ensure the cheetahs' safety and to study their movement patterns in this new terrain.
- **Validate the Corridor Concept:** The NTCA views this dispersal as a validation of the project's long-term strategic vision. It reinforces the rationale for developing a massive 17,000 sq. km Kuno-Gandhi Sagar inter-State wildlife corridor spanning eight districts in Rajasthan and seven in Madhya Pradesh. This corridor is designed to facilitate exactly this kind of natural movement.
- **Inform Future Planning:** Data gathered from the movements of KP2 and KP3 will be invaluable for managing the wider metapopulation and planning future reintroductions and habitat management.

## Conclusion

The journey of cheetahs KP2 and KP3 from Kuno to Rajasthan is a landmark event for Project Cheetah. Far from being a setback, it represents a significant biological milestone: the first generation of Indian-born cheetahs is exhibiting the natural, long-range dispersal behaviour typical of the species. This movement underscores the importance of the proposed Kuno-Gandhi Sagar wildlife corridor and highlights the complex task of managing a reintroduced population across a large, interconnected landscape.

## 5. The new Canada-India economic alignment emerges

### Why in the News?

The recent landmark visit of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to India has signalled a major reset in bilateral ties. The visit, which included direct dialogue with business leaders in Mumbai and policy discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi, has moved the relationship beyond reactive diplomacy. The formal relaunch of negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with an ambitious end-of-year deadline is the key headline, positioning the two countries for a new era of economic alignment.

### Background

- **A Troubled Past:** For years, the Canada-India relationship was often defined by "episodic tensions and reactive diplomacy," stemming from political differences and slowing progress on trade and strategic cooperation.
- **The Carney Visit (Feb 27 - Mar 2, 2026):** PM Carney's visit is portrayed as a turning point, shifting the focus from symbolic gestures to concrete commercial outcomes. It established renewed political will at the highest levels.
- **Key Outcomes:** The most significant result was the signing of the Terms of Reference to officially relaunch CEPA negotiations. Additionally, a historic \$2.6 billion uranium supply deal was signed between India and the Canadian company Cameco, underscoring a high level of strategic trust.

## Feature

- **Critical Minerals:** Canada's vast reserves of minerals essential for electric vehicles and advanced manufacturing align perfectly with India's industrial ambitions.

## Investment Flows:

- **Canada to India:** Canadian pension funds and institutional investors have already invested over \$100 billion in Indian infrastructure (e.g., airports, telecom towers, renewable energy). This capital is crucial for India's continued urbanisation and logistics development.
- **India to Canada:** Indian technology firms (like HCL Technologies) are expanding into Canada's innovation ecosystem, leveraging its deep AI research clusters and stable regulations as a gateway to the North American market.
- **Sectoral Synergies:** The article highlights opportunities in financial services (building on successful JVs like Sun Life-Aditya Birla) and agriculture, where Canadian exports can support India's food security goals.

## Challenge

- **The CEPA Deadline:** Both governments have committed to finalising an "ambitious agreement" by the end of the year. Negotiating a comprehensive trade deal in such a short timeframe is a significant challenge, requiring compromise and technical alignment on complex issues.
- **Execution is Key:** As the author notes, trade agreements "create frameworks but do not automatically generate market share." The real challenge lies in ensuring that businesses on both sides actively utilise the new framework to form partnerships, invest capital, and build joint ventures.
- **Sustaining Political Will:** The "new window of opportunity" relies on sustained engagement. The relationship must be protected from reverting to the "episodic tensions" of the past. PM Carney's invitation to PM Modi to visit Canada is a crucial step in making the partnership "sustained and reciprocal."
- **Geopolitical Navigation:** Both nations are navigating a complex geopolitical environment. India is simultaneously pursuing trade deals with trusted allies like the U.S., EU, UK, and Australia. Canada must ensure its alignment with India remains complementary and strategic amidst these competing interests.

## Way Forward

**The path forward is defined by action and ambition to capitalise on the political reset.**

- **Fast-track CEPA Negotiations:** Both governments must dedicate significant resources and political capital to meet the end-of-year deadline for the trade agreement, creating a predictable and rules-based framework for bilateral commerce.
- **Encourage Business Mobilisation:** Industry bodies like the Canada-India Business Council and government trade missions must actively facilitate connections, helping companies on both sides identify partners and navigate new market opportunities.
- **Deepen Strategic Sectoral Ties:** Building on the uranium deal, both nations should look to expand cooperation in critical mineral supply chains, clean technology, and advanced manufacturing.
- **Maintain High-Level Dialogue:** Ensuring reciprocity through visits (like the proposed Modi trip to Canada) and regular ministerial meetings will be essential to build trust and manage any future friction points.

## Conclusion

The Carney visit to India represents a genuine reset in Canada-India relations, driven by economic pragmatism and mutual ambition. By relaunching CEPA negotiations and signing a landmark nuclear energy deal, both countries have signalled a readiness to move beyond past frictions and build a partnership based on clear commercial and strategic complementarities. Canada offers stable capital, energy security, and a gateway to North America, while India offers massive market scale and long-term demand.



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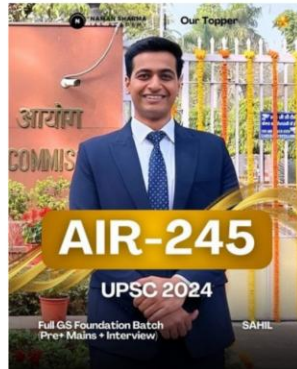
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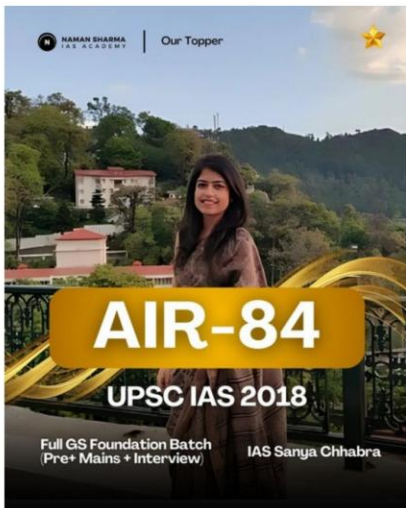
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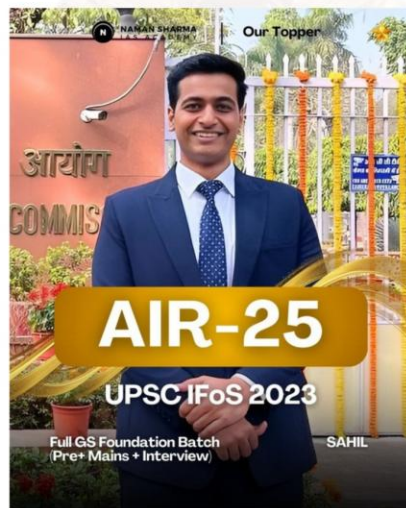
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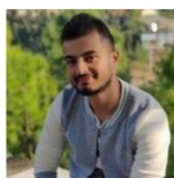
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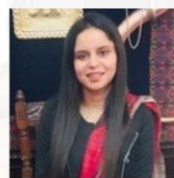
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