

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (2 September 2024)

## TOPICS COVERED

1. After four-month pause, two killed, six injured in fresh violence in Manipur
2. Relations between India and Pakistan unlikely to become better, finds survey
3. Vande Bharat sleeper coach prototype unveiled
4. Japan bets on heat-resistant rice against climate change (GS paper-III: Environment)
5. India's neighbourhood watch, past and present (GS paper-II: India and its neighbours)
6. A crisis in WANA that no one talks about (GS paper-II: International Relations)
7. Open season (PCS)
8. Reforming the process of judicial appointments (GS paper-II: Judiciary)
9. Are lie-detector tests legally valid? (GS paper-III: Basic science)
10. How quick commerce is disrupting everything with tech innovations (GS paper-III: Economy)
11. Nishad claims silver in men's high jump; Preethi wins 200m bronze (PCS)
12. When school is an uphill climb away (GS paper-I: Society)

# Relations between India and Pakistan unlikely to become better, finds survey

The study, carried out in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, says 48% of Indians, 31% Pakistanis, and 32% Bangladeshis will favour a 'reversal' in conditions created by Partition; a small proportion felt status of minorities, underprivileged was 'worse than expected' in the three countries

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

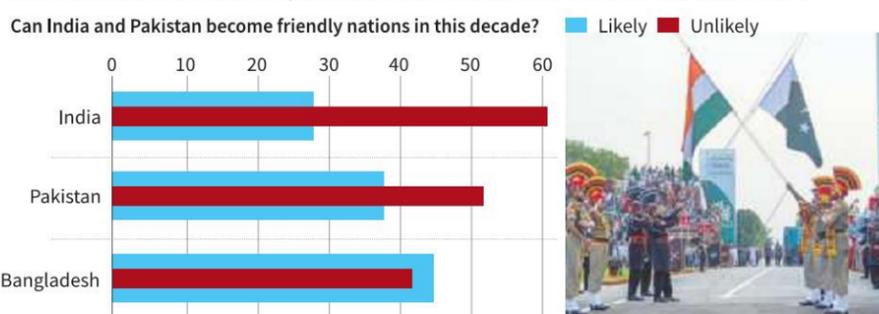
**M**ore than 60% of Indians and more than half of all Pakistanis surveyed believe the two countries cannot have friendly relations in this decade, says a new survey by the Centre for Policy Research (CPR)-C Voter that looks at the attitudes of Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis on a number of political, economic, and foreign policy issues.

The downturn in ties between India and Pakistan since 2016, after which no high-level bilateral talks have been held, is clearly mirrored in the mood in the two countries, shows the survey, which reached out to about 1,00,000 respondents, 12,000 of whom completed the survey in total across the three countries.

In contrast, previous surveys in 2011 and 2013 had indicated a much higher optimism for reconciliation in the subcontinent, with the *Aman ki Asha* (hope for peace) poll in 2011 showing two-thirds of

## Friendly neighbours?

In a CPR-CVoter survey, approximately two-thirds of respondents in India and almost half of those in Pakistan said that it is unlikely that India and Pakistan can become friends in this decade



people surveyed in both countries had felt that peace was "attainable in their lifetimes", up 35% since the 2011 survey.

The survey was carried out in 2022, the organisers of the exercise said, and its results were released last week in Delhi in a report titled "South Asia in a changing world: what citizens in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh think 75 years post-Partition".

"What we have learnt is that South Asians are comfortable with several contradictions. While there is still much nostalgia about Partition, they also now

believe India and Pakistan cannot be friendly nations," said Rahul Verma of the CPR, who co-authored the report.

According to the survey, 48% Indians, but only 31% Pakistanis and 32% Bangladeshis would favour a "reversal" in the conditions created by Partition. However, 62% of Indians felt it was unlikely and 28% said that it was likely that India and Pakistan could become friendly in the near future, while 52% of respondents in Pakistan said it was unlikely, and 38% said it was likely. Significantly, respondents in Ban-

gladesh were more positive about the possibility of India-Pakistan ties, with more respondents there (45%) saying good relations were likely, and 40% saying they were unlikely.

**Dialogue with Pakistan**  
The survey results came even as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar conceded at a public event last week that the chances of dialogue with Pakistan were now bleak. "I think the era of uninterrupted dialogue with Pakistan is over. Actions have consequences," he said, speaking at the release of a book,

*Strategic Conundrums: Reshaping India's Foreign Policy* by former diplomat Rajiv Sikri in Delhi on Friday, where Dr. Jaishankar defended the Modi government's policy in the neighbourhood.

"Insofar as Jammu and Kashmir is concerned, Article 370 is done. So the issue today is – what kind of relationship can we possibly contemplate with Pakistan?" Mr. Jaishankar added, warning that India's responses to "positive or negative events" would be reactive rather than passive. All eyes are now on how New Delhi will respond to an invitation from Pakistan for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Heads of Government meet on October 15-16, as no Indian Minister has travelled to Pakistan in more than eight years.

Asked about the role of global powers in the regions, the CPR-C Voter survey found that Indians believe their country had the highest influence in South Asia, while Pakistanis and Bangladeshis felt China had the most influence in the region, followed by the

United States. Indians were the least concerned about Chinese interference (less than half) while more than two-thirds of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis showed "high concern" over Chinese interference, which is significant given the two countries have much closer bilateral ties with Beijing than India does.

The survey received completed responses on 75-80 questions dealing with the state of democracy, the strength of institutions, as well as trends in economic progress, and authoritarian tendencies of the leadership. "It seems that South Asians like strong leaders and technocrats," Dr. Verma said, commenting on the results of the survey, which found most respondents quite optimistic about the future economic condition of their countries despite present distress.

A large proportion felt that South Asia was becoming "more religious", and a small proportion felt that the status of minorities and underprivileged groups was "worse than expected" in the three countries.

## Relations between India and Pakistan unlikely to become better, finds survey (2 September)

The study, carried out in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, says 48% of Indians, 31% Pakistanis, and 32% Bangladeshis will favour a 'reversal' in conditions created by Partition; a small proportion felt status of minorities, underprivileged was 'worse than expected' in the three countries

- A new survey by the Centre for Policy Research (CPR)-C Voter shows that over 60% of Indians and more than half of Pakistanis believe that the two countries will not have friendly relations in this decade.
- The survey reflects a downturn in relations since 2016, with no high-level bilateral talks occurring since then. It surveyed about 100,000 people, with 12,000 completing it.
- Previous surveys in 2011 and 2013 had shown more optimism about peace between the two countries. For instance, the Aman ki Asha poll in 2011 had indicated that two-thirds of people felt peace was attainable in their lifetimes.
- The 2022 survey, released recently, shows that while there is nostalgia about Partition, there is a belief that India and Pakistan cannot be friendly.
- The survey found that 48% of Indians, 31% of Pakistanis, and 32% of Bangladeshis would favor reversing the conditions of Partition.
- 62% of Indians think it is unlikely that India and Pakistan will become friendly soon, while 52% of Pakistanis feel the same. However, 38% of Pakistanis believe it is still possible.
- In contrast, respondents in Bangladesh were more positive, with 45% believing that good relations between India and Pakistan are likely, and 40% thinking they are unlikely.

### Dialogue with Pakistan

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar admitted that the likelihood of dialogue with Pakistan is now slim, suggesting that the era of continuous dialogue has ended due to past actions.
- Jaishankar's comments came during a book release event where he defended the Modi government's foreign policy, particularly regarding Jammu and Kashmir.
- The **upcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Heads of Government meeting in October 15-16, which Pakistan has invited India to**, is being closely watched. No Indian Minister has visited Pakistan in over eight years.
- The survey found that Indians believe India has the most influence in South Asia, while Pakistanis and Bangladeshis think China has the most influence, followed by the US.
- Indians are less concerned about Chinese interference compared to Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, who have shown high concern despite having closer ties with China.
- The survey included questions on democracy, institutional strength, economic progress, and leadership tendencies. It found that South Asians generally prefer strong leaders and technocrats.
- Despite current economic challenges, most respondents are optimistic about their countries' future economic conditions.
- Many believe South Asia is becoming more religious, and some feel the status of minorities and underprivileged groups is worse than expected in the three countries.

## Vande Bharat sleeper coach prototype unveiled (2 September)

- Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw unveiled a prototype of the Vande Bharat sleeper coach.
- The coach will undergo 10 days of rigorous trials and tests before further testing on tracks.
- A 9.2-acre hangar dedicated to exporting standard and broad-gauge rolling stock was also launched.
- The Vande Bharat sleeper trainset, a first in India, is designed and manufactured by BEML under the Defence Ministry.
- The train focuses on passenger comfort and safety with features like austenitic stainless-steel construction, advanced crashworthy elements, and high-grade fire safety.
- The train is designed to meet European standards and is expected to be ready for passenger service in three months.
- Modern features include integrated reading lights with USB charging, public announcement and visual information systems, modular pantries, and special berths and toilets for disabled passengers.
- Ticket pricing for the Vande Bharat sleeper will be similar to Rajdhani fares.

## Japan bets on heat-resistant rice against climate change (2 September)

- Japan is facing a rice shortage due to extreme weather conditions that damaged last year's crop.

- High temperatures and dry conditions led to lower rice yields and poorer grain quality, resulting in the lowest rice inventories in 25 years.
- Increased demand, partly due to record tourism, has made it difficult for supermarkets to keep rice in stock, leading to purchase limits.
- Saitama prefecture, known for high temperatures, is working on developing heat-resistant rice varieties to prevent future shortages.
- The new variety, emihokoro, is being tested in 31 fields this year to see if it can withstand high temperatures.
- High heat causes rice grains to become opaque and mottled, decreasing their market value and affecting farmers' income.
- Rice is a key staple in Japan and crucial to the country's self-sufficiency in food production.
- Poor yields last year have caused rice prices to increase significantly, with the highest price rise in over 20 years.
- The Japanese government is concerned about climate change's long-term impact on rice crops, projecting a 20% decline in yields by 2100.
- Shifting to heat-tolerant rice varieties is seen as a key measure to combat the effects of climate change on rice production.

## India's neighbourhood watch, past and present

GS Paper II: India and Its neighbours

While India's neighbourhood seems to be in disarray, there are times when the country indulges in unwarranted self-flagellation if things go wrong primarily because it credits itself a bit too much in its ability to determine the outcome of events in its neighbourhood.

### Change in a short span

Nearly 16 years ago, between 2008-10, in a span of just three years, epoch-making events unfolded in India's neighbourhood, ushering in democracy and promising much. This was a period which coincided with this writer's stint as Head of Division for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Myanmar in the Ministry of External Affairs. India had played a positive catalytic role to further this process in its neighbourhood.

In December 2008 in Bangladesh, after military rule under General Moeen U. Ahmed, Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister (2009) riding on the strength of a massive mandate, especially from women and youth. In fact, then External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee played a quiet "catalytic" role in the holding of elections in Bangladesh, free of army interference. And, over 15 years, India and Bangladesh forged a mutually beneficial partnership, with Ms. Hasina's government displaying sensitivity to India's core interests.

In May 2009 in Sri Lanka, after 33 years of its existence, the group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), was finally defeated in no small measure due to India's sustained engagement with Sri Lanka – a role which has not been adequately acknowledged. Without the sword of the LTTE over India's head, India could look forward to closer relations with a united Sri Lanka.

In October 2008 in the Maldives, after 30 years of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's autocratic reign, the first multi-party democratic elections were held where Mohamed Nasheed took over as President. India did its bit to stabilise this nascent democracy. In spite of ups and downs, the last three consecutive elections have ushered in three different Presidents, showing the democratic maturity of the Maldives in nearly 16 years.

In 2010 in Myanmar, after 20 years of military rule, elections were held in which the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) came to power. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was freed after phases of imprisonment. Subsequently, her National League for Democracy (NLD) had landslide wins in 2015 and 2020, indicating a strengthening of democratic roots.

Even Pakistan elected a civilian government in 2008, sending President Pervez Musharraf into exile.

These developments gave hope that democracy, with all its imperfections, was taking root in India's neighbourhood. It is not a coincidence that the years 2008-10 also witnessed an exponential increase in India's



T.S. Tirumurti

was India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, New York and, earlier, Head of Division for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and the Maldives

In some instances, it was New Delhi's missteps that affected it, while in others, it was a case of events spiralling out of control

development assistance to its neighbours, whether in the rebuilding of northern Sri Lanka or extending the biggest ever line of credit to Bangladesh, of \$1 billion, or in connectivity projects in Myanmar or as budgetary support to stabilise the fledgling democracy in the Maldives. For once, India could more than match China's "chequebook diplomacy" in its neighbourhood.

### The present situation

Moving to 2024, the neighbourhood looks almost unrecognisable.

Just when one thought that four consecutive elections in Bangladesh would make democracy irreversible, Ms. Hasina's government collapsed in August 2024 under the weight of its own democracy deficit, an economic downturn and a violent quashing of student protests that anti-Hasina forces joined in later. India was caught flat-footed. Could India have prevented it? Maybe yes, given that this happened over a period of time. But it is difficult to decide how much a leader should be pressured to change course without seeming to interfere in a country's internal affairs, especially when there is appreciation of each other's national interests. While India's bias toward Ms. Hasina is under the scanner, let us be realistic. Individuals do matter in relations between countries as much as institutional links. But that did not preclude India from maintaining regular engagement with Bangladesh's Opposition, which it failed to do.

In 2022, Sri Lanka had its own "Bangladesh" moment when President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled Sri Lanka, unable to control a series of mass anti-government "Aragalaya" protests led mostly by apolitical irate public and youth. Its democracy and the economy took a severe beating, the after-effects of which are still being felt in Sri Lanka. Could India have anticipated it? It is very unlikely. But what India did in the aftermath was commendable. India's timely and generous bailout package of about \$4 billion saved the economy.

Since India has built bridges across the political spectrum in Sri Lanka, it is in a much better position, irrespective of who comes to power in the forthcoming elections. India has even made peace with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, a right-wing party which has usually been anti-India in its stand.

In 2024, the results of elections in the Maldives caught India on the wrong foot as it nearly made the same mistake as in Bangladesh – not anticipating President Mohamed Muizzu's huge win and not having engaged with him earlier. India is now making amends. However, what is noteworthy is that after Maldives' first elections when President Nasheed (2008-12) was in trouble without a majority in the Majlis, India did not hesitate to "counsel" him on the importance of respecting the "coalition mantra". However, he was not persuaded and ended up losing his presidency. So much for India turning a blind eye to the "mistakes" of its friends.

In Myanmar, after three consecutive elections,

the military took over yet again in February 2021, despite the 2020 elections having given the NLD a huge mandate. Now, Myanmar's military is riding a tiger and unable to dismount, with the Opposition and ethnic groups gaining ground. The conflict is spilling over into India's north-east. It has renewed India's dilemma on whether to stay with the military to protect itself from insurgents using Myanmar soil or to side with the rejuvenated Opposition forces fighting for change, since India cannot afford to lose Myanmar in this balancing act.

In August 2021, the Taliban forcibly captured power after two decades, turning the clock back in Afghanistan. India had anticipated this and even cautioned the United States, but the U.S. kept its "strategic" partner India out of its engagement with Taliban for fear of offending Pakistan. Now, India is fending for itself from the fall-out.

And Pakistan saw its civilian government toppled in 2022, widely seen as at the army's behest as in the past.

### New Delhi's response as key factor

Hence, in some cases, India's missteps and misjudgments have cost it to an extent, while in others, for no fault of India's, events have spiralled out of control. The crux is on how India has reacted to these developments.

India has not done too badly considering that it bailed out Sri Lanka financially when Colombo needed India the most; extended friendship and patience with the new Maldivian government to find its feet; expressed willingness to do business with Taliban in Afghanistan to protect India's geopolitical interests, and re-extended the hand of friendship to an unstable but democratic Nepal after an attempt to pressure Nepal boomeranged on India.

But Myanmar and Bangladesh, given their centrality to India's interests, pose serious challenges – Myanmar is veering toward a possible civil war and Bangladesh is struggling to get back on its democratic feet. In both cases, going along with forces trying to keep democratic space open is India's best bet. In Myanmar, used as India is to an uneasy alliance of the army and NLD, India needs a different approach with ethnic groups getting into this mix. With Bangladesh, India needs a new understanding with parties, not all of whom are favourable to India and keep out external anti-India forces waiting to take advantage of the situation.

In the midst of these upheavals, the importance of India's robust developmental support becoming the bedrock for fostering closer relations with its neighbours and their peoples is underestimated. Even the Taliban hesitated to attack Indian projects over the last two decades since it benefited the people.

All these point to the fact that India requires more sustained engagement with its neighbours and in the region, which is discovering that once the genie of democracy has been freed, it is difficult to put it back in the bottle.

## India's neighbourhood watch, past and present (2 September)

- India sometimes overestimates its influence in determining outcomes in its neighboring countries, leading to unnecessary self-criticism when things go wrong.
- Around 16 years ago (2008-2010), significant democratic changes occurred in India's neighborhood, during which India played a positive and catalytic role.
- In December 2008, after military rule in Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister in 2009, with significant support from women and youth. India's then External Affairs Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, played a quiet role in ensuring elections free from military interference.
- Over the next 15 years, India and Bangladesh developed a mutually beneficial partnership, with Sheikh Hasina's government being sensitive to India's core interests.
- In May 2009, Sri Lanka defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) after 33 years, with India playing a sustained role in the process.
- India's role in Sri Lanka's post-LTTE era was crucial, although not widely acknowledged. The defeat of the LTTE allowed for the possibility of closer India-Sri Lanka relations.
- In October 2008, after 30 years of autocratic rule under President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the Maldives held its first multi-party democratic elections, leading to Mohamed Nasheed becoming President. India supported the stabilization of this new democracy.
- Over nearly 16 years, the Maldives has demonstrated democratic maturity, electing three different Presidents in three consecutive elections.
- In 2010, Myanmar held elections after 20 years of military rule, with the military-backed USDP coming to power. Aung San Suu Kyi was released, and her party, the NLD, won significant victories in 2015 and 2020, indicating growing democratic strength.
- Pakistan also saw a shift towards democracy in 2008, with the election of a civilian government and the exile of President Pervez Musharraf.
- The period from 2008-2010 marked an increase in India's development assistance to its neighbors, such as rebuilding efforts in northern Sri Lanka, a \$1 billion line of credit to Bangladesh, connectivity projects in Myanmar, and budgetary support to stabilize democracy in the Maldives.
- During this time, India was able to effectively compete with China's "chequebook diplomacy" in the region.

### The present situation

- In August 2024, the government of Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh collapsed due to a democracy deficit, economic downturn, and violent suppression of protests. India's lack of engagement with Bangladesh's opposition is noted.
- In 2022, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled amidst mass protests. India responded with a \$4 billion bailout, helping stabilize Sri Lanka's economy and maintaining strong political ties across the spectrum.
- In 2024, India was caught off guard by Mohamed Muizzu's victory in the Maldives elections, similar to its earlier oversight in Bangladesh. India is now attempting to rectify the situation.
- In Myanmar, the military took over in 2021 after three elections. The ongoing conflict there is affecting India's northeast, presenting a dilemma for India regarding its stance on Myanmar's military versus opposition forces.
- In August 2021, the Taliban took power in Afghanistan. India anticipated this but was excluded from U.S.-Taliban negotiations, leaving it to manage the consequences independently.
- In 2022, Pakistan's civilian government was toppled, widely believed to be orchestrated by the military.

### New Delhi's response as key factor

- India has faced challenges in its neighborhood due to a mix of its own missteps and uncontrollable events.
  - India successfully bailed out Sri Lanka financially, showed patience with the new Maldivian government, and engaged with the Taliban in Afghanistan to protect its interests.
  - India also reestablished ties with an unstable Nepal after a failed attempt to pressure the country.
  - Myanmar and Bangladesh present significant challenges for India; Myanmar is on the brink of civil war, and Bangladesh is struggling to restore democracy.
- 
- India should focus on supporting democratic forces in both countries, adapting its approach to Myanmar's complex ethnic situation and building new relationships with various parties in Bangladesh.
  - India's developmental support is crucial in strengthening ties with its neighbors and should be emphasized.
  - Sustained engagement with neighbors is essential, as once democracy is introduced, it is difficult to reverse.

# A crisis in WANA that no one talks about

GS Paper II: IR

First, a trick question: Where in West Asia-North Africa (WANA) in 2023 did a no-holds-barred conflict morph into the world's worst humanitarian crisis? The correct answer is not Gaza, but Sudan.

The conflict between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the Rapid Support Force (RSF) led by Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemyati ("My Protector") has devastated Sudan. The estimates vary widely, but the figures are horrific: up to 1,50,000 deaths, nearly 10 million people (nearly a fifth of Sudan's population) displaced, of whom 2.5 million have been forced abroad. These figures are nearly four times those of Gaza. Sudan, a Nile-irrigated agrarian economy exporting food, is now tethering on the brink of a major famine and epidemics such as cholera.

## A history of strife

Large and multi-ethnic Sudan is no stranger to civil strife and misgovernance. Since independence in 1956, the country has had 15 military coups and two civil wars, killing 1.5 million people and resulting in the eventual secession of South Sudan in 2011. For the past two decades, a conflict in the western region of Darfur has been waged by the infamous Janjaweed militia, the RSF's precursor, against local non-Arab Muslims, killing over 2,00,000 and displacing two million.

The genesis of the current crisis lies in the 30 years of autocracy by dictator Omar Hassan al-Bashir. He was overthrown in a military coup in April 2019 after months of popular protests. The Transitional Military Council signed framework agreements with citizens' groups to create a joint military-civilian sovereignty council and draft a new constitution. However, this civilian-military co-habitation collapsed after wobbling for two years, leading to a military coup in October 2021 that installed Gen. al-Burhan as the head of state. Although street protests demanding complete civilian rule and international pressures revived a



**Mahesh Sachdev**

a former Indian Ambassador

An ignored war has spiralled into a human tragedy

power-sharing framework, it proved no better. Simultaneously, the RSF's rejection of the December 2022 draft framework proposing its integration into the Sudanese Army pushed the multi-pronged chaos over the edge. On April 15, 2023, an armed conflict commenced between an estimated 3,00,000-strong SAF and the RSF with nearly 1,00,000 well-armed fighters. Beneath the ideological and ethnic trappings are the unadulterated ambitions of the two warlords. The ongoing mayhem has completely drowned the raison d'être of the crisis: the demand for civilian rule.

For the past 16 months, a civil war has waged over much of Sudan, which is nearly two-thirds the size of India. Despite its larger strength and air force, SAF could not dominate the conflict. It had to evacuate the national capital Khartoum and relocate to Port Sudan. In reverse, two decades of ethnic cleansing by the RSF and Janjaweed in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan have stiffened the resistance of several ethnic groups which have sided with SAF. The RSF has had some success in south-central regions.

## Playground for foreign interests

For pecuniary and geostrategic reasons, foreign interests have fished in Sudan's troubled waters. Sudan shares land borders with seven countries and a coastline along the Red Sea. It also has plenty of natural resources such as crude, gold and large fertile land. The war has created strange bedfellows: Egypt, Sudan's big brother, has supported SAF, as has Iran, Cairo's arch enemy. Russia's Wagner group critically supported the RSF, while the Kremlin has pressed SAF for a naval base in Port Sudan. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) emerged as the RSF's top backer, supplying it with weapons and laundering its gold. Chad and Libya's Gen. Khalifah Haftar have also anchored the RSF. Mercenaries from all over – from South Sudan to Russia and Ukraine – have joined in the melee, mostly backing the RSF. Ethiopia and Eritrea are waiting in the wings.

Gen. Burhan has earned some brownie points by re-establishing normal ties with the United States and recognising Israel.

While several attempts have been made by Saudi Arabia, the U.S., the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the African Union to arrange a ceasefire, none has succeeded largely due to the obduracy of the recalcitrant belligerents. The UN Security Council took nearly 11 months to pass its only resolution on the Sudan conflict which was more aspirational than prescriptive. The International Criminal Court has only made some initial moves to investigate the war crimes in Sudan. The U.S.-sponsored peace talks in Geneva last month had an inauspicious beginning with the SAF staying out, objecting to the presence of the UAE. Although these 10-day talks concluded on August 23 without reaching a ceasefire deal, the belligerents agreed to open three corridors for desperately needed humanitarian relief.

## Indian stakes

Although India evacuated its nationals from Sudan early in the conflict, it still has several reasons to be concerned with the situation in that large and friendly country. In 2022-23, India's direct trade with Sudan reached a record figure of \$2,034 million; it was 9:1 in India's favour with a large market for sugars, and petroleum products. There were also substantive indirect Indian exports via the UAE and Saudi Arabia. In 2003, India made its first major investment abroad in the upstream sector in Sudan cumulatively worth nearly \$2.3 billion and Indian President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's state visit to Sudan, in October of that year, was a grand success. India has also cumulatively committed nearly \$700 million in lines of credit to Sudan. Thanks to students and medical tourists from Sudan, people-to-people ties have remained strong. Negatively, a protracted conflict in Sudan can revive the latent Islamic militancy, potentially threatening India's interests.

## A crisis in WANA that no one talks about (2 September)

- Sudan's 2023 conflict has escalated into the world's worst humanitarian crisis, surpassing even Gaza.
- The conflict between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Force (RSF) has resulted in up to 150,000 deaths and displaced nearly 10 million people, including 2.5 million who have fled the country.
- Sudan, once a Nile-irrigated agrarian economy, now faces the threat of famine and epidemics like cholera.
- Sudan has a history of civil strife and misgovernance, with 15 military coups and two civil wars since its independence in 1956.
- The conflict's roots trace back to the 30-year autocracy of Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who was overthrown in 2019.
- Attempts to create a joint military-civilian government after Bashir's overthrow failed, leading to another military coup in 2021.
- The current conflict began on April 15, 2023, between SAF and RSF, following RSF's rejection of a proposed integration into the Sudanese Army.
- Despite having a larger force and airpower, SAF has struggled to dominate, leading to a relocation of the capital from Khartoum to Port Sudan.
- Ethnic tensions and past atrocities by RSF and Janjaweed have strengthened resistance among several ethnic groups, who have allied with SAF.

## Playground for foreign interests

- Foreign interests have become involved in Sudan's conflict due to its strategic location and rich natural resources, including crude oil, gold, and fertile land.
- Egypt and Iran, despite being adversaries, both support the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF).
- Russia's Wagner group backs the Rapid Support Force (RSF), while the Kremlin seeks a naval base in Port Sudan.
- The UAE is a key supporter of the RSF, supplying weapons and laundering gold. Chad, Libya's Gen. Khalifah Haftar, and various mercenaries also back the RSF.
- Ethiopia and Eritrea are observing the situation, while Gen. Burhan of SAF has improved relations with the U.S. and recognized Israel.
- Multiple attempts by Saudi Arabia, the U.S., IGAD, and the African Union to broker a ceasefire have failed due to the intransigence of the warring factions.

- The UN Security Council and International Criminal Court have made minimal progress in addressing the crisis.
- U.S.-sponsored peace talks in Geneva in August 2023 did not result in a ceasefire but led to an agreement to open humanitarian corridors.
- India has significant stakes in Sudan, including \$2 billion in trade (2022-23), \$2.3 billion in investments, and \$700 million in lines of credit.
- India's historical ties with Sudan include strong people-to-people connections, but the ongoing conflict could revive Islamic militancy, threatening India's interests.

## Old rivalries (2 September)

### The underlying differences are beginning to hurt the Mahayuti

- In the Mahayuti coalition in Maharashtra, tensions are evident between the BJP, Shiv Sena (led by Eknath Shinde), and NCP (led by Ajit Pawar).
- The coalition's internal strife has become more visible after the setback in the 2024 general election, which comes at a crucial time with upcoming Assembly elections.
- The Opposition alliance, Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), appears to be more unified.
- A flagship scheme recently unveiled by the ruling alliance has caused further discord, with each party referring to it by a different name.
- The collapse of a Shivaji Maharaj statue, which was unveiled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has embarrassed the coalition, with Ajit Pawar offering an apology.
- There is ongoing tension between the BJP, Sena, and NCP, with some BJP members blaming Ajit Pawar's group for the general election loss.
- Ajit Pawar has shown uncertainty in his alliance with the BJP and Sena, and has criticized some of the BJP's campaign tactics, suggesting he hasn't fully distanced himself from his family and the broader Pawar political network.
- These internal rivalries are starting to harm the Mahayuti coalition.

## Open season (2 September)

### The new order in tennis has been a long time coming, but it is here

- In the past, upsets of top players in early rounds of Grand Slam tournaments were more common, but the dominance of Federer, Nadal, and Djokovic over the past two decades made such surprises rare.
- The exits of Carlos Alcaraz and Novak Djokovic from the US Open within 24 hours of each other are significant.
- Alcaraz, ranked World No. 3 and a four-time Major champion, and Djokovic, the defending champion with 24 Grand Slam titles, were both expected to go far in the tournament.
- Their losses could be attributed to the physically and emotionally draining summer they experienced, with Alcaraz winning the French Open and Wimbledon, and Djokovic recovering from knee surgery to win an Olympic gold medal.
- Djokovic's third-round loss is particularly impactful as it marks the first time since 2017 that he has exited a Grand Slam this early, signaling a possible decline in his dominance at age 37.
- With Djokovic out, 2024 will be the first year since 2002 without a Slam winner from Federer, Nadal, or Djokovic.
- World No.1 Jannik Sinner, who won the 2024 Australian Open, now has a great opportunity to establish the new tennis order by winning the US Open.
- Despite a shaky start, Sinner has regained form and is expected to face Daniil Medvedev in the quarterfinals, a tough challenge even though Sinner has beaten him five times on hard courts.
- The situation reflects the ongoing shift in men's tennis, with younger players stepping up as the legendary trio's era begins to fade.

# Reforming the process of judicial appointments

GS Paper II: Judiciary

In April, while 60 lakh cases remained pending at various High Courts, 30% of the seats remained vacant, according to a report published by the Department of Justice.

**Collegium system versus NJAC**  
The problem of appointment of judges, which is linked to the problem of pendency of cases, has always been a matter of debate in India. Delays in appointments are often caused by a standoff between the executive and the judiciary. This was exacerbated when the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, 2014, and the 99th Constitution Amendment, 2014, which sought to give politicians and civil society a final say in the appointment of judges to the highest courts. The Court held that the collegium system, which is in place, protects the independence of the judiciary. Since the world over, the judiciary is not the sole body which appoints judges, this argument has always appeared weak.

Furthermore, the collegium system has frequently been criticised for its lack of accountability and transparency, and the prevalence of nepotism. Parliament in its wisdom enacted the NJAC Act. The proposed body would have replaced the collegium system. In order to give it credence, the NJAC was to be headed by the Chief Justice of India, and include the Law Minister, two eminent persons, and two senior judges.

The judiciary contended that the NJAC would give the government excessive control over selection of judges, therefore undermining its independence. The Court determined that the NJAC may jeopardise impartiality and objectivity in the appointment process, thus endangering judicial independence. However, a number of legal professionals, including former judges, have argued that the NJAC is a better system. If appointments of judges



**Pradeep Mehta**

Secretary General, CUTS International, a global public policy research and advocacy group; and author of 'Supreme Court and the Indian Economy'.

Anuska Kewlani of CUTS International contributed to this article

Some countries have commissions comprising members of the judiciary and legal academia, politicians, and laypersons to appoint judges. India could take lessons from them

have to take place faster, we need to bring back the NJAC. Prior to any plan being finalised, all relevant parties, including the judiciary, legislature, civil society, and Bar Associations should be consulted.

## Lessons from other countries

Upon reviewing the process of judicial nominations in other nations, we find that most of them are made by a committee established by the administrative and legislative branches of government. For instance, the Constitutional Reform Act, 2005, introduced by the U.K., established two Commissions for the purpose of choosing candidates: one for the courts in England and Wales, and the other for the Supreme Court. A 15-member commission, called the Judicial Appointments Commission, is designated to oversee the nomination of judges to the courts of England and Wales. It comprises the chairman, who is always a lay member; six judicial members, including two tribunal judges; two professional members – they must be a Barrister in England and Wales, Solicitor of the Senior Courts of England and Wales, or Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives, but both cannot hold the same qualification; five lay members; and one non-legally qualified judicial member.

Many countries have switched to an appointments commission system. South Africa has a Judicial Service Commission (JSC) that advises the President to appoint judges. The current JSC comprises the Chief Justice of South Africa, the President of the Supreme Court of Appeal, a Judge President, the Minister of Justice, two practicing advocates, two practicing attorneys, a professor of law, six persons designated by the National Assembly, four persons designated by the President, and four permanent delegates to the National Council of Provinces.

In France, the President of the Republic holds the constitutional

duty to safeguard the independence of the judiciary but does not directly select judges. Judges are chosen through a process involving the High Council of the Judiciary (Conseil Supérieur de la Magistrature) or, in the case of lower courts, by the Minister of Justice who may consult or receive advice from the High Council. These models, which provide space to members of the judiciary, of legal academia, politicians, and laypersons, are progressive appointment systems. India could take lessons from them.

## Reworking NJAC

The NJAC was an elegant reform. It could have resulted in faster nominations of judges because of its democratic structure. In its present form, the collegium system, under which the Chief Justice along with four/two senior-most Supreme Court judges, recommend appointments and transfers of judges, is opaque. No one knows what the criteria are to select judges. The system offers room for favouritism, which could prevent competent and deserving judges from being appointed. Despite its supposed faults, the NJAC can be reworked by taking into account the views of the judiciary, the executive, and civil society, and the need to strike a balance between judicial independence and accountability.

The NJAC could provide a more efficient method of appointing judges, encouraging communication between the arms of the state, and addressing some of the perceived drawbacks of the collegium system. The way forward ultimately necessitates a nuanced strategy that balances the justifiable concerns of all parties involved and guarantees that the new system will increase efficiency without jeopardising the integrity of judicial appointments. Attaining this equilibrium is vital for maintaining the rule of law and public confidence in the judiciary. In India, delayed justice is all too common and we need to think of ways of preventing this.

## Reforming the process of judicial appointments (2 September)

- As of April, 60 lakh cases were pending in various High Courts, with 30% of judicial seats vacant.
- The issue of appointing judges, closely tied to case pendency, is a long-standing debate in India, often delayed due to conflicts between the executive and judiciary.

- The debate intensified after the Supreme Court struck down the NJAC Act, 2014, and the 99th Constitution Amendment, 2014, which aimed to include politicians and civil society in the appointment of judges.
- The Supreme Court maintained that the collegium system protects judicial independence, although globally, judiciaries are not the sole bodies appointing judges.
- The collegium system has been criticized for its lack of accountability, transparency, and allegations of nepotism.
- The NJAC Act proposed a new system, including the Chief Justice of India, the Law Minister, two eminent persons, and two senior judges, to replace the collegium system.
- The judiciary opposed the NJAC, arguing it would give the government too much control over judge appointments, threatening judicial independence.
- Some legal experts, including former judges, believe the NJAC would be a better system and suggest its reintroduction, with consultations from all relevant parties, including the judiciary, legislature, civil society, and Bar Associations.

### Lessons from other countries

- In many countries, judicial nominations are handled by a committee involving the administrative and legislative branches.
- The UK's Constitutional Reform Act, 2005, established two Commissions for selecting judges: one for England and Wales, and another for the Supreme Court.
- The UK's Judicial Appointments Commission (15 members) oversees judge nominations for courts in England and Wales, including lay members, judicial members, and legal professionals.
- Many countries, including South Africa, have adopted an appointments commission system. South Africa's Judicial Service Commission (JSC) advises the President on judge appointments and includes a mix of judges, legal professionals, politicians, and laypersons.
- In France, the President safeguards judicial independence but does not directly select judges; the High Council of the Judiciary or the Minister of Justice handles judge appointments, with consultation from the High Council.
- These models involve judiciary members, legal academia, politicians, and laypersons, offering progressive appointment systems that India could consider.

### Reworking NJAC

- The NJAC was a promising reform aimed at faster and more democratic judicial appointments.
- The current collegium system, which involves the Chief Justice and senior judges recommending appointments, is opaque and criticized for favoritism.
- The NJAC could be revised to address these issues by incorporating views from the judiciary, executive, and civil society.
- Reworking the NJAC could lead to more efficient appointments, better communication between state branches, and improved accountability.
- A balanced approach is needed to ensure that judicial independence is maintained while improving efficiency and public trust.
- Delayed justice in India highlights the need for a better system to prevent such issues.

# Are lie-detector tests legally valid?

Why has the CBI obtained permission from a Kolkata court to conduct polygraph tests? How are these tests administered? Why have experts and scientists flagged concerns regarding their efficacy? What do judicial precedents say?

GS Paper III: Basic Science

EXPLAINER

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

**O**n August 26, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conducted a second round of polygraph tests on seven people, in connection with the rape and murder of a resident doctor at the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata. The tests were conducted on the former principal of the medical college Sandip Kumar Ghosh, four doctors who had dinner with the victim hours before the crime, civic police volunteer Sanjay Roy who is the main accused, and another police volunteer believed to be close to him. Mr. Ghosh reportedly provided inconsistent responses during questioning over the last 10 days, leading authorities to administer an additional round of polygraph tests. The central agency, which has been investigating the crime since August 13 following a Calcutta High Court order, had obtained permission from a Kolkata court to conduct the polygraph tests. The Court also remanded the main accused to judicial custody for 14 days.

**What are deception detection tests?**

Deception detection tests (DDTs) are scientific procedures employed to detect probable deception during interrogation. These tests include narco-analysis, polygraph tests, and brain mapping. A polygraph test operates on the presumption that specific physiological responses are triggered when a person is lying. Typically, the test is administered by attaching instruments like cardio-cuffs or sensitive electrodes to the suspect to measure variables such as blood pressure, galvanic skin response (a proxy for sweat), breathing and pulse rate. As questions are posed, each physiological response is assigned a numerical value to determine whether the individual is telling the truth or being deceptive.

In contrast, narco-analysis involves the injection of a drug called sodium pentothal into the accused, inducing a hypnotic or sedated state. The assumption is that a subject in such a state is less inhibited and is more likely to divulge information. Because the drug is thought to weaken the subject's resolve to lie, it is often referred to as a "truth serum." The third method, brain mapping, measures a subject's neural activity – specifically brainwaves – using electrodes attached to the face and neck. It operates on the principle that the brain generates distinctive brainwaves when exposed to familiar stimuli, such as an image or a sound.

However, the efficacy of such tests remains contentious in the medical field. In a 2010 paper published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, psychiatric expert Suresh Bada Math observed that lie-detection techniques have "faced a number of criticisms," and their effectiveness in revealing "concealed knowledge in applied real-world settings" remains uncertain. He also questioned the reliability of polygraph tests, pointing out that the test's underlying principle is flawed – parameters such as heart rate and blood pressure, which indicate a state of hyper-arousal, have not been proven to be uniquely indicative of lying. Similarly, a 2019 study conducted in the U.S. flagged high false positive rates and noted that individuals can train to beat a polygraph.

**What was the norm before 2010?**

Prior to 2010, Indian courts were strongly in favour of these tests, even deeming



**In rage:** West Bengal Medical Council protests against the rape and murder of a doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, in Kolkata, on August 31. PTI

consent from the accused as irrelevant before administering them. In *Rojo George vs. Deputy Superintendent of Police* (2006), the Kerala High Court noted that the techniques used for the commission of crimes have become "very sophisticated and modern," making the use of these scientific tests essential for effective investigations. "When such tests are conducted under strict supervision of the expert, it cannot be said that there is any violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed to a citizen of India," it underscored. Similarly, in *Dinesh Dalmia vs. State* (2006), the Madras High Court observed that reliance on these tests by agencies did not constitute "testimonial compulsion." The Court also pitched these "scientific methods of investigation" as a safer alternative to custodial violence often used to extract information.

In 2008, the Delhi High Court in *Sh. Shailender Sharma vs. State & Another*, asserted that in light of rising crimes against society, it is necessary to keep in mind the "need of a thorough and proper investigation as against individual rights while ensuring that constitutional rights are not infringed." Adding that narco-analysis tests "do not suffer from any constitutional infirmity" and are a "step in aid of investigation", the Court allowed the administration of the test.

**What happened in 2010?**

In a watershed moment, the Supreme Court in 2010 in the case of *Selvi vs. State of Karnataka* ruled that no lie detector tests should be administered "except on

the basis of consent of the accused" in accordance with the fundamental right against self-incrimination as enshrined under Article 20(3) of the Constitution. A Bench comprising former Chief Justice of India (CJI) K.G. Balakrishnan and Justices R.V. Raveendran and J.M. Panchal further elucidated that a person's right to make a statement or remain silent is integral to their right to privacy. Thus, they underscored, compelling an individual to make a statement would also constitute a violation of Article 21 of the Constitution.

The Court also noted that little empirical evidence is present to bolster the argument that these tests provide reliable leads for investigators. It accordingly cautioned that the results of these tests cannot be regarded as "confessions." However, if any information or material is subsequently discovered "with the help of voluntarily administered test results," such evidence can be admitted in court. For instance, if an accused discloses the location of a murder weapon during the test, and the investigating agency later finds the weapon at that location, the accused's statement itself will not be admitted as evidence, but the weapon will be.

The Court further mandated that individuals volunteering for such tests must have access to a lawyer and be apprised of the physical, emotional, and legal implications of undergoing the test. Additionally, it required that the subject's consent be formally recorded before a judicial magistrate and that the guidelines set out by the National Human Rights

Commission in 2000 for administering these tests be strictly adhered to.

**What next?**

Despite the top Court's cautionary stance, the administration of DDTs continue to be prevalent in India in sharp contrast to their dwindling appeal worldwide. In the recent past, such tests have been employed in several high-profile cases including the 2020 gang rape of a Dalit woman in Hathras, the 2012 disappearance of Sheena Bora, and the 2022 Shradha Walker murder case.

In the book, *The Truth Machines: Policing, Violence, and Scientific Interrogations in India*, Jinee Lokaneeta underscores the highly invasive nature of polygraphs and other allied tests, questioning whether informed and free consent can ever be obtained in police custody. She also documents instances, such as in the case of the exonerees in the 2007 Mecca Masjid blasts case and the accused in the 2006 Mumbai blasts case, where narco-analysis was forcibly administered, accompanied by physical abuse, to extract false confessions.

Echoing similar concerns, senior advocate Rebecca John told *The Caravan* that such lie-detector tests "masquerade" as scientific evaluations. She also highlighted how the prosecution often uses a person's unwillingness to undergo these tests to cast a judgment on their character before the court. "The fact that you have used your constitutional right is used against you to suggest mala fide conduct," she said.

THE GIST

On August 26, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conducted a second round of polygraph tests on seven people, in connection with the rape and murder of a resident doctor at the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata.

In a 2010 paper published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, psychiatric expert Suresh Bada Math observed that lie-detection techniques have "faced a number of criticisms," and their effectiveness in revealing "concealed knowledge in applied real-world settings" remains uncertain.

The Supreme Court in 2010 in the case of *Selvi vs. State of Karnataka* ruled that no lie detector tests should be administered "except on the basis of consent of the accused" in accordance with the fundamental right against self-incrimination as enshrined under Article 20(3) of the Constitution.

Are lie-detector tests legally valid? (2 September)

### **Why has the CBI obtained permission from a Kolkata court to conduct polygraph tests? How are these tests administered? Why have experts and scientists flagged concerns regarding their efficacy? What do judicial precedents say?**

- On August 26, the CBI conducted a second round of polygraph tests related to the rape and murder of a resident doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, Kolkata.
- The tests involved the former principal Sandip Kumar Ghosh, four doctors who dined with the victim, and two civic police volunteers, including the main accused Sanjay Roy.
- Sandip Kumar Ghosh gave inconsistent responses during questioning, leading to additional tests.
- The CBI obtained court permission to conduct these tests and the main accused was remanded to judicial custody for 14 days.

#### **Deception Detection Tests:**

- **Polygraph Tests:** Measure physiological responses (e.g., blood pressure, skin response, breathing, pulse) to detect deception.
- **Narco-Analysis:** Uses sodium pentothal to induce a sedated state, making subjects more likely to reveal information, often called a “truth serum.”
- **Brain Mapping:** Measures brainwave activity in response to familiar stimuli to identify deception.
- The effectiveness of lie-detection tests, such as polygraphs, is debated. Psychiatric expert Suresh Bada Math and a 2019 U.S. study highlighted criticisms, including high false positive rates and the potential for individuals to train to beat the test.
- Before 2010, Indian courts were generally supportive of these tests. Consent from the accused was often deemed irrelevant.
- In the 2006 case Rojo George vs. Deputy Superintendent of Police, the Kerala High Court deemed these tests essential for modern crime investigations.
- In Dinesh Dalmia vs. State (2006), the Madras High Court saw these tests as a safer alternative to custodial violence and not a violation of rights.
- In 2008, the Delhi High Court in Sh. Shailender Sharma vs. State upheld the use of narco-analysis tests, emphasizing their necessity for thorough investigations while ensuring constitutional rights were not infringed.

#### **What happened in 2010?**

- In the 2010 Selvi vs. State of Karnataka case, the Supreme Court ruled that lie detector tests can only be administered with the accused's consent, as per Article 20(3) of the Constitution which protects against self-incrimination.
- The Court emphasized that forcing someone to make a statement violates their right to privacy and Article 21 of the Constitution.
- The Court noted that there is limited evidence to support the reliability of these tests for providing useful investigative leads.
- Test results cannot be used as confessions. However, if a voluntarily given test result leads to discovering physical evidence (e.g., a murder weapon), that evidence can be admitted in court, but the statement itself cannot.
- The Supreme Court mandated that individuals volunteering for lie detector tests must have access to a lawyer, be informed of the test's implications, and give recorded consent before a judicial magistrate.
- Guidelines set by the National Human Rights Commission in 2000 must be followed.
- Despite these guidelines, lie detector tests are still widely used in India, unlike their decreasing use globally.
- Recent high-profile cases involving these tests include the Hathras gang rape, the Sheena Bora disappearance, and the Shraddha Walker murder.
- Critics argue that polygraphs and similar tests are highly invasive and may not truly offer informed consent in police custody.
- There are documented cases of forced narco-analysis and physical abuse used to extract false confessions.
- Some legal experts express concern that refusal to undergo these tests can be used against individuals in court, portraying them negatively.

## **How quick commerce is disrupting everything with tech innovations (2 September)**

**Global brokerages estimate India’s quick commerce market to be worth \$6 billion by 2025, up from near zero level about three years ago; in fact, almost 40% of online grocery sales now come from quick commerce; it is also gaining significant traction internationally across regions**

- The nursery rhyme “Jack be nimble” humorously parallels the quick commerce (q-commerce) industry, which focuses on **immediate delivery**.

- Amazon, previously critical of q-commerce, is now planning to enter the market in early 2025, competing with existing players like **Blinkit and Zepto**.
- India's q-commerce market is expected to reach **\$6 billion by 2025**, growing rapidly from almost zero three years ago.
- Nearly 40% of online grocery sales in India come from q-commerce.
- **India's e-commerce market grew by 18-20% in the first half of 2024, with grocery sales increasing by over 38%, largely due to q-commerce.**
- Globally, q-commerce is expanding in North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific, driven by demand for convenience and on-demand delivery.
- The global q-commerce market was valued at \$68.82 billion in 2022 and is projected to grow at a 22.2% CAGR from 2023 to 2030.
- The Asia-Pacific region accounted for over 50% of the global q-commerce market share in 2023, while North America held more than 28.5% of the market share in 2022.
- The writer was surprised to see **sex toys being sold alongside everyday items on Blinkit**.
- Reflects on how technology often advances with unexpected products, comparing this to how pornography drove early internet technology.
- The writer is interested in q-commerce, not just for fast delivery times but for its potential in urgent services like medical care.

#### Highlights key innovations in q-commerce:

- Dynamic Pricing: **Blinkit uses AI to adjust prices based on real-time demand and competition.**
- Dynamic Widget: Swiggy's technology allows for real-time updates to its app's user interface without needing a new app release.
- Demand Forecasting: **Zepto uses machine learning to predict customer demand and manage inventory effectively.**
- Smart Logistics: Dunzo uses AI for demand prediction, dynamic pricing, automated dispatch, GPS tracking, and fraud detection.
- Automated Billing: Bigbasket uses AI and deep learning to streamline self-checkout and reduce manual errors.
- Believes that innovations in q-commerce can be applied to various industries.

## Russians fear loss of 'main information source' after arrest of Telegram chief (2 September)

**Telegram's popularity has grown steadily in Russia throughout the Ukraine conflict, after Russia blocked access to Instagram, Facebook and X, as well as the websites of several opposition media outlets; both Russia and Ukraine warn their populations of air attacks via posts on the platform**

- **Pavel Durov, the chief of Telegram, was recently arrested in France, raising concerns in Russia.**
- Telegram is crucial in Russia as it provides access to uncensored news and information, especially after the crackdown on dissent and Western social media platforms.
- **Russia had previously blocked Telegram for not cooperating with Russian law enforcement but now relies on it for free speech and news.**
- Durov, who was charged for not controlling extremist content on Telegram, has been released on bail but cannot leave France.
- The Kremlin has warned France against using the case for political purposes.
- Additionally, the European Commission is investigating whether Telegram has more users in the EU than it claims, which could lead to stricter regulations.
- Telegram is widely used in Russia for both independent news coverage and government communication, making it essential for various political perspectives.
- Telegram is seen as independent from the Russian state and blocking it would be considered censorship.
- Its popularity has increased in Russia, especially after other platforms like **Instagram, Facebook, and X were blocked.**
- Telegram is now the fourth most popular online service in Russia, ahead of **YouTube and VKontakte.**
- **Two-thirds of Telegram users in Russia use it primarily for news, with only a small percentage interested in entertainment.**
- Both Russia and Ukraine use Telegram for military communication and to alert the public about air attacks.
- Telegram is crucial for coordinating military operations on both sides of the conflict.
- The platform is a rare point of unifying concern among various political groups in Russia, including both opposition figures and pro-Kremlin journalists.
- Telegram is viewed as a vital source of independent news and information, with no real alternatives in Russia.
- Users like Mila and Naida rely on Telegram for news and private communication, and its potential shutdown would significantly impact them.

## Nishad claims silver in men's high jump; Preethi wins 200m bronze (2 September)

**Shuttlers Nitesh and Suhas enter the summit clashes in SL3 and SL4 respectively, while Manisha takes on compatriot Thulasimathi for a spot in the SU5 final; heartbreak for archer Rakesh after being edged out in the bronze medal face-off**

- **Nishad Kumar won a silver medal in the men's T47 high jump** at the Paralympics with a season-best jump of 2.04m. The gold was won by Roderick Townsend-Roberts from the USA with a 2.12m jump.
- **Preethi Pal** made history by becoming the first Indian woman track and field athlete to win two Paralympic medals. She earned a **bronze in the 200m T35 category** with a personal best time of 30.01 seconds. Zhou Xia of China won gold and Guo Qianqian took silver.
- Ravi Rongali achieved a personal best of 10.63m and finished fifth in the men's F40 shot put.
- Rakshita Raju finished last in the opening round heats of the **women's 1500m T11**.
- **Indian shuttlers Nitesh Kumar and L.Y. Suhas advanced to the singles finals** in their respective categories. Nitesh won 21-16, 21-12 against Japan's Daisuke Fujihara, while Suhas defeated compatriot Sukant Kadam 21-17, 21-12.
- Nitesh Kumar will face Daniel Bethell from Great Britain, and Suhas will compete against Lukas Mazur from France in the finals.
- **Manisha Ramadass** reached the **women's singles SU5 semi-final**, ensuring India a medal in **badminton**.

### No trouble

- Manisha, 19, won against **Japan's Mamiko Toyoda 21-13, 21-16 in the badminton quarter-finals**.

## When school is an uphill climb away (2 September)

**Generations of Dongria Kondh tribals in Odisha's Rayagada district have not been to school because of the challenges of living in a hilly area in the forest. Satyasundar Barik reports on how roads, parental work, day school proximity, and boarding school problems all impact children's right to education**

- Amin Kadraka, 14, from the Dongria Kondh community in Odisha, is proficient with digital technology but struggles with reading.
- The **Dongria Kondh community** often lacks access to formal education due to remoteness, and interventions over the past four decades have not yet integrated them into the mainstream education system.
- Amin Kadraka, from the Dongria Kondh community, faces challenges in accessing school due to the difficult forest path and wildlife encounters.
- The nearest school is 3 km away, and Amin doubts how education might impact his life or family.
- A decade ago, the Dongria Kondhs gained recognition for opposing a bauxite mining project by **Vedanta Group**, which led to the project's cancellation.
- The Dongria Kondhs are classified as **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)** by the Central government due to their distinct lifestyle and economic status.

### Living in the forest ecosystem

- In Lahunikhunti village, six children of school age don't attend school due to lack of access.
- Children spend their days playing with goats or doing household chores like caring for babies, cleaning, and collecting water.
- Nearby Sergipai village has 25 Dongria Kondh families, with only one person who studied up to Class 5.
- Traveling to the nearest primary school in Bhatiguma from Upparguma is challenging due to a 3-km hilly path.
- Despite having 30 girls aged 9-18 in Upparguma, none have attended school, and no resident of Bhatiguma has completed Class 10.

### Literacy vs education

- The Dongria Kondh Development Agency (DKDA), Kurli, has focused on 7,000 Dongria Kondhs in 64 villages since 1978-79.
- The literacy rate among Dongria Kondhs in this area was only 7.40% in 2019, with female literacy at 6.67%.
- The **sex ratio among Dongria Kondhs is healthy at 1,349**.
- Overall literacy rates among **PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) in Odisha are very low, with female literacy as low as 4.13% among the Kutia Kondhs, 5.77% among the Didayis, and 7.46% among the Souras**.
- Odisha has a significant tribal population, about 96 lakh people, many of whom live in forest areas.