

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (23 September 2024)

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# Left leader Dissanayake is Sri Lanka President

'AKD', as he is popularly known, has pledged to end corruption and change the political culture of the country; poll results were declared by Election Commission after counting preferential votes; it marks the first time the island nation's presidency will be held by a party with no links to Sri Lanka Freedom Party or United National Party

**Meera Srinivasan**  
COLOMBO

**L**eft leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Sunday emerged winner in Sri Lanka's presidential race, obtaining a mandate that signals a clean break from the island nation's political establishment and ushers in unprecedented change.

Mr. Dissanayake was officially declared President-elect by the Election Commission of Sri Lanka after it completed a second count of votes to add preference votes, an exercise undertaken for the first time in the country's election history.

The tally of preferential votes cast by voters became necessary since neither Mr. Dissanayake, nor his chief challenger, Opposition Leader Sajith

Premadasa, secured the 50% plus one vote in the first round, which is required for winning.

Mr. Dissanayake secured 42.31% of the votes. Mr. Premadasa was in the second spot with 32.76%, while incumbent Ranil Wickremesinghe came third with under 20% of the vote share.

The three candidates dominated the election, which was the first to be held after the economic crisis of 2022, the worst seen in the country since its Independence. Thirty-five other contestants were in the race, including Namal Rajapaksa, son of Mahinda Rajapaksa, and Tamil candidate P. Ariyanethiran.

An Opposition legislator from capital Colombo, Mr. Dissanayake ran for the Na-



**New tide:** Anura Kumara Dissanayake arrives at the Election Commission office in Colombo on Sunday. AFP

tional People's Power (NPP) alliance, a coalition helmed by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP or People's Liberation Front), a party with Marxist-Leninist roots. "AKD", as he is popularly known, has pledged to end corruption and change the political culture of the country

through an effective campaign targeting scores of Sri Lankans who sought change after the country's economic crash in 2022.

Sunday's poll outcome is a big win for Mr. Dissanayake, with his vote share growing well over tenfold from the 3.16% he secured in 2019, when he chal-

lenged Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Mr. Premadasa. It marks the first time Sri Lanka's presidency will be held by a party with no links to the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) or the United National Party (UNP) or their offshoots that have dominated the country's politics for over seven decades.

#### 'A positive outcome'

University of Jaffna academic Mahendran Thiruvarangan described the poll outcome as a "positive" one. "The NPP is a political formation that represents some of the core demands of the *Aragayala* [people's struggle of 2022]. Their victory is reason for optimism," he told *The Hindu*.

Although Mr. Dissanayake's camp began working on a grassroots

campaign soon after its poor show in the 2019 presidential poll as well as the 2020 general elections, it came under greater focus after the mass uprising two years ago, that saw citizens emphatically demand "system change". The outcome of this presidential poll reflects the disenchantment of the people with the existing political culture, according to Pradeep Peiris, political scientist from the University of Colombo. "What you see is not necessarily support for his specific proposals or policies, but simply an emphatic anti-establishment vote," he said.

In his view, the verdict exposes both the positive side of Sri Lankan democracy and its limits. "We have seen this before, people rallying behind an indi-

vidual or a formation hoping they can somehow change the system, but it is never easy," he observed, pointing to "humongous challenges" facing the President-elect.

"We stand ready to rewrite Sri Lankan history," Mr. Dissanayake said in a message on 'X' on Sunday evening. "This dream can only be realised with a fresh start. The unity of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, and all Sri Lankans is the bedrock of this new beginning. The New Renaissance we seek will rise from this shared strength and vision," said Mr. Dissanayake, who is due to be sworn in on Monday.

**SRI LANKA'S VERDICT**  
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## Left leader Dissanayake is Sri Lanka President

- **Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the Left** emerged winner in **Sri Lanka's presidential race**.
- His victory signifies a **break from the island's political establishment** and **ushers in unprecedented change**.
- **Sri Lanka's Election Commission** declared him **President-elect** after completing a **second count** of votes.
- This second count was necessary due to the absence of a candidate securing **50% plus one vote** in the first round.
- **Mr. Dissanayake secured 42.31%** of the votes.
- **Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa** came second with **32.76%**, and incumbent **Ranil Wickremesinghe** came third with less than **20%**.
- **Thirty-five other candidates** participated, including **Namal Rajapaksa and P. Ariyanethiran**.
- This was the **first election** after the **economic crisis of 2022**, the worst in the country's post-Independence history.
- Mr. Dissanayake represented the **National People's Power (NPP) alliance**, led by the **Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)**, with **Marxist-Leninist roots**.
- He is commonly known as **"AKD"** and has promised to **end corruption** and **change the political culture**.
- His campaign resonated with many Sri Lankans seeking change after the **2022 economic crash**.
- **Sunday's poll outcome** is a major victory for **Anura Kumara Dissanayake**, with his vote share growing over **tenfold** from the **3.16%** he secured in **2019** when he contested against **Gotabaya Rajapaksa** and **Sajith Premadasa**.

- This marks the **first time** in Sri Lanka's history that the presidency will be held by a party with no connections to the **Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)**, the **United National Party (UNP)**, or their offshoots that have dominated politics for over **seven decades**.
- **Mahendran Thiruvarangan**, an academic from the **University of Jaffna**, described the result as a **positive outcome**, citing that the **National People's Power (NPP)** represents many of the core demands of the **Aragalaya (people's struggle of 2022)**.
- Mr. Dissanayake's **grassroots campaign** began after his poor performance in the **2019 presidential** and **2020 general elections**, gaining greater attention after the **mass uprising** in 2022 when citizens demanded **system change**.
- **Pradeep Peiris**, a political scientist from the **University of Colombo**, noted that the election result reflects widespread **disenchantment** with the existing political system and represents a strong **anti-establishment vote**.
- While the vote signals support for change, it also reveals the **limits** of Sri Lankan democracy, as previous movements rallied behind individuals or groups but faced difficulty in bringing systemic change.
- In a message on **'X' (formerly Twitter)** on Sunday evening, **Mr. Dissanayake** emphasized the need for a **fresh start**, calling for unity among **Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims**, and all Sri Lankans to form the foundation of a **New Renaissance** for the country.
- **Mr. Dissanayake** is set to be **sworn in as President** on **Monday**.

## **GST Council is looking at tax rates item by item for rationalisation: FM (23 September)**

- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that the GST Council is reviewing tax rates item by item for rationalization.
- This review has been delayed due to factors like COVID-19 and state elections.
- She emphasized the need for urgency in addressing this issue.
- The Group of Ministers is focused on evaluating the tax rates carefully.
- Regarding **GST compensation, she noted it cannot continue past June 30, 2022, as mandated by law.**
- The **compensation scheme was designed to help states manage revenue stability after GST implementation.**
- Some states still want GST compensation to continue, but Sitharaman explained it's not feasible under the original intent of the scheme.
- She highlighted that the compensation rate was initially set high, even though few states achieved that growth rate.
- **Tamil Nadu, for example, saw increased earnings due to the compensation and GST implementation.**
- Sitharaman addressed criticisms about GST, especially when they come from state finance ministers, suggesting they lack a logical basis.

# India sweeps Chess Olympiad, makes history by winning gold

PCS

**P.K. Ajith Kumar**

India recorded one of the greatest moments in its sporting history in Budapest on Sunday, winning the gold medals both in the Open and women's sections of the 45th Chess Olympiad.

The Indian men had been so dominant in the competition that they were almost assured of the gold with a round to spare.

In the 11th and final round match, India scored an easy victory against Slovenia. D. Gukesh, R. Praggnanandhaa and Arjun Erigaisi won their games, while Vidit Gujrathi drew. India won 3.5-0.5 against Slovenia, taking its tally to 21 points, out of the possible 22.

P. Harikrishna is the other member of the men's



**Winning moves:** D. Gukesh and Divya Deshmukh, along with Arjun Erigaisi and Vantika Agrawal, won individual golds to propel India to its first team golds in the chess Olympiad. FIDE

team and he competed as the reserve board player.

The United States, the top seed whom India defeated in the penultimate round, finished as the runner-up, with 17 points.

In the last round of the women's event, too, India scored a 3.5-0.5 victory over Azerbaijan.

There were wins for D. Harika, Divya Deshmukh and Vantika Agrawal and the only player to draw was

R. Vaishali.

Tania Sachdev played on the reserve board for the top-seeded Indian women. They finished with 19 points, one more than Kazakhstan.

India's win in the Open section was facilitated by outstanding performances on the first and third boards by Gukesh and Arjun, both of whom went on to win individual gold medals. After defeating Vladi-

mir Fedoseev in the final round, Gukesh finished with nine points in 10 games.

Arjun's performances were equally emphatic. Playing on the third board, despite leading the Indian contingent with the highest ELO rating, Arjun scored 10 points in 11 games. Arjun and Gukesh are now ranked third and fifth in the world in live ratings.

In the women's section, 19 year old Divya won the individual gold for the strongest performance on the third board. She finished with 9.5 points in 11 games. Vantika, playing on the fourth board also won individual gold, finishing with 7.5 points in 9 games.

**RELATED REPORTS**

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## India sweeps Chess Olympiad, makes history by winning gold (23 September)

- India achieved a historic win at the 45th Chess Olympiad in Budapest, securing **gold in both the Open and women's sections**.
- The Indian men's team was very strong and almost guaranteed gold with one round left.
- In their final match against Slovenia, India won 3.5-0.5, **with D. Gukesh, R. Praggnanandhaa, and Arjun Erigaisi** winning their games, and **Vidit Gujrathi** drawing.
- India finished with a total of 21 points out of 22 possible.
- The United States, who India defeated earlier, ended as the runner-up with 17 points.
- In the women's event, India also won 3.5-0.5 against Azerbaijan in the last round.
- **D. Harika, Divya Deshmukh, and Vantika Agrawal** won their games, **while R. Vaishali** drew.
- The Indian women's team finished with 19 points, just ahead of Kazakhstan.
- Gukesh and Arjun performed exceptionally well in the Open section, both winning individual gold medals.
- Gukesh scored 9 points in 10 games after defeating Vladimir Fedoseev.
- Arjun scored 10 points in 11 games and is ranked fifth in the world.

# Quad meet launches maritime and health initiatives

GS Paper II: IR

**Sriram Lakshman**  
WILMINGTON (DELAWARE)

Leaders of the Quad group of countries – Prime Minister Narendra Modi, U.S. President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida – met at their sixth summit-level meeting at Archmere Academy, Mr. Biden’s former school in Claymont, Delaware, to announce a broad range of outcomes. These included the launch of a new coast guard exercise, a logistics network, expansion of maritime surveillance, and a project to combat cervical cancer.

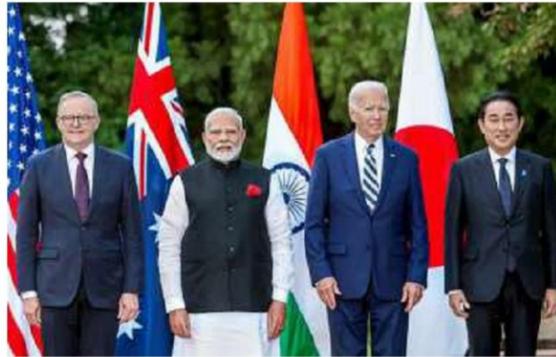
In terms of positions, the Quad strongly condemned aggression in the East and South China Sea and expressed alarm over the war in Ukraine, noting that all four leaders had vi-

sited the country.

The ‘Quad Cancer Moonshot’ will involve contributions from all four countries to combat cervical cancer. India will commit \$10 million towards screening for the disease. Vaccine manufacturer Serum Institute of India and Gavi will provide up to 40 million vaccines for the region, “subject to approvals”.

The countries announced the Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission in 2025 to improve interoperability and maritime safety. Future coast guard missions are planned for after 2025. A logistics network pilot project was also launched, which will involve Quad countries sharing airlift capacity to support disaster response.

A Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI) to train Quad



(From left) Anthony Albanese, Narendra Modi, Joe Biden, and Fumio Kishida at the ‘Cancer Moonshot’ event in Delaware. ANI

partners “to monitor and secure their waters, enforce their laws, and deter unlawful behaviour” was also announced. India will host the first MAITRI workshop in 2025.

A maritime legal dialogue has been launched to support actions to uphold the rules-based order, the statement said.

Quad members con-

demned maritime aggression, with pointed references to situations involving China, which is currently embroiled in tensions with the Philippines, most recently over the latter’s coast guard presence on the Sabina shoal, 150 km off its west coast.

“We are seriously concerned about the situation in the East and South Chi-

na Seas,” they said, as they expressed concern about the militarisation of disputed features and intimidation in the South China Sea.

The statement condemns the dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia vessels and opposes the disruption of other countries’ offshore resource exploitation activities.

## War in Ukraine

While there was no direct mention of Russia, presumably out of consideration for India, which shares a close relationship with Moscow, the joint statement had references that have been associated with a condemnation of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, such as Quad countries offering their “unwavering” support for the United Nations Charter. The countries ex-

pressed their “deepest concern” for the war in Ukraine and its consequences.

“Each of us has visited Ukraine since the war began and seen this firsthand; we reiterate the need for a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in line with international law, consistent with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, including respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the statement says. It also notes the impact the war has had on food and energy security, especially for developing countries.

The Quad fellowship, to promote STEM education, has been expanded to include 50 scholarships worth \$5,00,000 for students from the region to study at government-funded technical institutions in India.

## Quad meet launches maritime and health initiatives (23 September)

- Leaders of the Quad group (India, U.S., Australia, Japan) met for their sixth summit at Biden's former school in Delaware.
- They announced several initiatives, including a new coast guard exercise and expanded maritime surveillance.
- The Quad condemned aggression in the East and South China Sea and expressed concern about the war in Ukraine.
- They launched the "Quad Cancer Moonshot" to combat cervical cancer, with India committing \$10 million for screening.
- The Serum Institute of India and Gavi will provide up to 40 million vaccines for the region, pending approvals.
- A "Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission" will be established in 2025 for better maritime safety and interoperability.
- A logistics network pilot project was announced to share airlift capacity for disaster response.
- The "Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific" (MAITRI) aims to train partners in maritime security; India will host the first workshop in 2025.
- A maritime legal dialogue was initiated to support a rules-based order.
- The Quad leaders condemned maritime aggression, particularly referencing tensions with China, including issues with the Philippines on Sabina Shoal.
- They expressed serious concern about militarization in the East and South China Seas and the use of aggressive maritime tactics.
- While not directly mentioning Russia, the joint statement condemned the war in Ukraine and expressed support for the UN Charter.
- The leaders emphasized the need for a peaceful resolution to the Ukraine conflict and acknowledged its impact on food and energy security.
- The Quad fellowship for STEM education was expanded to offer 50 scholarships worth \$500,000 for students from the region to study in India.



## Cervical cancer

- **Cervical cancer** is a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the cervix, the **lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina**.
- It is one of the most common cancers in women, particularly in developing countries.

### Causes and Risk Factors

- The major cause of cervical cancer is persistent infection with **high-risk types of HPV**, particularly **Human Papillomavirus (HPV)** types 16 and 18.
- HPV is a sexually transmitted virus, and while most HPV infections are harmless and resolve on their own, some types can lead to cancer over time.

### Risk factors include:

- **Multiple sexual partners:** Increases the likelihood of HPV exposure.
- **Early sexual activity:** Early exposure to HPV increases the risk of persistent infection.
- **Weak immune system:** Women with weakened immune systems, such as those with HIV, are more likely to develop cervical cancer.
- **Smoking:** Tobacco use has been linked to cervical cancer.
- **Long-term use of oral contraceptives:** Some studies have found a small increased risk in long-term users.

### Stages of Cervical Cancer

- **Pre-cancerous lesions (Cervical intraepithelial neoplasia or CIN):** These are abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix, detectable through a **Pap test**.
- **Early-stage cervical cancer:** Cancer is confined to the cervix.
- **Advanced-stage cervical cancer:** The cancer spreads to nearby **tissues or organs such as the bladder or rectum**.

### Symptoms of Cervical Cancer

- In its early stages, cervical cancer may not produce any noticeable symptoms, making regular screening crucial for early detection.

### Symptoms that may occur as the disease progresses include:

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding, such as bleeding after intercourse or between periods.
- Pain during intercourse.
- Pelvic pain.
- Vaginal discharge with a strong odor.

### Diagnosis and Screening

- **Screening** for cervical cancer involves regular Pap tests (Pap smears) and HPV tests.
- These tests help in detecting abnormal cells in the cervix before they become cancerous.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends **screening starting at the age of 30 and repeated every 3–5 years depending on the results**.
- The **Pap test** involves **collecting cells from the cervix and examining them under a microscope to detect any abnormalities**. The **HPV test** identifies the presence of high-risk HPV types that are more likely to lead to cervical cancer.

### Prevention: HPV Vaccination

- One of the most effective ways to prevent cervical cancer is through vaccination against HPV.
- **HPV vaccines**, such as **Gardasil and Cervarix**, protect against the most common high-risk types of HPV (types 16 and 18). The vaccine is most effective when **given before individuals are exposed to HPV**, usually recommended for boys and girls aged 9 to 14 years.
- **In India**, the HPV vaccine was introduced in some states as part of the **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)**.
- **In June 2023, the Indian government approved** the indigenous vaccine **CERVAVAC**, developed by the Serum Institute of India, for widespread use.
- This move is expected to significantly reduce cervical cancer cases in India.

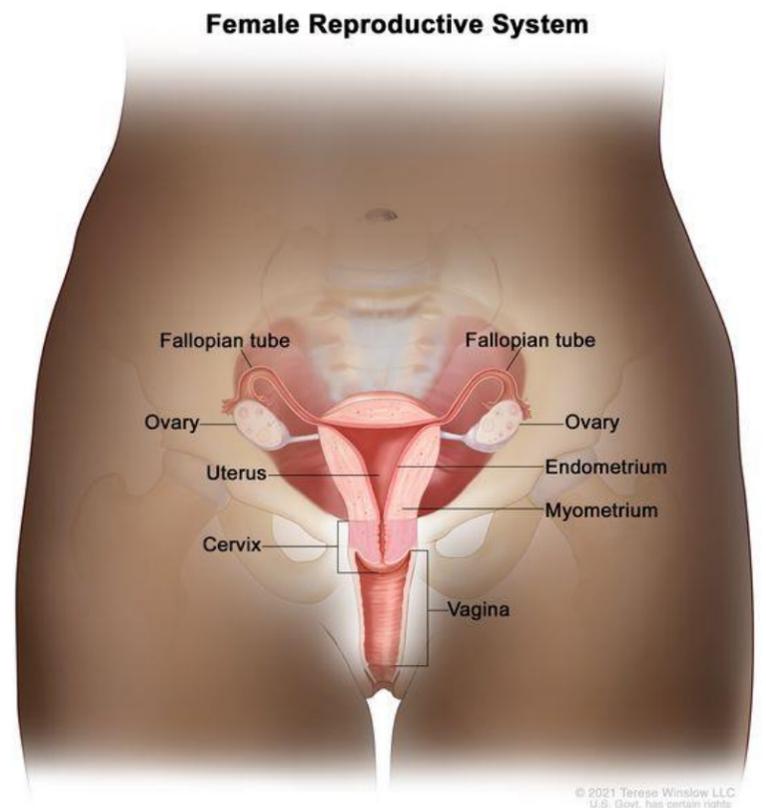
### Treatment

Treatment for cervical cancer depends on the stage of the disease and includes surgery, **radiation therapy, chemotherapy**, or a combination of these:

- **Surgery:** In early-stage cervical cancer, surgery may involve **removing the cervix and uterus (hysterectomy)**.
- **Radiation therapy:** High-energy X-rays are used to kill cancer cells.
- **Chemotherapy:** Drugs are used to kill cancer cells or shrink tumors.
- **Targeted therapy and immunotherapy:** In some cases, advanced therapies targeting specific cancer cells or stimulating the immune system to fight cancer are used.

### Global and Indian Scenario

- Globally, **cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women**, with approximately **604,000 new cases and 342,000 deaths** reported in 2020 (WHO).
- The majority of cases occur in low- and middle-income countries due to limited access to screening and treatment.
- In India, cervical cancer is the **second most common cancer in women**, accounting for around **96,000 new cases and 60,000 deaths annually** (National Cancer Registry Programme, ICMR).
- Despite these alarming numbers, the introduction of **CERVAVAC**, increased awareness, and improved access to HPV vaccines and screening programs are expected to lower these rates significantly.



**Recent Updates**

- **India's HPV Vaccine Rollout:** In 2023, India announced the rollout of the indigenously developed HPV vaccine, **CERVAVAC**, to be administered to adolescent girls through school-based programs.
- This initiative aims to reduce the burden of cervical cancer by providing affordable and accessible vaccines across the country.
- **WHO's Global Strategy:** In 2020, the WHO launched the **Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer**. The strategy sets targets for countries to achieve 90% HPV vaccination coverage, 70% screening coverage, and 90% access to treatment for pre-cancerous lesions by 2030.
- **Awareness and Screening Campaigns:** The Indian government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and international partners, has been conducting mass screening programs and awareness campaigns, especially targeting rural and underserved populations.

**Challenges and Way Forward**

- **Awareness:** Many women are unaware of the importance of regular screening and HPV vaccination, particularly in rural areas.
- **Access:** Limited healthcare infrastructure and socio-economic barriers prevent many from accessing screening and treatment services.
- **Cultural barriers:** In some societies, discussing sexual health and preventive measures like HPV vaccination is still taboo, leading to lower vaccination rates.

To address these challenges, governments and health organizations must:

1. **Expand access to vaccination and screening:** Provide affordable or free HPV vaccines and increase the reach of screening programs, especially in rural and underserved areas.
2. **Promote awareness campaigns:** Public health campaigns focusing on education about cervical cancer, HPV, and the benefits of early detection should be prioritized.
3. **Enhance healthcare infrastructure:** Strengthen healthcare systems to provide timely diagnosis and treatment for those affected by cervical cancer.

## Modi gifts an antique silver hand-engraved train model to Biden

(23 September)

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifted U.S. President Joe Biden an antique silver hand-engraved train model from Maharashtra.
- The model showcases Indian metalworking artistry, made of **92.5% silver with intricate filigree work**.
- It pays tribute to the steam locomotive era and combines artistic brilliance with historical significance.
- The train model is customized with "**Delhi-Delaware**" on the main carriage and "Indian Railways" in English and Hindi on the engine.
- The gift highlights the exceptional skills of Indian artisans and the long history of Indian Railways.
- Modi also gifted First Lady Jill Biden a **pashmina shawl in a beautiful papier mache box**.
- **Pashmina shawls** represent the rich handcrafting legacy of Jammu and Kashmir and are evolving with modern designs.
- These shawls are traditionally packaged in exquisite papier mache boxes, known for their craftsmanship.

## After Modi's visit, U.S. to return 297

antiquities (23 September)

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked U.S. President Joe Biden for promising to return 297 valuable antiquities to India.
- Modi is visiting the U.S. for three days to strengthen the **India-U.S. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership**.
- He attended the **Quad Leaders' Summit hosted by Biden in Wilmington, Delaware**.
- Modi emphasized the importance of **cultural connections and combating the illegal trafficking of cultural properties**.
- **In July, India and the U.S. signed an agreement to prevent illegal trafficking of cultural items and facilitate their return.**
- The Indian Ministry of External Affairs confirmed that the U.S. helped facilitate the return of the 297 antiquities during Modi's visit.

## 'Assam records 86% drop in rhino poaching since 2016' (23 September)



**Cultural connect:** The 'Delhi-Delaware' silver train model gifted by Narendra Modi to U.S. President Joe Biden. ANI

## Modi gifts an antique silver hand-engraved train model to Biden

PCS

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday gifted U.S. President Joe Biden an antique silver hand-engraved train model, a rare and extraordinary piece masterfully crafted by artisans from Maharashtra and showcasing the pinnacle of Indian metalworking artistry.

The vintage piece involves intricate filigree work and is made of 92.5% silver, the officials said. The creation is a tribute to the steam locomotive era, with "artistic brilliance merging with historical significance".

Signifying the robust linkages between India and the U.S., the model has been customised with the inscription of 'Delhi-Delaware' on the sides of the main carriage, and 'Indian Railways' on the sides of the engine in English and Hindi based on the standard format used on pas-

senger trains in India, the officials said.

"This work not only highlights the artisan's exceptional skill but also serves as a glowing testimony to the long history of Indian Railways and its global influences," they said.

Mr. Modi chose a pashmina shawl in a papier mache box as a gift for First Lady Jill Biden, they added.

Pashmina shawls are considered the apogee of J&K's rich and fine legacy of hand-crafting. Contemporary designers are incorporating modern sensibilities, experimenting with bolder colours, playful patterns, and even fusion styles. "This ensures the legacy of pashmina remains relevant, captivating hearts across generations and cultures," the officials said.

They traditionally come packed in papier mache boxes, which are renowned for their exquisite beauty and craftsmanship.

- Kaziranga and other protected areas for the one-horned rhinoceros in Assam saw an 86% decrease in rhino poaching since 2016.
- Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma made this announcement on World Rhino Day.
- He credited this positive change to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to protecting the rhino, an important symbol of Assam's identity.
- Kaziranga National Park has 233 anti-poaching camps, each staffed by three to five personnel.
- Gujarat is the best-performing state, reclaiming 75% of its landfills (698 out of 938 acres).

## Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve: A Sanctuary for Wildlife

- Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site located in Assam**, India.
- Renowned for its diverse wildlife, especially its large population of one-horned rhinoceroses, Kaziranga is a crucial conservation area for many endangered species.

### Geographical Location and Climate

- **Location:** Kaziranga is situated in the **Brahmaputra Valley**, Assam.
- **Climate:** The park experiences a subtropical monsoon climate, with hot summers and wet monsoons.

### Wildlife

- **One-Horned Rhinoceros:** Kaziranga is home to **the largest population of one-horned rhinoceroses in the world**.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists the greater one-horned rhinoceros **as vulnerable** on its Red List.
- **Tigers:** The park is also a **significant tiger reserve**, with a healthy population of Bengal tigers.
- **Other Wildlife:** Kaziranga is also known for its diverse wildlife, including elephants, water buffaloes, deer, and various bird species.

### Conservation Efforts

- **Anti-Poaching Measures:** The park has implemented strict anti-poaching measures to protect its wildlife, including regular patrols and the use of technology.
- **Habitat Restoration:** Efforts have been made to restore and protect the park's habitat, including grasslands, forests, and wetlands.
- **Community Involvement:** Local communities are involved in conservation efforts through initiatives like eco-tourism and awareness programs.
- **Increased Tiger Population:** The tiger population in Kaziranga has shown a positive trend in recent years, reflecting successful conservation efforts.
- **Challenges:** The park continues to face challenges such as human-wildlife conflict and habitat degradation.
- **Conservation Initiatives:** The government and conservation organizations are working to address these challenges and ensure the long-term survival of Kaziranga's wildlife.

## GS Paper III: Environment



## 'Assam records 86% drop in rhino poaching since 2016'

Kaziranga and other protected habitats of the one-horned rhinoceros in Assam recorded an 86% drop in poaching of the herbivore since 2016, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. In a statement marking the celebration of **World Rhino Day on Sunday**, the Chief Minister attributed the turnaround – **poachers killed 190 rhinos between 2000 and 2021** – to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "commitment to promoting and preserving" an animal that has been "synonymous to the identity" of Assam. The **Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve has 233 anti-poaching camps**, each manned by three to five personnel.

# U.P., Rajasthan, M.P. top in cases of atrocities on Dalits: report

Of the 51,656 cases registered under the law for SCs in 2022, Uttar Pradesh accounts for 23.78%, followed by Rajasthan, 16.75%, and Madhya Pradesh, 14.97%. Similarly, of the 9,735 cases filed for STs, Madhya Pradesh reports the highest 30.61%

GS Paper I:  
Society

Pre NE

Nearly 97.7% of all cases of atrocities against Scheduled Castes in 2022 were reported from 13 States, with Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh recording the highest number of such crimes, according to a new government report.

According to the latest report under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act by the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry, the majority of atrocities against Scheduled Tribes (STs) were also concentrated in 13 states, which reported 98.91% of all cases in 2022.

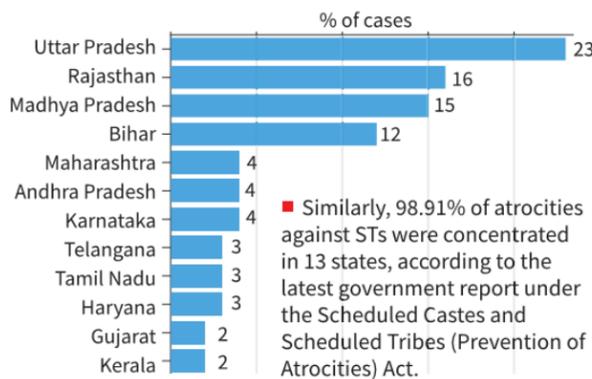
Of the 51,656 cases registered under the law for Scheduled Castes (SCs) in 2022, Uttar Pradesh accounted for 23.78% of the total cases with 12,287, followed by Rajasthan with 8,651 (16.75%) and Madhya Pradesh with 7,732 (14.97%). Other States with a significant number of cases of atrocities against SCs were Bihar with 6,799 (13.16%), Odisha with 3,576 (6.93%), and Maharashtra

## Atrocities on Dalits, tribal people

The chart shows the States accounting for 97.7% of total cases of atrocities against members of Scheduled Castes during the year 2022.



Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment



with 2,706 (5.24%). These six States accounted for nearly 81% of the cases.

“Thirteen states, cumulatively accounting for 97.7% (51,656) of the total cases (52,866) relating to offences of atrocities against members of SCs, registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, in conjunction with the Indian Penal Code, during the year 2022,” the report said.

Similarly, the majority of cases of atrocities against STs were concentrated in 13 states. Of the 9,735 cases registered under the law for STs, Mad-

hya Pradesh reported the highest number at 2,979 (30.61%), the report said.

Rajasthan had the second highest number of cases at 2,498 (25.66%) while Odisha recorded 773 (7.94%). Other States with a significant number of cases included Maharashtra with 691 (7.10%) and Andhra Pradesh with 499 (5.13%). The data also provided insight into the status of investigations and charge-sheeting under the Act.

Among the SC-related cases, 60.38% led to charge sheets being filed while 14.78% were concluded with final reports due to reasons such as false

claims or lack of evidence. By the end of 2022, investigation was pending in 17,166 cases.

For ST-related cases, 63.32% resulted in charge sheets being filed while 14.71% ended with final reports. At the end of the period under review, 2,702 cases involving atrocities against STs were still under investigation.

One of the most concerning trends highlighted in the report is the declining conviction rate for cases under the Act. In 2022, the conviction rate dropped to 32.4% from 39.2% in 2020. Moreover, of 498 districts in 14 States,

only 194 had established special courts to expedite trials in these cases.

The report also identified specific districts particularly prone to atrocities with only 10 States and Union Territories declaring such districts. It emphasised the need for targeted interventions in these districts to curb the caste-based violence and ensure stronger protection for vulnerable communities.

SC/ST protection cells had been set up in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, NCT of Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Puducherry, according to the report.

Special police stations for registration of complaints of offences against SCs and STs have been set up by Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh.

## U.P., Rajasthan, M.P. top in cases of atrocities on Dalits: report (23 September)

Of the 51,656 cases registered under the law for SC sin 2022, Uttar Pradesh accounts for 23.78%, followed by Rajasthan, 16.75%, and Madhya Pradesh, 14.97%. Similarly, of the 9,735 cases filed for STs, Madhya Pradesh reports the highest 30.61%

- In 2022, nearly 97.7% of atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SCs) were reported from 13 states.
- **Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh had the highest number of such crimes.**
- The Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry's report highlighted that 98.91% of atrocities against Scheduled Tribes (STs) were also concentrated in these 13 states.
- A total of 51,656 cases against SCs were registered in 2022.
- Uttar Pradesh had the most cases with 12,287 (23.78%), followed by Rajasthan with 8,651 (16.75%) and Madhya Pradesh with 7,732 (14.97%).
- Other states with significant numbers included Bihar (6,799), Odisha (3,576), and Maharashtra (2,706).
- These six states accounted for nearly 81% of all SC cases.
- Thirteen states accounted for 97.7% of the total 52,866 cases of atrocities against SCs in 2022.
- **For STs, there were 9,735 reported cases, with Madhya Pradesh having the highest at 2,979 (30.61%).**
- **Rajasthan had the second highest number of atrocities against Scheduled Tribes (STs)** with 2,498 cases (25.66%), while Odisha recorded 773 cases (7.94%).

- Other states with significant cases included Maharashtra (691 cases, 7.10%) and Andhra Pradesh (499 cases, 5.13%).
- The report also provided details on the status of investigations and chargesheets under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.
- For SC-related cases, 60.38% resulted in chargesheets being filed, while 14.78% were closed with final reports due to false claims or lack of evidence.
- By the end of 2022, investigations were pending in 17,166 SC cases.
- For ST-related cases, 63.32% resulted in chargesheets, and 14.71% ended with final reports, with 2,702 cases still under investigation.
- The **conviction rate for cases under the Act declined to 32.4% in 2022, down from 39.2% in 2020.**
- Out of 498 districts in 14 states, only 194 had special courts to expedite trials for these cases.
- The report identified specific districts prone to atrocities and emphasized the need for targeted interventions to reduce caste-based violence.
- SC/ST protection cells were established in several states and union territories across India.
- Special police stations for registering complaints against SCs and STs were set up in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, and Madhya Pradesh.

## Only 16% of land reclaimed under Swachh project to rid urban areas of legacy waste

### GS Paper II: Government

Launched with much fanfare, the legacy waste management project of Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 has been a slow starter, with only 470 out of 2,424 dumpsites completely remediated and an area of 16% reclaimed, three years since the mission was rolled out.

Legacy waste dumpsites are places that contain solid waste that has been collected and stored for years in an unscientific and uncontrolled manner.

With almost no installed facility in India for handling solid waste, the Municipal Corporations, Councils and Nagar Panchayats have traditionally opted to create man-made garbage hills.

While the Swachh Bha-

### Dumpsites of legacy waste store solid waste, collected and stored for years in an unscientific manner

rat Mission had been launched on October 2, 2014, its second phase (2.0) was launched on October 1, 2021 for a period of five years, up to October 1, 2026, with a vision of achieving "Garbage-Free Status" for all cities through 100% source segregation, door-to-door collection, and scientific management of all fractions of waste, including safe disposal in scientific landfills.

It aimed at remediation of all legacy dumpsites and converting them into green zones. Action plans amounting to ₹3,226 crore

of Central Share (CS) assistance on remediation of legacy waste dumpsites have been approved so far.

According to the Mission's website, out of the 2,424 dumpsites having more than 1,000 tonnes of legacy waste identified across the country, remediation has been completed in 470, and approved and ongoing in 1,224, while 730 have been left untouched.

With regard to the area covered, of the total 28,460.33 acres, 16% or 4,552.34 acres have been reclaimed and 84% or 23,908 acres are yet to be reclaimed.

Tamil Nadu has the maximum area reclaimed from dumpsites at 837 acres (42%). Gujarat is the best performing State with 75% area (698 of 938 acres) of landfills reclaimed.

## Only 16% of land reclaimed under Swachh project to rid urban areas of legacy waste (23 September)

- The Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0, aimed at legacy waste management, has had a slow start.
- Only 470 out of 2,424 identified dumpsites have been completely remediated, reclaiming 16% of the area.
- Legacy waste dumpsites contain solid waste stored in an unscientific manner for years.
- Indian municipalities have often created man-made garbage hills due to a lack of proper waste management facilities.
- The original Swachh Bharat Mission was launched on October 2, 2014, and Phase 2 (2.0) began on October 1, 2021, lasting until October 1, 2026.



The Bhalswa landfill in North Delhi. Pic: Odette Katrak

- The goal of the mission is to achieve "Garbage-Free Status" for all cities through source segregation, door-to-door collection, and scientific waste management.
- It aims to remediate all legacy dumpsites and convert them into green zones.
- The mission has approved action plans amounting to ₹3,226 crore for remediation of dumpsites.
- Out of 2,424 dumpsites with over 1,000 tonnes of waste, remediation is complete for 470, ongoing for 1,224, and 730 have not been addressed.
- Of the total 28,460.33 acres of waste sites, 4,552.34 acres (16%) have been reclaimed, leaving 23,908 acres (84%) unreclaimed.
- Tamil Nadu reclaimed the most area from dumpsites at 837 acres (42%).

## India needs a 'National Security Strategy' (23 September)

- The need for a national security strategy is being discussed in India due to changing regional dynamics, with old rivalries and uncertain alliances.
- India's goal of becoming a \$4 trillion economy faces challenges from global conflicts like those in Ukraine and Gaza, which could hinder growth.
- **Economic stability is crucial for national security**, influencing priorities across various government sectors, including health and defense.
- The **definition of "national security" varies by country and context**.
- **For the U.S., national security combines values and national interests**, sometimes leading to support for undemocratic regimes for economic benefits.
- President Biden's National Security Strategy emphasizes maintaining U.S. leadership and mentions "values" frequently, but focuses heavily on economic power.
- The U.S. national security strategy informs various military and defense documents, guiding budget allocations by Congress.
- The strategy serves as a tool for projecting power both internationally (to counter rising powers like China) and domestically (to reassure voters).
- The UK aims to maintain its status as a global power through its Integrated Review, despite budget constraints on military capabilities.
- **France's 2022 review**, prompted by the Ukraine war, aimed to assert its leadership in Europe and reaffirm its nuclear capabilities.
- **There is a consensus that India needs a cohesive national security strategy that integrates defense, finance, investments, and climate change**.
- This strategy must be developed confidentially, as it involves **clear assessments of threats to national security**.

### Now, multi-alignment

- **Budget speeches in India rarely mention defense or external threats**, focusing instead on economic issues.
- Protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity is crucial for national security, but a strong economy also helps maintain sovereignty in international relations.
- Poor countries often follow powerful nations or form their own alliances; India previously relied on the Non-Aligned Movement.
- India is now pursuing "multialignment," seeking relationships with various countries for support and defense technology.
- The **Quad (Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S.) focuses on security, while BRICS, led by China, offers economic partnerships**.
- **India's trade deficit with China complicates relations, especially given territorial disputes**.
- A public national security document would struggle to articulate the inability to defend against China independently.
- India does not form traditional alliances, which makes it difficult to openly discuss partnerships like the U.K.
- Prioritizing threats leads to task allocation for military services and determining necessary equipment.
- While defense budgeting is relatively transparent, a comprehensive strategy must identify which services need focus and where gaps exist.
- India lags behind China in submarine and ship-building capabilities, and this weakness should not be publicly advertised.
- **Clear identification of priorities and weaknesses is essential for an effective strategy**; otherwise, it becomes mere optimism without substance.
- The central message for the public in a national security document should emphasize **pride in India's non-adventurous defense history and effective support for other nations**.
- While some achievements deserve recognition, boasting about them may not be appreciated by neighboring countries.
- The public demands strong declarations of military strength, which could invite political backlash from the Opposition.

- **An open national security document could limit India's diplomatic flexibility**, especially regarding complex situations like the Russia-Ukraine and Gaza conflicts.
- Unlike the U.S., which can afford hypocrisy as a global power, India cannot.
- A national security document is urgently needed as it connects defense priorities to economic strategies.
- It should guide industry and financial institutions, integrating various reports into a clear direction for the country's future.
- This process should be done discreetly, with specific directives issued to relevant ministries.
- The National Security Council Secretariat is capable of managing this task effectively.
- The document should be concise, straightforward, and confidential to prevent adversaries from gaining insights into its contents.

## Brace for the new threat to air passenger safety (23 September)

- Recent incidents involving dangerous devices in West Asia have raised concerns about flight safety.
- Israeli actions, supported by the U.S. and Western countries, may pose risks to innocent air travelers.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, global flight cancellations led to blame directed at China; now Israel's tactics could affect aviation safety.
- In the past, hijackings were a common method for political disputes, but after 9/11, security measures increased significantly.
- The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) established safety standards to prevent future attacks, with most countries exempting only a few dignitaries from security checks.
- In India, the exemption list includes individuals with questionable backgrounds, which creates vulnerabilities in security.
- Allegations exist that Indian government agencies have used spyware, such as Pegasus, to infiltrate citizens' phones, raising additional security concerns.
- Passengers are required to switch mobile phones to 'flight mode' during flights, but many ignore this rule in India, unlike in other countries where it could lead to arrest.
- The restriction on cellphones was implemented after a crash linked to an incoming signal affecting the aircraft's autopilot, resulting in a few survivors.
- Modern aircraft are equipped with shields to prevent phone interference, but airlines continue to enforce the rule as a safety precaution.

### The issue of decompression

- The recent threat from West Asia involves small electronic devices that can explode, similar to incidents in Lebanon.
- These explosions could be triggered by implanted codes and may cause localized damage, but in an aircraft cabin, they could lead to catastrophic consequences.
- If small devices explode during a flight, they could start a cabin fire and potentially damage the pressure bulkhead, causing decompression and requiring oxygen masks.
- A cabin fire combined with the presence of oxygen creates a dangerous situation: using oxygen could lead to death by fire, while not using it could result in brain death due to lack of oxygen.
- Ignoring Israel's actions could jeopardize air travel safety globally.
- There are strict regulations on electronic devices in checked baggage, but devices in the cabin pose a new safety threat.
- Airlines may need to ban Wi-Fi on flights to prevent remote activation of dangerous devices.
- It's difficult to fully prevent determined terrorists from smuggling devices onto planes, as shown by past incidents like 9/11.
- The ICAO mandates that passengers must carry their own hand baggage, but in India, VVIPs often have others carry their bags, creating security vulnerabilities.
- A terrorist could easily exploit this by placing a dangerous device in a VVIP's bag that has bypassed security checks.
- If such a bag were triggered during landing in crowded cities like Mumbai, Delhi, or Chennai, the consequences could be dire.
- Following incidents in Lebanon, expect increased global security measures; passengers flying from Beirut are already banned from carrying certain electronic devices.
- The airline industry will suffer until governments recognize the dangers posed by current events.
- The Indian government should take proactive measures, such as banning Wi-Fi on flights and considering signal shields at airports, to enhance air safety.

## Unwarranted curbs (23 September)

### Fact-checking cannot be an excuse to impose censorship

- The Indian government's attempt to create a "fact-checking unit" to remove false information from social media faced legal challenges.
- Justice A.S. Chandurkar of the Bombay High Court struck down the amended rule, ruling it unconstitutional.
- The ruling was a tie-breaker after a two-judge panel was divided on the issue.
- Justice Chandurkar agreed with Justice G.S. Patel, who argued that the rule violated freedom of expression and relied on vague definitions of "fake," "false," or "misleading."
- The 2023 amendment required social media platforms to remove flagged content or risk losing legal protections for hosting third-party content.
- Editors and publishers saw the unit as a potential tool for government censorship, prompting concerns about self-censorship among satirists and comedians.
- The government claimed it aimed to tackle reckless misinformation and allowed platforms to seek legal remedies if aggrieved.
- However, the court found the rule unconstitutional due to undefined terms and a lack of redress options.
- The rule applied only to information about the government, raising further concerns about its fairness.
- Justice Chandurkar noted that restricting speech based on truth or falsehood was not justified under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.
- Justice Neela Gokhale, the third judge, upheld the rule, stating it wasn't vague and allowed platforms to publish disclaimers to maintain legal protections.
- Although misinformation is a real issue, the ruling emphasized that the government should not be the sole judge of what is misleading about itself.

## Sri Lanka's verdict (23 September)

### The spirit of the mandate of the presidential poll was clear — for change

- The people of Sri Lanka have voted for change by electing Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the National People's Power (NPP) in the ninth presidential election.
- This election required a second round of counting, a first since the executive presidency was introduced in 1978.
- The election results show a shift away from traditional political parties, with the JVP, which has Marxist roots, receiving about 42% of the vote, a significant improvement from previous elections.
- Voter turnout was approximately 79.5%, reflecting strong public engagement.
- All candidates conducted themselves positively, demonstrating respect for the democratic process.
- The campaign resonated with the earlier popular uprising known as Aragalaya, which was driven by economic struggles.
- Dissanayake has prioritized fixing the economy and is open to private and foreign investments.
- His election manifesto suggests renegotiating a \$2.9 billion bailout agreement with the IMF rather than scrapping it.
- To succeed, he needs to adopt a consensual approach in implementing his economic policies.
- He faces challenges in governance and addressing the "corrupt political culture" he criticized.
- His promise to hold elections for provincial councils should reassure the Tamil community, as the JVP previously opposed this.
- Critics label him a "pro-China" leader, but he has shown pragmatism by visiting India.
- His manifesto states that Sri Lanka will not allow its territory to threaten any country's national security, including India.
- It remains uncertain how he will fulfill his promise to abolish the executive presidency, a long-standing political issue in Sri Lanka.
- Dissanayake will need support and cooperation from all sections of Sri Lankan society as he takes office under challenging circumstances.

## What is the controversy regarding Venezuela elections? (23 September)

### Why did the opposition accuse President Nicolas Maduro of fudging the results? What is their demand?

- On July 28, Venezuela held elections with President Nicolás Maduro running against opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez.
- The National Electoral Council declared Maduro the winner with 51.21% of the votes, while Gonzalez received 44.2%.
- The **opposition claimed their count showed Gonzalez with 67% and Maduro with only 30%.**

- They demanded the government release the vote tallies from each polling station, which Maduro refused.
- This led to massive protests, resulting in 24 deaths and over 2,000 arrests.
- Maduro is set to be sworn in again on January 10, 2025.
- Maduro became president after Hugo Chavez died in 2013.
- Venezuela is known as a **petrostate** due to its rich oil reserves, which heavily influence its economy.
- **Petrostate economies** often focus on oil exports, have weak political institutions, and suffer from power concentrated among a few elites.
- Such economies are fragile and vulnerable to changes in global oil prices, often leading to a condition called ‘**Dutch disease**.’
- In the early 2010s, global oil prices fell, causing inflation and shortages of essential goods in Venezuela.
- In response, Maduro and his party cracked down on protests, leading to international sanctions from countries like the U.S.

**How were the elections held?**

- The **Ukraine war has led to rising oil prices, prompting the U.S. to ease sanctions on Venezuela in November 2022.**
- In return, Maduro promised free and fair elections this year, but opposition candidates Maria Corina Machado and Corina Yoris were barred from running.
- **Edmundo Gonzalez** became the consensus candidate for the opposition.
- **Venezuela uses electronic voting machines that produce paper receipts, which are deposited in ballot boxes.**
- After voting, machines provide a tally sheet of votes, but the electoral authority denied the opposition access to this sheet.
- **Anticipating challenges, the opposition coalition created a plan to monitor the elections, training over a million people across 5,000 workshops.**
- They accessed 83% of tally sheets from 30,026 polling stations within 48 hours, showing Gonzalez had 67% of the votes.
- While countries like **China, Cuba, Iran, and Russia** congratulated Venezuela, 50 countries at the UN called for the release of the vote tally sheets.
- Media outlets like the Associated Press confirmed the opposition's results.
- **Maduro claimed a cyberattack was the reason for withholding the tally sheets but did not provide evidence.**
- Citizens protested against the situation, facing government resistance, leading to deaths and arrests.
- The **UN Human Rights Council described this as the most acute human rights crisis in recent history.**

# What is the controversy regarding Venezuela elections?

Why did the opposition accuse President Nicolas Maduro of fudging the results? What is their demand?

**GS Paper II: IR**

**Adithya Narayan**

**The story so far:**

On July 28, Venezuela went to polls with the current President Nicolas Maduro facing off against opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez. Four hours after the polls closed, the country's National Electoral Council (CNE) declared Mr. Maduro the winner, citing his tally of 51.21% votes compared to Mr. Gonzalez's 44.2%. However, the opposition was quick to refute these results, saying their count showed Mr. Gonzalez polling 67% of the votes and Mr. Maduro just 30%. They asked the government to publish the vote tally from each polling station, which Mr. Maduro refused. This led to massive protests and a government crackdown wherein 24 people died and over 2,000 were arrested. The winner is scheduled to take oath on January 10, 2025.

**What was status quo before polls?**  
Mr. Maduro took over from long-time

leader **Hugo Chavez** following his death in 2013. A country replete with oil reserves, Venezuela's economy has witnessed spurts of booms and lulls since oil reserves were first discovered there in the 1920s, lending it the tag of a petrostate.

Petrostates are marked by governments whose sole focus lies on oil exports, weak political institutions, and power concentrated in the hands of a few politically elite groups. Such nations' economies are fragile and are susceptible to the slightest fluctuations in global fuel prices. They are also vulnerable to a condition called ‘Dutch disease’. Governments of afflicted countries have almost completely forgone local oil production, and the major mode of revenue are the taxes paid by foreign drilling companies. An accompanying fallout is the damage borne by labour-intensive industries such as agriculture and manufacturing.

Venezuela met with a similar fate in the early 2010s when global oil prices plummeted. Inflation rose throughout the

country and shortage of essential goods became widespread. People protested and Mr. Maduro and his United Socialist Party responded by consolidating power through further crackdowns, inviting the wrath of global powers such as the U.S., which imposed sanctions.

**How were the elections held?**

One of the fallouts from the Ukraine war has been the rising oil prices. To mitigate the crisis, the U.S. eased some of the sanctions on Venezuela in November 2022. The Maduro regime reciprocated by promising free and fair elections this year. This proved to be hollow from the start as the opposition's original candidate Maria Corina Machado and its subsequent choice Corina Yoris were barred from running. Mr. Gonzalez ultimately emerged as the consensus candidate.

To ensure transparency, the electoral system in Venezuela comprises an electronic voting machine which produces a paper receipt after each voter registers their choice at the polling booth.

These receipts are then deposited in a ballot box at the booth. At the end of the polls, the voting machines at the booths produce a tally sheet showing the names of every candidate and the number of votes they polled. The electoral authority, long sympathetic to Mr. Maduro, denied the opposition access to the tally sheet.

Foreseeing such adversities, a Guardian report states that members of the 10-party opposition coalition called the Democratic Unitary Platform drew up a nine-month-long plan to circumvent the rigged election process. Their strategy, involving more than one million people trained in 5,000 workshops, made sure that the opposition could access 83% of the tally sheets from 30,026 polling stations within 48 hours, revealing that Mr. Gonzalez polled 67% votes.

**What has been the aftermath?**

While China, Cuba, Iran and Russia congratulated Venezuela, a joint statement from 50 countries at the UN called for publishing the vote tally sheets. Media houses such as the Associated Press and The Washington Post have verified the opposition's results and certified them. However, Mr. Maduro has withheld the release of the vote tally sheets citing a cyberattack but without providing evidence. Crying foul, citizens took to the streets and were met with resistance from the state. The deaths and arrests prompted the United Nations Human Rights Council to call it the most acute human rights crisis in recent history.

**THE GIST**

On July 28, Venezuela went to polls with the current President Nicolas Maduro facing off against opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez. Four hours after the polls closed, the country's National Electoral Council (CNE) declared Mr. Maduro the winner. However, the opposition was quick to refute these results.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

# Judicial appointments and disappointments

GS Paper II: Judiciary

Judges are the ultimate authority in the interpretation of the Constitution, and so must be learned in the law. But who will select the judges, and ascertain their qualifications and class character?

**V. R. Krishna Iyer**

On September 20, the Supreme Court asked the Attorney General for India why the names reiterated by the Supreme Court Collegium for appointment as judges were not yet cleared, as Collegium reiterations are binding on the Union government. Following the remark, the Union government processed the appointment of eight new High Court Chief Justices. In this article dated December 4, 2021, V. R. Krishna Iyer talks about the importance of upholding the judiciary's independence.

The Constitution of India operates in happy harmony with the instrumentalities of the executive and the legislature. But to be truly great, the judiciary exercising democratic power must enjoy independence of a high order. But independence could become dangerous and undemocratic unless there is a constitutional discipline with rules of good conduct and accountability: without these, the robes may prove arrogant.

It is in this context that Chief Justice S.H. Kapadia's observations, at an event at the Supreme Court of India on Independence Day, underlining the need for the government to balance judicial accountability with judicial independence, have to be reconciled with what Law Minister Salman Khurshid observed about judicial propriety. It is this reconciliation of the trinity of instrumentality in their functionalism that does justice to the Constitution. A great and grand chapter on judicial sublime behaviour to forbid the "robes" becoming unruly or rude and to remain ever sober is obligatory.

The Constitution has three instrumentalities – executive, legislative and judicative. The implementation of the state's laws and policies is the responsibility of the executive. The Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister at the Centre and the Cabinet led by the Chief Minister in the States, are its principal agencies. The rule of law governs the administration.

Parliament consisting of two Houses and legislatures at the State level make law. When the executive and the legislature do anything that is arbitrary, or contrary to the constitutional provisions, the judiciary has the power to correct them by issuing directions under Article 143. The Constitution lays down the fundamental rights, and if the States do not safeguard them, any citizen can approach the Supreme Court for the issue of a writ to defend his or her fundamental rights. Thus, among the three instrumentalities, the judiciary has pre-eminence. But the judiciary itself has to act according to the Constitution and work within the framework of the Constitution.

Felix Frankfurter pointed out thus: "Judges as persons, or courts as institutions, are entitled to no greater immunity from criticism than other persons or institutions. Just because the holders of judicial office are identified with the interests of justice they may forget their common human frailties and fallibilities. There have sometimes been martinets upon the bench as there have also been pompous wielders of authority



ISTOCKPHOTO

who have used the paraphernalia of power in support of what they called their dignity. Therefore judges must be kept mindful of their limitations and of their ultimate public responsibility by a vigorous stream of criticism expressed with candour however blunt."

## Ultimate authority

Judges are the ultimate authority in the interpretation of the Constitution, and so must be learned in the law and in the cultural wealth of the world. They play a vital role in the working of the Constitution and the laws. But how judges are appointed is a matter of concern. Simply put, the President appoints them, but in this the President only carries out the Cabinet's decisions.

The Preamble to the Constitution lays down as the fundamentals of the paramount law that India shall be a socialist, secular democratic republic which shall enforce justice – social, economic and political – and ensure

liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and of opportunity, and promote among them fraternity, ensuring the individual's dignity and the nation's unity and integrity.

## Need for clarity

But who will select the judges, and ascertain their qualifications and class character? Unless there is a clear statement of the principles of selection, the required character and conduct of judges in a democracy may fail since they will often belong to a class of the proprietariat, and the proletariat will have no voice in the governance: the proprietariat will remain the ruling class.

Winston Churchill made this position clear with respect to Britain thus: "The courts hold justly a high, and I think, unequalled pre-eminence in the respect of the world in criminal cases, and in civil cases between man and man, no doubt, they deserve and command the respect

and admiration of all classes of the community, but where class issues are involved, it is impossible to pretend that the courts command the same degree of general confidence. On the contrary, they do not, and a very large number of our population have been led to the opinion that they are, unconsciously, no doubt, biased."

We in India have under the Constitution the same weaknesses pointed out by Churchill, with the result that socialism and social justice remain a promise on paper. Then came a new creation called collegiums. The concept was brought in by a narrow majority of one in a 5-4 decision of the Supreme Court for the selection of judges. It was binding on the executive, the decisions of which in turn were bound to be implemented by the President.

Thus, today we have a curious creation with no backing under the Constitution, except a ruling of the Supreme Court, and that too based on a very thin majority in a single ruling. Today, the collegium on its own makes the selection. There is no structure to hear the public in the process of selection. No principle is laid down, no investigation is made, and a sort of anarchy prevails.

In a minimal sense, the selection of judges of the highest court is done in an unprincipled manner, without investigation or study of the class character by the members of the collegium. There has been criticism of the judges so selected, but the collegium is not answerable to anyone.

In these circumstances, the Union Law Minister has stated that the government proposes to change the collegium system and substitute it with a commission. But, how should the commission be constituted? To whom will it be answerable? What are the guiding principles to be followed by the Commission? These issues remain to be publicly discussed. A constitutional amendment, with a special chapter of the judiciary, is needed. Such an amendment can come about only through parliamentary action.

Surely a commission to select judges for the Supreme Court has to be of high standing. It must be of the highest order, of a status equal to that of the Prime Minister or a Supreme Court judge. The commission's chairman should be the Chief Justice of India.

In the process of selection, an investigation into the character, class bias, communal leanings and any other imputations that members of the public may make, may have to be investigated. This has to be done not by the police, which function under the government, but by an independent secret investigation agency functioning under the commission's control. These and other views expressed by outstanding critics may have to be considered.

The commission has to be totally independent and its ideology should be broadly in accord with the values of the Constitution. It should naturally uphold the sovereignty of the Constitution beyond pressures from political parties and powerful corporations, and be prepared to act without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. It should act independently – such should be its composition and operation. The commission should be immune to legal proceedings, civil and criminal. It should be removed only by a high tribunal consisting of the Chief Justice of India and the Chief Justice of all the High Courts sitting together and deciding on any charges publicly made. We, the people of India, should have a free expression in the commission's process.

V.R. Krishna Iyer, eminent jurist, is a former Judge of the Supreme Court of India.

## Judicial appointments and disappointments (23 September)

**Judges are the ultimate authority in the interpretation of the Constitution, and so must be learned in the law. But who will select the judges, and ascertain their qualifications and class character?**

- The Indian Constitution works well with the executive and legislative branches but emphasizes the need for a highly independent judiciary.
- **Judicial independence must be balanced with accountability and rules of conduct to prevent arrogance among judges.**
- **Chief Justice S.H. Kapadia** highlighted the importance of balancing judicial accountability with independence during an Independence Day event.
- The Constitution includes three branches: executive, legislative, and judiciary, each with distinct roles.
- The executive, led by the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers, implements laws and policies.
- The legislature, made up of Parliament and state assemblies, creates laws.
- The judiciary can correct arbitrary actions by the executive and legislature, ensuring they follow the Constitution.
- Citizens can approach the Supreme Court to protect their fundamental rights if states fail to do so.
- The judiciary holds a prominent position but must act within the Constitution's framework.
- **Felix Frankfurter** noted that judges and courts should be open to criticism like any other individuals or institutions.
- Judges may sometimes become overconfident or misuse their authority, so it's important they remain aware of their limitations and responsibilities.
- Open and honest criticism of judges helps maintain accountability.

### Ultimate authority

- **Judges are the final authority on interpreting the Constitution and must be knowledgeable in law and culture.**
- Their appointment is a concern, as the President appoints judges based on the Cabinet's decisions.
- The Constitution's Preamble states India is a socialist, secular, democratic republic that aims to enforce justice and ensure liberty, equality, and fraternity.
- There is a need for clear guidelines on how judges are selected and their qualifications to ensure they represent diverse classes in society.
- **Without clear selection principles, judges may come from a ruling class, leaving the proletariat without a voice.**
- Winston Churchill highlighted that courts may not command equal respect when class issues are involved, leading to perceptions of bias.
- India faces similar issues, with socialism and social justice remaining unfulfilled promises.
- **A system called "collegium" was created for judge selection based on a narrow Supreme Court decision.**
- **This collegium operates without constitutional backing and makes selections independently.**
- There is no public involvement in the selection process, no established principles, and a lack of oversight, leading to a chaotic situation.
- The current process for selecting judges of the highest court lacks principles and thorough investigation of candidates' backgrounds.
- Criticism of judges selected by the collegium has emerged, but the collegium is not accountable to anyone.
- The Union Law Minister has proposed replacing the collegium system with a commission, but details on its structure and accountability remain unclear.
- A constitutional amendment is needed to establish clear guidelines for this commission, requiring parliamentary action.
- The commission should have high standing, with the Chief Justice of India as its chairman.
- **The selection process must include investigations into candidates' character, potential biases, and public concerns, conducted by an independent agency, not the police.**
- The commission should operate independently and align with constitutional values, free from political and corporate pressures.
- It must act without fear or favoritism and be immune to legal proceedings.
- Removal of commission members should only occur through a tribunal made up of the Chief Justice of India and all Chief Justices of High Courts, based on public charges.
- The public should have a voice in the commission's process.