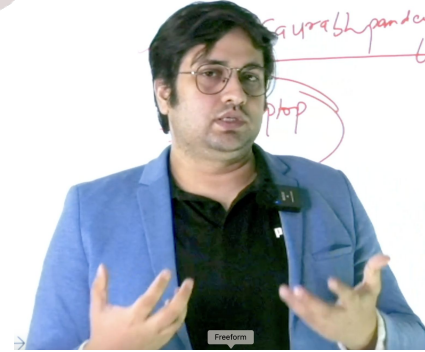


Topics - MINDS MAPS included (Daily current affairs)-- 23rd October 2024



- Tenkana
- Cobenfy
- Galaxy Cluster Abell 3381
- Brown Dwarfs:
- UN Peacekeeping & UNSC REFORM
- Supreme Court Ruling on Section 6A of the Citizenship Act
- Google and Nuclear Energy:
- ETF (exchange-traded fund) & Extended Trade Facility
- Mains



By saurabh Pandey



THE HINDU

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C) Uttarakhand
D) Ladhak

Q2. Consider the following statements in context of the Gold Production. (The Hindu)

- 1) Gold is a precious metal with the atomic number 69 and the Latin name 'aurum', symbolized as Au on the periodic table
- 2) Around 10% of gold produced globally is utilized in various industries due to its desirable properties, including being corrosion-resistant and a good conductor of electricity
- 3) While South Africa is the largest producer of gold, China holds the second position.
- 4) Each Nobel Prize awarded from is a featured medal made of electrum, an alloy of gold and silver, plated with 24-carat gold.

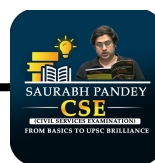
Q3. This is a wildlife sanctuary situated on the northern boundary of Madhya Pradesh and the adjoining Rajasthan state in India. It was notified in 1974. The Chambal River passes through the sanctuary dividing it into two parts. It is in the Khathiar-Gir dry deciduous forests ecoregion. Which of the following Wildlife Protected Area is described above. (DTE)

- A) Kuno National Park
- B) Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary.
- C) Sailana Wildlife Sanctuary
- D) Madhav National Park

Q4. Consider the following statements. (DTE)

Statement I: Inclusive institutions were often introduced in countries that were poor when they were

Three scientists discover new genus of jumping spiders '*Tenkana*' in South India



The Hindu Bureau

CHENNAI

A team of arachnologists has discovered a new genus of jumping spiders, '*Tenkana*', found across southern India, encompassing two previously known species. It also introduced a new species, *Tenkana jayamangali*, from Karnataka.

The name *Tenkana* comes from the Kannada word for south, reflecting that all the known species are from southern India and northern Sri Lanka. This new group belongs to the *Plexippina* subtribe of jumping spiders and is different from related groups such as *Hyllus* and *Telamonia*. The research team in-



The newly identified *Tenkana jayamangali* has been named after the Jayamangali river in Karnataka. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

cluded scientists from various institutions in India and Canada, and their findings were published in the journal *Zookeys*. They used both genetic studies and physical examinations to support their work.

Unlike related species that live in forests, *Tenka-*

na spiders prefer drier areas and ground habitats. They have been found in Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Kiran Marathe and Wayne Maddison from the University of British Columbia, Canada, and John


Caleb T.D. from Saveetha Institute in Chennai established this new genus. The genetic analysis was done with Krushnamegh Kunte from the National Centre for Biological Sciences in Bengaluru.


Two species that were previously in *Colopsus* – *Tenkana manu* (found in south India and Sri Lanka) and *Tenkana arkavathi* (from Karnataka) – have now been moved to the new genus. Interestingly, the former was named after a retired professor, Dr. Manu Thomas, in 2014.

The team also described *Tenkana jayamangali* for the first time, named after the Jayamangali river in Karnataka, where it was first seen.


Topic → Tenkana



 A new genus of jumping spiders, named 'Tenkana', has been discovered in southern India, including two previously known species.

 The new species, Tenkana jayamangali, was introduced from Karnataka and is named after the Jayamangali river.

 The name 'Tenkana' is derived from the Kannada word for south, indicating the geographical origin of the species.

 The research was conducted by a team of scientists from India and Canada, utilizing genetic studies and physical examinations, and published in the journal Zookeys.



- 🌳 Unlike related species that inhabit forests, Tenkana spiders prefer drier areas and ground habitats, found in states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh.

↩️ Two species previously classified under Colopsus, Tenkana manu and Tenkana arkavathi, have been reclassified into the new genus.

🧑🔬 The research team included notable scientists such as Kiran Marathe, Wayne Maddison, and John Caleb T.D., with genetic analysis conducted by Krushnamegh Kunte.

Summary: A new genus of jumping spiders, Tenkana, has been identified in southern India, including a new species, Tenkana jayamangali, with findings published in Zookeys.



FDA approval for Cobenfy casts light on schizophrenia's wickedness

Cobenfy is the first antipsychotic drug to treat schizophrenia by targeting cholinergic receptors instead of dopamine receptors. Cobenfy is a combination of xanomeline and trospium chloride that has a novel mechanism of action that steers clear of older drugs' side effects, too. It has side effects of its own, though

Alok Kulkarni

Trigger warning: suicide

In September 26, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a drug called Cobenfy to treat schizophrenia. Cobenfy is a combination of xanomeline and trospium chloride that has a novel mechanism of action that steers clear of older drugs' side effects, too. It has side effects of its own, of course.

Schizophrenia is one of the most serious of all psychiatric disorders. It has life-changing consequences, including social isolation, stigma, and diminished prospects of finding a partner. Persons with schizophrenia have a life expectancy lower by 13-15 years, with contributions from weight gain, poor dietary habits, smoking, and comorbid substance use. Five percent of people with schizophrenia die by suicide.

Schizophrenia affects one in a hundred people in their lifetime. Newer evidence has challenged the idea that it is equally prevalent in both sexes, finding it is slightly more common in men. It typically develops during late adolescence and early adulthood. In men, it peaks in the early 20s; new cases among women are also seen in the mid- to late 40s.

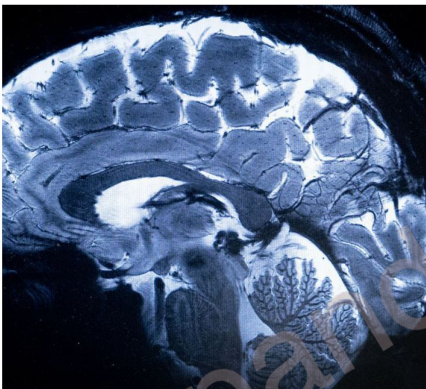
Appreciating Cobenfy's novelty and the difference it can make requires awareness of the various effects of schizophrenia, its diagnosis, and scientists' understanding of what causes it.

Clinical symptoms of schizophrenia

Most people who develop schizophrenia display prodromal symptoms. They last for a little under 12 months on average and may include unexplainable feelings of inner change, the development of novel spiritual and philosophical interests, anger, irritability, anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal.

The clinical phenotype of schizophrenia falls into three categories: reality distortion, disorganisation, and negative symptoms. The so-called positive symptoms are characterised by delusions, hallucinations, and a pattern of speech that is difficult to follow; the technical name for this is formal thought disorder.

The Swiss psychiatrist Paul E. Bleuler used the "four As" to characterise schizophrenia in 1911: affect, associations, ambivalence, and autism. Contemporary descriptions are richer and more sensitive to differences in symptoms. They include negative symptoms like reduction in the quantity of words spoken, reduced goal-directed activities, apathy or lack of motivation, anergia, reduced experience of pleasure, and reduced expression of emotions.



A picture of a human brain as revealed in an MRI. ALAIN JOCARD/AFP

Disorganisation symptoms include formal thought disorder (also considered a positive symptom), disorganised behaviour, and inappropriate affect. Another intriguing symptom that has today become more uncommon, especially in the economically developed world, is catatonia: characterised by a host of abnormal motor behaviours occurring alongside stupor or excitement. It is no longer considered characteristic of schizophrenia, as it is seen in other psychiatric disorders as well.

The German psychiatrist Kurt Schneider had described "first rank" symptoms previously considered to be pathognomonic of schizophrenia. These included auditory hallucinations referring to the patient in the third person, subjective changes in the ownership of thinking, and the experience that one's actions, bodily sensations, or emotions are controlled by external forces.

Cognitive impairment is ubiquitous in schizophrenia. Patients have shown impaired performance on various cognitive tests that measure judgement, attention, memory, and general intellectual functions.

What causes schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a multifactorial disorder. Viewing it through the lens of a single construct is futile. The role of genetics in the pathophysiology of schizophrenia cannot be

Most people who develop schizophrenia display prodromal symptoms, which last for a little under 12 months and include feelings of inner change, the development of spiritual and philosophical interests, anger, depression, and withdrawal

overemphasised. Genetic variants associated with risk play a direct role in the brain by changing gene expression that disrupt brain development and function.

A genome-wide association study in 2014 identified 108 genetic loci associated with schizophrenia. (Reminder: correlation does not imply causation.) Disorders like Huntington's disease, cystic fibrosis, hemochromatosis, and sickle cell anaemia are caused by mutations in a single gene. Unlike them, schizophrenia is polygenic, meaning it is the result of hundreds and possibly thousands of genes of small effect sizes. Rare genetic variants of moderate to large effect sizes have also been identified.

According to neurodevelopmental theory, the causes include events in early life, at birth, or even in utero. Prenatal and perinatal complications represent the most common environmental risk factor for schizophrenia. The genetic risk for schizophrenia interacts with early life

complications and increases the risk probability up to fivefold when there are early-life complications.

The discovery of genes that confer risk and the neurodevelopmental origins of schizophrenia have expanded our understanding of disease pathophysiology.

Xanomeline and trospium

Dopamine and glutamate, two neurotransmitters, have been implicated in the genesis of schizophrenia. But studies investigating the neurochemical origins of the disorder have thrown up conflicting results.

Amphetamine abuse stimulates dopamine release and produces a clinical syndrome resembling schizophrenia. Antipsychotics act by blocking brain dopamine receptors. These two premises gave rise to the dopamine hypothesis. The initial version of the dopamine hypothesis now stands discredited in light of new evidence. Multiple studies have demonstrated people with established schizophrenia have an increased dopamine synthesis capacity, and so far only one replication effort has failed to reproduce their findings.

Cobenfy, the new drug that has just received the FDA's approval, "is the first antipsychotic drug approved to treat schizophrenia that targets cholinergic receptors as opposed to dopamine receptors, which has long been the standard of care," the FDA said in a statement.

According to a review of xanomeline and trospium chloride published in 2022, the early development of xanomeline as a drug candidate to treat Alzheimer's disease and schizophrenia was stopped due to the compound's adverse effects. It gained favour again after researchers considered using it with trospium. Xanomeline is an agonist of muscarinic receptors (i.e., of the parasympathetic nervous system) and "might lead to improvement in all symptom types of schizophrenia," while "trospium is expected to reduce the adverse effects of xanomeline" given "its role as an antimuscarinic agent."

The FDA said Cobenfy's most common side-effects include nausea, indigestion, hypertension, tachycardia, and dizziness. The drug belongs to Bristol Myers Squibb, which has priced it at \$1,850 a month.

(Assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts is available via Tele-MANAS 14416, Sneha's suicide prevention helpline 044-24640050, and Speak2Us mental health helpline 9375430754.)

(Alok Kulkarni is a senior interventional neuropsychiatrist at the Manas Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences at Hubli in Karnataka. alok@kulkarni@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Schizophrenia has life-changing consequences. Persons with schizophrenia have a life expectancy lower by 13-15 years because of weight gain, poor diet, smoking, and comorbid substance use. Five percent die by suicide

Schizophrenia falls into three categories: reality distortion, disorganisation, and negative symptoms. The positive symptoms are characterised by delusions, hallucinations, and a pattern of speech that is difficult to follow

Genetic variants play a key role in schizophrenia by changing gene expression that disrupts brain function. This, combined with prenatal and perinatal complications, increases risk fivefold

Topic → Cobenfy



The FDA approved a new drug called Cobenfy on September 26 to treat schizophrenia.



Cobenfy is a combination of xanomeline and trospium chloride, featuring a novel mechanism of action that avoids the side effects of older drugs.





Schizophrenia significantly impacts life expectancy, reducing it by 13-15 years due to factors like weight gain, poor diet, smoking, and substance use.




Approximately 1 in 100 people will experience schizophrenia in their lifetime, with a slightly higher prevalence in men.



-  The disorder typically manifests in late adolescence and early adulthood, peaking in the early 20s for men and mid- to late 40s for women.

 Five percent of individuals with schizophrenia die by suicide, highlighting the severe consequences of the disorder.

 Understanding Cobenfy's potential benefits requires knowledge of schizophrenia's effects, diagnosis, and underlying causes.

Summary: The FDA has approved Cobenfy, a new drug for schizophrenia, which offers a novel treatment approach while addressing the serious impacts of the disorder

BIG SHOT



This image shows an area of a mosaic released by the Euclid space telescope on October 15. This patch of the southern sky shows stars in the Milky Way, and many galaxies beyond. Red stars are colder, and white/blue stars are hotter. On the right of the image, galaxy cluster Abell 3381 is visible as a string of galaxies. EUCLID CONSORTIUM, ESA, NASA

Topic → Galaxy Cluster Abell 3381



Overview

Abell 3381: A galaxy cluster with red and blue stars

Characteristics:



Red Stars: Colder temperatures



White/Blue Stars: Hotter temperatures



Visibility: Cluster observed as a string of galaxies



Key Points:

Structure: The arrangement and types of stars

Importance: Understanding cosmic evolution and star formation

Brown dwarfs: wannabe stars



Q.What is a brown dwarf?

A: In 1995, astronomers confirmed the discovery for the first time of

a brown dwarf, a body too small to be a star and too big to be a planet. They could be considered wannabe stars that, during their formative stages did not reach the mass necessary to ignite nuclear fusion at their core like a star. But they are more massive than the biggest planets.

"They are formally defined as objects that can burn a heavy form of hydrogen, called deuterium, but not the most common basic form of hydrogen," said Sam Whitebook, a graduate student in Caltech's division of physics, mathematics, and astronomy. Recently, researchers took a closer look at the first brown dwarf discovered and found that it's actually two brown dwarfs orbiting astonishingly close to each other while also circling a small star. The research papers were published in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

These two brown dwarfs are gravitationally locked to each other in what is called a binary



An artist's concept of a brown dwarf. NASA/JPL-CALTECH

system, an arrangement commonly observed among stars but quite rare among brown dwarfs. So the brown dwarf that three decades ago was named Gliese 229B is now recognised as Gliese 229Ba, with a mass 38 times greater than Jupiter, and Gliese 229Bb, with a mass 34 times greater than Jupiter.

They are located 19 light-years from our solar system, rather close in cosmic terms, in the constellation Lepus. - Reuters

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Topic → Brown Dwarfs: Cosmic Discoveries

Overview of Brown Dwarfs



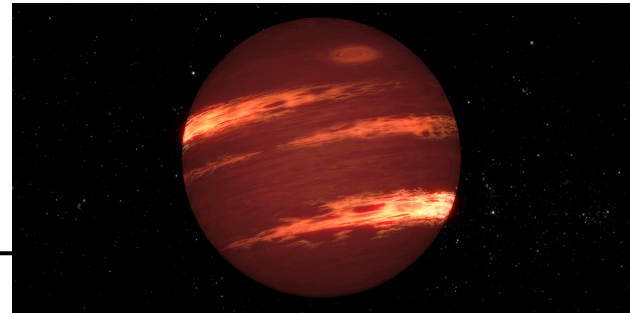
Definition of Brown Dwarfs: Celestial bodies that are too small to be stars and too large to be planets, often called "wannabe stars."



Nuclear Fusion: Unable to ignite nuclear fusion like stars but capable of burning deuterium, a heavy form of hydrogen.



Discovery Confirmation: The first brown dwarf was confirmed by astronomers in 1995.



Recent Discoveries



Recent Findings: The first discovered brown dwarf, Gliese 229B, is now known to be a binary system of two brown dwarfs.



Mass Comparison: Gliese 229Ba has a mass 38 times that of Jupiter, while Gliese 229Bb has a mass 34 times that of Jupiter.



Location: These brown dwarfs are situated 19 light-years away in the constellation Lepus.



Publication: The findings were published in the Astrophysical Journal Letters.

Summary

Brown dwarfs are sub-stellar objects capable of burning deuterium. The first confirmed discovery in 1995, Gliese 229B, is now recognized as a binary system located 19 light-years away.

The world needs blue helmets who act as blue helmets



Thou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but, above all, thou shalt not be a bystander.” In suggesting this, Yehuda Bauer, Holocaust historian, rested his case wherein the ‘bystander’ was brought centre-stage and held accountable alongside the perpetrator for crimes against humanity. The ‘bystander’ implies the collective conscience of the world which must work as the weapon of the powerless. So, while the United Nations through Chapter VI of its Charter is committed to the peaceful settlement of disputes, Chapter VII of the same Charter prescribes the use of armed force with the authorisation of the Security Council in cases of aggression and breaches of peace threatening international security. Chapter VII further exhorts member-states to make available such military or police forces as may be required to establish peace. In fact Chapter VIII goes further and prescribes robust ‘regional arrangement’ in enforcing peace upon authorisation by the Security Council.

Hits and misses

Thus, one would be led to an erroneous belief that the UN has everything in place – in its strongly worded Charter and over 1,00,000 peacekeepers on the ground – to eliminate wars and exploitation from the world. UN political diplomacy and peace operations have established peace in many theatres in seven decades of peacekeeping such as in Cambodia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Angola, Timor Leste, Liberia and Kosovo, to name a few notably successful UN engagements.

Yet, there have been glaring instances, such as in Rwanda (1994) and Bosnia (1995) where the UN was accused of being a bystander, unwilling or unable to protect non-combatants and vulnerable sections, especially women and children. That in subsequent missions, notably Sierra Leone (UNSMIL), Timor Leste (UNMIT), Darfur (UNAMID), South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), the UN brought the protection of civilians centrestage, thus restoring substantially, if not wholly, its commitment to its core values, is a tribute to its willingness to use institutional memory in improving peacekeeping to give primacy to protection of civilians.

Today the world is again on the brink of a much bigger war in Europe and West Asia precisely because, over the last three years, the UN has frittered away the dividends of its



Hermanprit Singh

a retired Indian Police Service officer with experience in United Nations peace operations as Acting Police Commissioner and Principal Officer in Timor Leste and in the Office of Operations at the UN headquarters

By being reduced to ‘bystander’ status in the ongoing and serious conflicts in the world, the United Nations is frittering away the dividends of its ‘enforceable peacekeeping’

‘enforceable peacekeeping’ between 2006 and 2020. It has been reduced to a ‘Bystander’ status again in the ongoing conflict in West Asia and the war in Ukraine.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Hamas-led massacre of non-combatants in Israel, followed by an even larger offensive of Israel on hapless civilians in Gaza, the UN response in both theatres has failed to call out the perpetrator in no uncertain terms and take decisive action in protecting civilian lives. This has happened despite it having a 1,00,000-strong UN military and police forces at its disposal, as battle ready infantry battalions and as ‘standing capacity’ at its logistics hub in Brindisi, Italy, that could have been deployed in robust numbers to contain a further loss of life and destruction of cities. There is little point in having such strong forces and yet be a bystander as both conflicts have widened, with the world continuing to witness unprecedented destruction. Even though 1,00,000 UN uniformed forces are deployed in many missions in Africa and elsewhere, it would have done no grave damage to the current missions were over half of them re-deployed in Ukraine, Gaza and West Bank, right between the warring forces, just as they continue to be in Cyprus between the Turks and Greeks or were deployed in Timor Leste, between Indonesian forces and the Timor Leste freedom fighters, the FRETILIN.

A lost chance to act with decision

Extraordinary situations demand extraordinary interventions. The fact that contributing member-countries have committed these forces to not just maintain but also to enforce peace implies their consent to protect civilians regardless of the ‘theatre’. Otherwise, these well-armed and well provisioned troops are just biding their time till their rotation and pocketing the green bucks as a tribute. Blue helmets must act as blue helmets, impartially and decisively, as in Kosovo (UNMIK 1999-2008) and Timor Leste (UNTAET, UNMIT 1999-2008), with legitimacy to use reasonable force. It needed just over 6,000 UN uniformed personnel (typically, two infantry brigades) in Kosovo and 3,000 UN police personnel (including the lightly-armed formed police units) and an infantry brigade from Australia, under operational command of UN Mission (UNMIT) in Timor Leste to restore peace and bring back the rule of law and an elected government.

A deployment of similar numbers in a

similar-sized geographical area of Israel-Gaza-West Bank would have contained the colossal loss of lives that has followed and is making this theatre a killing field with mounting civilian casualties.

There is a need for UNSC reform

This also brings us to the subject of much-needed reform in the functioning of the Security Council. The veto power of the P5, the Permanent Security Council members, instead of being a rock of stability for the UN peace operations to stand on, has more often than not acted as a mill-stone around their neck. The world has repeatedly witnessed the negative power of veto precisely at a time when ‘enforcing peace’ has become an urgent necessity in the face of threats to civilian lives. Nearly a million Tutsi civilians were killed in the now infamous Rwanda genocide of 1994-95 even as the French continued to support the Rwandan Army, the main perpetrators of the genocide, and UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) was a bystander.

The case for reform of the Security Council to obviate such genocides in future by swift deployment and having a decisive role for the blue helmets rests on a two-pronged approach. The first is for the expansion of Permanent membership of the Security Council to include India (by virtue of it being the most vibrant voice of the global South) and South Africa (for long overdue representation from Africa). The second is to bell the veto cat.

In an expanded Council of P7, rather than each member having veto power, contentious issues such as the use of force in West Asia to stop an expansionist Israel or in Ukraine to thwart the expansionist designs of Russia – which in the current scenario will be vetoed by the U.S. and Russia, respectively – should have a division of votes of a P7 to decide on UN intervention. Once such a division of votes is in favour of peace operations to thwart hostilities, the deployment of UN standing troops or shifting troops between ‘missions’ should be enabled under Chapters VII and VIII of the UN Charter, with full executive powers to the UN military and police commanders on the ground.


Ultimately, if the UN cannot stand on its own feet and enforce peace despite having standing uniformed forces of the size of a sovereign nation, then UN-led peace operations must close and the plush halls of the UN be used only for exalted deliberations by another international non-governmental organisation or a think-tank.


Topic → UN Peacekeeping: Successes and Challenges





Overview

 The UN Charter is robust, with over 100,000 peacekeepers, yet struggles persist in eradicating wars and exploitation worldwide.


 Successful missions have been conducted in Cambodia, Mozambique, and Kosovo over the past seventy years.


 The UN has faced criticism for inaction during crises, notably in Rwanda (1994) and Bosnia (1995), where it failed to protect vulnerable populations.

 Recent missions emphasize civilian protection, showcasing the UN's dedication to its core values and institutional memory.

 The UN is perceived as a bystander in ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia, to take decisive action despite its military resources.



 The effectiveness of UN peacekeeping has diminished since 2020, leading to increased violence and destruction in conflict zones.

 The UN's response to recent escalations in Ukraine and Gaza has been criticized for lacking urgency and clarity in addressing the perpetrators.

Challenges and Criticisms

Inaction in Crises: Notable failures in Rwanda and Bosnia highlight the UN's struggle to protect vulnerable populations.

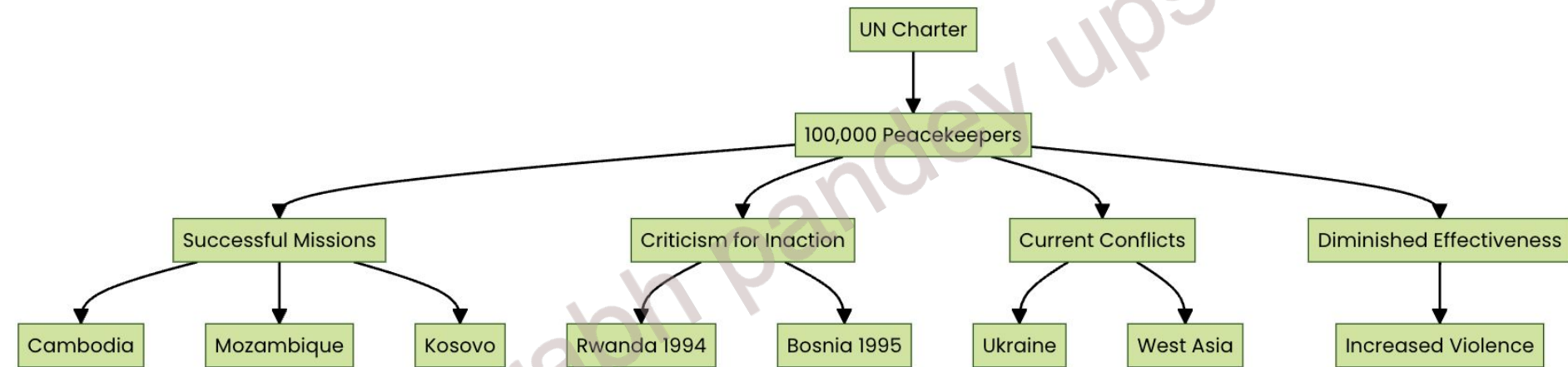
Current Perception: Seen as a bystander in Ukraine and West Asia, the UN's military resources are underutilized.

Diminished Effectiveness: Since 2020, the impact of peacekeeping has waned, resulting in more violence.

Recent Focus

Civilian Protection: Recent missions prioritize safeguarding civilians, reflecting a commitment to core values.

UN Peacekeeping Dynamics:




Summary: The UN has a history of both successful peacekeeping and significant failures, currently facing criticism for its inaction in ongoing conflicts despite having substantial military resources.

Urgent Reforms in UN Peacekeeping and Security Council

Extraordinary Interventions Needed




 Decisive Actions: Extraordinary situations require decisive actions from peacekeeping forces to protect civilians effectively.

Historical Precedents


 Successful Missions: Peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and Timor Leste involved significant troop deployments that restored peace and governance.

Potential for Loss of Life


 Mitigation of Casualties: A similar deployment in the Israel-Gaza-West Bank region could have mitigated severe civilian casualties.

Need for UNSC Reform




 **Veto Power Issues:** The veto power of the P5 members in the UN Security Council often hinders timely peace enforcement, as seen during the Rwandan genocide.

Proposed Security Council Changes

 **Expansion and Reform:** Calls for expanding permanent membership to include India and South Africa, and reforming veto powers for more effective decision-making.

Voting System for Interventions

 **P7 Voting System:** A proposed P7 voting system would allow for UN interventions without the current veto deadlock, enabling quicker responses to conflicts.

Consequences of Inaction

❌ Reconsidering UN's Role: If the UN cannot effectively enforce peace, there are calls to reconsider its role and possibly transition to a different organizational structure.

Summary: The text advocates for urgent reforms in UN peacekeeping and the Security Council to enable decisive action in conflict zones, preventing civilian casualties and improving global governance.



Extraordinary Interventions



Historical Precedents



Potential for Loss of Life



Need for UNSC Reform



Proposed Security Council Changes



Voting System for Interventions



Consequences of Inaction

In Section 6A of the Citizenship Act

What does the contentious provision state? What does the Assam Accord signed in 1985 stipulate? Why are there different cut-off dates for citizenship in Assam? What are the court's findings? What are the potential implications?

EXPLAINER

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

In a landmark ruling, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on October 18 upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 (1955 Act) which laid out an exclusive regime for migrants in Assam from erstwhile East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) to obtain Indian citizenship as long as they entered India before March 25, 1971. The decision was rendered by a 4:1 majority. Justice Surya Kant authored the lead majority opinion on behalf of himself, CJ D.V. Chandrachud, Justices M. M. Sundresh, and Manoj Mishra, while Justice Pardiwala delivered the lone dissenting opinion.

What does Section 6A stipulate?

Section 6A originates from the "Assam Accord", a political settlement signed on August 15, 1985, between the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government and Assam's student groups, following a six-year-long agitation against the influx of undocumented migrants from Bangladesh into Assam. It established a framework for granting or denying Indian citizenship to migrants in Assam based on a cut-off date – March 25, 1971. The date marked the onset of the genocide in East Pakistan, leading to the Bangladesh Liberation War and the eventual creation of Bangladesh. The conflict drove millions of Bengalis to flee East Pakistan and seek refuge in Assam, which shares a 263 km border with Bangladesh. Accordingly, all those who entered the State after March 25, 1971, would be treated as foreigners and deported in accordance with law.

The provision also conferred Indian citizenship upon migrants of "Indian origin" who entered Assam before January 1, 1966, and had been "ordinarily resident" in the State since then. Meanwhile, those who arrived between January 1, 1966, and March 24, 1971, were granted the full rights of Indian citizens, except for voting rights, which were withheld for a decade.

Why was it challenged?

The petitioners, including the NGO Assam Public Works and the Assam Sahitya Mahasanga, contended that setting a different cut-off date for citizenship in Assam is discriminatory and violates the right to equality enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution. Concerns were also raised about the provision's inconsistency with Articles 6 and 7, which regulate citizenship pertaining to Partition-era migration for the rest of the country. Article 6 grants citizenship to individuals who migrated to India from Pakistan before July 19, 1948, provided they have resided in the country since then. Meanwhile, Article 7 denies citizenship to those who moved to Pakistan after March 1, 1947, while allowing it for those who returned to India under a permit for resettlement or permanent return.

They also claimed the provision resulted in a "perceptible change in the demographic pattern of the State", thereby violating the cultural and linguistic rights of the "indigenous" population of Assam, as guaranteed under Article 29. This, they argued, constituted both "external aggression" and "internal disturbance" under Article 355 of the Constitution, thereby imposing an obligation upon the Union government to protect the State.

What did the majority rule?

Both Justices Kant and Chandrachud



Final verdict: Members of the All Assam Students' Union light lamps to celebrate the verdict on Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, in Guwahati, on October 18, 2019.

upheld the differentiated treatment of Assam under Section 6A, citing the region's unique historical and political considerations. They reasoned that the provision does not violate the equality clause under Article 14, as it represents Parliament's careful balancing act between its humanitarian approach toward Bangladeshi immigrants and the significant strain their mass exodus has imposed on Assam's economic and cultural resources.

The majority also opined that Section 6A is not inconsistent with the citizenship provisions in Articles 6 and 7 of the Constitution. The Chief Justice pointed out that while these Articles establish a cut-off date for conferring citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution—January 26, 1950—Section 6A specifically addresses individuals not covered by these two provisions. Justice Kant concurred, asserting that Section 6A aligns with the constitutional philosophy of Articles 6 and 7, as it is rooted in the "same underlying policy of granting citizenship to the people of Indian origin migrating from Pakistan due to political disturbances in a foreign territory". Both judges also concluded that Article 11 of the Constitution grants Parliament substantial flexibility in formulating laws related to citizenship, including the authority to establish conditions for granting citizenship that may differ from those outlined in Articles 6 and 7.

Adopting a multicultural and pluralistic interpretation of Article 29, the judges further observed that Section 6A does not violate the cultural rights of the "indigenous" Assamese people. They reasoned that while the Article aims to

"conserve" the culture of a specific group, it does not preclude the coexistence of other cultures. In fact, Justice Kant highlighted that such grievances may stem from the failure of authorities to implement the other leg of Section 6A—specifically, the deportation of individuals who migrated to Assam after the cut-off date. He accordingly urged the Chief Justice to constitute a Bench to monitor the identification, detection and deportation of illegal immigrants in the State in a time-bound manner.

Both the judges also noted that "external aggression" referred to military actions and did not cover within its ambit humanitarian migration driven by economic or other distress. Accordingly, they found no breach of the Union's duty under Article 355. The Chief Justice further cautioned that allowing the Union to exercise such "emergency powers" would be detrimental to federalism and could undermine the constitutional status of States.

Why did Justice Pardiwala dissent?

In a sharply reasoned dissent, Justice Pardiwala declared Section 6A unconstitutional, effective only from the date of the judgment. He reasoned that while the provision may have been justifiable at the time of its enactment, its failure to curb illegal migration in Assam had rendered it inconsistent with constitutional principles over time. He also noted that the lack of a sunset clause on the application of Section 6A incentivises illegal immigration and exacerbates demographic imbalances in the region.

The judge further highlighted that

Section 6A does not allow for self-declaration or voluntary identification as a foreigner thereby leaving the detection process entirely reliant on state intervention. He concluded that this marked a clear departure from the scheme of the Citizenship Act and Articles 6 and 7 of the Constitution, which allow citizenship to be acquired through registration.

The manner in which the provision is worded, counter serves the very purpose of its enactment, which is the speedy and effective identification of foreigners of the 1966-71 stream, their deletion from the electoral rolls, registration with the registering authority and conferring of regular citizenship," the dissent noted.

What are the potential ramifications?

The March 25, 1971, cut-off date endorsed by the majority serves as the foundation for the contentious National Register of Citizens which was prepared in 2019 following the top court's directives. Although the register is yet to be implemented, it has identified 19 lakh residents (5.7% of Assam's population) as potential non-citizens. Moreover, the ruling bolsters the long-standing demand of Assamese organisations to repeal the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA), which sees December 31, 2014, as the cut-off date for granting citizenship to non-Muslim migrants who illegally entered India from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Critics argue that by prescribing a different timeline, the CAA creates a loophole that exempts Bengali Hindus who migrated to Assam from Bangladesh after 1971 from the application of Section 6A.

THE GIST

Section 6A originates from the "Assam Accord", a political settlement signed on August 15, 1985, between the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government and Assam's student groups, following a six-year-long agitation against the influx of undocumented migrants from Bangladesh into Assam. It established a framework for granting or denying Indian citizenship to migrants in Assam based on a cut-off date – March 25, 1971.


Both Justices Kant and Chandrachud upheld the differentiated treatment of Assam under Section 6A, citing the region's unique historical and political considerations.


In a sharply reasoned dissent, Justice Pardiwala declared Section 6A unconstitutional, effective only from the date of the judgment.

Topic → Supreme Court Ruling on Section 6A of the Citizenship Act





Overview of the Ruling

 Supreme Court Decision: On October 18, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, with a 4:1 majority.


 Section 6A Details: This section provides a framework for migrants from erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to obtain Indian citizenship if they entered India before March 25, 1971.


Historical Context


 Significance of March 25, 1971: This date marks the beginning of the Bangladesh Liberation War, leading to a significant migration to Assam.

 Assam Accord: Section 6A is based on the Assam Accord, signed on August 15, 1985, addressing concerns of Assam's student groups about undocumented migrants.

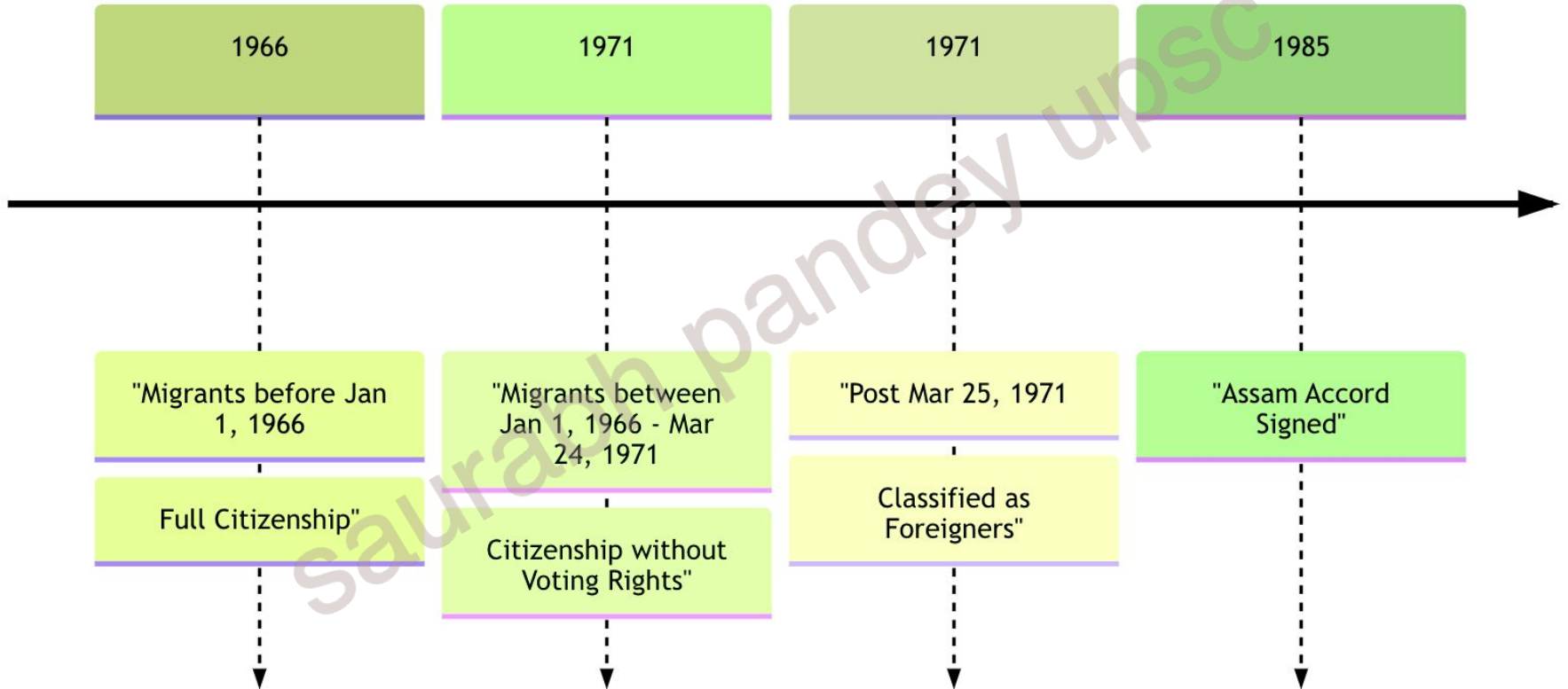
Citizenship and Migration

 Post-Cut-off Migrants: Those entering Assam after March 25, 1971, are classified as foreigners and are subject to deportation.

 Criteria for Citizenship: Migrants of Indian origin who entered Assam before January 1, 1966, and have been residents since are granted Indian citizenship.

 Voting Rights: Migrants arriving between January 1, 1966, and March 24, 1971, receive full citizenship rights except for voting, which is withheld for ten years.

Timeline of Migration and Citizenship



Assam's Unique Treatment Under Section 6A

Key Points of the Ruling



⚖️ **Majority Ruling:** Justices Kant and Chandrachud emphasized the distinctive historical and political context of Assam, justifying its differentiated treatment under Section 6A.

📜 **Equality Clause:** The provision was found to be in harmony with Article 14, balancing humanitarian concerns for Bangladeshi immigrants against the resource limitations of Assam.

🏛️ **Constitutional Consistency:** Section 6A aligns with the citizenship provisions in Articles 6 and 7, addressing individuals not covered by these articles.





Parliamentary Flexibility: Article 11 empowers Parliament to enact citizenship laws with conditions that may differ from those in Articles 6 and 7.



Cultural Rights: Article 29 was interpreted to support the coexistence of cultures, affirming that Section 6A does not infringe upon the cultural rights of indigenous Assamese people.



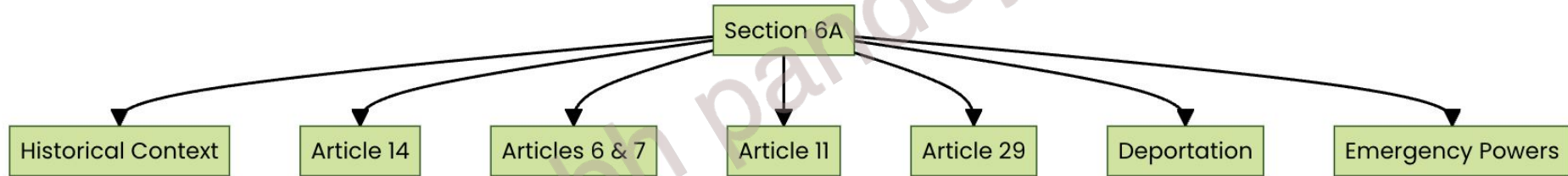
Deportation Urgency: Justice Kant called for a monitoring Bench to ensure the timely deportation of illegal immigrants after the cut-off date.



Emergency Powers: The ruling clarified that "external aggression" does not encompass humanitarian migration, warning against the misuse of emergency powers that could undermine federalism.

Summary: The ruling upheld Assam's unique treatment under Section 6A, balancing humanitarian needs with local resource concerns, while affirming constitutional consistency and cultural rights.

Conceptual Overview:





Green energy: The Three Mile Island nuclear power plant is seen at sunset in Middletown, Pennsylvania, U.S., on October 16, 2019/16

Why are Big Tech companies such as Google scouting for nuclear power?

Training AI models, ensuring that they remain always online and maintaining growing data centres are energy-hungry tasks. Google has held that nuclear energy is clean, available round-the-clock, and carbon-free. However, is green energy 'truly' clean?

Sahana Venkatesh

The story so far: In October 14, Google announced the "first corporate agreement" to buy nuclear energy from multiple Small Modular Reactors (SMRs). These SMRs will be developed by Xcel Energy. The initial phase of the work will bring up the first SMR by 2030, and subsequent deployments will continue through 2035. Per Google, this deal will provide 500 MW of carbon-free power to the U.S. electricity grid. They said this agreement will help the development of AI technology to better scientific advances.

Why nuclear energy? Training AI models, ensuring that they remain always online, and maintaining growing data centres are energy-hungry tasks. In a 2024 Environmental Report, Google admitted that its total global greenhouse gas emissions rose by 13% in 2023 year-over-year, pointing to the "challenge of reducing emissions while compute intensity increases and we grow our technical infrastructure investment to support this AI transition." Google has held that nuclear energy is clean, available round-the-clock (unlike solar energy), and carbon-free. In that vein, the search giant sees the next generation nuclear reactors as a way to power global data centres and its offices with the help of clean energy. Smaller sites and modular designs further help the tech

giant in faster deployment cycles.

Which companies are partnering with nuclear reactor makers? On September 20, Microsoft and Constellation signed a 20-year power purchase agreement intended to launch the Crane Clean Energy Center (CCEC) and restart the Three Mile Island Unit 1. The deal should add around 835 MW of carbon-free energy to the grid, according to Constellation's statement. "This agreement is a major milestone in Microsoft's efforts to help decarbonise the grid in support of our commitment to become carbon negative," said Bobby Holts, Microsoft's VP of Energy, at the time. Amazon also announced that it signed three new agreements to support nuclear energy projects, such as the construction of SMRs in Washington, it partnered with Energy Northwest. It is further making an investment in SMR reactors and fuel developer Xcel Energy, and partnering with Dominion Energy in Virginia. "We also previously signed an agreement to co-locate a data centre facility next to the Talen Energy's nuclear facility in Pennsylvania, which will directly power our data centres with carbon-free energy, and helps preserve this existing reactor," Amazon said in a blog post. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman backed the nuclear startup Oklo, which aims to build a commercial microreactor in Idaho and have it operational in 2027, though delays could affect this, reported CNBC. Mr.

Altman also invested in the nuclear fusion company Helion in 2022.

Is nuclear energy truly clean? This is still a matter of debate. The main takeaway is that nuclear energy has a serious reputation problem, due to public memory of past accidents and crises that span generations. For example, Ukraine's Chernobyl explosion (1986) and Japan's Fukushima accident (2011) resulted in extensive environmental destruction that lasted for years, even as the impact on human health is still being researched. While Chernobyl is a case study on multiple human errors and a communication breakdown, Fukushima demonstrates how natural disasters beyond human control – such as a tsunami – can lead to devastating nuclear accidents.

Separately, in the U.S., the Three Mile Island accident of 1979 in Unit 2 of the facility's nuclear generating station involved the contribution of a malfunctioning valve and human error, resulting in the core overheating and releasing radioactive gases. While not considered overly dangerous to the surrounding population, it is regarded as one of the worst industrial nuclear accidents in U.S. history. Microsoft's deal with Constellation aims to start Unit 1 again. Unit 2 was decommissioned after the accident.

Many environmental groups are actively protesting nuclear energy and the way it is being presented as "clean".

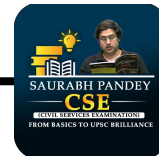
"Friends of the Earth," an international network of organisations, said on its website in 2018, "Since it was first commercialised, nuclear power has proven to be one of the dirtiest, most dangerous and most expensive sources of energy. Nuclear reactors have a long history of accidents, leaks, extended outages and skyrocketing costs." The organisation also pointed out the dangers of nuclear infrastructure being built over earthquake-prone areas.

But there is hope in SMRs as they have potentially lower building and operational costs. A U.S. Department of Energy report noted that SMRs have compact designs and can function in areas unable to withstand larger or older nuclear power plants that require huge volumes of water.

What is the U.S. government's stance on nuclear energy?

Apart from seeing nuclear power as one source of clean energy, the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Nuclear Energy highlighted the importance of re-establishing the U.S. as a nuclear leader, to stay ahead of China and Russia. Dr. Rita Karamwal, Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy, noted, "As the use of nuclear energy continues to expand internationally, it is crucial that the United States reasserts itself as a leader in this incredible technology. Existing U.S. nuclear plants prevent about 500 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year – the equivalent of taking 400 million cars off the roads."

–Topic →Google and Nuclear Energy: A Strategic Move



Corporate Agreement

Announcement: On October 14, Google revealed its inaugural corporate agreement to acquire nuclear energy from multiple Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) developed by Kairos Power.

Energy Capacity

Objective: The agreement aims to deliver 500 MW of carbon-free power to the U.S. electricity grid.

Timeline

Operational Date: The first SMR is anticipated to be operational by 2030, with additional deployments planned through 2035.

Support for AI: Google believes this nuclear energy deal will bolster the development of AI technologies and scientific progress.

Emissions Challenge

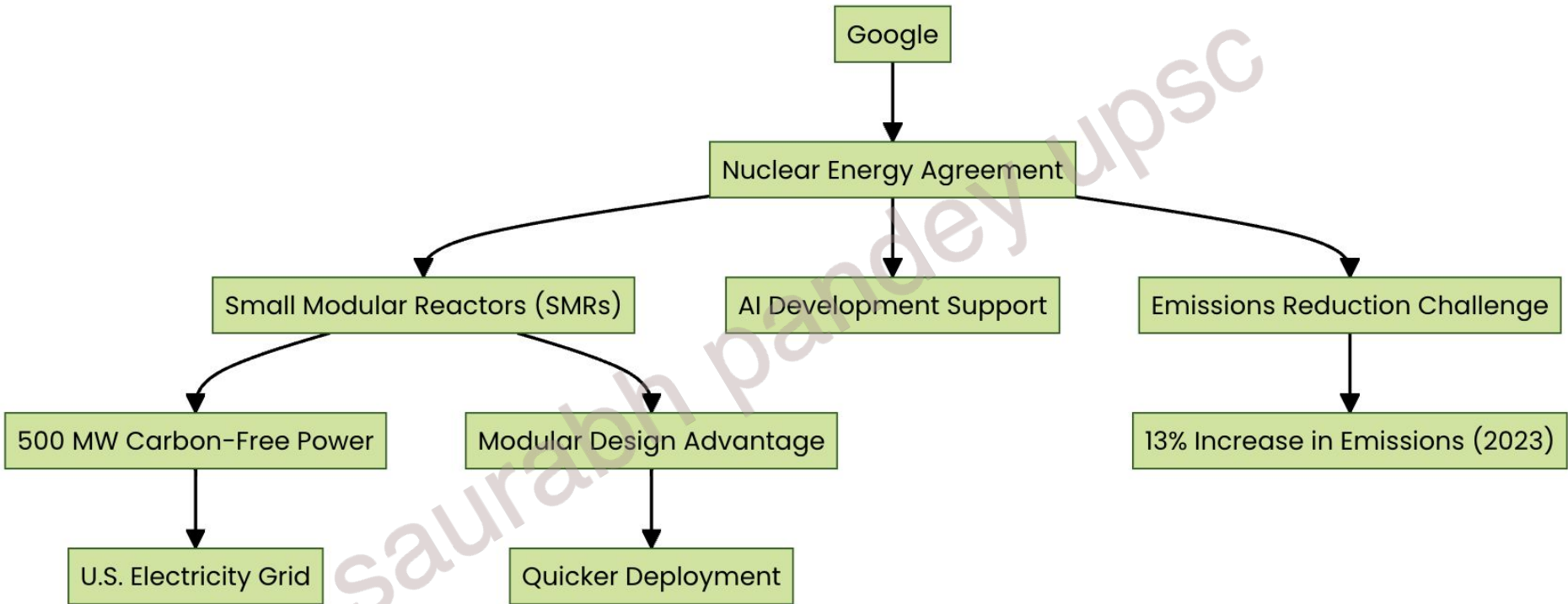
Environmental Report: In its 2024 Environmental Report, Google noted a 13% increase in global greenhouse gas emissions in 2023, underscoring the challenge of reducing emissions amid rising energy demands.

Nuclear Energy Benefits

Advocacy: Google promotes nuclear energy as a clean, reliable, and carbon-free power source, crucial for powering data centers and offices.

Modular Design Advantage

Deployment: The smaller sizes and modular designs of SMRs facilitate quicker deployment cycles, aligning with Google's infrastructure needs.



Nuclear Energy: Challenges and Opportunities



Nuclear Energy's Reputation

Historical Accidents: Nuclear energy has a tarnished reputation due to past accidents that have left a lasting impact on public perception.

Chernobyl and Fukushima

Environmental Damage: The Chernobyl (1986) and Fukushima (2011) disasters caused severe environmental harm and ongoing health concerns.

Three Mile Island Incident

Major Accident: The 1979 incident in the U.S. was marked by human error and equipment failure, leading to core overheating and radioactive gas release.

Environmental Opposition



Criticism: Groups like 'Friends of the Earth' criticize nuclear energy for its perceived dangers and high costs, citing a history of accidents.

Concerns Over Location

Safety Issues: Building nuclear infrastructure in earthquake-prone areas raises significant safety concerns.

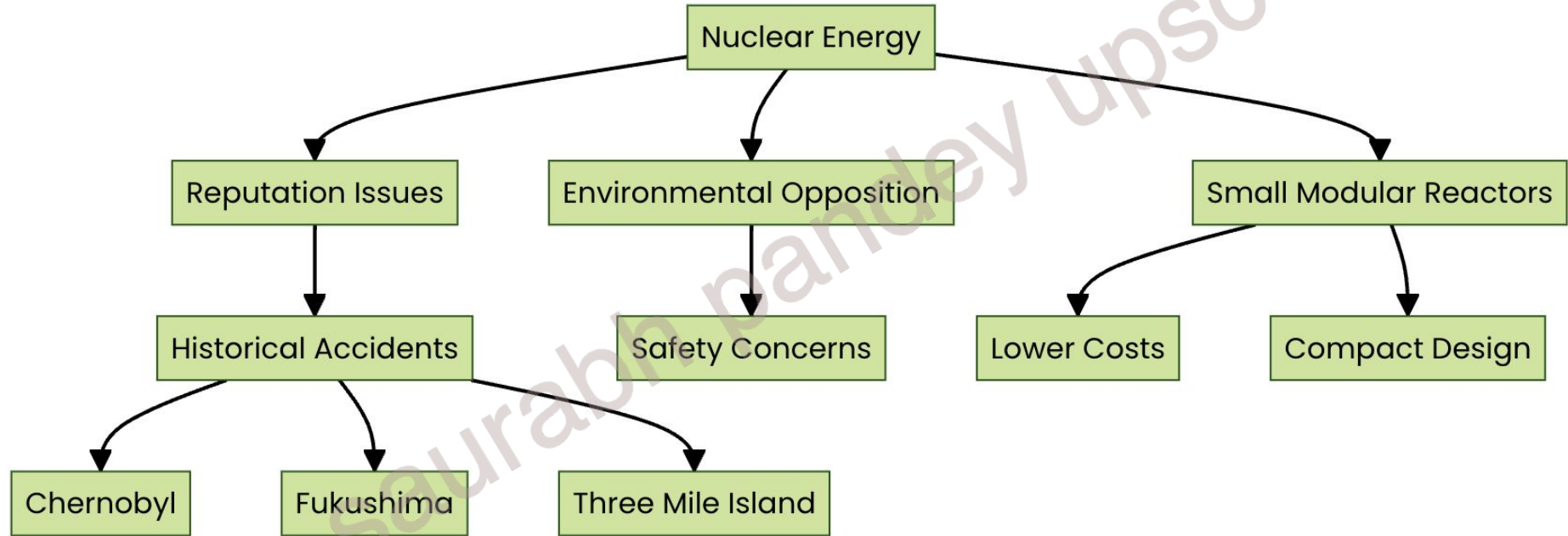
Promise of SMRs

Potential Solution: Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) offer lower costs and are suitable for locations unable to support larger plants.

Department of Energy Insights

Compact Design: A report highlights SMRs' compact design, making them viable for areas with limited water resources.

Nuclear Energy Landscape:



Investors flee thematic ETFs as stock benchmarks soar

Reuters

Investors are leaving exchange-traded funds tied to specific themes, such as artificial intelligence and video gaming, as they flock to funds linked to broad stock-market benchmarks that are hitting record highs. The run for the exits, however, may slow if the broader market stumbles.

While flows in equity ETFs overall continue to climb, thematic ETFs, which invest in companies tied to everything from solar energy to robotics and millennial consumers, are on pace for their third-consecutive year of net outflows, according to financial data and analysis company Morningstar.

The category, which has

total assets of \$108 billion, has lost \$5.8 billion in investor capital this year, greater outflows than the \$4.8 billion for all of 2023, according to Morningstar.

“It’s winter for thematic ETFs right now,” said Taylor Krystkowiak, investment strategist at Themes ETFs, an asset-management firm focused on this category. Returns from broad market indexes are setting a higher bar for thematic funds this year. The S&P 500, the benchmark for the U.S. stock market, has climbed over 22% this year, propelled by gains from influential stocks including Nvidia and Meta.

The five-largest ETFs tracking the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq 100 have seen inflows of \$170 billion this year. The SPDR S&P 500



High bar: Returns from broad market indexes are setting a higher bar for thematic funds this year. AP

ETF Trust on Thursday became the first ETF to reach \$600 billion in assets.

“It’s not that people don’t like the idea of themes any longer, but a

bull market dominated by a handful of megacaps makes it hard for any theme to stand out,” said Aniket Ullal, ETF analyst at CFRA. Part of the chal-

lenge, said Bryan Armour, ETF analyst at Morningstar, is the nature of thematic investing itself.

Investors often mistime investing in themes, ac-

cording to a Morningstar study that found investors in thematic ETFs missed out on two-thirds of their returns in a five-year period.

Hard task

“You have to pick the right theme, then be sure that the fund has picked the stocks that will benefit most from that theme, and then be right about the timing of when you buy the fund,” Mr. Armour said. “Getting that trifecta right is tough.”

Even some AI-themed ETFs with outsized exposure to market-darling Nvidia have struggled to retain assets. The Global X Robotics & Artificial Intelligence ETF has seen net outflows of \$89 million in the last 12 months, according to the

firm. Despite the fund having nearly 13% of its portfolio in the AI chipmaker—almost double the S&P 500 weighting—it has performed only in line with the index, with both up about 39% in the past year.

“We still have longer-term conviction in themes,” said Arelis Agosto, head of thematic at Global X, which has seen outflows in 19 of its 31 thematic funds over the last 12 months.

Cathie Wood’s ARK Innovation ETF has seen \$2.6 billion in outflows in 2024, the most among thematic ETFs, according to Morningstar. The fund is down more than 9% this year. The fact that thematic funds tend to levy higher fees can diminish their appeal to investors.

Thematic ETFs’ fees average 0.62% of money invested while the average ETF fee is 0.49%. The number of thematic launches dropped to 13 this year from 39 in 2023, while closures of thematic funds in 2024 have already topped 2023’s total, with 36 compared to 32, according to Morningstar.

Themes ETFs is bucking that trend, having launched 18 products since December, including a Transatlantic Defense ETF, which invests in defense companies based in NATO member states, and a European Luxury ETF.

“I think that when S&P 500 megacaps stop delivering the way they do today, the focus will shift back to thematic ETFs,” Mr. Krystkowiak said.

Topic → ETF (exchange-traded fund)

- An exchange-traded fund is an investment vehicle that pools a group of securities into a fund. It can be traded like an individual stock on an exchange.
- ETFs can even be designed to track specific investment strategies.
- Various types of ETFs are available to investors for income generation, speculation, and price increases, and to hedge or partly offset risk in an investor's [portfolio](#).
- An ETF must be registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission



Part -2 Extended Trade Facility (ETF)



Overview of Extended Trade Facility (ETF)

Definition: A mechanism allowing trading beyond regular hours.

Purpose: Enhances market accessibility and liquidity.

Types:

- Pre-market trading

- After-hours trading



Key Components of ETF



Trading Hours:

Regular hours (e.g., 9:30 AM - 4:00 PM EST)

Extended hours (e.g., 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM EST)

Market Participants:

Retail investors

Institutional investors

Benefits of ETF

Increased Flexibility: Trade at convenience outside regular hours.

Market Reaction: Respond to news and events impacting prices.

Extended Access: More opportunities for profit.





A boy puts up a net to catch fish in the floodwaters covering a road outside his home in Odobere on Tuesday. Floods along the Senegal river have affected more than 55,000 people after heavy rain in the Senegal River Basin, leaving many villages underwater. AFP

Topic → Senegal River



Overview of Senegal River

Location: West Africa, flowing through Senegal and Mauritania 

Length: Approximately 1,086 km

Significance: Vital for agriculture, transportation, and local ecosystems 

Importance of River

Geography

Flows into the Atlantic Ocean 

Surrounding regions: wetlands, savannahs, and forests 

Economy

Agriculture: irrigation for crops like rice and millet 

Fishing: local communities rely on it for food and income 

Trade: river transport for goods and resources 



Environmental Concerns

Pollution: from agriculture and urban run-off 🚫

Flooding: seasonal floods impact local communities 🌧️

Conservation: initiatives to protect biodiversity and ecosystems 🐾

Cultural Importance

Home to various ethnic groups with rich traditions 🎉

Festivals and events related to the river and its resources 🎵

Tourism

River cruises: exploring the natural beauty 🌅

Wildlife watching: diverse fauna along the riverbanks 🌳



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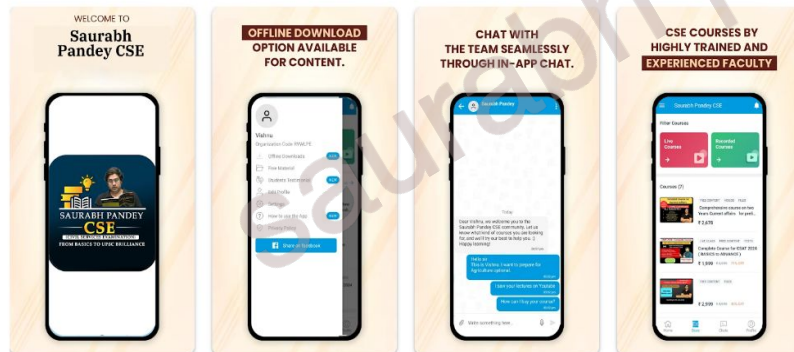
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Topic → Committee On Simultaneous election

Q 1- ELECTORAL REFORM

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has accepted the recommendations of the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections under the chairmanship of former President Shri Ram Nath Kovind.

Simultaneous elections: Recommendations of high-level committee

1. Elections have been held simultaneously between 1951 and 1967.
2. Law Commission (1999): One election to Lok Sabha and all state assemblies.
3. Panel of Experts (2015): suggest methods for simultaneous elections.
4. High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (2017): Shri Ram Nath Kovind extensively consulted stakeholders including political parties.

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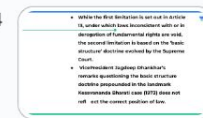


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Q 3 --Parliamentary
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Bound supremacy

Parliamentary sovereignty isn't undone
by the basic structure doctrine

It is fairly well-known that parliamentary legislation is subject to two limitations under the Constitution of India. One is by judicial review, or the power of constitutional courts to review legislation for possible violation of any fundamental right. Another is that no amendment to the Constitution should have the effect of destroying any of its basic features. While the first limitation is set out in Article 32, under which laws inconsistent with or in derogation of fundamental rights are void, the second limitation is based on the 'basic structure' doctrine evolved by the Supreme Court. Vice-President Biju Bhaskar's remarks questioning the basic structure doctrine propounded in the landmark Kesavananda Bharati (case 1973) does not reflect the correct position of law. In his view, the basic structure doctrine has usurped parliamentary sovereignty and goes against the democratic imperative that the elected legislature should reign supreme. His particular concern seems justified: that the Supreme Court prevented the National Judicial Appointments Commission, a body to appoint judges to the superior courts in the country, from coming into existence by striking down the relevant amendment to the Constitution and a parliamentary law to give effect to it. But it is difficult not to see his attack on the basic structure doctrine as part of the current dispensation's tirade against the judiciary and its grievance that it does not have enough say in the appointment of judges.

The idea that the basic structure doctrine undermines parliamentary sovereignty is simply wrong. Parliament is sovereign in its domain, but it is still bound by the limitations imposed by the Constitution. Mr. Bhaskar seems to have a problem with any sort of limitation on Parliament's jurisdiction to amend the Constitution. Surely, he could not have forgotten that the basic structure doctrine had helped save the Constitution from being undermined through the misuse of parliamentary majority. The main purpose of the doctrine is to ensure that some fundamental features of the Constitution are not legislated out of existence. It has been invoked to strike down amendments only in a few cases, but many others have survived basic structure challenges. Parliamentary majority is transient, but essential features of the Constitution such as the rule of law, parliamentary form of government, separation of powers, the idea of equality, and free and fair elections ought to be perennially protected from legislative excess. It may be open to a new Constituent Assembly to come up with another constitution that changes these fundamental concepts, but a legislature formed under the current Constitution cannot be allowed to change its core identity.

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28th dec 2022



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29

on the Human Development Index.

However, health experts say this fact that India's fertility rate is declining due to a variety of factors, including increased literacy rates, increase in the age of marriage and so forth, should prompt measures to offer exemptions from the government, decision to general health workers to launch campaigns on oral cancer awareness, push vaccination and screening for all girls.

30

What is the CAG's audit report on Assam's NRC?

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has released an audit report on the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam. The report highlights several irregularities, including 'haphazard development' of software for the exercise, making it prone to data tampering, and flagged undue profits worth crores amassed by the system integrator (SI) by violating the Minimum Wages Act.

31

The story so far:

A recent Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report on the update exercise of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam has flagged serious irregularities, including "haphazard development" of software for the exercise, making it prone to data tampering, and flagged undue profits worth crores amassed by the system integrator (SI) by violating the Minimum Wages Act.

32

The audit flagged irregularities in a compliance report of irregularities generated by NRC update project in Assam tabled in the Assam Assembly on December 24.

33

What is the NRC exercise?

The NRC was first created in 1951 to ensure that only those born in India and migrants from neighboring countries, were recognized. In 2019, the Supreme Court issued directions to the Centre and States to initiate an exercise in Assam to update the NRC register.

34

What are the CAG's concerns?

The story so far:

- A recent Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report on the update exercise of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam has flagged serious irregularities, including "haphazard development" of software for the exercise, making it prone to data tampering, and flagged undue profits worth crores amassed by the system integrator (SI) by violating the Minimum Wages Act.

11th october 2022

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- The Constitution mandates that panchayats and municipalities shall be elected every five years and enjoins States to devolve functions and responsibilities to them through law.
- This is regarded as a design weakness, but on closer look, is not one.
- Given diverse habitation patterns, political and social history, it makes sense to mandate States to assign functions to local governments.

20th January 2022



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Background

Layout

Theme

Transition



Democratise and empower city governments

The general approach towards urban empowerment, including financial

capabilities, has remained piecemeal in India



THIRUKUMAR SINGH PANWAR

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in a report, "State Finance, Study of Budgets of 2021-22", released in November 2021 (<https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/writereaddoc/2021-22>), wrote "With the third-tier governments in India playing a frontline role in combating the pandemic by implementing containment strategies, healthcare... their finances have come under severe strain, forcing them to cut down expenditures and mobilise funding from various sources."

The RBI further commented that the functional autonomy of civic bodies must increase and their governance structure strengthened. This could happen by "empowering them financially through 'resource availability'."

It is interesting that the RBI did echo the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission report on local bodies that emphasised city government's financial and financial empowerment. The addition in the RBI report is in the form of praxis and the objective reality from during the need coronavirus pandemic, which continues even now.

However, there is only partial truth in the report. The emphasis on resource availability, but how this will happen is not highlighted. At the most, it speaks only about generating more resources at the local level.

The essence
While correctly identifying the role of the city governments in meeting the challenges the pandemic has thrown up, the report also points to the draining of resources. An RBI survey of 221 municipal corporations (MC2023) re-

vealed that most of them saw a decline in revenues; in contrast, their expenditure rose by almost 71.2%. The RBI report also highlights the limited coverage of property tax and its failure in shoring up municipal corporation revenues. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data show that India has the lowest property tax collection rate in the world – i.e., property tax to GDP ratio, but this equates only one part of the story.

An old problem continues
During the pandemic, while leaders from the Prime Minister's Office were seen taking a call on disaster mitigation strategies, city mayors were found missing. Why? Because under the disaster management plan of action, cities are at the forefront to fight the pandemic, however, the elected leadership finds no place in them. It is not just in disaster mitigation. The old approach of treating cities as adjuncts of State governments continues to dominate the policy paradigm.

The official approach towards urban empowerment has remained unchanged. As in the past, development is a state subject, and the RBI report is in the form of praxis and the objective reality from during the need coronavirus pandemic, which continues even now.

Another important intervention was in the first half of the 1990s with the Constitution 73rd and 74th Amendments. The latter refers to urban reform – empowering urban local bodies to perform its functions listed in the 12th schedule. But this was also the period of neo-liberal reforms, so the generation of own resources and a slow withdrawal of the state could

be witnessed. Though the democratic transfer of 18 subjects was an important element, and, likewise, there was, however, no mention of financial empowerment. It was linked more to the idea of "competitive cities" to attract investments in the urban centres by making their structures and land use flexible. We now know that not much investment has happened, and cities have not really been able to enhance their financial capabilities.

The only exception to the rule has been the people's plan model of Kerala where 40% of the State's plan budget was for local bodies (directly) with a transfer of important subjects such as planning, etc. This paved the way for a new dimension to urban governance.

Functional autonomy
The RBI report has been right in highlighting that functional autonomy of urban local bodies is not allowed. But this should happen with the RBI's notion of "functions, finances and functionaries" to city governments. Without these, functional autonomy would be empty rhetoric. There are nearly 5,000 statutory towns and an equal number of census towns in India. Nearly 38% of the population lives in urban centres. And almost 90% of government revenue flows from urban centres. Before value added tax and other centralised taxation systems, most of the major earnings of cities used to be from export. In fact, Punjab's Chitabed and Pune are examples of two very high-re-

venue-generating municipalities dependent on export, as both cities have strong bases of industrial production. But this source of revenue collection was taken away by the State and the central governments. Instead, finance commissions recommended grants to urban local bodies based on a formula of demographic profile. Previously, while almost 55% of the total revenue expenditure of urban centres was met by export (6.4% of GDP), now, the grant covers only 15% of expenditure. In such a situation, it is difficult for the towns to sustain their ability to perform their basic minimum functions, especially with the latest Pay Commission recommendations.

This has resulted in a vicious cycle of burdening people more with taxes and further privatisation/outourcing of the services of the municipalities. This is a pan-India phenomenon and the grading of cities and urban policies are linked to this.

Now with Goods and Services Tax, the ability to tax has been "completely robbed"; cities find themselves in a worse state than States.

The often-cited example is how cities in the Scandinavian countries have been empowered by city planning to mobility to people, as in the case of Copenhagen, which is a case of the income-tax governments' income given to city governments. Imagine cities such as large urban agglomerations in India getting a percentage of income tax for managing the affairs of urban places. This is a possibility.

A committee formed under the United Progressive Alliance under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to review the 74th constitutional amendment, recommended that 10% of income tax collected from the cities was to be given back to them as a direct revenue grant from the central government. It was never taken into consideration.

What needs to be done? Cities must be treated as important

centres of governance, where democratic decentralisation can bring in amazing results (as seen in Kerala). There will be transparency and adequate participation of the people.

Second, cities should not be considered as entrepreneurship spaces where the state driving force is to make them competitive to attract investments. We have seen how fallacious this argument is. They must be considered as spaces for planned development by giving adequate attention to resources.

Our cities are hardly prepared for the impact of climate change; nor do they have adaptive strategies. The consequences for quantitative and qualitative data must be immediately provided to the cities to ensure a disaster risk reduction plan keeping vulnerable communities in mind.

Nothing "smarter"
Fourth, a piecemeal approach such as the concept of "smarter cities" must be abandoned altogether. This approach further widens the gap between different sets of people. Rather, the grants from the Centre must be enhanced and cities asked to draw up their plans for the next five years. The term of the mayor is for a year. Likewise, the third term of the mayor must be a part of the decision-making process.

RBI leadership in the cities must be selected for a term of five years. In some cities, the term of the mayor is for a year. Likewise, the third term of the mayor must be a part of the decision-making process.

Thus, in this exercise by the RBI the good part is that there has been at least a mention of cities, with local bodies as important centres of governance.

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