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New UN figures reveal huge cost of drought, desertification

Reuters
LONDON

In a year when extreme heat triggered droughts from southern Africa to South America, world leaders are meeting in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia this month to thrash out ways of tackling desertification and water scarcity.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called the summit - the 16th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP16) - a "moonshot moment" to accelerate action on land and drought resilience as some estimates predicted trillions of dollars would be needed to tackle the problem.

As the talks kicked off, a

new report showed global losses from drought cost \$307 billion a year.

The report, released Tuesday by UNCCD and the UN University Institute for Water, Environment, and Health (UNU-INWEH), puts the cost much higher than previously believed because earlier calculations focused on agriculture, overlooking the wider consequences on health and energy sectors.

Up to 40% of the world's land is degraded, droughts are becoming more frequent and severe, increasing by 29% since 2000 due to climate change and unsustainable land management, the UN says.

This threatens agriculture, water security, and livelihoods of 1.8 billion people, with the poorest



Parched land: COP16 had the largest-ever attendance of any UN land, drought talks to date. REUTERS

nations bearing the brunt.

Scientists say drought worsens water and air quality and intensifies sand and dust storms, causing respiratory illness

es and disrupting electricity grids. It can also harm food supplies when rivers dry up or food production becomes impossible because of water shortages.

Ibrahim Thiaw, the executive secretary of the UNCCD, said the summit should promote healthy lands and drought resilience to ensure food and

energy security, human development and peace.

He said this COP16 had the largest-ever attendance, including delegates from the private sector and civil society, of any UN land and drought talks to date.

"Achieving land and drought goals is essential to meet the global climate and biodiversity targets," Thiaw told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview via email.

The Riyadh summit comes after UN talks on biodiversity in Colombia in October and COP29 in Azerbaijan in November with the question of who pays to stem the worst effects of climate change taking centre-stage.

The Riyadh conference aims to accelerate investment and action in

drought resilience and land restoration, building on agreements negotiated during the last summit in Ivory Coast in 2022.

"Given the urgency of the challenge, the gravity of the impacts, and the unique opportunity before us, I call on all parties to rise their ambition and solidarity for our lands and our future," Thiaw said.

As talks began, host and oil producer Saudi Arabia announced the creation of the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership that will leverage public and private finance to support 80 of the most vulnerable and drought-hit countries around the world.

An initial \$2.15 billion has been pledged to the partnership by Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Develop-

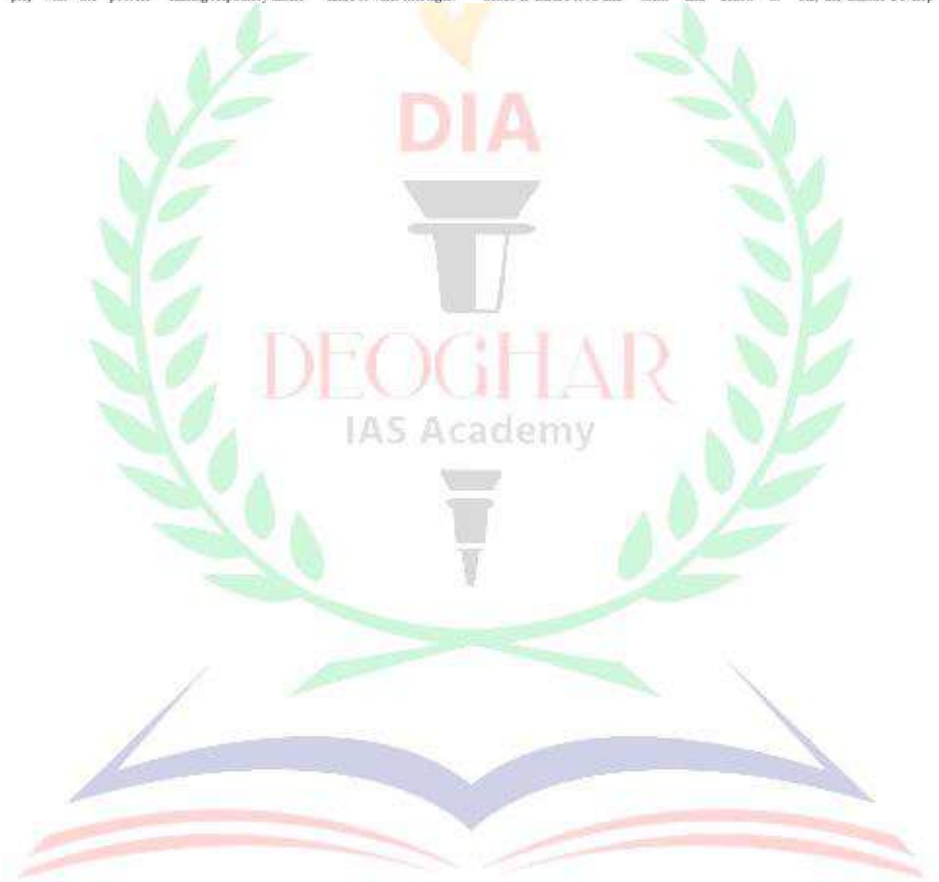
ment Bank and the OPEC Fund for International Development.

Nature-based solutions

The new UNCCD report said nature-based solutions, including planting trees, managing livestock grazing and creating green spaces in cities, offered cost-effective ways to combat drought.

The research found investment in natural capital - the world's natural resources - offered returns of \$1.40 to \$27 for every dollar spent in two years.

Such investments could include restoring and improving the health of soil so it can hold more water by, for example, using organic fertilisers and preventing nutrient depletion by rotating crops.



Rajya Sabha clears new Oilfields (Regulation & Development) law to grant petroleum lease

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha passed the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill aimed at delinking petroleum operations from mining operations, broadening the scope of "mineral oils", and introducing the concept of "petroleum lease", among its key provisions.

The Opposition, during the discussions, said some provisions in the Bill are against the interest of the States, and demanded the benefit of the decrease in prices of crude oil be shared with consumers.

Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said the Bill is



Hardeep Singh Puri

for granting leases on stable terms, strengthening petroleum operations through rules framed for grants of leases or licences, their extension or renewal, and sharing of production and processing facilities, including infrastructure

and safety at oilfields.

It also provides for efficacious dispute resolution, decriminalising the provisions of the previous Act by introducing penalties and creating an environment for facilitating energy transition, the minister said.

"We need the oil and gas sector for 20 more years. We need to bring this legislation here to provide a win-win confidence not only to our own operators but also to foreign investors so that they can come and do business here with a view to benefit everyone," Mr. Puri said, replying to the debate on the Bill.

DMK MP N.R. Elango demanded the Bill be sent to a select committee as cer-

tain definitions are against the federal rights of States.

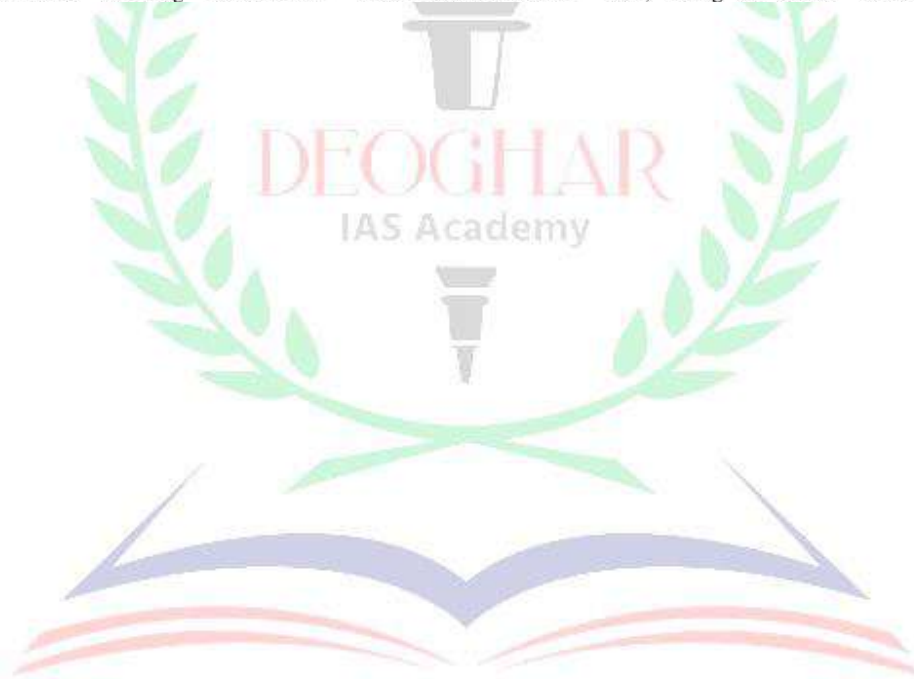
"The Bill seeks to expand the meaning of mineral oils. The word 'mine' is omitted from definitions. Mining lease is replaced with petroleum lease. There comes the problem," he said, adding the Bill's scope was expanded to give retrospective effect to such lease agreements.

Mr. Puri assured members the Bill was not about handing over the segment to the corporate sector. "The petroleum mining leasing will still have to be granted by State governments, no matter what changes have been brought about," Mr. Puri said, adding the Centre

had nothing to hide, and the Bill is a win-win for the States.

The Opposition reminded the BJP that before 2014, the party had promised to cut the price of petrol to ₹50 per litre but the prices increased even when the crude prices were low. Trinamool Congress MP Dola Sen, AAP MP Sanjay Singh and other Opposition speakers raised this issue.

Mr. Singh alleged the Bill was meant to invite big corporates into the sector. Ms. Sen said the Centre was trying to divest the oil PSUs. CPI's P.P. Suneer said the BJP's priority was corporate comfort over the exploitation of India's precious natural resources.



What are the toxins of the 1984 Bhopal disaster?

Past reports have indicated worrisome concentrations of hexachlorobutadiene, chloroform, carbon tetrachloride, and trichlorobenzene at the site of the plant, in addition to elevated levels of heavy metals

Vasudevan Mukunth

Forty years after the Bhopal disaster on December 2-3, 1984, several hundred tonnes of toxic waste still remain around the ill-fated Union Carbide plant. Despite pleas from locals and activists – bolstered over the years by orders from the National Green Tribunal and the Supreme Court – to dispose of the waste, the Madhya Pradesh government has only been able to get rid of a small fraction. Chemical analyses of soil, air, and water samples collected from the area have revealed the presence of toxic compounds at elevated concentrations. This year, Madhya Pradesh received ₹126 crore from the Union government to incinerate around 340 tonnes of the aboveground material, but others have resisted the plan saying burning the compounds will release poisonous fumes that could lead to further contamination and adverse health effects.

What toxins are associated with the disaster?

Union Carbide India, Ltd. (UCIL) built the Bhopal plant in the late 1960s to manufacture an insecticide called carbaryl using a reaction of methyl isocyanate (MIC) with 1-naphthol. MIC is a highly toxic compound. It reacts with water at high temperatures, and its reaction with water also releases heat.

On the night of December 2, 1984, a large quantity of water entered a tank storing MIC at the plant such that the MIC was soon boiling. Facilities at the plant to cool the tank were otherwise diverted, leaving MIC vapours to escape to the environment and spread through the settlements around the plant. MIC doesn't have a particular smell at concentrations at which other gases may become noticeable but it can irritate the eyes. However, given the hours, most of the people exposed to the gas were asleep.

The Union Carbide Corporation has never officially specified which gases were leaked from the plant, including MIC. This decision also compromised health workers' ability to respond effectively to the hordes of people who showed up in clinics and hospitals in Bhopal that night and the next day.

Some visual cues, including the blood-red colour of the viscera of those who died, also raised concerns that hydrogen cyanide was present in the fumes.

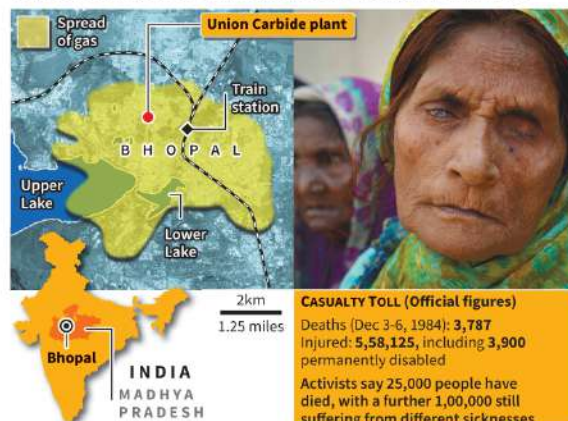
What are the toxins at the plant?

As *The Hindu* reported on December 2, "a 2010 government-commissioned study showed that ... the factory premises also contain about 11 lakh tonnes of contaminated soil, one tonne of mercury, and nearly 150 tonnes of underground dumps" – in addition to the 340 metric tonnes earmarked for incineration.

In 2001, the *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health* published an editorial by Jayshree Chander, then at the School of Medicine at the University of California San Francisco. Here, Dr. Chander citing a Greenpeace report released in 1999, based on analyses of samples collected at the site in May that year, wrote that Greenpeace reported the presence of

Toxins linger 40 years on

Chemical analyses of soil, air, and water samples collected from the area around the ill-fated Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh have revealed the presence of toxic compounds at elevated concentrations. Several hundred tonnes of toxic waste still lie around the plant



CASUALTY TOLL (Official figures)

Deaths (Dec 3-6, 1984): 3,787
Injured: 5,58,125, including 3,900 permanently disabled
Activists say 25,000 people have died, with a further 1,00,000 still suffering from different sicknesses

RESPONSIBILITY
The Indian government argues that slack management and deferred maintenance caused the disaster. Then-plant owner, the U.S. firm Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), blamed sabotage
In 2010, eight former managers of the plant were convicted of negligence and sentenced to short prison terms

UCC chairman Warren Anderson, who left India soon after the disaster, was sought by the Indian government, which had called for his extradition from the U.S.
He died in September 2014, aged 92

COMPENSATION
In 1989, UCC paid \$470m to the Indian government to settle litigation stemming from the disaster
But India is now backing a new court case to secure greater compensation – Dow Chemical, which bought UCC in 2001, denies liability

Payouts by the Indian government to Bhopal claimants over the years reportedly average \$550 apiece

CONTAMINATION
Environmentalists say the toxic chemicals remaining in the abandoned plant continue to leak, causing health problems
Dow says contamination is the responsibility of Indian authorities who took control of the site in 1998

Sources: Indian government, Madhya Pradesh government Picture: AP © GRAPHIC NEWS

mercury, chromium, copper, nickel, and lead. According to her, the report also noted the presence of hexachlorobutadiene, chloroform, carbon tetrachloride, and trichlorobenzene, among other compounds.

Reports from the area have also said the plant was disposing of untreated liquid effluent before the events of 1984.

In 2004, the Supreme Court ordered Madhya Pradesh to supply drinking water from tankers to 14 communities around the plant; by 2013 this exercise had expanded to encompass 22 communities.

In 2017, in response to a plea from an NGO, the court ordered the Indian Institute of Toxicology Research (IITR) to test water samples in 20 more communities.

In 2018, the IITR reported higher than permitted concentrations of nitrate and chloride compounds and heavy metals. The court subsequently ordered Madhya Pradesh to expand its water-supply operations to 42 communities overall. Since then, according to Amnesty International, the same NGO and others have identified persistent organic

pollutants in 29 more communities and have described it as evidence of contamination still spreading from the plant.

How toxic are heavy metals?

Chromium, copper, lead, mercury, and nickel are classified as heavy metals because their density is at least 5x that of water. Mercury has been known to damage multiple organs even at low concentrations by accumulating in soft tissue and preventing normal cellular function.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has said there is "sufficient evidence" for arsenic and its compounds being able to cause cancers of the urinary bladder and the lungs; for hexavalent chromium to cause cancers of the lungs; and for nickel and its mixtures to cause cancers of the lungs, nose, nasal cavity, and the paranasal sinuses.

According to a 2002 paper in the journal *Pathogens and Disease*, "Chromium is an essential nutrient required by the human body to promote the action of insulin for the utilisation of sugars, proteins and fats. ... But high

doses of chromium and long term exposure can give rise to various cytotoxic and genotoxic reactions that affect the immune system of the body."

Lead is capable of damaging chlorophyll and disrupting photosynthesis in plants and rendering structural damage to cells and hampering their ability to produce energy in animals. Also, lead from inorganic compounds has been correlated with stomach cancer and to a lesser degree with cancers of the lungs, kidneys, and the brain.

High levels of copper in the body have been known to damage the liver, the kidneys, and the gastrointestinal system.

How are organic compounds harmful?

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, hexachlorobutadiene is a possible carcinogen in humans.

When inhaled, ingested, or brought in contact with skin, this compound can cause the liver to store too much fat (hepatic steatosis), destroy cells in the kidneys involved in producing urine, and inhibit brain activity, among other effects. It is also corrosive.

Chloroform by another name is trichloromethane, and is infamous for its effects on the central nervous system. At a sufficient concentration, it can cause an adult to faint, but at even higher ones it can cause death. The IARC has classified chloroform as "possibly carcinogenic" on the back of limited evidence of cancer-causing potential in humans but more reliable evidence in animals.

In the PubChem database of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, carbon tetrachloride, that is carbon tet, is classified as an "acute toxin" and a "health hazard". It is notorious for its ability to damage the liver, including causing cancer. At present, a common way to be exposed to carbon tet is via contaminated groundwater. According to at least one review, ingesting 1 ml of carbon tet can blur vision, damage nerves, and/or cause heartbeat to become irregular.

Trichlorobenzene can take three chemical forms, or isomers, but all of them are volatile and spread easily through the air, although they have also been found in groundwater and in surface water bodies like lakes.

These compounds build up in the body's fatty tissues and at high concentrations can damage the liver and the kidneys.

Finally, Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) refer to organic compounds that don't break down easily and thus last for many years in the environment once they enter it. According to the Stockholm Convention on POPs, their effects include "cancer, allergies and hypersensitivity, damage to the central and peripheral nervous systems, reproductive disorders, and disruption of the immune system." Some POPs have also been associated with developmental disorders and worse outcomes in cancers of the liver, breasts, pancreas, and the prostate.

Note: The toxic effects described in this article are not guaranteed to occur, even at the requisite concentration, because toxicity also depends on the demographic, physiological, and genetic characteristics of the exposed individual.

What are the controversies around pardoning power?

What is the history of the pardoning power in the US? What is the current controversy?

Rangarajan. R

The story so far:

U.S. President Joe Biden has granted an unconditional pardon to his son Hunter Biden who faced sentencing for federal tax and gun convictions.

Can the President pardon anyone?

The 'royal prerogative of mercy' is a historic prerogative of the British monarch to grant pardons to convicted persons. This was originally used by the monarch to withdraw or provide alternatives to death sentences. At present it is used to grant clemency for any sentence or penalty based on ministerial advice. According to the U.S. Constitution, the President can grant pardon except in cases of impeachment. The U.S. President has absolute power of pardon for federal criminal offences. Such a pardon may be issued prior to the start

of a legal case as well as prior to or after a conviction for a crime.

Once accepted, the pardon grants relief from punishment and associated disqualifications but does not erase the conviction record.

What is the current controversy?

Right from the pardon to the leaders of the 'whiskey rebellion', who protested against a federal tax, granted by the first President George Washington in 1795 to President Bill Clinton's pardon of his half-brother Roger on the last day of his office in 2001, pardoning power has been mired in controversies. Donald Trump had pardoned his son-in-law's father in 2020. In the instant case, President Joe Biden has granted pardon to his son for tax and gun offences for which he has been convicted, and for any potential federal crimes that Hunter Biden may have committed between 2014 and 2024. This is in contrast to the public promises

that Joe Biden had made earlier that he would not pardon his son. The reason stated by the President was that Hunter Biden was selectively and unfairly prosecuted, and was singled out only because he is his son. Hunter Biden was convicted by a jury of illegally buying and possessing a gun as a drug user. He then pleaded guilty in a tax evasion case.

What is the Indian system?

Article 72 and 161 of the Constitution provide powers to the President and Governor respectively to grant pardon, commutation, remission, respite or reprieve to a convict. These are sovereign powers which are to be exercised on the advice of the council of ministers. A pardon in the Indian context absolves the offender from conviction, punishment and all associated disqualifications. There have been various instances in India where the acceptance, rejection or delay in decisions of mercy petitions by ruling

governments have been entangled in political controversies. The Supreme Court in the *Epuru Sudhakar* case (2006) has held that the exercise of pardoning power is subject to judicial review on the grounds of arbitrariness, mala fides or extraneous considerations.

What can be the way forward?

The pardoning power is a practice that has its origins during the time of absolute monarchy when there was no separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary.

Critics have argued that the pardoning power in modern times have been more often used for political considerations than to correct judicial errors.

In the U.K., the Criminal Cases Review Commission has been constituted to investigate alleged miscarriages of justice. It has diminished the use of the royal prerogative of mercy. This is a transparent and judicious manner of correcting judicial errors in a modern democracy, governed by the rule of law. However, till such time the pardoning power continues in the statute books, it must be exercised in a manner that does not reek of nepotism or arbitrariness. It is essential for retaining the trust of people, who are the source of all power in a democracy, in high constitutional offices.

Rangarajan R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Polity Simplified'. Views expressed are personal.

THE GIST

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The salience of the Places of Worship Act

Why was there communal violence in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh? What were Justice Chandrachud's remarks in the Gyanvapi case in 2022 and why did it spark political controversy? What does the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 stipulate?

EXPLAINER

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

A suit filed against the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal district, Uttar Pradesh, in which the trial court issued an ex parte order permitting a survey of the mosque, triggered violence on November 24, resulting in the death of four persons. The petitioners have alleged that the 16th century mosque was built at the site of an ancient Hari Har Mandir which was purportedly demolished by Mughal ruler Babur in 1529. The incident is part of a pernicious trend of local courts in States like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh entertaining civil suits contesting the origins of mosques across the country. Experts have however flagged that such suits constitute a violation of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.

What does the 1991 Act stipulate?

The 1991 Act was introduced by the Congress government under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao amid the communal turmoil that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992. Then Home Minister S.B. Chavan stated that the "enactment of this Bill will go a long way in helping restore communal amity and goodwill."

The law preserves the character of a place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947, and prohibits courts from examining whether any place of worship has been altered since that date. Section 3 of the Act forbids the conversion—either in whole or in part—of a place of worship from one religious denomination to another, or even within different sects of the same religion. However, the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute in Ayodhya was explicitly exempted from the Act's purview, as the matter was already sub judice when the law was enacted.

A five-judge Constitution Bench in the 2019 Ayodhya title suit affirmed that the



Tense times: The main gate of the mosque at Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh on November 27. BY MOORTHY

law was designed to protect the nation's secular fabric and imposes a positive obligation on the State to preserve the religious character of all places of worship as they stood on the day India attained independence. Although the disputed site was awarded to the child deity Ram Lalla, the top court barred the institution of similar suits concerning other religious places, in accordance with the provisions of the 1991 Act.

Why has it been challenged?

A slew of petitions have been filed in the apex court challenging the constitutionality of the law, including one by BJP leader and advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay. The petitioners argue that by freezing the status of religious sites as they stood in 1947, the law effectively prevents Hindus from "reclaiming" their places of worship that were allegedly

"invaded" by Muslim rulers and British colonialists. They further point out that destroyed temples retain their original character under Hindu personal laws and cannot be considered valid mosques under Islamic law without the establishment of a waqf.

In September 2022, a Bench led by then Chief Justice of India (CJI) U.U. Lalit directed the government to file a response on its stand within two weeks. However, two years later, the Centre has still not submitted its affidavit.

Noted academician Prof. (Dr.) Faizan Mustafa told *The Hindu* that the inordinate delay in hearing the challenge has emboldened lower courts to disregard the provisions of the 1991 law. "An authoritative pronouncement from the top court is crucial to preserving the country's social fabric. The government is duty-bound to defend the

constitutionality of parliamentary laws. Similarly, the court must expedite the hearing of the challenge with a presumption in favour of the Act's constitutionality. A heavy burden lies on the petitioners to prove its unconstitutionality," he said.

Why did Justice Chandrachud's remarks stir political row now?

In August 2021, five women associated with the Vishwa Vedic Sanatan Sangh filed a petition in a Varanasi civil court seeking year-round access to pray at a shrine located behind the western wall of the Gyanvapi mosque complex. They claimed the mosque housed several Hindu deities. On April 8, 2022, a Varanasi civil judge appointed an Advocate Commissioner to conduct a videographic survey to ascertain the alleged existence of these idols. The mosque committee challenged the order citing the 1991 Act. However, the High Court and later the Supreme Court refused to halt the survey.

In May 2022, during a hearing on the maintainability of the suit, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud remarked that the 1991 Act does not preclude inquiries into the status of a place of worship as of August 15, 1947, provided there is no intent to alter or convert its character. This interpretation marked a stark departure from the stance taken in the Ayodhya verdict, also purportedly authored by the former CJI. It also broadened the scope for district courts to entertain a host of similar petitions. This oral remark has also recently sparked a political storm, with Congress leader Jairam Ramesh claiming that it has since opened a Pandora's box.

"Oral observations hold no binding authority as they are not formally recorded in the order. The legislative intent of the 1993 Act could not have been any clearer – it explicitly bars even the admission of such suits. Such claims may only be considered if, on August 15, 1947, the site was unquestionably used by multiple religious communities, for instance, as both a temple and a mosque," explained Dr. Mustafa.

THE GIST

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▼ The Supreme Court is yet to decide the preliminary issue raised in several of these suits — whether the 1991 Act bars even the filing of pleas questioning the "original" status of a religious site or just the final alteration of its nature of worship.



Takeaways from COP29

While there were disappointments, there was much cause for celebration too

Sumant Sinha

Two major global events took place last month: the G20 Summit in Brazil and the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Baku, Azerbaijan. Catalysing finance to address climate change was a central theme at both events. The deal reached in Baku, though hard-won, falls short of expectations.

To be fair, the expectations for climate finance were never easy to meet. Assessments had shown that developing countries need \$1.3 trillion per year through 2035 to build infrastructure for adapting to climate change; investing in clean energy, land use, and urban development to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and recovering from disasters. This amount was to come from the 24 high-income countries listed in Annex I of the UNFCCC. Given the outlook of slow economic growth, green investments required in their own territories, and the likelihood of the U.S., which accounts for half of cumulative federal spending, pulling back, there was little appetite for a significant commitment.

The biggest disappointment, however, is that even the small commitment made – \$300 billion per year – does not come entirely from public finance, but from sources including Multilateral Development Banks, carbon markets, and private finance. It is recognised that private finance tends to flow to economies where returns are commercially attractive, and it can easily shift back to advanced economies when conditions change. This creates uncertainty about whether emerg-

ing economies will see much benefit. Even larger economies like India are unlikely to get adequate resources for priorities such as adaptation.

That said, there were significant victories as well. The set of agreements on carbon markets concluded a decade of negotiations. While bilateral carbon credit deals between countries had been taking place under Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement, COP29 clarified the procedures for authorising these credits, their transferability between registries, and the standards needed to ensure their environmental integrity. This prevents credits from being revoked and investment getting stranded. A bigger win was the move towards implementing a global carbon market under Article 6.4, with several procedural rules agreed upon. The swift adoption of these rules by individual countries is crucial to launching this market, which will help direct capital towards the most efficient emission reduction projects worldwide. India is likely to be a major beneficiary in this regard.

Other positive outcomes included new emission reduction pledges from the European Union, Canada, and other regions. Many nations committed to propose steeper 2035 targets in their revised Nationally Determined Contributions than their current commitments. The U.K. and Brazil have announced their updated targets, while Norway is consulting on its own. Mexico, under the leadership of climate scientist Claudia Sheinbaum, became the latest major economy to announce a goal to reach net zero by 2050.

At the G20 Summit, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto unveiled an ambitious plan to retire all coal and fossil fuel-fired plants by 2040. This is significant, as Indonesia is the largest exporter and third-largest consumer of coal globally. It also highlights that the focus on coal is back – a challenge that India

staved off in previous COPs in order to ensure that the focus remained on all fossil fuels. The lack of progress on the “phase-out” of all fossil fuels at

both COP29 and the G20 Summit is a cause for concern.

Should we acknowledge that the battle to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C has likely been lost, and adopt a more realistic target? A study released before COP29 indicated that the world was already 1.49°C warmer than pre-industrial levels by the end of 2023. Another suggests that there are still pathways to reverse temperature rise within the 1.5°C limit, even with a temporary overshoot. But this would require the removal of several hundred gigatonnes of carbon using untested carbon removal technologies. At present, large-scale investment in these technologies is not being seriously discussed. Despite this, the 1.5°C goal remains a key leverage point for developing countries, which use it to push for more financial support, and for large economies to take more aggressive steps to cut emissions. There are pros and cons to abandoning the 1.5°C target. It deserves serious thought.



Sumant Sinha is the founder, Chairman and CEO of ReNew, and was recognised as global climate leader in 2024
TIME100 Climate list

Power of pardon

Political interference can corrupt the working of the criminal justice system

Outgoing U.S. President Joe Biden has signed a presidential pardon for his son Hunter, for any federal crimes that he “committed or may have committed or taken part in” between January 1, 2014, and December 1, 2024. The younger Biden was convicted earlier this year on federal gun and drug charges and pleaded guilty to tax charges in California. Addressing the cases against his son, Mr. Biden said that unless there were aggravating circumstances, “people are almost never brought to trial on felony charges solely for how they filled out a gun form”. He also noted regarding the tax evasion allegations that late payment of taxes owing to “serious addictions”, with subsequent full payment of all taxes, interest, and penalties were typically given non-criminal resolutions, yet it was “clear that Hunter was treated differently”. On the one hand, there have been legitimate questions raised about the nature of the pardon – “full and unconditional” – that goes well beyond the gun and tax charges. Most likely, the vagueness of the language is deliberate to allow Hunter Biden to evade prosecutions that the incoming Trump administration might seek to foist upon him, possibly relating to charges of unlawful lobbying, corruption-related payments and similar crimes linked to his foreign business activities. Indeed, Donald Trump has already been impeached in Congress for attempting to pressure, for the sake of political gain, the Ukraine President into conducting investigations against Hunter Biden.

On the other hand, U.S. presidential pardons are hardly uncommon, with even Mr. Trump handing out 143 during his first term – including to Republican Party lobbyist Steve Bannon, the father of Mr. Trump’s son-in-law, Charles Kushner, and controversial figures such as Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, and former George W. Bush aide Lewis “Scooter” Libby. Presidential pardons to family members are not unprecedented either – Bill Clinton pardoning his half-brother Roger, convicted on drug-related charges. Yet, the larger question that Mr. Biden’s latest pardon begs is whether justice can be served fairly in a political ecosystem of bitter polarisation, the kind that is presently found in the U.S. When Mr. Biden said that he believed that “raw politics has infected this process” it was a reflection upon the increasing weaponisation of law enforcement authority to score political points – ironically, a charge that Mr. Trump levels against the Department of Justice under Mr. Biden. While there is no reason to assume that Presidents will not continue to issue pardons to their allies, leaders on both sides of the aisle would do well to show restraint and prevent political interference from corrupting the working of the justice system.



Rethinking 'representation' for a meaningful COP30

Frustration over the slow progress made during COP29 negotiations in Baku is hardly new. History has repeatedly shown us that the politics of climate change and the forces of nature rarely align. Adding to this challenge is the absence of a unified global authority to address the urgency of the issue. There is no world government or state to act on behalf of the planet. Compounding this challenge is the lack of a universal metric system capable of reconciling the diverse political, economic, and social interests of nation-states. While the jury is still out on whether COP29 was a “disappointment”, “failure”, or “disaster”, critics have often pointed out that ‘business as usual’ does not work. As Brazil prepares to host COP30 in Belém next year, here is an alternative suggestion on the concept of ‘representation’ for them.

This innovative methodology was pioneered by Bruno Latour, Emeritus Professor at Sciences Po, and Laurence Tubiana, France’s Climate Change Ambassador and Special Representative for the 2015 COP21 in Paris. In the lead-up to COP21, in May 2015, there was a week-long public event, hosted by Sciences Po, called the ‘Theatre of Negotiations’ at Nanterre-Amandiers on the outskirts of Paris. This experiment brought together 200 students from 143 universities worldwide to role play and reimagine a life-sized COP. The goal of this bold pedagogical initiative was to transform the traditional framework of climate negotiations. At its core was a radical rethinking of ‘representation’.

As Irish author Sally Rooney writes, “When American colonists famously rebelled against the practice of ‘taxation without representation,’ [how] is environmental devastation without representation any different? Even if carbon emissions were thoroughly democratically determined – which they are not – why should voters in the world’s richest countries have the right to poison the air, sea, soil, and rivers for the entire population of Earth?” People living on Polynesian islands or in Africa have no right to vote in American or European elections. Yet, they



Gaurav Daga

Associate
Vice-President at
Guidance, Industries
Department,
Government of
Tamil Nadu

Future climate
change
conferences can
achieve
meaningful
outcomes only if
there is honest
representation,
actionable
commitments,
and a
transparency
of intentions

often bear the brunt of the resulting environmental damage.

Granting equal rights

In the approach to representation, humans and non-humans – such as the atmosphere, oceans, and soil – were granted equal rights in negotiations. The idea was to give voice and agency to these non-human entities, allowing them to express their stakes in climate negotiations. Unlike conventional COP meetings, this assembly did not defer to the authority of science or nature, as these too were subjects of negotiation. The aim was to simulate a truly inclusive and representative process.

The theatre setting at Nanterre-Amandiers encouraged dynamic and creative reinterpretations of negotiation. Delegates dramatised and de-dramatised issues, explored alternative spatial-temporal perspectives, and allowed non-speaking entities to ‘represent’ or ‘speak’ through proxies. This flexibility opened new avenues for addressing climate challenges, from reframing territorial sovereignty to dramatising the interdependence of ecosystems and nations. For example, the ‘Ocean’ imposed conditions on the ‘United States,’ while the ‘Atmosphere’ directly addressed ‘China’ regarding greenhouse gas emissions. These novel interactions forced participants to reconsider the boundaries of sovereignty and territorial responsibility. This writer, who was a part of the Philippines delegation, represented a civil society organisation, voicing the concerns of indigenous, rural, and coastal communities. Each delegation comprised a diverse mix of actors – state and non-state representatives, scientists, business leaders, and civil society members – thus ensuring a broad range of perspectives.

The week-long simulation yielded profound insights. For delegates, it underscored the critical need for clear communication of interests, values, and territorial concerns. For organisers, it highlighted the logistical and resource

mobilisation challenges required to facilitate a process of this scale. For students, it revealed alternative pathways for advancing the climate agenda, recognising the limitations of existing negotiation frameworks. As simulators, we achieved our goal of creating a dynamic, inclusive, and scientifically informed pedagogical tool for climate action.

One could argue that the prevailing global governance system does not allow for such ‘representation’, or critique it from an anthropocentric point of view. While there are gaps in the existing legal-cum-institutional framework to govern and/or implement rights, the recurrent tendency to give representation of non-humans via courts (in the case of India, Pakistan), parliament (Ecuador, New Zealand) or other institutions (Canada) is to only enlarge its legal and political agency. Such tendency stems from the fact that non-humans are ‘interest bearers’ having moral standing and deserving political and legal representation.

There needs to be transparency

So, if future COPs are to achieve meaningful outcomes, honest representation and actionable commitments must be paired with a transparency of intentions. Hosting COPs in economies which are heavily reliant on oil, sends mixed signals, particularly when the host nation simultaneously promotes investment in state-run oil and gas enterprises. Such contradictions erode trust and undermine genuine progress.

It would be a significant step forward if COP30, held in Belém – the heart of the Amazon, gave representation to the ‘Amazon’ as an entity, exploring what possibilities this opens up. Bridging the gap between ambition and action requires not just new negotiation methods but also a willingness to align policies with the values we collectively champion. Let us hope we are not sleepwalking through the Anthropocene.

The views expressed are personal



Reflections on Baku's 'NCQG outcome'

The urgency of climate change has never been more evident. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has highlighted the need for significantly stronger commitments to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Current policies, if continued globally, are expected to lead to a temperature rise of up to 3.1°C. The increasingly visible impacts of climate change across geographies, apart from the growing body of scientific evidence, serve as a constant reminder of the need to accelerate climate action. Cleaner fuels and technological solutions are emerging across sectors and could be increasingly accessed and deployed with adequate focus on the means of implementation.

Against this backdrop with COP 29 (in Baku, Azerbaijan, in November 2024) branded as the "Finance COP", the hope was to see an ambitious outcome (specifically related to the NCQG or New Collective Quantified Goal) which strongly supported this understanding.

Financing needs of the developing world

Finance is a critical component in accelerating the adoption of cleaner alternatives, especially in developing countries. While some of the renewable technologies pay off in the long run due to lower fuel and operational costs, the upfront costs of some of these technologies are much higher than the current options requiring government support to ensure affordability at the consumer end. Other green technologies may still be evolving and are associated with risks of failure that front-runners may need to bear. Given the pressure on government resources that need to be prioritised towards development activities, additional finance must be up-scaled urgently within this decade if transformational changes are to be expected in the adoption of clean and efficient alternatives in developing countries, as access to modern energy and infrastructure improves.

India's expenditure on green energy schemes encompass a wide range of initiatives aimed at expanding renewable energy infrastructure, promoting energy efficiency and clean fuel and technology innovations as part of its commitment to global climate goals. MNRE received its highest ever allocation of ₹19,100 crore in the Budget 2024-25, apart from about ₹40 crore being allocated for enhancing energy efficiency. In the transport sector, a subsidy of ₹5,790 crore has been provided to electric vehicle manufacturers under phase-II of Faster Adoption and



Ritu Mathur

Director, Energy Assessment and Modelling, TERI



Sanchit Saran Agarwal

Associate Fellow, Energy Assessment and Modelling, TERI

It appears to have bypassed the principles of equitable burden sharing and climate justice, having failed to have recognised the financial needs of the global south

Manufacturing of (Hybrid) Electric vehicles (FAME) scheme.

Another aspect of finance required for the transition relates to the source and type of finance. There are growing concerns regarding fiscal debt, which forms the basis of the ask, for part of the financial support from developed countries to be in the form of public grants rather than loans.

The pace and the scale of transitions are also affected by the higher cost of capital in developing countries. Financial flows from developed countries must ideally aim to strengthen fiscal capacities and enable the unlocking of financial markets in developing countries to support and accelerate their climate action. The use of debt instruments to access finance does not work well for developing countries since their high debt burdens limit their ability to successfully incentivise domestic private capital for climate action. It is well recognised that developing countries attract much higher lending rates as compared to developed countries and much of the global financial flows are restricted within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Therefore, ensuring the flow of climate finance to developing countries at affordable lending rates is important.

Role of the NCQG

At Cancun, in 2010, developed countries had pledged to provide \$100 billion annually upto 2020. Further, at COP21 in Paris, the parties decided to establish an NCQG prior to 2025, with the Cancun commitment as the base point. The rationale for establishing the NCQG was pressing. The existing climate pledges have generally been criticised for their lack of specificity and accountability.

Therefore, the NCQG was intended to create a framework for shared climate goals, to establish clear and quantified objectives that nations could aim to achieve, with transparency and accountability at the forefront. At COP26 at Glasgow in 2021, an ad hoc work programme for NCQG discussions was established to run from 2022-24, culminating towards the discussions at COP29.

The Second Needs Determination Report by the Standing Committee on Finance under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) estimated that

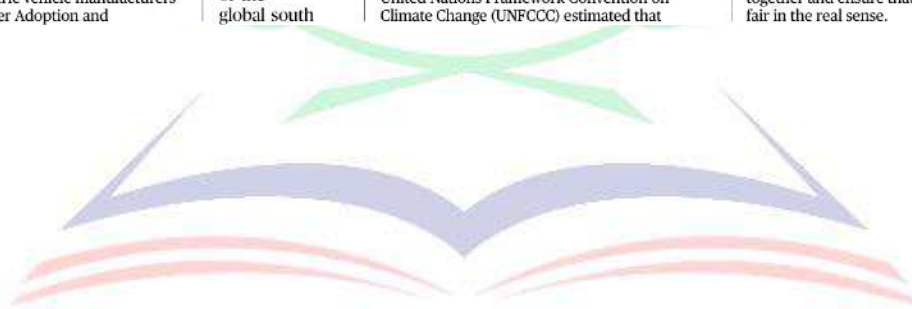
between \$5 trillion to \$7 trillion would be needed by 2030 to meet half the needs of 98 countries. Developing countries had put forward a conservative ask of \$1.3 trillion annually at COP 29 (largely from public sources to enable leveraging the rest through private finance).

However, the developed world has in the NCQG agreed to provide an abysmal figure of \$300 billion annually till 2035. This quantum is not only miniscule but hardly represents any major change in real flows – probably a target that could be achieved even with current or minimally additional efforts, if we account for inflation. Further, the mobilisation of funds is expected through all sources of finance including private capital. Undoubtedly, therefore, there is disappointment with the NCQG outcome, both on the quantum and structure of finance since it does not support the narrative of transformative action. While the decision to triple the flow of public resources through various operating entities of the Financial Mechanism, the Adaptation Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund, and the Special Climate Change Fund from the 2023 level by 2035 is a positive aspect, it could also see rather slow progress in the next few years (and not aligned to the narrative of the urgency in climate action).

The road ahead

COP29 saw the finance commitment step up from the earlier commitment of \$100 billion a year to \$300 billion a year. While this is a step in the correct direction, it is clearly not as ambitious as expected given that climate change is clearly recognised as one of the greatest threats and challenges of our time. Overall, the NCQG outcome is rather disappointing and does not seem to have aligned well with the very core of why the goal was set up in the first place. It clearly bypasses the principles of equitable burden sharing and climate justice as it fails to recognise the financial needs of the global south.

The way forward is to keep the talks ongoing. Climate change has no geographical boundaries. Thus, it is imperative that the international community cooperates towards the global good, keeping climate justice at the core and respecting the principles of the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR and RC). Developing countries must stick together and ensure that any transition is just and fair in the real sense.



QUESTION CORNER

When a storm passes over land



Q: What is landfall?

A: Once it's fully formed, a tropical cyclone (in the northern

hemisphere) has a complex 3D structure. Two important parts of it are the eye and the eyewall. The eye is the centre around which the cyclone rotates. It consists of cold air descending from the cyclone's top with warm air rising in a spiral around it. The eyewall consists of high thunderstorms that bring rain, lightning, and powerful winds.

As long as the cyclone moves over water, it can draw more moisture from below to produce new clouds and rain events around it. But when the storm crosses over onto land, its moisture supply declines drastically, and the cyclone weakens.

Landfall is the moment in a tropical cyclone's life when its eye moves over land. Stormy weather brought by a cyclone is stronger around the eye, and landfall events can be deadly because they expose human settlements on land to strong winds and heavy rain. Their effects can be compounded by storm



Tidal waves triggered by Cyclone Fengal lashed the R.K. Beach in Visakhapatnam on November 30. DEEPAK K.R.

surges that flood coastal areas and prevent inland areas from draining normally.

If the air over land is drier, among other factors, a cyclone weakens quickly after landfall. Depending on environmental conditions, it may dissipate completely, or it could pass over land and re-emerge on the other side. In 2021, Cyclone Gulab made landfall over coastal Andhra Pradesh, weakened as it moved across peninsular India, and re-emerged four days later as Cyclone Shaheen in the Arabian Sea.

- The Hindu Bureau



For feedback and suggestions

for 'Science', please write to
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ecDNA challenges law of genetics, groundbreaking new studies find

In normal human cells, the DNA is enclosed in 23 pairs of chromosomes. Some natural processes can damage DNA; cells can also make mistakes in DNA when making copies to imbue in new cells. Such processes could cause a small part of the DNA to break away and float freely inside the nucleus. This is ecDNA

Manjeera Gowravaram

Once brushed aside as a curiosity, extrachromosomal DNA (ecDNA) is now taking centerstage in the complex field of cancer biology. Scientists first discovered it as a small fragment of genetic material in cancer cells 50 years ago. Because it was present in only 1.4% of tumours, they didn't consider it to be important.

But more sophisticated genomic techniques later revealed their mistake: one study published in 2017 revealed ecDNA is present in nearly 40% of cancer cell lines and in up to 90% of patient-derived brain tumour samples, revealing its pivotal role in cancer biology.

On November 6, three papers were published in the journal *Nature* by a team called eDyNAmiC – an international collaboration led by Stanford University professor Paul Mischel. The studies explore how ecDNA is formed and contributes to the progression of cancer and drug resistance.

Importantly, the findings also challenge a fundamental law of genetics.

What is ecDNA?

In normal human cells, the nucleus contains 23 pairs of chromosomes that enclose the DNA. There are some natural processes that can damage DNA. For example, in chromothripsis, which occurs in some cancers, the chromosomes are broken and rearranged. Cells can also make mistakes in the DNA when making copies of it to imbue in new cells. Such processes could cause a small part of the DNA to break away from the main chromosome and form a circular structure that floats freely inside the nucleus. This is ecDNA.

One of the three studies was led by eDyNAmiC members Mariam Jamal-Hanjani and Charles Swanton, both professors at University College London. They analysed the mutation patterns in tumours before and after the formation of ecDNA. They identified various environmental factors, including smoking, exposure to certain substances, and genetic mutations, to be triggers of DNA damage that could lead to the formation of ecDNA. In the same study, the researchers attempted a comprehensive analysis of samples from nearly 15,000 cancer patients from the U.K.'s 100,000 Genomes Project, covering 39 tumour types. They validated their findings using a method called fluorescence in-situ hybridisation (or FISH), which specifically looks for certain cancer-related genes in tissue samples. They found that ecDNA was present in



Researchers analysed samples from nearly 15,000 cancer patients from the U.K.'s 100,000 Genomes Projects. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

about 17% of tumour samples but more so in liposarcomas, brain tumours, and breast cancers. They also reported that the prevalence of ecDNA rose after treatments like chemotherapy and correlated with metastasis and worse patient outcomes.

ecDNA and cancer growth

ecDNA present in tumours often contains multiple copies of oncogenes – mutated genes capable of causing cancer – that are required to activate tumour growth. But these oncogenes are not present in chromosomes, where scientists used to believe they lived.

A study published in 2021, led by another Stanford University professor, Howard Chang, showed that while chromosomal DNA is fixed within specific regions in the cell, ecDNA moves freely and can interact with other ecDNA to form hubs – concentrated zones where oncogenes are expressed more.

Cells transcribe DNA to mRNA to use the latter to manufacture proteins. The 2021 study also found that when cells transcribe ecDNA to mRNA, the process causes specific oncogenes to become four-times more common in the cell than if the DNA came from the chromosomes.

This anomaly has the potential to accelerate the evolution of tumours and help the cancer resist drugs.

An inheritance of loss

Another finding reported in the new studies involves a fundamental shift in scientists' understanding of genetics.

ecDNA was present in about 17% of tumour samples but more so in liposarcomas, brain tumours, and breast cancers. Prevalence of ecDNA rose after chemotherapy and correlated with metastasis and worse patient outcomes

Typically, when cells divide, they duplicate the chromosomes and distribute them equally among their daughter cells. In this process, researchers have known the genes on the same chromosome are inherited together while those on different chromosomes are distributed independently of one another. This basic genetic principle is called Mendel's third law of Independent assortment (named after Gregor Mendel).

But in the second of the three studies, a team led by Mischel and Chang used single-cell sequencing, imaging, and modelling to report that ecDNA is passed on in clusters to the daughter cells during cell division – a violation of the third law. This clustering gives some cancer cells an advantage because it allows them to enhance gene interactions, support cancer growth, and preserve favourable genetic combinations over multiple life-cycles. The researchers have called this the "jackpot effect."

This discovery has profound implications. It overturns the idea that gene inheritance is entirely random when the genes are not linked by DNA strands. The researchers also reported that the

transcription process – from DNA to RNA – facilitates the coordinated segregation of ecDNA during cell division.

A new vulnerability in cancer cells

But for the new threats posed by ecDNA, the third study uncovered a potential weakness in tumours that depend on ecDNA. The unusual structure of the ecDNA and its interactions with other DNA elements increase the activity of specific genes. This can lead to a conflict between the cellular machinery involved in making RNA and the activity of cancer cells that leads to DNA damage.

Cells respond to this conflict by the heavy use of a protein called CHK1, which helps fix DNA and allows the cell to keep growing. When the researchers used a drug called BBI-2779 that blocks CHK1, they found the drug selectively killed cancer cells with ecDNA, significantly reducing the number of tumours in mice with stomach cancer.

A San Diego-based biotechnology company co-founded by Mischel and Chang, called Boundless Bio, is currently working to translate these discoveries for clinical use. The company's stated aim is to give patients new treatment options that target vulnerabilities created by ecDNA. This is particularly crucial for patients with ecDNA-driven cancers, such as glioblastoma and ovarian and lung cancers, where current treatments often fall short.

(Manjeera Gowravaram has a PhD in RNA biochemistry and works as a freelance science writer. gmanjeera@gmail.com)

THE GIST

An international collaboration by a team called eDyNAmiCled has discovered how ecDNA contributes to the progression of cancer and drug resistance. The findings contradict Mendel's third law of independent assortment

eDyNAmiC members analysed mutations in tumours and identified environmental factors, including smoking, exposure to certain substances, and genetic mutations, to be triggers that could lead to the formation of ecDNA

ecDNA in tumours often contains copies of oncogenes that are required to activate tumour growth. But these are not present in chromosomes, where scientists used to believe they lived

Researchers have found a drug called BBI-2779 that selectively kills cancer cells with ecDNA. A company is now working towards clinical use. This is crucial for patients with ecDNA-driven cancers, such as glioblastoma, ovarian, and lung cancers

On World Wildlife Day, making a clarion call to protect India's critically endangered species

The Hindu Bureau

Despite possessing only 2.4% of the world's land area, India accounts for 7-8% of all recorded species, which includes 45,000 species of plants and 91,000 of animals. This rich biodiversity is one of the reasons that it has been historically identified as a megadiverse country.

World Wildlife Conservation Day (December 4) serves as an occasion to not only celebrate the country's rich biodiversity but also evaluate if enough is being done to protect the critically endangered species that find a home here.

India has 10 biogeographic zones and is home to 8.58% of the mammalian species documented so far, with the corresponding figures for avian species being 13.66%, for reptiles 7.91%, for amphibians 4.66%, for fish 11.72% and for plants 11.8%.

Four of the 34 globally identified biodiversity hotspots, namely the Hima-



layas, Indo-Burma, the Western Ghats-Sri Lanka and Sundaland, are located in India.

With only about 2.4% of the world's total land surface, India punches far above its weight in encompassing the breadth that evolution has to offer. However, the natural bounty is often at odds with India's economic trajectory.

As the most populous country in the world and with 65% of the population aged under 35, India's growth trajectory implies a hunger for natural resources: land, wood, timber, forest produce, precious metals, coal and more. This unfortunately conflicts with wildlife habitat, bringing several species – of the land and air – too close to

comfort with human settlements.

Indian civilisation has absorbed a tolerance, even reverence for several wild animals as is evidenced in its religious mythology. The wildlife reserves and sanctuaries in India, set up to conserve certain endangered species, are unfenced, unlike the big game reserves in Africa and neither is hunting permissible in India as a licensed, recreational sport.

Risk of extinction

However this doesn't imply that India is a haven for wildlife. There are 73 "critically endangered" species in India as of 2022 – the most updated estimates made available by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies species as critically endangered when they are at the highest risk of extinction in the wild. The number of critically endangered species has risen from 47 in

2011, though this also due to improvements in data availability and monitoring and not entirely due to animals of a species getting decimated.

Of the nine species of mammals considered critically endangered, eight are endemic, which means that their habitat is limited to a small geographic area within India. These include the Kashmir stag or Hangul, Malabar large-spotted civet, Andaman Shrew, Jenkin's shrew, Nicobar shrew, Nandapha flying squirrel, large rock rat and Leafletted leaf-nosed bat.

While the carnivores of the cat family – lions, tigers, cheetahs – garner considerable attention because of their appeal to tourism, they are only three on the list of critically endangered animals.

Birds such as the Great Indian Bustard face threats from sources such as powerlines in Rajasthan and often fail to garner the attention they deserve for their conservation.



U.S. approves \$1.17-bn deal for equipment for MH-60R helicopters

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The United States has approved a possible \$1.17-billion deal to sell India support equipment for MH-60R multi-role helicopters under its Foreign Military Sales programme.

Nine of the 24 choppers contracted under a \$2.2-billion deal with Lockheed Martin in February 2020 have been inducted into India's armed services so far, officials said.

The U.S. Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) delivered the required certification notifying the U.S. Congress of this possible sale of follow-on systems. "The Government of India has requested to buy 30 Multifunctional Information Distribution System-Joint Tactical Radio Systems," the DSCA said.

To deter threats

"The proposed sale will improve the Government of India's capability to deter current and future threats by upgrading anti-submarine warfare capabilities. India will have no difficulty absorbing this equipment and services in-



The principal contractor will be Lockheed Martin.

to its armed forces," the notification said.

The principal contractor will be Lockheed Martin and any offset agreement will be defined in further negotiations.

Other items which do not fall in the major defence equipment category and are part of the prospective sale include advanced data transfer systems; external fuel tanks; forward-looking infrared systems; an operator machine interface assistant; spare containers; facilities study, design, construction and support; support and test equipment; munitions; integration and test support; spare and repair parts; and intermediate and depot-level repair capabilities and spares.



Bank Bill passes LS, allows one account, 4 nominees

Finance Minister says proposed amendments will strengthen governance and enhance customer convenience; Opposition criticises government over inflation being higher than economic growth

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, the first Bill of the Winter Session after the week-long logjam ended.

The Bill, piloted by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, was approved by a voice vote.

The Bill allows bank account holders to have up to four nominees in their accounts and also proposes changes related to redefining “substantial interest” for directorships, which could increase to ₹2 crore instead of the current limit of ₹5 lakh.

It proposes to increase the tenure of directors (excluding the chairman and whole-time director) in cooperative banks from eight years to 10 years, so as to align with the Constitution (Ninety-Seventh Amendment) Act, 2011.

Once passed, the Bill will allow a director of a Central Cooperative Bank to serve on the Board of a State Cooperative Bank. The Bill also seeks to give greater freedom to banks



Discussions begin: Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Winter Session of Parliament. PTI

in deciding the remuneration to be paid to statutory auditors.

It also seeks to redefine the reporting dates for banks for regulatory compliance to the 15th and last day of every month instead of the second and fourth Fridays.

“The proposed amendments will strengthen governance in the banking sector and enhance customer convenience with respect to nomination and protection of investors,” Ms. Sitharaman said while moving the Bill for consid-

eration and passing.

Depositors will have the option of successive or simultaneous nomination facility, while locker holders will have only successive nomination. “The intention is to keep our banks safe, stable, healthy, and after 10 years you are seeing the outcome,” Ms. Sitharaman said.

Participating in the debate earlier, the Opposition parties criticised the Bill.

Gaurav Gogoi, Deputy Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, questioned the rising imports from

China at a time when relations between the two countries were strained. He also questioned the government over demonetisation and electoral bonds.

Rani Srikumar of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam questioned the fees for basic banking services such as ATM withdrawals and SMS alerts and expressed concern over the vulnerability of senior citizens to cyberfraud.

Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) leader Supriya Sule proposed a stricter approach to tackling financial fraud, and suggested that perpetrators compensate victims before serving prison sentences.

Congress MP Karti Chidambaram said the Indian rupee against the US dollar was at ₹84.73, and the growth rate in quarter two of FY25 was 5.4%, the lowest in seven quarters, while the inflation was 6.21%. “Whenever inflation is greater than economic growth, it will lead to stagflation. Against this backdrop, this government has brought about the Banking Laws Amendment Bill,” he said.

Justice Manmohan appointed judge of Supreme Court

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Union government on Tuesday notified the appointment of Justice Manmohan, the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, as a judge of the Supreme Court.

“In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution of India, the President is pleased to appoint Shri Justice Manmohan, Chief Justice, High Court of Delhi, to be a Judge of the Supreme Court of India, with effect from the date he assumes charge of his office,” the Department of Justice notification read.

Acting Chief Justice

Justice Vibhu Bakhru, the senior most *puisne* judge of the Delhi High Court, has been appointed Acting Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court with effect from the date Justice Manmohan relinquishes the charge of his office consequent upon his elevation as a Supreme Court judge.

Justice Manmohan’s ele-



Justice Manmohan

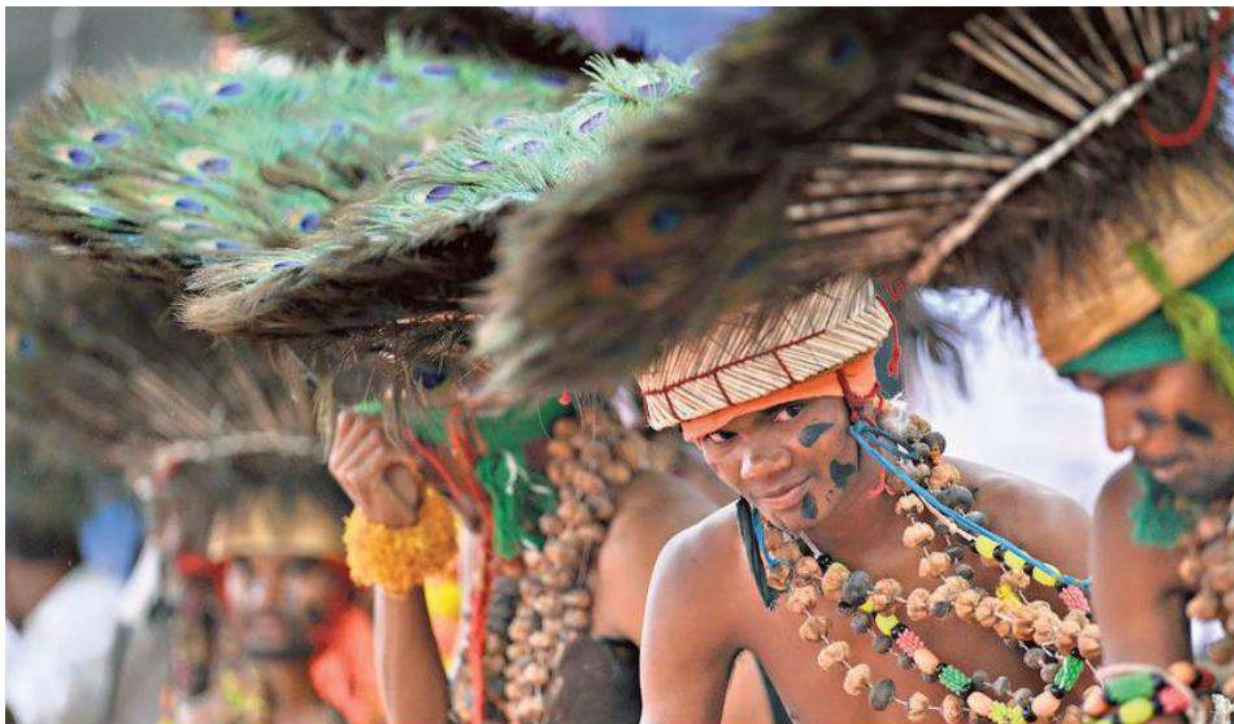
vation increases the Supreme Court’s judicial strength to 33, one short of the full sanctioned strength.

The Supreme Court Collegium, headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna, had recommended Justice Manmohan’s name for appointment as a top court judge on November 28. He was also the first recommendation to the Supreme Court Bench from the Collegium led by Chief Justice Khanna.

The two vacancies had arisen in the top court with the retirements of Chief Justice Khanna’s predecessor, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, and Justice Hima Kohli.



Vibrant moves



Claiming success: Artistes from the Gond tribe perform the Gussadi dance during the 'Praja Palana Vijayotsava', to commemorate the completion of one year of the Congress government in Telangana on Tuesday. NAGARA GOPAL



India, China ties set on right track: Jaishankar

External Affairs Minister in Parliament cites 'continuous diplomatic engagement' with Beijing for disengagement along the Line of Actual Control; Lok Sabha Speaker disallows questions by Opposition on the matter; Minister says government took 'firm and principled' stance during the talks and had ensured that India's national security was upheld

Suhasini Haider
NEW DELHI

India and China have set ties in the "direction of some improvement", External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar told Parliament on Tuesday, crediting "continuous diplomatic engagement" and a step-by-step approach with Beijing in achieving disengagement in border areas, where he said the situation had been "abnormal" since 2020 as a "result of Chinese actions".

"We have been very clear that the restoration of peace and tranquillity would be the basis for the rest of the relationship to move forward," Mr. Jaishankar said.

In a 20-minute *suo motu* statement to the Lok Sabha, he recounted steps leading to the agreement announced on October 21, in which the Indian Army

and People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces agreed to disengage troops at Demchok and Depsang, and work towards de-escalating tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla refused requests from the Opposition for any questions or clarifications to the statement.

"As a result of this recent understanding, arrived at after intensive negotiations, resumption of patrolling to the traditional areas is under way," Mr. Jaishankar said, adding that patrols had conducted the "verification of disengagement on the ground" as well.

He said that disengagement from all friction points at the LAC has now been "fully achieved", and that the next priority would be de-escalation, or the withdrawal of troops from the area, and also the

Next steps

With disengagement 'fully achieved' at the India-China border, the EAM details the developments to follow as per agreement between the two countries

- Talks on de-escalation along Line of Actual Control (LAC)
- Discussions on management of border and confidence-building measures
- Meeting of Special Representatives Ajit Doval and Wang Yi
- Meeting of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and his Chinese counterpart

We have been very clear that the restoration of peace and tranquillity would be the basis for the rest of the relationship to move forward

S. JAISHANKAR
External Affairs Minister



management of border areas. He said the Special Representatives and Foreign Secretaries of the two countries would meet soon to take ties forward.

String of meetings

He said the government's stance during negotiations had been "firm and principled".

They were driven by "unstable" local situation, and the impact of the tensions on the bilateral relationship, he said, adding that the negotiations included 17 meetings of the WMCC (Working Mechanism for Cooperation and Coordination) and 21 rounds of the SHMC (Senior Highest Military Com-

manders meeting) since 2020.

The Minister said that the October 21 agreement had followed the two meetings he had with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in July, and one meeting between National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval and Mr. Wang in September.

Since the agreement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had met Chinese President Xi Jinping, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and the Foreign Ministers had met on the sidelines of various conferences.

He also said that the focus had been on Demchok and Depsang since September 2022, which were the two remaining points of friction after the governments had achieved disengagement on five other points, including the Pangong Tso Lake and the Hot

Springs area. While he did not refer to "buffer zones" directly, Mr. Jaishankar said that "steps of a temporary and limited nature" had been taken in order to avoid further friction, and would be revisited "as the situation demands".

In the wake of the October 21 agreement, several former military and diplomatic officials have questioned how *status quo ante* could be restored unless the buffer zones were dismantled.

Mr. Jaishankar claimed the government had ensured India's national security was upheld, with three key principles during the talks – that both sides should strictly respect and observe the LAC; that neither side should attempt to unilaterally alter the *status quo*; and that agreements and understandings reached in the past must be fully abided

by in their entirety.

In his speech, Mr. Jaishankar reaffirmed the government's contention, which has been questioned by the Opposition, that Chinese troops had "amassed" along the LAC but not transgressed into territory or posts controlled by India.

At various points in the past four years, experts have cited satellite images to hold that Chinese troops had made inroads into the Indian side of the LAC, and an official police paper in 2023 had said that Indian troops had lost access to 26 out of 65 patrolling posts in eastern Ladakh.

However, the government has held consistently that no territory has been ceded, and the Prime Minister said in June 2020 that "no one had crossed into Indian territory nor had any Indian border posts been taken".

