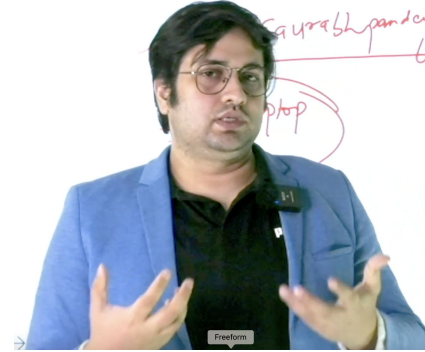


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- **Supreme Court Rescues Student's Admission**
- **Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary**
- **The First Rocky Planet Orbiting a White Dwarf**
- **India's Nuclear Energy Sector Expansion**
- **Elderly Population Challenge**
- **Key Concepts in Gender Theory**
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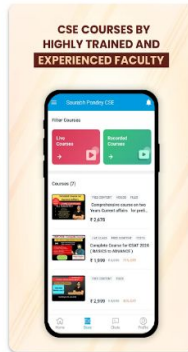
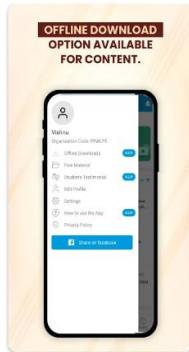
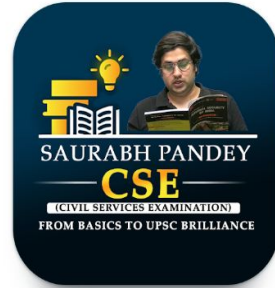
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# SC reopens IIT doors for daily wager's son who could not pay fees on time



**Krishnadas Rajagopal**

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday came to the rescue of a student, the son of a daily wager and a member of a Scheduled Caste community, who missed admission to the Indian Institute of Technology (Dhanbad) due to his inability to pay ₹17,500 as fees on time before the admission portal closed.

“He is a brilliant student. No child seeking education should go back disappointed from the Supreme Court,” Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, heading a three-judge Bench, said. The

**Top court uses its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to facilitate the admission**

court exercised its extraordinary power under Article 142 of the Constitution to open the doors of IIT Dhanbad to Atul Kumar, who was present in the courtroom.

**Last chance**

Mr. Kumar had secured a rank of 1,455 for the JEE (Advanced) 2024 in his category. He had been allotted a seat at IIT Dhanbad for the four-year Bachelor

of Technology course in Electrical Engineering. It was his second and final shot at securing admission.

The court noted that Mr. Kumar had struggled against the odds to achieve his dream to study at an IIT. The family income was below the poverty line. He had studied in a higher secondary school at Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh.

He had logged in to the admission portal on June 24 after his parents managed to collect ₹17,500. However, the portal closed by the time he could complete filling in his details. After his attempts to communicate his quandary with the exam authority IIT Madras,

Mr. Kumar approached the Madras High Court through legal aid. The High Court advised him to appeal to the Supreme Court for relief.

“Affirmatively, he is a talented student who belongs to a marginalised community and who has done everything to secure admission. Our power to do substantive justice under Article 142 is precisely for situations like this,” the Chief Justice noted. “All the best,” he wished Mr. Kumar at the end of the hearing.

Mr. Kumar is one of three brothers. His siblings are studying in IIT Kharagpur and NIT Hamirpur.





# Topic → Supreme Court Rescues Student's Admission

## Overview

The Supreme Court intervened to help a student, who missed the admission deadline for IIT Dhanbad due to financial constraints.

The Chief Justice emphasized the importance of education and fairness in opportunities.

## Key Points:

**Student Profile:** Atul Kumar, son of a daily wager, represents a Scheduled Caste community.

**Fee Issue:** Missed ₹17,500 fee payment deadline affected his admission.

**Judicial Action:** The Supreme Court exercised its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to ensure admission.

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# *Free range*



**Wild set:** One-horned rhinos grazing in the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Morigaon district of Assam on Monday. Assam's Kaziranga National Park and other wildlife sanctuaries are all set to welcome visitors for the new season from Tuesday. RITU RAJ KONWAR

# Topic → Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary

## Overview of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary

Location: Assam, India 🌍

Established: 1987

Size: 38.8 square kilometers

Notable Species: One-horned rhinoceros 🐘

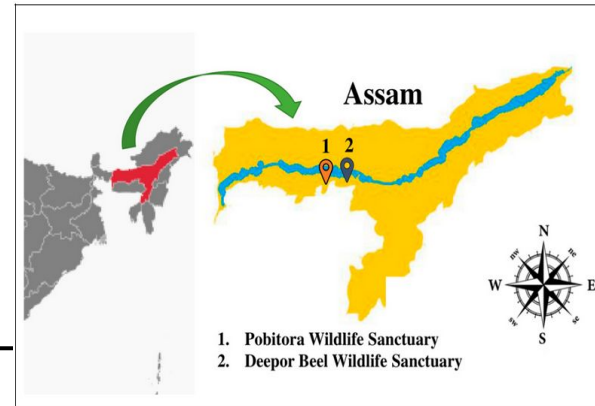
The Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary is known for its high density of the Indian rhinoceros and diverse flora and fauna.

## Features

Biodiversity

Flora: Grasslands, wetlands 🌾

Fauna: Various bird species (over 200)





An artist's impression shows a rocky planet orbiting a stellar remnant called a white dwarf roughly 4,200 light years from earth in this undated illustration. REUTERS

## *Frigid planet offers glimpse of earth's final fate*

Reuters

The first rocky planet ever spotted orbiting a burnt-out star, called a white dwarf offers a glimpse of what may be in store for the earth billions of years from now – showing it is possible our planet might survive the death of the Sun, albeit as a cold and desolate outpost in space. The planet, with a mass about 1.9 times that of the earth, is orbiting the white dwarf about 4,200 light years away from our Solar System near the bulge at the centre of the Milky Way galaxy, according to a study using data from Hawaii-based telescopes.

The white dwarf began as an ordinary star, one or two times the mass of the Sun. Its current mass is about half the Sun's. Stars with a mass less than eight times the Sun's end their lives as a white dwarf, the most common type of stellar remnant.

Before its host star's death, the planet orbited at a distance, possibly placing it in the "habitable zone" – not too hot and not too cold – where liquid water could exist on the surface and perhaps support life. It originally orbited at about the same distance as the earth is from the sun.

**Astronomers are debating if the earth will be engulfed when the Sun expands during its red giant phase. It will become a white dwarf a billion years after that**

Following its star's demise, it is at 2.1 times that distance.

"It's currently a freezing world because the white dwarf, which is in fact smaller than the planet, is extremely faint, compared to when it was a normal star," said University of California (UC), San Diego astronomer Keirong Zhang, lead author of the study published on September 26 in the journal Nature Astronomy.

The Sun, roughly four and a half billion years old, is destined to become a white dwarf.

"At the end of our Sun's life, it will puff up to enormous size – astronomers call it a red giant – and gently blow off its outer layers in a wind," UC Berkeley astronomer and study co-author Jessica Lu said. "As our Sun loses mass, the planets' orbits will expand to larger sizes. Eventually, the sun loses all of its outer layers and leaves behind a hot, compact core. This is called a white dwarf."

Astronomers have debated whether the earth would be engulfed and destroyed when the Sun expands during its red giant phase, estimated to occur seven billion years from now. It will become a white dwarf a billion years after that. Until now, only gas giant planets larger than Jupiter, our Solar System's biggest planet, had been spotted orbiting white dwarfs.

The white dwarf is orbited by two bodies: the earth-like planet and, further out, a brown dwarf, an object bigger than a planet but smaller than a star.

As the sun ages and heats up, our solar system's habitable zone would move outward. The earth will remain habitable for less than about a billion more years from now, by which point its oceans likely will have evaporated, Zhang said.

# Topic → The First Rocky Planet Orbiting a White Dwarf




## Overview of the Discovery


Rocky Planet: First of its kind detected orbiting a white dwarf star 

Significance: Provides insight into Earth's potential future as the Sun evolves 

Distance: Approximately 4,200 light-years from Earth 

## Key Findings:

Planet Mass: About 1.9 times that of Earth 

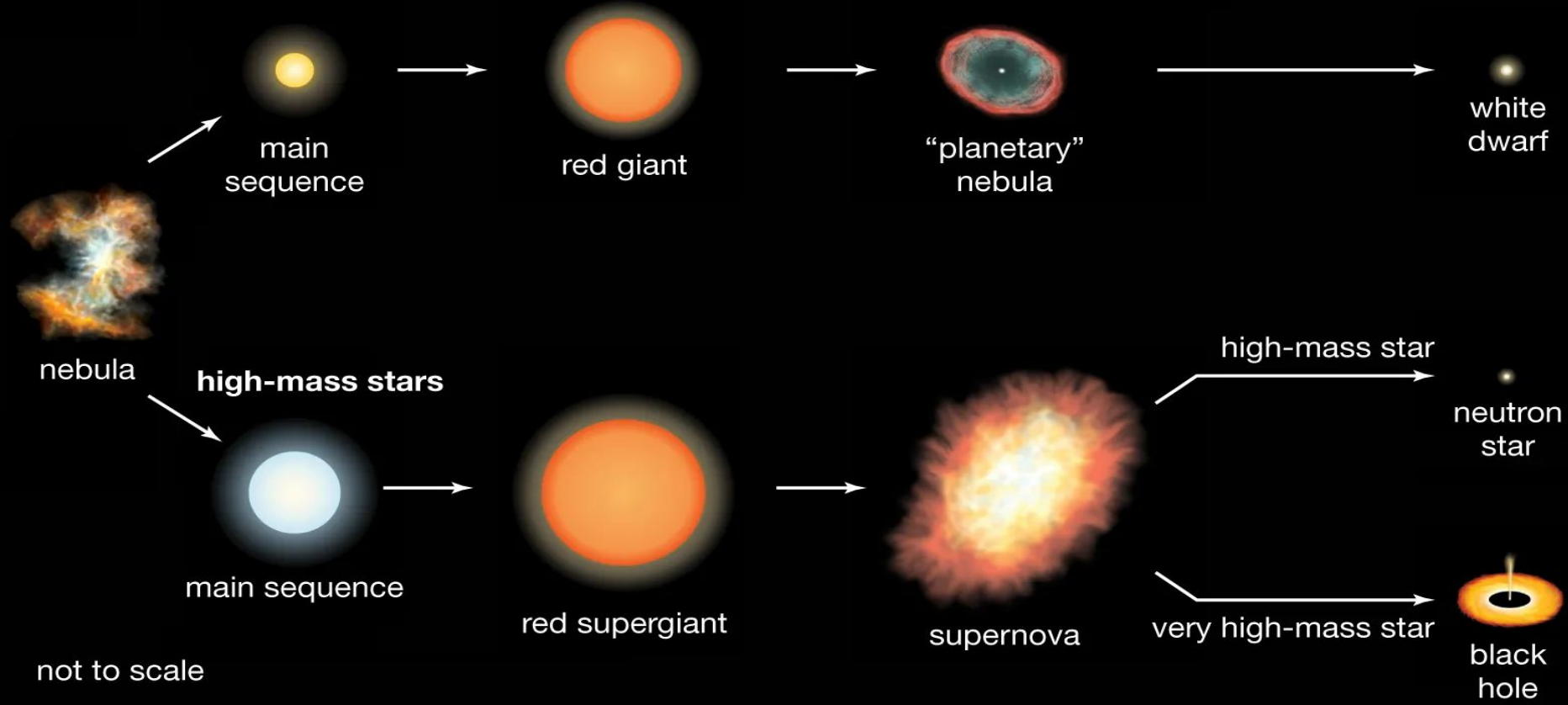
Current Condition: A cold and desolate world, potentially a glimpse into Earth's fate 

The white dwarf began as a star, one or two times the mass of the Sun, and is now about half its original mass. This discovery hints at what could happen to Earth billions of years from now.

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# Stellar evolution

low- and medium-mass stars  
(including the Sun)



not to scale



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## Planetary Characteristics

Habitable Zone: Originally in a zone where liquid water could exist




Current Orbit: Now at 2.1 times the distance of Earth from the Sun



## Implications for Earth:

Future of Earth: May survive the Sun's death, but in a frigid state



Astronomical Predictions: Sun expected to evolve into a red giant and then a white dwarf in about 8 billion years 

# Having private participation in India's nuclear energy

In July 2024, the Government of India, while presenting the Union Budget for FY 2024-25, *inter alia*, made announcements on the expansion of India's nuclear energy sector, proposing partnerships with the private sector for research and developing Bharat Small Reactors (BSR), Bharat Small Modular Reactors (BSMR) as well as newer nuclear energy technologies. Presumably, this announcement is aimed at India's ambitious pursuit of the decarbonisation of energy generation and achieving 500 Gigawatts of non-fossil fuel-based energy generation in India by 2030, as pledged at the COP26 Summit in Glasgow, in 2021.

With the government's new announcement, there is renewed interest in revisiting the existing framework governing the Indian nuclear energy sector to assess what kind of changes that may be required. The Atomic Energy Act, 1962 (AEA) – it was amended as the Atomic Energy (Amendment) Act, 1987 (No. 29 of 1987) – is the primary governing statute at the helm of the development and the operation of the nuclear energy sector. Pertinently, Section 3(a) of the AEA, 1962 empowers only the central government "to produce, develop, use and dispose of atomic energy".

Ironically, on September 17, 2024, the Supreme Court of India dismissed a petition, *Sandeep T.S. vs Union of India & Ors.*, challenging the provisions of the AEA, which restrict involvement of private entities in the licensing of nuclear power, observing that "The Parliamentary regime envisages a calibrated exploitation of atomic power, subject to stringent safeguards, bearing in mind the likely consequences of misuse and, for that matter, of an accident".

In addition to the challenges listed above, there is also the issue of the pending challenge to the constitutionality of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 (CLNDA), which seeks a declaration for the act to be void *ab initio*. These challenges not only introduce a high degree of regulatory uncertainty but also have the potential to leave private investments in the sector in a state of limbo.

Thus, the road map for private participation in the Indian nuclear energy sector must run consonance, and not in conflict with the applicable laws.

## AEA, restrictions on private sector

The governing scheme, i.e., the AEA, gives the government sole control and responsibility over all activities in respect of nuclear energy either through an authority or company established by it. In essence, the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) currently have overarching control over the nuclear energy infrastructure.

This, however, does not suggest that there is



**Akash Lamba**  
Senior Associate at  
SKV Law Offices



**Vineet Kumar**  
Senior Associate at  
SKV Law Offices



**Bharath Gangadharan**  
Counsel at SKV Law  
Offices

With the government proposing such a partnership, the existing framework governing the nuclear energy sector needs to be assessed

no record of or attempt to alter this situation. Last year, the DAE and NITI Aayog released "A Report on the Role of Small Modular Reactors in the energy Transition", which specifically discusses key enablers to promote the private sector in Small Modular Reactors (SMR). The report focuses on "Conductive SMR regulatory framework led by national regulators" and "Unambiguous Civil Nuclear Liability Framework and supporting legal structure" to ensure a sustainable and continuous engagement of the private sector.

Historically, the NPCIL has involved the private sector only in engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) where the infrastructure for the reactor is developed by private entities such as Megha Engineering & Infrastructures and Reliance.

In so far as the cost implications are concerned, the NITI Aayog report, and the Union Minister of Finance's statement contemplate partnering with private participants to attract nearly \$26 billion of investments into the sector. Such involvement, specifically for research and development (R&D), is strictly prohibited as in Section 3(a) of the AEA.

Rule 25 of the Atomic Energy (Radiation Protection) Rules, 2004, grants Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) authority over radioactive technology. But concerns about its lack of independence persist. The Nuclear Safety Regulatory Authority Bill 2011 aimed to address this but it was never enacted. Attracting private investment in nuclear energy will require significant changes to the AERB's structure and functions, alongside efforts by organisations such as the NPCIL and the DAE to create programmes that encourage private participation while ensuring a robust regulatory oversight of the sector.

## A possible structure

A possible approach is in forming public-private partnerships, where the NPCIL or a similar government body/authority own ownership of nuclear plants, aligning with existing laws. This structure may invite private capital while keeping responsibility, ownership, and accountability with the government. Additionally, entities with a majority government stake would also be covered under Section 2(b) of the Right to Information Act (RTI) Act, ensuring transparency. The entity would also be required to make disclosures under Section 4 and respond to the public queries under Section 6 of the RTI Act, maintaining public accountability.

The other large concern is a significantly higher standards of liability with nuclear infrastructure. For reasons that are obvious to anyone who is vaguely familiar with nuclear technology, the presence of nuclear reactors in

the vicinity of human settlements introduces a gnarly threat. The Chernobyl disaster of 1986 and the Fukushima Daiichi accident of 2011 are near synonymous with the word nuclear in this context.

In India, compensation for nuclear disasters is given to affected parties under the CLNDA. The CLNDA aims to provide civil liability for nuclear damage and prompt compensation to victims of a nuclear incident through a no-fault liability to the operator. As mentioned at the outset, the constitutionality of this act is presently challenged in a writ petition and is pending adjudication before the Supreme Court. This petition challenges the constitutionality of the CLNDA, *inter alia*, on the grounds of: violation of absolute liability principle; violation of polluter pays principle and serious dangers to nuclear safety.

The judgment in *G. Sundararajan vs Union Of India and Ors.* (2013) has references to the Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters while addressing a Special Leave Petition (SLP) concerning protests over the Kundankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu. Although the Supreme Court allowed the plant's commissioning, it issued directions for regular inspections, reports, and due diligence by the DAE, the NPCIL, and Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.

## Specific needs

India's country profile, as published by the World Nuclear Association in September 2024 recognises an in-principle proposed gross increment of 32 GWe in the Indian nuclear energy production capacity. It is evident that this ambitious growth in nuclear energy infrastructure is very capital intensive and requires extremely skilled construction resources due to high-risk physical reactions.

Given the sensitive requirements for nuclear technology, strict and comprehensive legislation is crucial to address these needs and ensure ease of business. The legislative restriction on R&D under the AEA is just one issue, while litigation on the constitutionality of the Civil Liability Law, has been pending before the top court for over 12 years now. These factors only contribute to uncertainty of this ambitious target.

Energy generation capacity has been central to all economic development across the globe after the Industrial Revolution and a commitment to achieving the same through renewable sources makes India's ambition just as admirable as it is challenging. It will undoubtedly be interesting to see how legislative and policy changes will shape the Indian nuclear energy sector.

*The writers have significant experience in dispute resolution and litigation in the energy sector*

# Topic-- >India's Nuclear Energy Sector Expansion

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## Overview of India's Nuclear Energy Sector

Government Initiative: Expansion announced in Union Budget FY 2024-25

Goals:

500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based energy by 2030 🌱

Partnerships with private sector for research & development

The initiative aims to enhance India's energy generation capacity while focusing on decarbonisation efforts.

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Goal: Achieve 500 Gigawatts of non-fossil fuel-based energy generation by 2030.

Focus: Partnerships with the private sector for research and development of Bharat Small Reactors (BSR) and Bharat Small Modular Reactors (BSMR).

Key Challenges:

- Regulatory uncertainty

- Involvement of private sectors

- Legislative restrictions


- Safety and liability concerns

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## ## Key Legislative Framework

### Atomic Energy Act, 1962:

Central government control over atomic energy production  
Recent Supreme Court ruling on private sector licensing  
restrictions 

### Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 (CLNDA):

Challenges to constitutionality pending in court  
Implications for regulatory certainty in investments

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## Challenges:

Regulatory uncertainty from AEA

Need for comprehensive legislation

High standards of liability for nuclear infrastructure ⚠️

## Opportunities:

Potential for \$26 billion investments

Enhanced roles for private partners in nuclear technology

Growing interest in Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)

## Implications for Private Participation

### Public-Private Partnerships:

Structure to align with existing laws

Transparency under the Right to Information Act (RTI)

### Higher Standards of Liability:

Risks associated with nuclear technology\_\_\_\_\_

Compensation laws under CLNDA



500 GW Non-Fossil Fuel Energy by 2030

Private Sector Collaboration

Regulatory Challenges

Safety and Liability Concerns

Research and Development

Bharat Small Reactors (BSR)

Bharat Small Modular Reactors (BSMR)

# India's 'silver dividend', challenge to opportunity

**W**hile the rising quantum and share of the elderly population is a global concern, India and China, the two population giants in the world, have a disproportionate share of the elderly given their large population size. And rising longevity is intensifying this concern every day. Therefore, it is pertinent to transform this challenge into an opportunity that involves suitable reforms to cater to the evolving needs of this population. In this regard, evidence indicates that it is not merely the quantum of this population but also its quality that needs attention and intervention.

## Rising health-care consumption and reform

For instance, the health-care consumption of this segment of the population, presently estimated at \$7 billion, is rising. Such a rise in India is because three-quarters of the elderly have at least one chronic ailment along with a quarter of them having limitations in daily living. In addition, a third of them display depressive symptoms along with low-life satisfaction. When these adversities are coupled with economic insecurities, there is every reason to dwell on senior care reform to ensure the better well-being of this population segment.

Such a reform initiative needs to recognise the multi-sectoral attention involving health, social, economic/financial and, above all, digital domains towards mainstreaming the elderly within the evolving environment. Health empowerment and inclusion can happen by improving health literacy among the elderly and their care-givers. On this front, the initiative of adopting comprehensive health care at health and well-being centres under the renewed mission of the Ayushman Arogya Mandir (AAM) may be considered a good initiative. This involves a preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative component under the multiple system of ayurveda, yoga, naturopathy, unani, siddha and homoeopathy (AYUSH).



**S. Irudaya Rajan**

Chair at the International Institute of Migration and Development (IIMAD), Kerala



**U.S. Mishra**

Honorary Visiting Professor at the International Institute of Migration and Development (IIMAD), Kerala

There need to be tailored reforms to cater to the evolving needs of the country's senior citizens

Strengthening the health-care infrastructure to focus on the elderly by expanding tele-consultation services, enhancing the skilled workforce for the elderly, and capacity building of the existing workforce may facilitate the utilisation of health care among senior citizens despite limitations of means on the one hand and specific need on the other. This all-inclusive package has a mental health services aspect as well as nutrition-related services that will operationalise senior care through preventive, wellness and therapeutic interventions and is thus holistic.

## Addressing financial insecurities

The social inclusion of the elderly may well be served by sensitising the larger community on their needs and sensitivities and by establishing peer support groups for interaction. At the same time there is a need to make them aware of their entitlements and legal safeguards on inheritance, succession and protection that will help their confidence in handling ugly eventualities that could arise in the course of life.

Economic and financial insecurities need to be addressed through innovative schemes and plans specifically for the elderly, in terms of investments, to reduce their financial burden. Such a burden that is largely on account of health care costs may be protected with well-designed insurance products such as ₹5 lakh coverage for every individual above the age of 70 years. Reskilling the younger population that is also aging (given their adaptability to modern technology and infrastructure) to be engaged in the labour market may be another option to maintain the economic independence of the elderly.

Finally, the inclusion of the elderly in a rapidly growing digital environment is equally important for the elderly to benefit from many schemes and programmes with ease and convenience. Digital adaptation among the elderly still remains below

expectation, excluding them from desirable schemes and benefits. Targeting the current elderly population and those younger who are also aging to go digital should get a second look from the domain of finance to the delivery of numerous care services that are meant for the elderly.

## As an economic segment

Besides this five-point care reform for seniors, the idea of turning this emerging challenge into an opportunity lies in viewing a silver economy that comprises economic activities, and goods and services catering to this population segment. On this count, the available worth of this economy is estimated at ₹73,082 crore and is expected to grow manifold over the years. While the 60-plus share is estimated at 13.2% in 2031, and at 19% by mid-century, the elderly will constitute a major consumer segment that is also characterised as the wealthiest given the professional in the age group of 45-64 years is the richest. Therefore, one has the quote these days which says 'they become rich before they grow old'. Further, as health-care consumption is about a third of their entire consumption, it can ignite the health and wellness-driven businesses among the senior care segment in India. On the whole, the silver economy is set to grow in India and the world, with a market size that has potential for innovation in the health technology domain as well as utility infrastructure for varying limitations that come with age.

In recognition of this eventual reality, the government appears to have given consideration to rehabilitating the silver segment by launching the Senior Able Citizens for Re-Employment in Dignity (SACRED) portal to connect senior citizens with job providers in the private sector. Another initiative is the Senior care Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE), by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, to promote and incentivise senior care products.

# — Topic → Elderly Population Challenge

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## Overview

Global Concern: Rising share and longevity of the elderly population in India and China.

Opportunity: Transform challenges into opportunities through suitable reforms.

## Key Points

Health care consumption rising to \$7 billion.

Significant health issues among the elderly (chronic ailments, limitations, low life satisfaction).

Multi-sectoral interventions needed (health, social, economic, digital).

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# Global Concern

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Significant Share: India and China have a large elderly population.

Longevity: Rising life expectancy is a contributing factor.

## Healthcare Consumption

Estimated Cost: \$7 billion spent on elderly healthcare in India.

Chronic Ailments: Many elderly suffer from long-term health issues.

Life Satisfaction: Generally low among the elderly.

## Reform Initiatives

Comprehensive Reforms Needed: Focus on preventive, promotive, curative, and rehabilitative care.

AYUSH System: Utilization of traditional medicine systems.

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## **Economic Opportunities**

Silver Economy Value: ₹73,082 crore, with growth potential.

Consumer Segment: Elderly becoming a major market segment.



## **Digital Inclusion**

Enhancing Literacy: Need to improve digital skills among the elderly.

Access to Services: Ensures they can utilize various schemes.

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## **Financial Security**

**Innovative Schemes:** Development of insurance products and financial solutions.

**Economic Burden:** Alleviating financial stress for the elderly.

## **Social Inclusion**

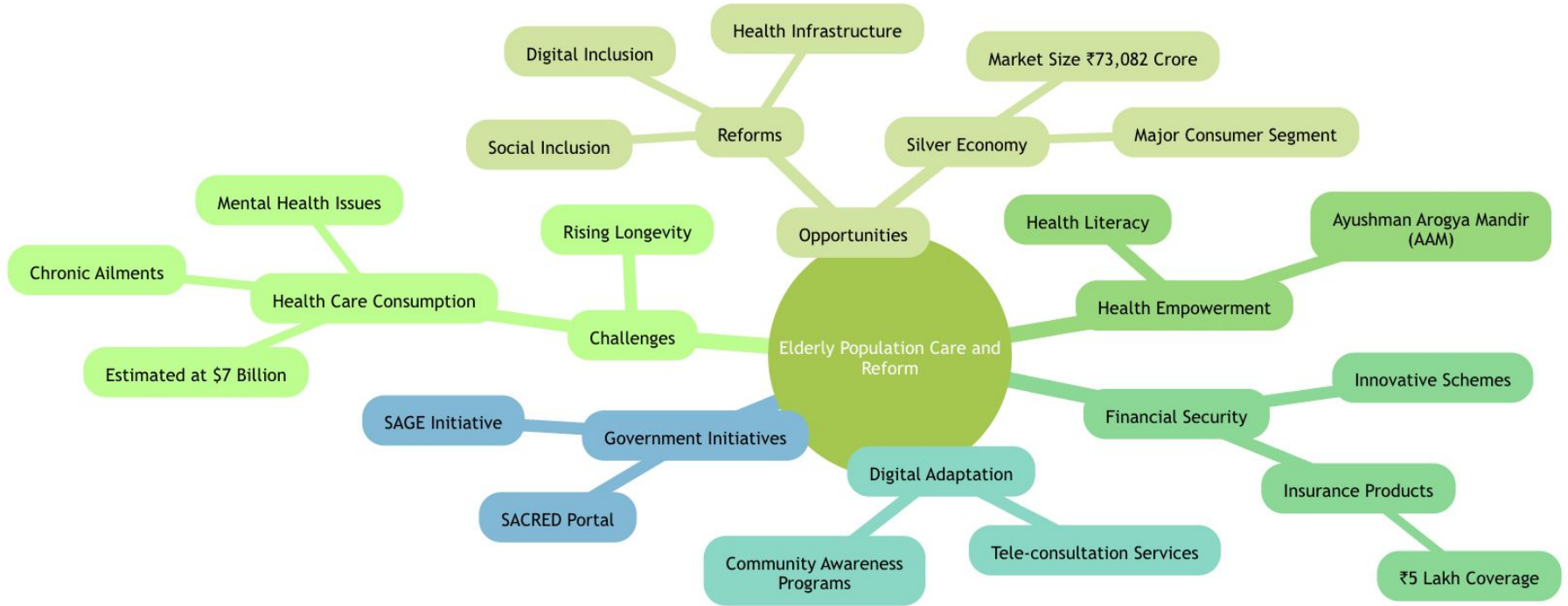
**Peer Support Groups:** Establishing networks for the elderly.

**Community Awareness:** Raising awareness about elderly needs.

**Summary:** The increasing elderly population in India and China presents both challenges and opportunities. Comprehensive reforms in healthcare, economic support, and digital inclusion are essential to enhance their quality of life.

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# On gender performance: how it challenges the gender binary

A look at how Judith Butler through her 1990 work, *Gender Trouble*, reimagined gender as something we do, not something we are and framed it as a socially constructed phenomenon

Rebecca Rose Varghese

A concept that has significantly influenced gender theory, gender performativity enables a more fluid understanding of gender by challenging fixed notions of identity. Poststructuralist scholar Judith Butler introduced this idea in her 1990 work, *Gender Trouble*. Butler critiques the essentialist view, which associates sex to the binary of the masculine and the feminine. Instead, Butler argues that gender is a socially constructed identity – produced, reproduced, and maintained through repeated actions, behaviours, and discourse. Therefore, it can never truly be a fully stable identity, even if it appears persistent.

Butler explains that social norms surrounding gender are so embedded in our lives that they seem natural and appropriate, confining individuals to rigid gender roles. However, these norms are not fixed and the roles can be subverted because they depend on constant repetition for their seeming stability. Acts of resistance within social structures can lead to transformation and a new understanding of gender. Butler's work on gender not only challenges traditional theories but also marks a milestone in third-wave feminism, making a significant contribution to queer theory.

## Two theories of gender

While there are many debates surrounding the definition of gender, two of the most significant theories are gender essentialism and social constructionism. Gender essentialism, in simple terms, posits that gender is best explained through biology – sex chromosomes and DNA determine one's sex, which in turn defines their gender. According to this perspective, the traits, roles, and behaviours associated with masculinity and femininity come naturally, as they are predetermined by biological factors.

On the other hand, social constructionism explains that gender identity is constructed through discourse, which includes not only language but also bodily, verbal, and non-verbal acts. Gender norms become internalised to the point that they feel natural to those who align with their assigned gender. For example, a child with a uterus is assigned the gender of a girl at birth, given the pronouns she/her, and exposed to traditionally feminine roles. Deviations from these norms are often met with bullying and disciplinary actions.

For example, in many schools in India, while girls are expected to have long neatly tied hair, if a boy grows his hair short, he may face criticism and be pressured to conform to traditional masculine norms and cut his hair short. This demonstrates how regulations and expectations shift according to gender, even in contexts where uniform standards should apply.

In his Marion Young's 1980 essay, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Compartment, Motility, and Spatiality," examines how gender norms can also influence movement. Young shows that girls are expected to act in ways perceived as weaker and more restrained, such as using less physical space and energy when throwing a ball,



ISTOCKPHOTO

compared to boys. Interestingly, these behaviours and roles are not constant and may shift over time and across cultures; for instance, in the 19th century, pink was considered masculine, while blue was associated with women.

This also reflects Simone de Beauvoir's assertion in the 1949 book, *The Second Sex*: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." De Beauvoir's statement underscores that gender identity is shaped and constructed through societal norms, and is not an innate quality.

## Sex and gender

Judith Butler extends this discussion, and critiques second-wave feminism's distinction between sex and gender. Scholars like Gayle Rubin argue that sex is determined by biological factors while gender is shaped by social norms.

However, Butler challenges this separation, contending that even "sex" is subject to social interpretation. According to Butler, we cannot experience biological sex apart from the social meanings attached to it. Thus, both sex and gender should be viewed as socially constructed, as gender ultimately subsumes sex. The idea that a person's body predetermines their gender identity is a product of social discourse, not a biological fact.

Butler explains that gender is not something we are, but something we do. Instead of viewing gender as a noun, Butler conceptualises it as a verb – something one performs rather than possesses. One is not a woman but does 'womaness'. Gender thus, is defined as the stylised repetition of acts through time. This can be compared to the act of speaking. Just as talking involves the continuous repetition of words within the

structure of language, gender involves an ongoing enactment of set roles. Speaking requires not just uttering individual words but engaging in a consistent and rule-governed process over time. Similarly, gender performativity involves the repetition of acts and behaviours aligned with societal expectations.

## Performativity and performance

While expanding on the notion of performativity, it is important to distinguish it from the concept of performance. Performance suggests that individuals take on a gender role and actively embody societal expectations of what it means to be masculine or feminine, as if role-playing is central to the gender we express. However, performativity of gender is not a conscious act that one can alter at will. Rather, it refers to the ongoing process through which individuals unconsciously perform and reinforce societal norms of masculinity and femininity. These norms are deeply ingrained, creating the illusion that they are natural, even though they are socially constructed.

For example, we give baby dolls to young girls to play with, which plays into feminine stereotypes of being nurturing as eventually a woman, as per societal norms, has to become a mother. Although these actions of caregiving seem instinctive, they are learned through imitation and reinforced by societal expectations. Performativity, in this sense, means that these repeated actions produce a series of effects – talking and acting in ways that reinforce the impression of being a man or a woman.

Gender expression then, according to Butler, does not originate from within the individual but is shaped by external social norms. People don't instinctively know how to be masculine or feminine; instead, it is through the repetitive enactment of societal expectations and norms that individuals come to express these gender characteristics.

## Critiques of gender performativity

Despite the groundbreaking impact of Butler's work, the theory has faced criticisms, particularly from transgender theorists like Julia Serano.

As a transgender and bisexual activist and author of *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, Serano argues that gender essentialism fails to explain the numerous individuals whose gender expression defies societal expectations. There are far too many of them to be dismissed as genetic anomalies. Yet, Butler's theory and social constructionism also fail to account for transgender individuals, whose gender expression is not merely a response to societal norms but often aligns with what feels right for the individual. This suggests that gender identity can emerge from within, especially as these expressions frequently manifest at a young age, before the full impact of social conditioning takes effect.





To address these gaps, Serano introduces her concept of "subconscious sex" where individual minds are intrinsically inclined toward a certain gender identity, independent of societal conditioning. While cisgender individuals experience alignment between their physical bodies and gender identities, transgender individuals face a mismatch, leading to gender dissonance.

But while emphasising the role of the brain in gender identity, Serano agrees with Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir that social norms can influence or interpret one's subconscious sex. Thus, gender becomes both subject and object shaped by internal inclinations as well as societal influence.

Rebecca Rose Varghese is a freelance journalist.

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## Topic → Key Concepts in Gender Theory

-  Judith Butler's Influence: Introduced the concept of gender performativity in "Gender Trouble" (1990), challenging fixed notions of gender identity.
  -  Social Construction of Gender: Gender is constructed through repeated actions and discourse, not a stable identity linked to biological sex.
  -  Critique of Essentialism: Butler critiques gender essentialism, arguing that gender roles are socially imposed, not innate.
  -  Cultural Variability: Gender norms vary over time and cultures, as seen in changing color associations and behavior expectations.
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— Influence on Movement: Iris Marion Young's essay shows societal norms dictate physical comportment, with girls expected to be more restrained.



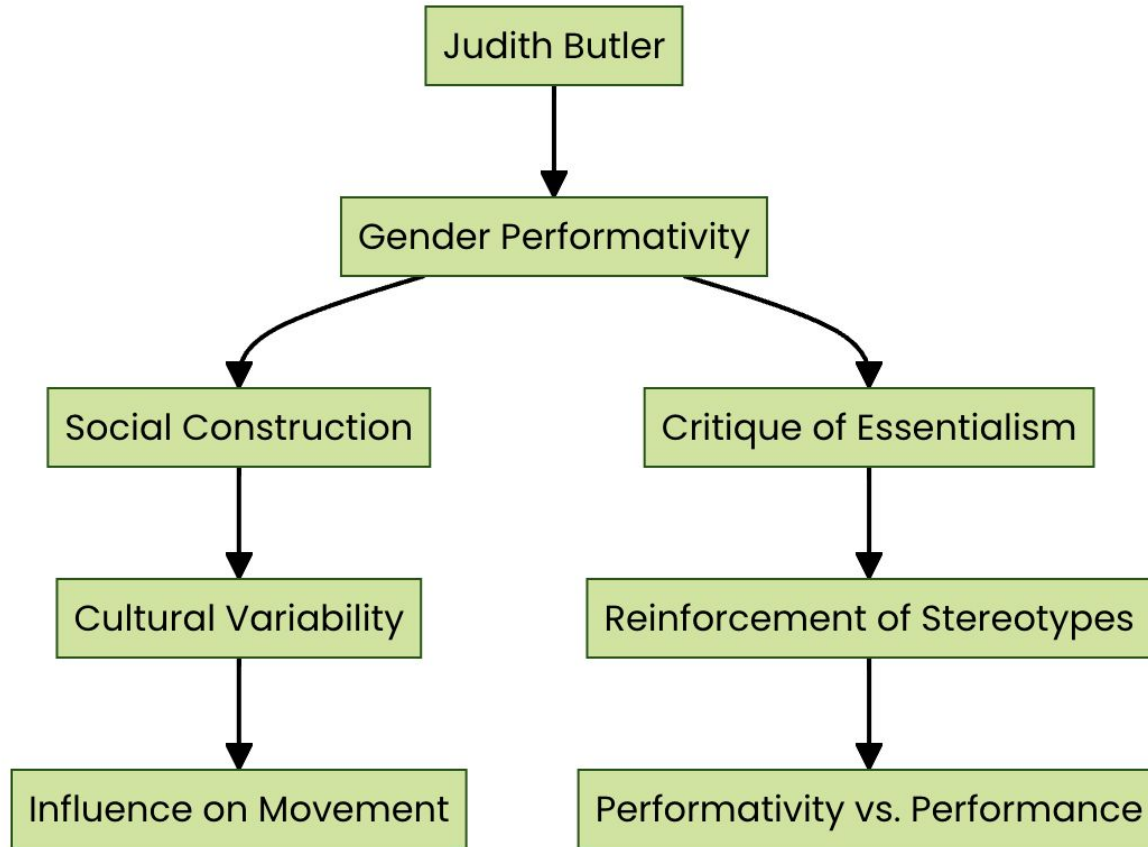
↔ Performativity vs. Performance: Gender performativity is an unconscious enactment of norms, distinct from conscious role-playing.



🧸 Reinforcement of Stereotypes: Societal expectations shape gender expression, seen in how children are socialized through toys and behaviors.

Summary: Judith Butler's work on gender performativity challenges traditional views of gender as a fixed identity, emphasizing its social construction through repeated actions and norms.

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**KIGALI**

## Rwanda confirms eight deaths from Ebola-like Marburg virus



AP

▶ Rwanda says eight people have died so far from the Ebola-like Marburg virus, just days after it declared an outbreak of the deadly hemorrhagic fever that has no authorised vaccine or treatment. The Marburg virus originates in fruit bats and spreads between people through close contact with the bodily fluids. AP

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# — Topic → Marburg virus

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- Marburg virus is the causative agent of Marburg virus disease (MVD), a disease with a case fatality ratio of up to 88%, but can be much lower with good patient care.
  - Marburg virus disease was initially detected in 1967 after simultaneous outbreaks in Marburg and Frankfurt in Germany; and in Belgrade, Serbia.
  - Marburg and Ebola viruses are both members of the Filoviridae family (filovirus).
  - Though caused by different viruses, the two diseases are clinically similar. Both diseases are rare and have the capacity to cause outbreaks with high fatality rates.
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- Two large outbreaks that occurred simultaneously in Marburg and Frankfurt in Germany, and in Belgrade, Serbia, in 1967, led to the initial recognition of the disease.
  - The outbreak was associated with laboratory work using African green monkeys (*Cercopithecus aethiops*) imported from Uganda.
  - Subsequently, outbreaks and sporadic cases have been reported in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, South Africa (in a person with recent travel history to Zimbabwe) and Uganda.
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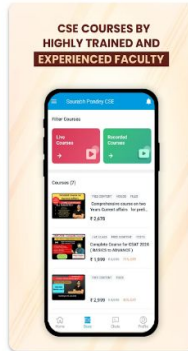
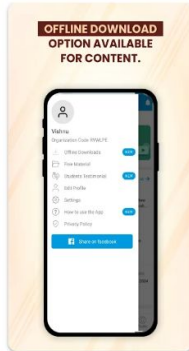
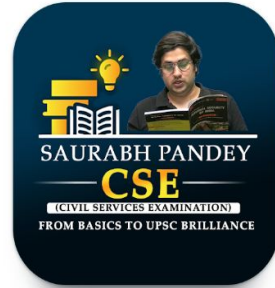
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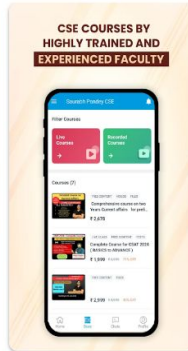
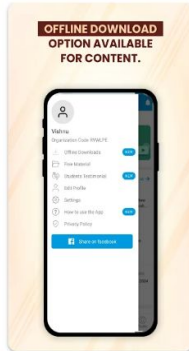
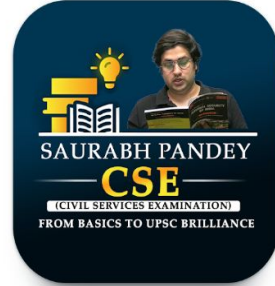
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