

## 1. Bengaluru Hosts Kambala Races: A Traditional Spectacle

### Event Overview

During the weekend of November 25 and 26, Bengaluru hosted Kambala races. This traditional racing event, held at City Palace Grounds, has faced legal scrutiny in the past but continues to draw large crowds.

### Kambala: A Coastal Karnataka Tradition

Kambala is a folk sport practiced in coastal Karnataka, particularly in areas where Tulu speakers form a majority. Traditionally held in slushy paddy fields post-harvest, Kambala has evolved into a series of weekly events organized by the Kambala Samithi from November to April.

### Participation in Bengaluru Kambala

Initially, 228 teams registered across the four categories, with 160 pairs eventually participating. To encourage wider participation, organizers offered incentives, including a cash prize of Rs 1.5 lakh and gold for the first prize winner.



### Pan-Karnataka Appeal

While Kambala's popularity is concentrated in coastal Karnataka, the organizers believe that portrayals in films, such as the 2022 movie 'Kantara,' have contributed to a broader appeal for the event across the state.

### Supreme Court Ban and Reversal

Kambala, along with Jallikattu and bullock-cart racing, faced a ban in 2014 due to allegations of animal abuse, including tying buffalo noses with ropes and continuous whipping. The ban was lifted in 2016, with the Environment Ministry granting exceptions for traditional events, recognizing cultural practices, and imposing conditions to ensure animal welfare.

### **Legal Amendments and Upheld Changes**

State governments, including Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra, amended the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, securing exemptions for events like Kambala. Despite legal challenges, a constitutional bench upheld these amendments in May, allowing the continuation of these traditional events.

### **Caste Discrimination Allegations**

Historically, Kambala has faced accusations of caste discrimination, particularly against the Koraga community. Members of this community were treated as 'untouchable,' and critics argue that dominant caste groups still control the sport, leading to unequal participation and roles during the event.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Social Issues

Source: The Indian Express

## **2. Why is Bihar demanding the Special Category Status?**

### **Introduction**

On November 22, the Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led Cabinet passed a resolution seeking the grant of special category status (SCS) to Bihar. The demand comes in the backdrop of the findings from the "Bihar Caste-based Survey, 2022", which revealed that nearly one-third of Bihar's population continues to live in poverty.

### **What is a special category status?**

It is a classification granted by the Centre to assist the development of States that face geographical or socio-economic disadvantages. The SCS was introduced in 1969 on the recommendation of the fifth Finance Commission (FC). Five factors such as (i) hilly and difficult terrain (ii) low population density and/or sizeable share of tribal population (iii) strategic location along international borders (iv) economic and infrastructural backwardness and (v) non-viable nature of state finances, are considered before granting SCS.

In 1969, three States — Jammu & Kashmir, Assam and Nagaland — were granted the SCS. Subsequently, eight more States including Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand were given the SCS by the erstwhile National Development Council.

### **What are the benefits attached?**

In the SCS States, the Centre-State funding of centrally sponsored schemes is divided in the ratio of 90:10, far more favourable than the 60:40 or 80:20 splits for the general category States. Besides, there are several other incentives available to the SCS States in the form of concession in customs and excise duties, income tax rates and corporate tax rates to attract investments to set up new industries etc.

### **Why is Bihar demanding the SCS?**

The demand for SCS for Bihar has been made by various political parties of the State time and again. The poverty and backwardness of the State are argued to be because of the lack of natural resources, continuous supply of water for irrigation, regular floods in the northern region and severe droughts in the southern part of the State. Simultaneously, the bifurcation of the State led to the shifting of industries to Jharkhand and created a dearth of employment and investment opportunities. With a per-capita GDP of around ₹54,000, Bihar has consistently been one of the poorest States.

### **Do other States also want SCS?**

Since its bifurcation in 2014, Andhra Pradesh has asked for a grant of SCS on the grounds of revenue loss due to Hyderabad going to Telangana. Additionally, Odisha has also been requesting for the SCS, highlighting its vulnerability to natural calamities such as cyclones and a large tribal population (nearly 22%). However, the Central government citing the 14th FC report, which made a recommendation to the Centre that no State be accorded the SCS, has repeatedly denied their demands.

### **Is Bihar's demand justified?**

Although Bihar meets most of the criteria for the grant of SCS, it does not fulfil the requirement of hilly terrain and geographically difficult areas, which is considered to be the primary reason for difficulty in infrastructural development. In 2013, the Raghuram Rajan Committee set up by the Centre, placed Bihar in the "least developed category" and suggested a new methodology based on a 'multi-dimensional index' for devolving funds instead of a SCS, which can be revisited to address the State's backwardness.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Hindu

## **3. Rat-hole mining used to evacuate workers in Uttarakhand**

### **Introduction**

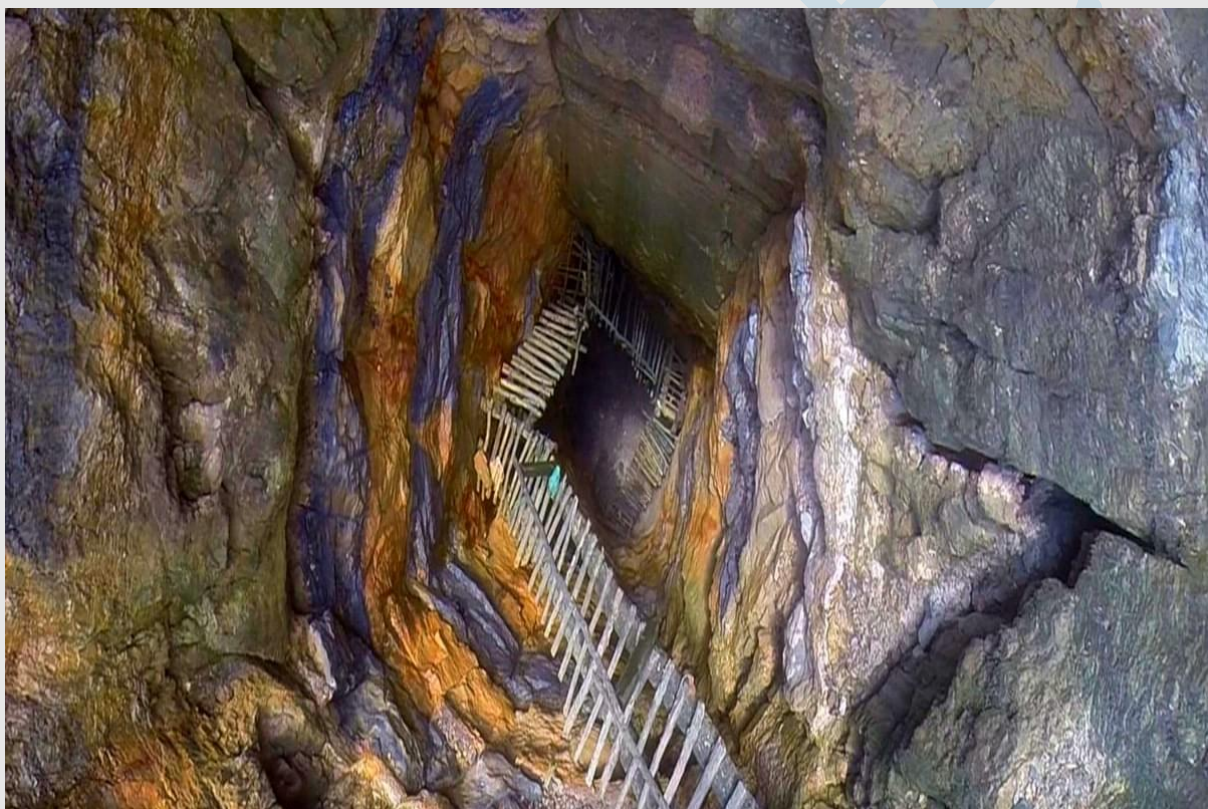
Earlier, the auger joint of the machine drilling through the debris to release 41 workers trapped in the collapsed Silkyara-Barkot tunnel broke down. Rescuers spent two days cutting through the blade stuck inside the rescue pipes and removing it piece by piece.

However, with large metal pieces hindering the machine drilling and breaking the auger, the rescuers drilled through the remaining few meters using the practice of rat-hole mining.

### **What is rat-hole mining**

Rat hole mining is a method of extracting coal from narrow, horizontal seams, prevalent in Meghalaya. The term "rat hole" refers to the narrow pits dug into the ground, typically just large enough for one person to descend and extract coal.

Once the pits are dug, miners descend using ropes or bamboo ladders to reach the coal seams. The coal is then manually extracted using primitive tools such as pickaxes, shovels, and baskets.



### **Environmental and safety concerns**

Rat hole mining poses significant safety and environmental hazards. The mines are typically unregulated, lacking safety measures such as proper ventilation, structural support, or safety gear for the workers. Additionally, the mining process can cause land degradation, deforestation, and water pollution.

This method of mining has faced severe criticism due to its hazardous working conditions, environmental damage, and numerous accidents leading to injuries and fatalities. Despite attempts by authorities to regulate or ban such practices, they often

persist due to economic factors and the absence of viable alternative livelihoods for the local population.

**When was it banned, and why?**

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned the practice in 2014, and retained the ban in 2015. The NGT observed, "It is also informed that there are umpteen number of cases where by virtue of rat-hole mining, during the rainy season, water flooded into the mining areas resulting in death of many... individuals including employees/workers."

The order was in connection with Meghalaya, where this remained a prevalent procedure for coal mining. The state government then appealed the order in the Supreme Court.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Disaster Management  
Source: The Hindu