

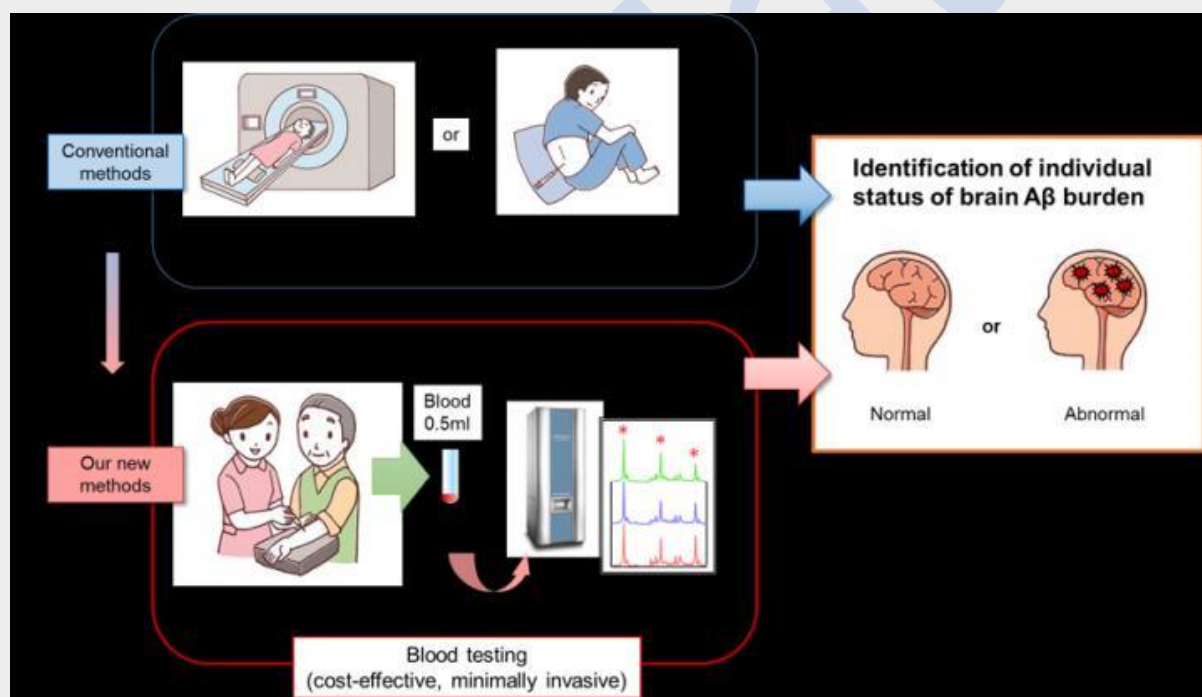
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1. What is the new Alzheimer's blood test?

Why in News?

Researchers have developed a new blood test to detect Alzheimer's disease that helps diagnose the disease even at the early stage of mild cognitive impairment. Scientists at Lund University in Sweden have shown that PrecivityAD2, a new blood test, is about 90% accurate in identifying AD in people experiencing cognitive symptoms.



Why are practitioners excited about the test?

According to statistics, one in five women and one in 10 men develop dementia due to AD (Alzheimer's disease). Further symptomatic AD is misdiagnosed in 25% to 35% of patients.

For long, a blood test has been the Holy Grail for diagnosis of AD, since even current, modern methods of diagnosis involve very expensive and complex amyloid or Tau Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans. The other alternative is to draw cerebrospinal fluid via a painful procedure, lumbar puncture.

This blood test comes as close to the target as possible, and in that sense will make the diagnosis of AD very simple. Blood tests will not only reduce the costs of diagnosis, but also simplify the diagnostic procedure — involving as it does, just drawing of blood.

What does the test do?

According to Medical News Today, the test works by measuring a combination of two ratios within a blood sample: plasma phosphorylated-tau217 (also called p-tau217) to not-phosphorylated-tau21 and two types of amyloid-beta: AB42 and AB40. Let it suffice for us to understand that both tau and amyloid-beta proteins are currently considered pathological hallmarks of AD.

The significance is that there are several drugs that work in the early stages of the disease, and an early, cost-effective, simple diagnosis will go a long way for patients, experts say.

How does this impact the future?

Future studies should evaluate how the use of blood tests for these biomarkers influences clinical care, researchers have said in their paper. No doubt the costs will come down, naturally impacting positively on affordability. Availability is the other issue. Dr. Krishnamoorthy says that in India, the diagnostic tools still remain an MRI and a regular PET scan. Amyloid or Tau PET scans are not commercially available yet. He adds that availability of the blood test will happen, but one needs to wait and watch if the test will be accessible to all or if only a few will be able to afford the test, even at reduced rates.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

2. Why did courts revisit bar on sub-quotas?

A seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court has ruled that States have the power to sub-divide Scheduled Castes (SC) into groups so that it can give sub-quotas within the quota for Dalits. In the process, the Bench overruled a 2004 judgment by a five-member Constitution Bench that said such sub-classification was impermissible as Parliament alone was empowered to modify the list of SCs notified by the President under Article 341 of the Constitution.

What was the 2004 judgment?

The Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservation) Ordinance, 1999, and the Act that replaced it created four groups — A, B, C and D — of Scheduled Castes and earmarked varying percentages of reservation for each group. The rationale was that there were differences in the level of advancement among communities under the SC list and that such sub-classification will ensure representation for the weaker castes. The Andhra Pradesh High Court rejected the challenge against the Act.

However, in the Supreme Court, a Constitution Bench of five judges held the sub-classification was unconstitutional. The November 2004 judgment in *E.V. Chinnaiah vs State of Andhra Pradesh* noted that under Article 341 of the Constitution, the President notifies the list of Scheduled Castes. Once the list is notified, it shall not be modified through another notification, and the only way to include or exclude a community in that list was by an act of

Parliament. The Bench then ruled that once enumerated under Article 341, SCs constitute a single homogeneous class, and that State legislatures were not competent to tinker with the list by further classifying them into groups.

TO AND FRO	
1975: Punjab govt reserves 50% jobs within the Scheduled Caste (SC) quota for Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs	sub-classification not permissible
2000: Andhra Pradesh govt introduces sub-quotas within the SC quota	2006: Punjab and Haryana High Court strikes down Punjab govt circular against the backdrop of the 2004 judgment
2004: A 5-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in <i>EV Chinniah vs Andhra Pradesh</i> holds that SCs were a homogeneous group and	2006: Centre constitutes Justice Usha Mehra Commission to examine sub-categorisation of SCs in Andhra, recommends amending the Constitution
	2020: In <i>Davinder Singh and Ors</i> , a 5-judge
	Supreme Court Bench doubts the correctness of the decision in the <i>EV Chinniah</i> verdict, refers it to a 7-judge Bench
	2024: 7-judge Bench verdict allows for sub-classification in the SC quota



How did it come up before a larger Bench?

The Punjab Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes (Reservation in Services) Act, 2006, provided for 25% reservation for SCs and 12% for backward classes in direct recruitment to services. Half the jobs under the SC quota, the law said, would be given as first preference to Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs, if candidates were available. When this was challenged, the Punjab and Haryana High Court cited the judgment in *E.V. Chinniah* to hold that the relevant section on preference to two communities among SCs was unconstitutional. Similarly, in 2006, the High Court also struck down the Haryana government's notification dividing SC communities into two blocks and earmarking 50% of the SC quota to each block.

In 2009, the Tamil Nadu Assembly enacted a law to provide a sub-quota in services and educational institutions for Arunthathiyars, a group of sub-castes considered the weakest among the Scheduled Castes in the State. This was challenged directly in the Supreme Court. In 2020, a Constitution Bench doubted the correctness of the *Chinniah* judgment, noting that the nine-judge Bench in *Indra Sawhney* (1992) had permitted sub-classification of backward classes. However, in *Chinniah*, the Bench had declined to use that as a precedent for sub-division of SC communities as *Indra Sawhney* was only concerned with OBC reservation. Hence, a larger Bench was constituted to revisit the earlier verdict.

What is the reasoning behind it?

Six of the seven judges have now ruled that the 2004 judgment was wrong. In his judgment on behalf of himself and Justice Manoj Mishra, Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud has held that SC communities are not a homogeneous class as ruled in the earlier judgment. He disagreed with the view that the act of notifying a list of SCs creates a deemed fiction that all of them have a similar status. It is true that they get a common constitutional identity as Scheduled Castes based on their experience of untouchability and discrimination, but this does not mean that there is no heterogeneity among them.

He cited historical and empirical evidence to show that there were inter se differences among SC communities. There were even instances of some sections of SCs being discriminated against by other SC communities. Therefore, sub-classification was permissible, but it should be based on an "intelligible differentia" (a clear characteristic that will mark one group as different from another) and should have a rational nexus to the purpose of doing it. Further, such sub-classification is subject to judicial review, and the State should be able to justify it using empirical data.

The CJJ also held that sub-classification will not in any way amount to tinkering with the Presidential list and that it will not violate Article 341, which confers the power to notify Scheduled Castes exclusively on the President. The function of Article 341 was to identify who came under the category of Scheduled Castes, but States are free to identify those with different degrees of backwardness and make special provisions or extend reservation benefits to them. The new ruling is expected to encourage States to earmark sub-quotas for the most marginalised sections of Dalits who have not enjoyed the fruits of reservation so far.

In her dissent, Justice Bela Trivedi stands by the Chinnaiya doctrine that it is impermissible to sub-classify a homogeneous class and that it would amount to tinkering with the President's list under Article 341.

What about creamy layer exclusion?

The creamy layer concept is now applicable only to OBCs and so far has not been extended to Dalit communities. Justice B. R. Gavai, in a separate opinion in which he concurs with the Chief Justice, has written in detail about the need for identifying the more advanced among the Scheduled Castes and excluding them from the benefits of affirmative action.

Noting that equality would mean that unequals cannot be treated as equals, Justice Gavai has wondered whether the children of IAS or IPS officers could be treated the same way as children in remote villages even though they may belong to the same community. Underscoring the differences in access and resources to those in urban and rural areas, and those attending elite institutions and those in schools with limited facilities, he has said putting them in the same bracket would obliterate the equality principle. However, he also notes that the parameters for excluding the creamy layer for the SCs cannot be the same as those used to identify the well-off among the OBCs. Three other judges have agreed with his view. However, the opinions do not constitute a direction to the government to implement the creamy layer concept, as the issue did not directly arise in this case.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express

3. Why are students protesting in Bangladesh?

Internet shutdowns prevailed across Bangladesh even as a sense of calm prevailed following the ruling by the Appellate Division of Bangladesh's Supreme Court to reduce the quotas in government jobs. The latest order dismisses a ruling by the lower court, and comes amidst nationwide protests that have left 114 people dead and thousands injured.

According to the Associated Press, the quota for descendants of the country's freedom fighters will now be reduced to 5%, with 93% of jobs to be allocated on merit. The remaining 2% will be set aside for members of ethnic minorities and transgender and disabled people.

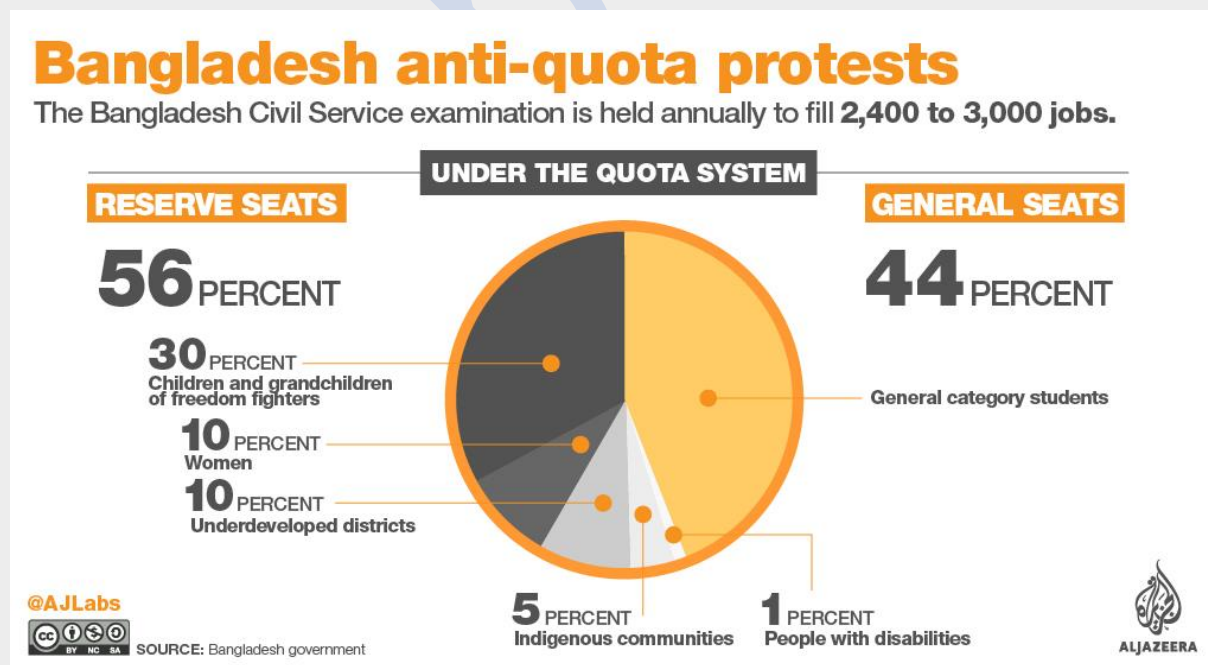
However, protestors have vowed to continue their demonstrations, even setting a 48-hour deadline to ensure their key demands are met, including the release of those jailed, and the dismissal of officials responsible for the violence.

These developments follow a nationwide curfew with a "shoot-on-sight" order, first imposed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government, which was indefinitely extended. The shutdown was marked by military deployment to maintain order after weeks of violence. The government had also declared public holidays with only emergency services allowed to operate.

The protests are led by youths opposed to the return of a 30% quota in government employment at all levels for those who fought for the freedom of Bangladesh from Pakistan, as well as their children and grandchildren.

The situation was inflamed by a statement from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on July 14, appearing to equate the protesters with the descendants of razakars, mercenary collaborators of the Pakistan military who led a brutal campaign of murder and rape in which up to 3 million Bangladeshis are estimated to have been killed in the space of a few months in 1971.

A Reuters report cited some analysts as saying the violence was now being driven by wider economic discontent, including high inflation, growing unemployment, and shrinking foreign exchange reserves.



Sparked by a court order

On June 5, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh (commonly known as "High Court"; the other division is the Appellate Division) ruled on a suit filed by the "children of nationally recognised freedom fighters", restoring the 30% reservation and striking down a

circular issued by the government in October 2018, which had scrapped the freedom-fighter and other quotas.

The 2018 decision had been announced by Prime Minister Hasina ahead of the national elections that took place in December that year. Students and teachers had been protesting since April, demanding that quotas be capped at 10%. There had been violence, though at a smaller scale than this week, and protesters had clashed with police and members of Bangladesh Chhatra League, the students' wing of Hasina's ruling Awami League party.

This time too, the government has said it agrees with the students. It has appealed to the Supreme Court, which has suspended the High Court's order and will hear the matter on August 7. Hasina has asked the protesters to be patient until then.

Constitution and quotas

Article 29(1) of Bangladesh's 1972 Constitution says "there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic". However, under Article 29(3)(a), the state can make "special provisions in favour of any backward section...for the purpose of securing their adequate representation in the service of the Republic".

The High Court's June 5 order provides a summary of how the country's reservation policy has worked. The system was notified on September 5, 1972, reserving 30% of government and semi-government posts for freedom fighters, and 10% for women. After the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh, in August 1975, however, the quotas were effectively frozen until 1996 — when Hasina became Prime Minister for the first time. Benefits of the freedom fighters' quota were subsequently extended to their sons and daughters.

After the Awami League lost power in 2001, the process of implementation of the quota slowed down again. But Hasina returned as Prime Minister in 2009 and, two years later, the quota benefits were also made available to the grandchildren of freedom fighters.

The withdrawal of the quota in 2018 was challenged in court. In its June 5 order, the High Court ruled the government's decision was arbitrary — and that the freedom fighters and their progeny remained one of the most backward sections of the country's citizens.

Economy and employment

More than two-thirds of Bangladesh's 170 million population is the working age group of 15-64, and more than 25% are between the ages of 15 and 29 according to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data quoted by the Bangladeshi daily Prothom Alo say 1.8 million to 1.9 million young people join the job market every year. (Bangladesh government websites were not accessible on Thursday evening.) Besides the 30% quota for freedom fighters, there are 10% quotas each for women and backward districts, 5% for members of tribal communities, and 1% for persons with disabilities, taking the total reservation to 56%.

Government jobs are highly coveted due to their promise of stability and a guaranteed income. Many of Bangladesh's export oriented enterprises are yet to recover from the disruption caused by Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine.

However, only 3.5 lakh appointments were made to government posts in the 2019-23 period, Bangladesh Sangbad Sanstha quoted Public Administration Minister Farhad Hossain as telling Parliament in February. More than 5 lakh posts remain vacant, Hossain said.

A fraught national history

In an early reaction to the violence, Hasina asked rhetorically why the protesters resented the freedom fighters' quota, and whether they believed that the benefits should instead go to the "grandchildren of razakars", using a derogatory word that carries grim historical baggage.

The razakars, literally "volunteers", were a paramilitary force set up by Pakistan's General Tikka Khan in 1971 to facilitate Islamabad's control over East Pakistan, and to crush the liberation movement that the Bangabandhu was leading at the time. The collaborationist razakars, working alongside Pakistan's armed forces, were behind some of the worst atrocities perpetrated on the Bangladeshi people.

In the popular Bangladeshi memory, razakars are often remembered with greater resentment than even the Pakistani army and bureaucracy. Over the years, the Awami League has often referred to its critics and dissidents — constituted in large measure by Islamists and pro-Pakistan elements — as razakars.

In response to Hasina's jibe, student protesters called her an autocrat — raising slogans that translate as "Who am I? Who am I? Razakar, razakar. Who said that? Who said that? Autocrat, autocrat." Among those clashing with the protesters are members of the Awami League's youth wing, media reports from Bangladesh have said. The government has said that the protests have been infiltrated by cadres of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its ally, the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express