Banning Nuclear Weapon

What is the issue?

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A majority of nations, nuclear have-nots, now negotiating a historic United Nations treaty in New York to ban atomic weapons.

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Will a UN treaty to ban atomic weapons be another exercise in futility?

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- The above nations are demonstrating **unprecedented moral leadership** on a question that continues to threaten human survival.
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- Predictably, the nine countries that currently possess these catastrophic arms, as well as others that are part of the military blocs that some of them lead, are boycotting the talks that commenced last week.
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- Even so, the latter group can do little to prevent an agreement whose modest aim is the codification of the essential illegality of this last remaining category of weapons of mass destruction, even if their complete elimination is likely to prove more elusive.
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What is the new area of focus?

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- A major game changer in the decades-long global debate on nuclear disarmament appears to be the greater emphasis being placed on the humanitarian consequences of the testing and detonation of nuclear weapons.
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- This new focus has rightly shifted attention away from the conventional narrative of protection of national sovereignty and security, one that

legitimised an arms race among nuclear weapons states, inducing potential aspirants to nurture superpower ambitions.
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Where it all began?

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- Current endeavours towards a comprehensive pact are a result of many building blocks towards total abolition, beginning with the **1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice which ruled that the use of nuclear weapons had to be compatible with humanitarian law.**
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- Yet, in a split verdict, the judges ruled that it could not pronounce definitively on the legality or otherwise of their use in circumstances of extreme self-defence.
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- The landmark outcome was seized upon by many governments and activist groups to lobby the UN with innumerable draft conventions and resolutions in the General Assembly calling for complete prohibition.
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- Notable have been the three conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons — the last one in Vienna drew participation from over 150 nations and the UN.
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- Ever since, the idea that targeting populated areas with nuclear weapons would constitute a violation of humanitarian law has gained traction.
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- Further, several resolutions of the UN General Assembly have affirmed that the use of nuclear weapons constitutes a crime against humanity.
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What are the factors that aid current efforts?

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- The rationale underpinning current efforts is also the need to address the prevailing anomaly on the road to the prohibition of all types of weapons of mass destruction.
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- That task began with the **ban on biological arms in 1975**. Chemical

weapons, anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions have been outlawed in more recent years.
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Way ahead:

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- The next round of the UN talks, scheduled in late June, will grapple with practical issues of defining the scope and reach of the treaty, as well as the number of ratifications required for its entry into force.
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- What is certain however is that once the pact becomes law, the growing stigma attached to nuclear weapons, as well as to states that flex their military muscle, will only further deepen.
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Source: The Hindu

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