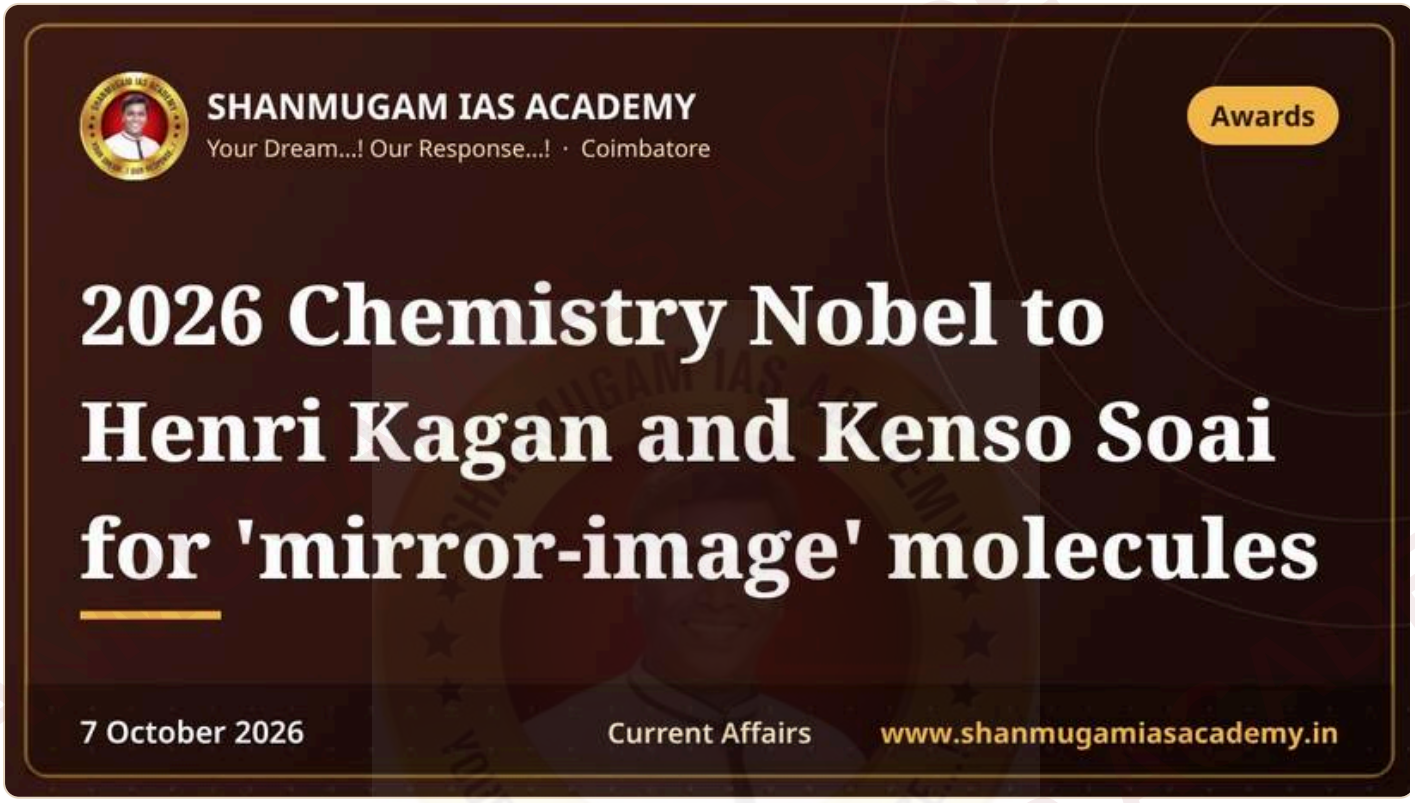
2026 Chemistry Nobel to Henri Kagan and Kenso Soai for 'mirror-image' molecules

Awards · 7 October 2026 · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/current-affairs-english/2026/10/07



News

On 7 Oct 2026 the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded the 2026 Nobel Prize in Chemistry to Henri B. Kagan of France (95, Université Paris-Saclay, Orsay) and Kenso Soai of Japan (76, Tokyo University of Science) 'for the discovery of non-linear effects and autocatalysis in asymmetric organic synthesis'. The prize is 12 million Swedish kronor.

Key facts

Laureates	Henri B. Kagan (France, b. 1930); Kenso Soai (Japan, b. 1950)
Kagan	1986 – 'non-linear effect' in asymmetric catalysis; DIOP ligand; samarium iodide (SmI_2) reagent
Soai	1995 – the 'Soai reaction': asymmetric autocatalysis, the product speeds up its own formation
Significance	Making the right 'hand' of drugs; origin of life's homochirality
Prize	SEK 12 million; presented in Stockholm on 10 Dec

Background

- Chirality: from Greek 'cheir' = hand. Mirror-image molecules that cannot be superimposed, like left and right hands, are 'enantiomers'; they rotate plane-polarised light in opposite directions.
- Louis Pasteur first observed molecular chirality in 1848 by separating tartaric acid crystals.
- The thalidomide tragedy (1957–61): one form eased morning sickness while its mirror form caused birth defects – showing why the right form must be made.
- Related Nobels: 2001 – Knowles, Noyori, Sharpless (asymmetric catalysis); 2021 – List, MacMillan (organocatalysis). Kagan's omission in 2001 was debated; he won the 2001 Wolf Prize.
- Nobel Prize: from Alfred Nobel's will (1895); first awarded in 1901; the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences chooses chemistry and physics; the economics prize was added in 1968.

Tamil Nadu link: Venkatraman Ramakrishnan, born at Chidambaram (Cuddalore district), won the 2009 Chemistry Nobel for ribosome structure. C.V. Raman (born Thiruvanaikaval, Trichy) won the 1930 Physics Nobel; S. Chandrasekhar (Presidency College, Madras) the 1983 Physics Nobel.

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