

The Hindu

News

Places of Worship Act and the contesting claims (Page no. 8)

GS Paper 2, Governance

The legal battle over the validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991, which underlines the need to protect the liberty of faith and worship, is gaining steam in the Supreme Court.

Several petitions have been filed in the top court questioning the law's role, as they say in perpetuating the "crimes of the barbaric invaders" who built mosques after destroying temples centuries ago.

The Muslim bodies, such as the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, have countered that a dent in the 1991 Act would be the first blow to the secular fabric.

Harbinger of litigation Jamiat, significantly, is using the Ayodhya judgment, seen as the harbinger of the slew of litigation concerning other mosques, to buttress its case in support of the 1991 Act.

The Muslim body stressed that the Ayodhya verdict, which upheld the Places of Worship Act, had noted that "historical wrongs cannot be remedied by people taking the law into their own hands".

India-Russia deal on radio equipment (Page no 8)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Radio technical Systems (RTS) of Russia has signed a large-scale contract with the Airports Authority of India (AAI) for the supply of radio equipment.

The Russian company will manufacture 34 sets of instrument landing system (ILS) 734 for the modernisation of 24 airports in India, the Russian Embassy in India.

The contract comes amid the war in Ukraine and pressure from the West on India to diversify its dependence for defence needs.

The domestic manufacturer received the right to conclude a contract based on the results of a global tender, in which, in addition to RTS, the world's largest suppliers of radio equipment took part.

The increased interest of leading manufacturers in the competition is due to the scale of the project: this lot for the purchase of landing systems has become the largest in the world over the past few years.

Pakistan hopes for relief on FATF sanctions (Page no 8)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Pakistan is hoping for some reprieve as the international watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF) begins meetings in Berlin ahead of its plenary session from June 14 to 17.

Announcing the meeting, the FATF secretariat said that delegates would discuss "the progress made by some jurisdictions identified as presenting a risk to the financial system", referring to entities on the grey list, including Pakistan and 22 other countries.

According to media reports in Pakistan, the new PML(N)-led government is pulling out all the stops in sending its high profile Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Hina Rabbani Khar, to lead the delegation this week that will make Pakistan's case for being taken off the "grey list" of countries of "jurisdictions under increased monitoring".

In particular, government sources indicate that Pakistan is confident it has "completed" its task list, particularly after the sentencing of LeT chief Hafiz Saeed in April 2022 for a term of 32 years, adding to a previous term of 36 on several counts of terrorism and terror financing.

World

'China threatens Indo-Pacific security' (Page no. 9)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

U.S. Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin stressed American support for Taiwan, suggesting at Asia's premier defence forum that recent Chinese military activity around the self-governing island threatens to change the status quo.

Speaking at the ShangriLa Dialogue in Singapore, Mr. Austin noted a "steady increase in provocative and destabilising military activity near Taiwan," including almost daily military flights near the island by the People's Republic of China.

Our policy hasn't changed, but unfortunately that doesn't seem to be true for the PRC. Mr. Austin said Washington remains committed to the "one - China policy," which recognises Beijing but allows informal relations and defence ties with Taipei.

Taiwan and China split during a civil war in 1949, but China claims the island as its own territory and has not ruled out using military force to take it.

China has stepped up its military provocations against democratic Taiwan in recent years, aimed at intimidating it into accepting Beijing's demands to unify with the communist mainland.

Venezuela, Iran enter into 20-year agreement (Page no. 9) (GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and Iran's hard-line president signed a 20-year cooperation agreement, a day after Mr. Maduro praised the Islamic Republic for sending badly needed fuel to his nation despite U.S. sanctions.

In an interview with President Maduro after his arrival in Tehran for a two-day visit, Iranian state media reported that Mr. Maduro hailed Iran's move to send fuel tankers to his energyhungry nation.

Tehran's delivery of oil to Caracas was a great help to the Venezuelan people. Mr. Maduro's first visit to Iran comes amid tensions across the Middle East over the collapse of Iran's nuclear deal with world powers. U.S. sanctions and rising global food prices are choking Iran's ailing economy, putting further pressure on its government and its people.

A high-ranking political and economic delegation from Venezuela — which like Iran is under heavy U.S. sanctions — is accompanying Mr. Maduro on his visit, following an invitation from hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi.

Science and Tech

Is monkey pox a sexually transmitted infection? (Page no 10)

(GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)

As of June 8, 1,177 cases of monkeypox have been confirmed, with Europe being the worst affected with 704 cases, as per the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

Monkeypox cases have been detected in 18 countries in Europe, mainly in the U.K., Spain and Portugal. The U.S. has confirmed 45 cases of monkeypox virus cases as of June 9.

Most of the cases reported so far have been in men who have sex with men and bisexual men. However, the risk of monkeypox virus is not restricted to men who have sex with men.

"People who closely interact with someone who is infectious, including health workers, household members and sexual

partners are at greater risk for infection, the World Health Organization (WHO).

This includes touching and being face-to-face. Monkeypox can spread through close skin-to-skin contact during sex, including kissing, touching, oral and penetrative sex with someone who has symptoms."

The WHO also stresses that it is currently not clear if monkeypox virus can spread through semen or vaginal fluids. "But direct skin-to-skin contact with lesions during sexual activities can spread the virus.

Monkeypox rashes are sometimes found on genitals and in the mouth, which is likely to contribute to transmission during sexual contact.

Mouth-to-skin contact could cause transmission where skin or mouth lesions are present. The virus can also spread through large respiratory droplets and contact with bedding, towels, etc. that a person with monkeypox infection has used.

A network of spiking neurons demonstrated (Page no 10)

(GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)

Using the phenomenon of quantum tunnelling, IIT Bombay researchers have demonstrated, for the first time, a spiking neuron network that is highly compact and shows potential for brain-scale implementation.

The research, published in the journal IEEE Transactions on Circuits and Systems, demonstrates the use of a 36-member network of spiking neurons in a speech recognition module.

The inter-disciplinary work provided the technology and algorithm knowhow, from the Electrical Engineering department of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay, showed that their concept of a neuron could be realised and that it works in an energy efficient mode with low power requirement, suitable for emulating the brain.

This specific work started in 2020, though the relevant knowledge has built over many years and by many people in the team.

Our goal was to show a neuron in a network doing something useful. So, we took a prototypical spoken word recognition problem, that is, mimicking the auditory cortex.

Sushruta's description of reconstructing a nose (Page no 10) (GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)

Surgery performed on the nose is called rhinoplasty. In the modern era, it is popularly called a 'nose job' and is often associated with vanity — the cosmetic improvement of “facial symmetry”.

Functional improvements to the airways is also a good reason for surgery, or less frequent causes such as birth defects (cleft palate) falls, cancers, etc.

India ranks fourth in the world in rhinoplasties performed annually. (A note of caution — availability of the procedure does not translate to widespread availability of expertise, and the outcome of nose jobs can be hit-or-miss.

Prominent surgeons say that a significant number of their new patients are only seeking a 'redo'). The nose is a defining feature of our appearance and identity.

This may explain why phrases such as the Hindi phrase, *naak kat gaya* (mynose was cut) refer to a not so literal loss of face. In many societies, the cutting of the nose was a severe form of punishment.

This may also explain why the reconstruction of noses is a very old surgical procedure. The first careful description of nasal reconstruction is found in the Sushruta Samahita. Modern scholars have dated this text to the 7th or 6th century B.C, its esteemed author having practiced this art on the banks of the Ganges. The collection of Sushruta's writings is regarded as the earliest true medical textbook.

FAQ

Why are economic stakes high in West Asia? (Page no. 11) (GS Paper 3, International Relation)

The diplomatic fallout forced the government into firefighting mode earlier this month after several West Asian nations including Qatar, Kuwait, Iran, Bahrain, Oman, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE as well as the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) took strong exception to the remarks denigrating Islam and the Prophet Muhammed.

In response, Indian officials strenuously asserted that the government stood by the country's traditional values and respected all religions. It also tasked its diplomats to reach out to individual OIC member states and reassure them on India's position of an 'inclusive' approach to all communities.

India's cultural, economic and trade ties with the countries of the West Asian region are deep and abiding. Starting with maritime trade, the exchange of goods, services and cultures between the people of the Gulf region including those on the western shores of the Arabian Sea and the people of India's southern and western States reaches back several millennia and significantly predates even the foundation of the Islamic faith.

The West Asian region also served as a land trade bridge to Greece, Rome and other early European empires and a flourishing trade in spices, cloth, silk and indigo in exchange for gold and silver is well recorded.

In a more contemporary historical context, the British colonial era saw the advent of even a loose common monetary system with the rupee serving as legal tender in several Gulf states till the middle of the 20th century.

It was also the discovery and subsequent commercial exploitation of oil in the Gulf region during the colonial era that started to alter the balance of trade flows between India and the countries in the region.

What are SEBI's concerns around crypto assets? (Page no. 11) (GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the watchdog which regulates the securities and commodities market, has reportedly told the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance led by Jayant Sinha that regulation of crypto assets would be difficult given the nature of technology that sustains them.

It was reported last month that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had also shared its worries about cryptocurrencies with the committee.

SEBI has essentially flagged the problems with regulating crypto assets because they “are maintained in decentralised distributed ledgers, which are nested in computer nodes spread all across the globe.”

Crypto assets is usually used as an umbrella term to encompass cryptocurrencies (e.g., Bitcoin, Ether) as also non-currency tokens such as utility tokens (which provide a certain utility within an ecosystem) and non-fungible tokens (which help establish ownership of unique items), among others.

The underlying technology for crypto assets is the same — distributed ledgers that aren't controlled by any one entity.

Business

‘Vital to reform poorly aimed subsidies’. (Page no. 13)

(GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

Union Finance Secretary T.V. Somanathan stressed the need for fiscal discipline to make the economy stronger and suggested reforming poorly targeted subsidies such as those for electricity and fertilizers in order to improve the quality of public expenditure.

First and foremost, State and Central governments need prudent and conservative fiscal policies, this is absolutely critical.

The importance of reducing the fiscal deficit, particularly at the central level, minimizing external debt as well as fostering a strong domestic investment climate.

“We need to improve the quality of our public expenditure, with greater share for those aspects of public expenditure which help to promote growth. To do this, we have to reform poorly targeted subsidies such as those in electricity and fertilizers, without which we can’t improve the quality of public expenditure.