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RECLAIMING INDIA'S BUDDHIST CIVILISATIONAL LEGACY

Context

- PM Modi inaugurated the Grand International Exposition of Sacred Piprahwa Relics, titled "The Light & the Lotus: Relics of the Awakened One", in New Delhi, marking the return of sacred Buddhist relics to India after more than a century.

About Piprahwa relics

- The Piprahwa relics were discovered in **1898** by British civil engineer **William Claxton Peppé** in Piprahwa, Uttar Pradesh.
  - They are excavated from the **Piprahwa Stupa**—widely recognized as the ancient city of **Kapilavastu**, the birthplace of Lord Buddha.
- **They include** bone fragments, soapstone and crystal caskets, a sandstone coffer, and offerings such as gold ornaments and gemstones.
- They are believed to be associated with the mortal remains of Lord Buddha.
  - An inscription in the **Brahmi script** on one of the caskets confirms these as relics of the Buddha deposited by the **Sakya clan.**
- **Status:** Most of these relics were moved to the **Indian Museum in Kolkata in 1899** and are legally protected as **'AA' antiquities**, forbidding their sale or removal.
- While some bone relics were gifted to the **King of Siam, a portion kept by Peppé's descendants.**

Major Schools of Buddhism

- **Theravada Buddhism:** Focuses on **individual liberation** and is prominent in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.
- **Mahayana Buddhism:** Emphasises compassion and the **Bodhisattva ideal**, spreading across East Asia.
- **Vajrayana Buddhism:** Incorporates ritual practices and tantric elements, prevalent in Tibet, Bhutan, and the Himalayan region.

Core Philosophical Foundations of Buddhism

- **Four Noble Truths:**
  - **Dukkha:** Life is suffering or unsatisfactory.
  - **Samudaya:** Suffering is caused by craving and attachment (tanhā).
  - **Nirodha:** The cessation of suffering is possible by letting go of craving.
  - **Magga:** The path to the cessation of suffering is the Eightfold Path.
- **The Noble Eightfold Path (Magga):** Right Understanding/View, Right Thought/Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration.

Relevance of Buddhism in Contemporary World

- **Mental Well-being:** Buddhist meditation traditions, especially Vipassana and its related forms, are widely used to manage stress, anxiety, and mental health challenges in fast-paced modern life.
- **Teachings of non-attachment and humility** provide an ethical response to excessive consumerism, comparison, and ego-driven living encouraged by modern society and social media.
- **The Middle Way:** The principle of the Middle Way encourages balanced living by avoiding extremes of indulgence and austerity.
- **Compassion:** The Buddhist values of karuṇā (compassion) and mettā (loving-kindness) promote empathy, moral responsibility, and peaceful coexistence in societies marked by inequality and conflict.
- **Inclusive and Universal Appeal:** Buddhism's inclusive philosophy makes it relevant in pluralistic, multicultural, and democratic societies.

Source: DD News

FROM VENEZUELA TO GREENLAND: EXPANDING US STRATEGIC AMBITIONS

Context

- The recent remarks by the US President asserting that the United States **"needs Greenland for national security"** have triggered a diplomatic standoff with Denmark and Greenland, raising concerns over sovereignty, Arctic geopolitics, and great-power competition.

About Greenland

- It is **semi-autonomous** and part of the **Kingdom of Denmark,** with strong defense ties to NATO.
- **Location:** Situated between the Arctic and North Atlantic Oceans, northeast of Canada.

- It's the **world's biggest island** with over **80%** covered by a massive ice sheet.

Strategic Significance of Greenland

- **Military and security significance:** Greenland's location between North America and Europe makes it a critical pillar of NATO's Arctic defence. It hosts key US military infrastructure such as Pituffik Space Base, which supports ballistic missile early-warning systems and enhances monitoring of polar missile trajectories.
- **Space and satellite tracking role:** Greenland is ideally placed for ground stations that track polar-orbiting satellites, which are essential for intelligence, navigation, weather forecasting, and secure military communications.
- **Critical minerals and resources:** The island holds vast, largely untapped reserves of rare earth elements and other strategic minerals (uranium, graphite, zinc), crucial for renewable energy, electric vehicles, and defence manufacturing, helping reduce dependence on concentrated global supply chains.
- **Emerging Arctic shipping routes:** Melting Arctic ice is opening routes such as the Transpolar Sea Route, positioning Greenland near future global maritime highways that can significantly shorten travel between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.
- **Bypassing global chokepoints**: Arctic routes near Greenland can avoid traditional chokepoints like the Panama Canal and the Suez Canal, enhancing trade resilience and strategic maritime flexibility.
- **Geopolitical competition in the Arctic:** Growing interest from the US, China, and Russia in Arctic dominance has increased Greenland's importance as a strategic asset in great-power competition.

Historical Trajectory of USA- Greenland Engagement

- **During World War II,** the **US occupied Greenland** (A Danish colony) to prevent Nazi Germany from gaining control after Denmark was occupied.
- In **1946,** the USA **offered Denmark $100 million** to purchase Greenland.
- The **1951 US–Denmark Defence Agreement** granted the US long-term military access to Greenland, institutionalising American presence.
  - The US operates the **Pituffik Space Base (formerly Thule Air Base)**, a key installation for monitoring missile threats from Russia, China, and North Korea.
- During his first term, President Trump revived the idea of purchasing Greenland, calling it a **"large real estate deal"**, which Denmark categorically rejected.

The Alleged 'Three-Phase Strategy'

- Denmark allege a **multi-layered influence campaign**, reflecting modern forms of hybrid warfare and grey-zone tactics.
- **The reported strategy includes:**
  - **Soft power engagement,** through high-profile visits and symbolic outreach.
  - **Diplomatic coercion**, involving public criticism of Denmark's governance over Greenland.
  - **Political influence operations,** allegedly aimed at nurturing separatist sentiments within Greenland.

Has the US Bought Territories in the Past?

- The **Louisiana Purchase (1803)** saw the US acquire over 2 million sq km from France for $15 million.
- The **Alaska Purchase (1867)** transferred 1.5 million sq km from Russia to the US for $7.2 million.
- In **1917**, the US bought the **Danish West Indies,** now the US Virgin Islands.
- However, all past acquisitions occurred under very different international legal and geopolitical norms, unlike today's sovereignty-based global order.

Arctic as the Next Theatre of Great-Power Competition

- The Greenland issue reflects growing **militarisation of the Arctic** amid climate change and melting sea routes.
- It raises concerns about **erosion of sovereignty norms** and pressure tactics against smaller states.
  - Arctic governance institutions such as the **Arctic Council** face stress due to rising militarisation and geopolitical polarisation.

- The situation mirrors a broader trend of **re-territorialisation** of global politics, where geography regains primacy in strategic thinking.

Way Ahead

- **Strengthening multilateral Arctic governance** mechanisms is essential to prevent conflict escalation.
- **Respect for sovereignty** and consent-based cooperation must guide Arctic engagement.
- The US and its allies need to reconcile **security imperatives with alliance credibility.**
- Confidence-building measures and transparency in military activities are necessary to preserve Arctic stability.

Source: IE

GOVERNMENT EASES FUNDING NORMS TO BOOST DEEP-TECH START-UPS

Context

- The Union government relaxed norms for deep-tech start-ups to avail financial assistance from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR).

About

- The Centre has removed the mandatory **three-year** viability criterion for deep-tech start-ups to avail financial assistance of up to **₹1 crore** from DSIR.
- The funding support is provided under the **Industrial Research and Development Promotion Programme (IRDPP).**
- DSIR functions under the **Ministry of Science and Technology** to promote industrial R&D and innovation.
- **Earlier Funding Norms:**
  - Start-ups were eligible for DSIR support only after demonstrating sustainability and viability for **at least three years.**
  - This condition often excluded early-stage deep-tech innovators, who typically face long gestation periods.

What is deep technology?

- Deep tech refers to **advanced and disruptive technologies** that have the potential to trigger transformative change, and provide solutions for the future.
- The term is used to describe **cutting-edge research** in nanotechnology, biotechnology, material sciences, quantum technologies, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, data sciences, robotics, 3D printing, etc.

Significance of India's Deep-Tech Ambitions

- **Global Leadership:** It positions India as a trusted R&D hub in the "China+1" global landscape, leveraging its massive STEM talent pool to lead in frontier technologies like Quantum Computing and 6G.
- **Technological Sovereignty:** Reduces critical reliance on foreign imports for national security, defense, and space, ensuring India isn't vulnerable to global supply chain disruptions.
- **Solving Local Challenges:** Enables "India-first" solutions for massive social hurdles, such as AI for rural healthcare, precision agriculture for food security, and green hydrogen for energy independence.
- **Economic Value:** A robust deep-tech ecosystem enables India to move up the global value chain, shifting from **low-cost services and assembly-based manufacturing to high-value research,** design and intellectual property creation.

Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme Fund

- The scheme has an outlay of **Rs 1 lakh crore over 6 years**, with Rs 20,000 crore allocated for FY 2025–26, funded from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- **The Department of Science and Technology (DST)** will serve as the nodal department for implementation of the RDI Scheme.
- **Key objectives** of the Scheme are as follows;
  - **Encourage the private** sector to scale up research, development, and innovation (RDI) in sunrise domains and in other sectors relevant for economic security, strategic purpose, and self-reliance,
  - Finance transformative projects at higher levels of **Technology Readiness Levels (TRL),**
  - **Support acquisition of technologies** which are critical or of high strategic importance,
  - Facilitate setting up of a **Deep-Tech Fund of Funds.**

Source: TH

RISE IN POLICE SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING CELLS ACROSS INDIA

Context

- States across India have witnessed a steady rise in the use of **Social Media Monitoring Cells (SMMCs)** by state police forces to counter misinformation, maintain law and order, and pre-empt digital threats.

Key Findings, based on data collected between 2019 and 2023

- **Expanding Digital Surveillance in Policing:** The number of **dedicated social media monitoring cells** has risen from **262 as of January 1, 2020**, to **365 as of January 1, 2024**, a nearly **40% increase** in just four years.
- **States Leading in Social Media Surveillance:** As of 2024, **Bihar (52)**, **Maharashtra (50)**, **Punjab (48)**, **West Bengal (38)**, and **Assam (37)** have the highest number of operational social media monitoring cells.
- **Rapid Expansion in Conflict and Sensitive Regions:**
  - **Manipur: 3 in 2020 to 16 in 2024**, despite facing an **Internet suspension** lasting nearly **140 days in 2023**.
  - **Assam**: 1 cell in 2022 to 37 in 2024
  - **West Bengal:** 2 cells in 2022 to 38 in 2024
  - **Punjab**: 24 cells in 2022 to 48 in 2024
- **Institutionalization of Monitoring Cells:** Social media monitoring was often conducted informally or within **cybercrime police stations** before 2021.
  - However, since 2021, these units have been **recognized as distinct operational entities** in the DoPO reports.
- **Parallel Growth in Cybercrime Infrastructure:** The **expansion of monitoring cells** has occurred alongside the growth in **cybercrime police stations**, which increased from **376 in 2020** to **624 in 2024**.
  - It underscores the escalating complexity of digital offenses and the necessity of specialized responses.
- **Modernization of Policing Tools:** The number of **drones** available with police forces rose from **1,010 in 2023** to **1,147 in 2024**, indicating the increasing use of aerial surveillance and crowd management tools.
  - The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) attributes the above expansion to the **Modernisation of State Police Forces (MPF) Scheme**, under which the **central government allocates funds** for upgrading technology infrastructure and capacity-building in law enforcement.

Modernisation of State Police Forces (MPF) Scheme

- Launched By: **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** in **1969–70**; Recent expansions in the **2017–2025 period**.
- **Funding Pattern:**
  - For **Union Territories**: **100% Central** Fund
  - For **North-Eastern and Himalayan States: Centre (90%)**; **State (10%)**
  - For **Other States: Centre (60%)**; **State (40%)**
- **Key Components:**
  - **Procurement of Modern Weapons and Equipment:** Upgrading firearms, protective gear, drones, and surveillance systems.
  - **Mobility Support:** Vehicles for law and order, emergency response, and border security.
  - **Communication Systems:** Integration with the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS).
  - **Forensic Support and Training:** Strengthening state forensic labs and cyber labs.
  - **Infrastructure Upgrades:** Police stations, housing, and offices.
  - **Special Focus Areas:** LWE-affected (Left Wing Extremism) regions, NE states, and Jammu & Kashmir.

Operational Framework of SMMCs

- SMMCs generally function at the **district or range level**, often under the supervision of **Cyber Cells or Special Branch units**. Their primary objectives include:
  - Monitoring posts that may disturb **public order or communal harmony**.
  - Detecting **cyberbullying, online fraud, and misinformation campaigns**.
  - Generating 'trend reports' and **sentiment analyses** for senior officers.
  - Coordinating with social media companies for **content takedown or user identification**.
- **Positive Outcomes of SMMCs:**
  - **Countering misinformation** during public crises, such as COVID-19 or natural disasters.
  - **Tracking online radicalization** and terror propaganda.

- **Preventing mob violence** incited by fake news or doctored videos.
- **Assisting investigations** into cyber fraud, trafficking, and scams.
- Some states like **Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka** have developed **advanced monitoring setups** that use **AI-assisted analytics** to detect online anomalies in real time.

Concerns & Related Issues

- **Oversight and Privacy:** SMMCs raise **serious privacy and accountability questions**. Such monitoring often occurs **without judicial oversight or public transparency**.
  - Instances have emerged where users were **summoned or booked for critical posts**, sometimes under **ambiguous sections of the IT Act or IPC**, blurring the line between legitimate monitoring and censorship.
- **Persistent Workforce Shortage:** India's police forces continue to face a **large manpower deficit**, despite infrastructural and technological advances.
  - It presents challenges in implementing and maintaining the expanding technological infrastructure.

Way Forward: Balancing Technology with Accountability

- India needs a **clear legal framework** for digital policing, one that balances technological capability with democratic safeguards.
- Recommendations include:
  - Establishing **independent oversight committees** for SMMCs.
  - Introducing **transparency reports** to track data usage and content flagging.
  - Aligning police monitoring with the principles of **necessity, proportionality, and legality** as laid down in the Puttaswamy (2017) **privacy judgment.**

Source: TH

REMOTE-SENSING TECHNOLOGY GAINING POPULARITY

Context

- Remote-sensing technology is becoming increasingly popular and widely used by researchers.

What is Remote Sensing?

- Remote sensing refers to the acquisition of information about Earth's surface without direct contact, typically using satellites, aircraft, or drones.
- It relies on detecting spectral signatures of objects through visible, infrared, and microwave sensors.
- In India, remote sensing is central to environmental monitoring, agriculture, urban planning, and national security.

Remote sensing has a wide range of applications

- **Coastal applications**: Monitor shoreline changes, track sediment transport, and map coastal features. Data can be used for coastal mapping and erosion prevention.
- **Ocean applications:** Monitor ocean circulation and current systems, measure ocean temperature and wave heights, and track sea ice.
  - Data can be used to better understand the oceans and how to best manage ocean resources.
- **Hazard assessment:** Track hurricanes, earthquakes, erosion, and flooding. Data can be used to assess the impacts of a natural disaster and create preparedness strategies to be used before and after a hazardous event.
- **Natural resource management:** Monitor land use, map wetlands, and chart wildlife habitats. Data can be used to minimize the damage that urban growth has on the environment and help decide how to best protect natural resources.
  - Identifying groundwater zones and mineral deposits.
- **Forests & Ecology:** Mapping forest cover, biodiversity hotspots, and carbon stock.
  - In plants, satellites detect chlorophyll via near-infrared and red light to monitor crop and forest health using indices
- **Agriculture**: Crop yield estimation, soil moisture mapping, and precision farming.
- **Urban Planning:** Monitoring land use change, infrastructure growth, and pollution.

Importance of Remote Sensing

- It Provides reliable data for governance and planning.
- It reduces the need for extensive ground surveys.
- It enhances surveillance and border monitoring.
- It supports conservation and climate adaptation strategies.
- It positions India as a key player in space-based Earth observation.

Challenges

- Limited availability of high-resolution data for public use.
- Difficulty in combining satellite data with ground-based surveys.

- Need for trained manpower in advanced geospatial analytics.
- Dependence on foreign satellites for certain high-resolution imagery.
- Balancing open data with national security concerns.

India's Steps in Remote Sensing

- **ISRO's Remote Sensing Satellites:** Launch of Indian Remote Sensing (IRS) series and Cartosat satellites for high-resolution imaging.
- **Forest Survey of India (FSI):** Biennial India State of Forest Report based on remote sensing.
- **National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC)** provides geospatial services and disaster support.
- **Indian Space Policy 2023** encourages private sector participation in satellite data and applications.
- **Digital India Initiatives:** Integration of geospatial data for governance and citizen services.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- Remote sensing is vital for India's development and strategic needs, from forest monitoring to disaster prediction.
- To fully utilize it, India must focus on data access, skill development, and infrastructure upgrades.
  - Initiatives by ISRO and national policies indicate that remote sensing will become a key tool for governance, science, and security.

Source :TH

NEWS IN SHORT

SAMPANN (SYSTEM FOR ACCOUNTING AND MANAGEMENT OF PENSION)

Context

- SAMPANN (System for Accounting and Management of Pension) is an integrated, online pension management system for Department of Telecommunications (DoT) pensioners.

About

- SAMPANN creates a **single platform for processing, sanctioning and disbursing pension** directly to the bank account of pensioners.
- It also **offers online grievance redressal, digital profile management and transaction record,** enhancing transparency and efficiency for telecom retirees.
- The pension related documents i.e. Gratuity Payment Orders, Pension Certificates/ePPOs, Pension Commutation Payment Orders and Form 16 are now made available through **DigiLocker.**

Source: PIB

HUNTINGTON'S DISEASE

Context

- **Huntington's Disease** is increasingly recognised as **underdiagnosed in India** due to limited awareness and delayed diagnosis.

About Huntington's Disease (HD)

- It is a rare, progressive, hereditary neurodegenerative disorder that affects the brain and leads to motor dysfunction, cognitive decline, and psychiatric disturbances (depression, psychosis, irritability, OCD), resulting in lifelong disability.
- The disease is caused by a mutation in the **huntingtin (HTT) gene** and follows an **autosomal dominant inheritance pattern**, meaning a child inheriting the mutated gene from either parent will develop the disorder.
  - **Consanguineous marriages** significantly increase the probability of transmission, up to **75%.**
- Symptoms typically begin between 40 and 50 years of age and progress over 15–20 years.
- While there is **no cure** for the disease, treatments are available that can improve patients' quality of life and ease the burden on caregivers.

Policy Perspective

- The WHO defines rare diseases as those affecting 1 or fewer per 1,000 people. Although over 7,000 rare diseases exist globally, fewer than 5% have treatment options.
- In 2021, the Union government formulated the National Policy for Rare Diseases (NPRD)-2021 for identification, prevention and providing support to families with rare diseases.
  - The NPRD recognises **63 rare diseases** in India, but Huntington's Disease is not included. Patients with any of the 63 recognised diseases are eligible for financial assistance of up to ₹50 lakh under PM-JAY.

Source: TH

PAYMENTS REGULATORY BOARD

In News

- The first meeting of the Payments Regulatory Board (PRB) was held under the chairmanship of RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra, marking the operationalisation of India's new payments governance framework.

About Payments Regulatory Board

- The Payments Regulatory Board (PRB) is a statutory body through which the Reserve Bank of India exercises regulatory and supervisory control over payment and settlement systems in India.
- It was created under Section 3 of the Payment and Settlement Systems (PSS) Act, 2007.
- It replaced the earlier Board for Regulation and Supervision of Payment and Settlement Systems (BPSS).
- Its objective is to ensure safety, efficiency, stability, and consumer protection in digital and non-cash payments.

Source: AIR

TAJ TRAPEZIUM ZONE (TTZ)

In News

- The National Green Tribunal issued a notice to the Centre and the Uttar Pradesh government over non-compliance with environmental norms in the **Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ).**

What is the Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ)?

- The Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ) is a protected eco-sensitive area of about 10,400 sq. km created to protect the Taj Mahal from environmental pollution and ecological degradation.
- It covers the broader Agra region and includes key heritage sites like the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, and Fatehpur Sikri.
- The TTZ regime traces to the Supreme Court's directions in **M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (1996)**, which mandated strong pollution-control measures in the area (including regulation of industries and emissions, and cleaner fuel/ technology measures).
    - In **M.C. Mehta (2015)**, the Supreme Court also restricted tree felling within a 5 km aerial distance from the Taj Mahal, requiring prior permission (as per the Court's directions) before any such felling.

About NGT

- NGT is a **statutory body** established under the **National Green Tribunal Act, 2010** to ensure speedy and effective disposal of cases related to environmental protection and conservation.
- It hears matters linked to major environmental laws in **Schedule I**, including the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, among others.

Source: TH

WOLF SUPERMOON

Context

- The **January 2026 Wolf Supermoon** occurred recently.

About

- A **Wolf Supermoon** combines two distinct concepts: **Wolf Moon** and **Supermoon**.
    - **Wolf Moon:**
        - The term refers to the **full moon occurring in January**. Such traditional names for full moons originated from seasonal patterns and were popularised through folklore and almanacs to mark time before modern calendars.
        - The name is associated with winter stories of wolves being heard more frequently, though it has **no astronomical significance**.
    - **Supermoon:**
        - A supermoon is an **astronomical phenomenon** that occurs when a full moon coincides with the Moon's closest approach to Earth, known as **perigee**.
        - The Moon follows an **elliptical orbit**, with its farthest point called **apogee**.

Key Features

- During a Wolf Supermoon, the Moon appears slightly larger and brighter than a typical full moon.
- An associated visual effect is the Moon Illusion, where the Moon appears larger near the horizon due to human perception, not actual size change.

Source: TH

SURYASTRA ROCKET LAUNCHER SYSTEM

Context

- The Indian Army has signed a **₹293 crore** contract with the NIBE Limited, in collaboration with Israel, for the supply of the long-range Suryastra Rocket Launcher system.

About Suryastra Rocket Launcher

- Suryastra is India's **first indigenously manufactured universal multi-calibre rocket** launcher capable of precision surface-to-surface strikes up to 300 km.
- The system can integrate and **fire multiple rocket types** from the same launcher, enabling flexibility across operational scenarios.
- It has demonstrated a **Circular Error Probable (CEP)** of less than five metres, indicating high-precision deep-strike capability.
- The launcher is also capable of **firing loitering munitions up to 100 km**, expanding its role beyond conventional rocket artillery.

Source: TH

SAMUDRA PRATAP

In News

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh commissioned the Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) 'Samudra Pratap'.

Samudra Pratap

- It has been designed and constructed by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) under the two-ship PCV project.
- It is the **first indigenously designed** and built pollution control vessel commissioned into the Indian Coast Guard and is also the largest ship in the ICG fleet.
- It is the first Indian Coast Guard ship fitted with **Dynamic Positioning capability (DP-1) and holds FiFi-2/FFV-2 notation certification**.
- It is equipped with specialised systems to detect and respond to oil spills, including an oil fingerprinting machine, a gyro-stabilised standoff active chemical detector, and onboard pollution control laboratory equipment.
- It also features an indigenously developed Integrated Bridge System, Integrated Platform Management System, Automated Power Management System, and a high-capacity external firefighting system.

Source :TH

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