The Importance of Lumbini

Why in news?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Lumbini, Nepal is full of symbolism and substance.

What does the visit symbolize?

- Mr. Modi's visit is a combination of personal desire and political and strategic goals.
- Prime Minister's visit also provides a moment for quiet reflection and a reiteration of the message of peace, compassion and non-violence preached by the Buddha.
- The visit is also political and strategic and is an opportune time for India to do much more in the region.
- During his visit, the Prime Minister is set to meet Nepali counterpart Sher Bahadur Deuba for bilateral talks.
- The PM's participation in "Shilanyas" ceremony of the India International Centre for Buddhist Culture and Heritage in the Lumbini Monastic Zone is also significant.
- His visit is intended to celebrate and further deepen these time-honoured linkages that have been fostered through centuries and recorded in our long history of inter-mingling.

What is the significance of Lumbini?

- The Lord Buddha was said to be born in 623 BC in the sacred area of Lumbini located in the Terai plains of southern Nepal.
- The Indian emperor Ashoka had erected one of his commemorative pillars there.
- The site is now being developed as a Buddhist pilgrimage centre, where the archaeological remains associated with the birth of the Lord Buddha form a central feature.
- The complex of structures within the archaeological conservation area includes
    - the Shakya Tank
    - the remains within the Maya Devi Temple dating from the 3rd century BC to the present century
    - the sandstone Ashoka pillar with its Pali inscription in Brahmi script
    - the excavated remains of Buddhist viharas (monasteries) of the 3rd century BC to the 5th century AD
    - the remains of Buddhist stupas (memorial shrines) from the 3rd century BC to the 15th century AD
- Both Lumbini and the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya are UNESCO World Heritage sites.
- The first foreign monastery in Lumbini was built by a Vietnamese monk, Thay Huyen Dieu.
- India does not have a monastery in Lumbini.
- The largest monastery has been built by the Chinese who sponsor and support international conferences on Buddhism in Nepal as well as the massive celebrations on Buddhist festivals such as Vesak.

India is home to some of the most sacred sites of Buddhism:

1. *Lord Buddha's enlightenment- Bodh Gaya*
2. *Buddha's first sermon- Sarnath*
3. *Mahaparinirvana- Kushinagar*
4. *Buddha preached for many years- Shravasti*
5. *Others- Nalanda and Rajgir*

What can India do at Lumbini?

- **Indian monastery**- Mr. Modi's visit is an opportune time to remedy the situation and announce the establishment of an Indian monastery in Nepal.
- **Development of Lumbini**- India could assist in the development of Lumbini along with the international committee that has been set by the UN.
- **Buddhist circuit**- There is a need to develop a Buddhist circuit with seamless connectivity and comfortable travel between the major pilgrimage sites in Nepal and India.
- **Infrastructure development**- Speedy construction of the integrated check post would also boost tourism and the local economy.

What is the Buddhist centre whose foundation PM Modi laid in Lumbini?

- The India International Centre for Buddhist Culture and Heritage in the Lumbini Monastic Zone in Nepal is expected to cost Rs 1 billion and take three years to complete.
- The Centre will be constructed by the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), New Delhi.
- Once completed, the Centre will be a world-class facility welcoming pilgrims and tourists from all over the world to enjoy the essence of spiritual aspects of Buddhism.
- It will be a modern building, NetZero compliant in terms of energy, water and waste handling, and will house prayer halls, meditation centers, library, exhibition hall, cafeteria, offices and other amenities.

What can India do to develop a Buddhist circuit?

- **Master plan for Bodh Gaya**- There is an urgent need to adopt a master plan and develop Bodh Gaya as like Lumbini.
- **Committee**- A high-level coordination committee comprising representatives of State and Central governments as well as of foreign monasteries should be set up to resolve problems.
- **UNESCO WHS**- Efforts should be made for the entire Buddhist circuit, namely Lumbini-Bodh Gaya-Sarnath-Kushinagar, to be declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site(WHS).
- **International conference**- India can also take the initiative to organise an international conference on the development of the Buddhist circuit to give a sense of participation and ownership to Buddhist countries.
- **International museum**- India can also establish an international museum of Buddhist tradition in Bodh Gaya and invite all Buddhist countries to participate.

References

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