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Largest Reclining Buddha Statue

- Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the ceremony to install India's largest Reclining Buddha statue (on Buddha Purnima or Vesak) at the Buddha International Welfare Mission temple, Bodh Gaya, was put off.
- The giant 100-foot fibreglass statue was built over three months by a team of 22 artisans in Kolkata.
- It remains a fascinating work of art, as much for its size as for the way The Buddha has been depicted.

Reclining Buddha

- A Reclining Buddha statue or image represents the Buddha during his last illness, about to enter Parinirvana (483 BC), the stage of great salvation after death that can only be attained by enlightened souls.
- Buddha died at the age of 80, in meditation state, in Kushinagar in UP.
- Buddha's Mahaparinirvana that happened in Kushinagar is the great demise, after which there is no rebirth for him. It is his final going away.
- The Reclining Buddha also signifies the Buddha's last deeksha - even while on his deathbed, he took a follower into the fold.
- The statues and images of the Reclining Buddha show him lying on his right side, his head resting on a cushion or on his right elbow.
- This popular iconographic depiction shows that all beings can be awakened and be released from the cycle of death and rebirth.
- The Reclining Buddha was first depicted in Gandhara art, which began in the period between 50 BC and 75 AD and peaked during the Kushana period from the 1^{st} to 5^{th} centuries AD.

Reclining Buddha outside India

- In Sri Lanka and India, the Buddha is mostly shown in sitting postures, while the reclining postures are more prevalent in Thailand and other parts of South East Asia.
- The World's largest Reclining Buddha is the 600-foot Winsein Tawya Buddha built in 1992 in Mawlamyine, Myanmar.
- In the late 15th century, a 70-metre statue of the Reclining Buddha was built at the Hindu temple site of Baphuon in Cambodia's Angkor.

- The World's oldest statue of its kind is the Bhamala Buddha Parinirvana (2nd century AD) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

Reclining Buddha in India

- **Ajanta** - Cave No. 26 of Ajanta contains a 24-foot-long and 9-foot-tall sculpture of the Reclining Buddha (5th century AD).
- **Kushinagar** - It has a 6-metre-long red sandstone monolith statue of the Reclining Buddha inside the Parinirvana Stupa.

Other Depictions

- Sitting Buddha (world's most common depiction) signifies teaching or meditating.
- Standing Buddha signifies rising to teach after reaching nirvana.
- Walking Buddha -least common of the Buddha postures- is either beginning his journey toward enlightenment or returning after giving a sermon. This is seen mostly in Thailand.
- The Buddha statues found in South East Asia are an amalgamation of all his various postures and life events, including mahaparinirvana.
- In India, there are a lot of Buddhas in sitting postures, mostly pertaining to his Enlightenment rather than to his demise.
- **Mahabodhi temple** - The Buddha is sitting in the bhoomi-sparsha mudra, where his hand is pointing towards the ground. It symbolises earth as being witness to his enlightenment.
- **Sarnath** - The stone statue of the Buddha has a hand gesture called the dharma-chakra mudra, which signifies preaching.
- This is the most popular depiction in India, along with the Bodhi tree depiction.

Bitcoin Mining Council

- The Bitcoin Mining Council will consist of miners who commit to publishing current and planned renewable usage.
- The move comes weeks after Elon Musk suspended Tesla vehicle purchases using bitcoin, over environmental concerns.
- He said that Tesla will not sell any bitcoin and intends to use bitcoin for transactions as soon as mining moves to more sustainable energy.
- Musk convinced many bitcoin miners in North America to form an organisation to promote cryptocurrency's energy usage transparency and accelerate sustainable mining worldwide.
- The Bitcoin Mining Council, formed by cryptocurrency companies like ArgoBlockchain, Galaxy Digital, Core Scientific and Hive, will,

1. Standardise energy reporting,
2. Pursue industry ESG goals and
3. Educate and grow the marketplace.

- The Musk-led council will respect bitcoin's fungibility and won't change the nature of the crypto asset, but will simply promote greener practices.

Target Olympic Podium Scheme

- Tennis player Ankita Raina has been added to the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS or TOP Scheme).
- The TOPS is a flagship program of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) that provides assistance to India's top athletes.
- Under the Scheme, the Department of Sports shall identify athletes who are potential medal winners in 2020 / 2024 Olympics.
- The scheme looks to add a premium to the preparations of these athletes so that they can win Olympic medals.
- It also funds a Developmental Group of Athletes who are medal prospects for the Olympic Games in Paris (2024) and Los Angeles Games (2028).
- **History** - In order to realize India's Olympic medal dream, at the 2016 and 2020 Olympics, the MYAS established the TOP Scheme in 2014.
- **TOPS Elite Athletes' Identification Committee** was constituted to identify the elite athletes who could achieve the Olympic podium.
- The MYAS appoints the TOPS members with emphasis on ensuring representation from 'High-Priority' sports (Archery, Badminton, Boxing Hockey, Shooting and Wrestling).
- **Mission Olympic Cell (MOC)** is a dedicated body created to assist the athletes who are selected under the TOP Scheme.
- The Chairman of MOC is the Director General, Sports Authority of India.
- The idea of the MOC is to debate, discuss and decide the processes and methods so that the athlete receives best assistance.
- The MOC also focuses on selection, exclusion and retention of athletes, coaches, training institutes that can receive TOPS assistance.

WHO BioHub

- The World Health Organization (WHO) will establish the first BioHub Facility in Spiez, Switzerland.
- The BioHub will allow rapid sharing of pathogens between labs and partners to facilitate a better analysis and preparedness against them.
- It will also help in safe reception, sequencing, storage and preparation of biological materials for distribution to other labs.
- It will enable member states to share biological materials with and via the

BioHub under pre-agreed conditions and regulations.

- **Significance** - The move will help contribute to the establishment of an international exchange system for SARS-CoV-2 and other emerging pathogens, to assess risks and launch countermeasures.
- This move will ensure timeliness and predictability in response activities.

Mekedatu

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT), Southern Zone, has appointed a joint committee to look into allegations of unauthorised construction activity taking place in Mekedatu, Karnataka.
- Mekedatu (means 'goat's leap') is a gorge along Kaveri where Arkavati merges with Kaveri. From this point, about 3.5 kilometers downstream, the river Kaveri flows through a deep and narrow gorge.
- In 2017, the Karnataka government had proposed to construct a dam in Mekedatu across the Cauvery River.
- This project received approval from the erstwhile Ministry of Water Resources for the detailed project report. It was opposed by Tamil Nadu government.

NGT Order on Banni Grasslands

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) ordered all encroachments to be removed from Gujarat's Banni grasslands within six months and directed a joint committee to prepare an action plan in a month.
- The nomadic pastoralist community, the Maldharis welcomed the move.
- The NGT said that the Maldharis will continue to hold the right to conserve the community forests in the area, granted to them as per the provisions in Section 3 of Forest Rights Act, 2006.

Banni Grasslands

- Banni Grasslands, which is the largest grassland of Asia, is located in the Bhuj taluka of Kutch district, Gujarat (Arid climate).
- Banni grassland account for almost 45% of the pastures in Gujarat. In 1955, the court notified that the grassland will be a reserve forest.
- It emerged from the sea as a result of tectonic activities. It received soils from the rivers and the wind.
- Two ecosystems, wetlands and grasslands, are juxtaposed in Banni.
- It has numerous natural wetlands, and the largest one is Chhari-Dhandh wetland which is a Conservation Reserve.
- Banni grassland started losing its original ecosystem slowly due to invasion of prosopis juliflora, a foreign alien species.

Maldharis

- The Maldhari community's livelihoods depends on the protected shrub-savanna Banni, Gujarat. (Maldhari means owner of goods)
- They breed Banni Buffaloes, a species endemic to the region. These buffaloes are adaptive to Kutch's hot weather condition.

Source: PIB, The Hindu, Times Now, The Indian Express, Down To Earth

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