CURRENT AFFAIRS FOR 4th DECEMBER 2024

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(Coaching For Civil Services-IAS,IFS,IPS,IRS etc.,)
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1. INC-5 Outcomes and Implications: Addressing Global Plastic Pollution

The **fifth Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5)** meeting in **Busan, South Korea**, aimed at formulating a global treaty to combat plastic pollution, ended without a conclusive agreement. The lack of a binding treaty has sparked concerns over the effectiveness and inclusivity of the ongoing negotiations.

Key Outcomes and Challenges

1. **Lack of Ambition:**
   The Chair's draft, designed to incorporate diverse national perspectives, fell short of proposing decisive actions required to address the escalating plastic crisis.
2. **Transparency Issues:**
   The exclusion of scientific experts, civil society organizations, and representatives from vulnerable communities led to criticism, with many highlighting the need for a more transparent process.
3. **Impact on Vulnerable Communities:**
   Decisions made without adequate representation from communities disproportionately affected by plastic pollution risk exacerbating existing social and environmental inequities.
4. **Division Among Nations:**
   Deep-seated disagreements among participating countries on the scope and enforceability of proposed measures hindered collective action and progress.
5. **Concerns Over Legitimacy:**
   The reliance on closed-door negotiations raised questions about the legitimacy of the process and the inclusivity of the decisions made.
6. **Political Expediency:**
   The emphasis on reaching a consensus, often at the expense of bold environmental action, highlighted the prioritization of political compromises over urgent environmental solutions.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthened Inclusivity:**
   Future negotiations must ensure the active participation of all stakeholders, especially marginalized and vulnerable communities that bear the brunt of plastic pollution.
2. **Enhanced Transparency:**
   Open dialogue, accessible decision-making processes, and the inclusion of diverse voices are essential to build trust and credibility in the treaty's outcomes.
3. **Ambitious Targets:**
   To address the plastic crisis effectively, future treaty drafts should incorporate clear, actionable, and enforceable commitments aimed at significantly reducing plastic production, consumption, and waste.

The failure to reach an agreement at INC-5 underscores the urgent need for more inclusive, transparent, and ambitious international cooperation to tackle the global plastic pollution crisis.

"Assess the key challenges and outcomes of the INC-5 meeting on global plastic pollution, and discuss the implications for future negotiations."

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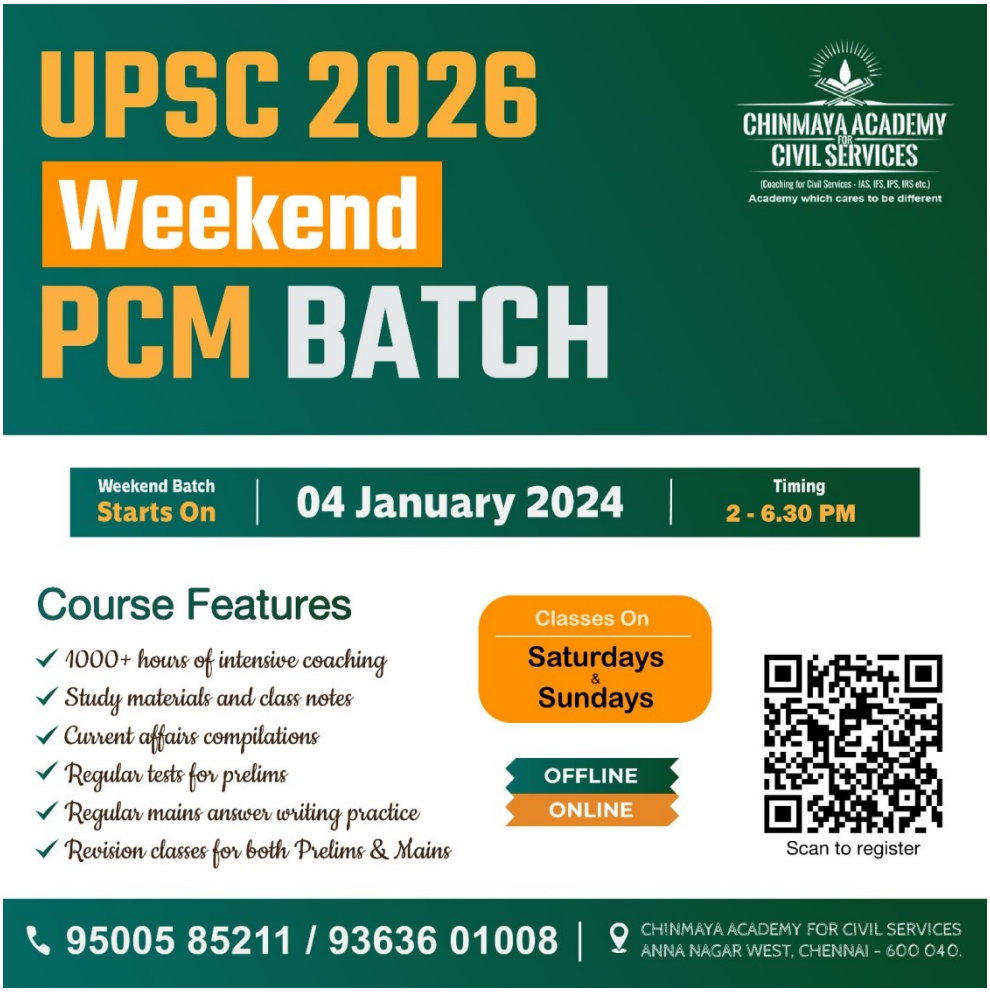
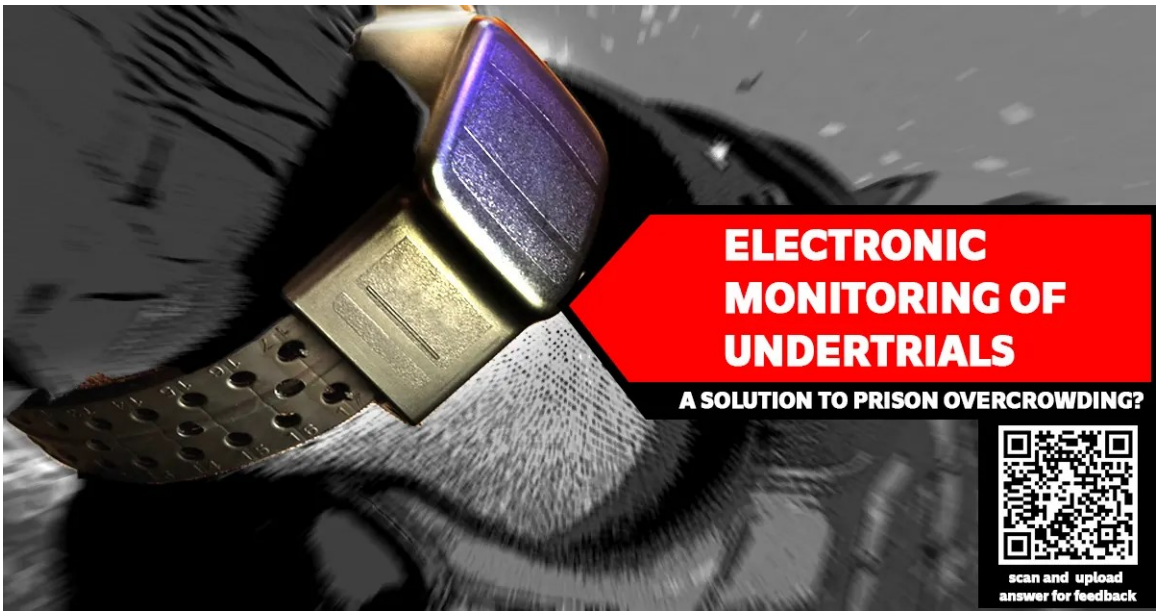


2. Electronic Monitoring of Undertrials: A Solution to Prison Overcrowding?



A recent report on Indian prisons highlights the potential of electronic tracking as a strategy to address overcrowding, with jails operating at 131.4% capacity as of December 2022. Notably, 75.8% of inmates were undertrials, underscoring the urgent need for alternative solutions.

Benefits of Electronic Tracking

1. **Prison Decongestion:**
   By allowing undertrials to be monitored outside of prison, electronic tracking can significantly reduce overcrowding in jails.
2. **Economic Viability:**
   The annual cost of electronic monitoring per undertrial ranges between ₹10,000 and ₹15,000, making it a more affordable option compared to traditional incarceration.
3. **Administrative Efficiency:**
   Reduces the need for extensive prison staff, improving resource allocation and operational efficiency.
4. **Rehabilitation Support:**
   Enables undertrials to maintain social connections and employment, facilitating smoother reintegration into society.
5. **Compliance with Bail Conditions:**
   Ensures that undertrials adhere to legal requirements, reducing the likelihood of re-offending and improving overall public safety.

Challenges and Concerns

1. **Privacy Issues:**
   Mandatory electronic monitoring may infringe upon the right to privacy. For instance, a Delhi High Court case raised concerns about foreign nationals subjected to such monitoring, highlighting potential privacy violations through additional measures like drug tests or home searches.

2. **Risk of 'E-Carceration':**
   Studies warn that electronic monitoring could extend the negative impacts of incarceration, especially on marginalized communities.

3. **Financial Burden:**
   In countries like the U.S., individuals often bear the cost of electronic monitoring, leading to financial stress. Similar concerns may arise in India, particularly for economically disadvantaged undertrials.

4. **Social Stigma:**
   Visible tracking devices can lead to social isolation, anxiety, and stress, further complicating the individual's reintegration into society.

5. **Community Disparities:**
   Marginalized communities, such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), already overrepresented in Indian prisons, may disproportionately face the negative effects of electronic monitoring.

6. **Human Rights and Ethical Issues:**
   There is a risk of misuse, necessitating the informed consent of individuals and strict adherence to human rights norms.

7. **Technological Reliability:**
   Malfunctions or inaccuracies in the tracking system can undermine its effectiveness, leading to legal and administrative challenges.

Way Forward

1. **Balancing Privacy and Security:**
   Establish legal safeguards and regular audits to protect privacy while ensuring the effectiveness of monitoring systems.

2. **Informed Consent:**
   Make electronic monitoring voluntary, ensuring individuals are fully informed about the process and their rights.

3. **Judicial Oversight:**
   Restrict the use of electronic tracking to serious cases and repeat offenders, with appropriate judicial supervision to prevent misuse.

4. **Financial Support:**
   Provide subsidies for economically disadvantaged individuals to ensure equitable access to electronic monitoring systems.

5. **Mental Health Support:**
   Address the psychological impacts of electronic tracking by offering counseling and support services to reduce stigma and stress.

By addressing these challenges, electronic monitoring can become a viable alternative to incarceration, promoting both decongestion of prisons and better rehabilitation of undertrials.

"Evaluate the potential of electronic monitoring of undertrials as a solution to prison overcrowding in India, highlighting its benefits and challenges."

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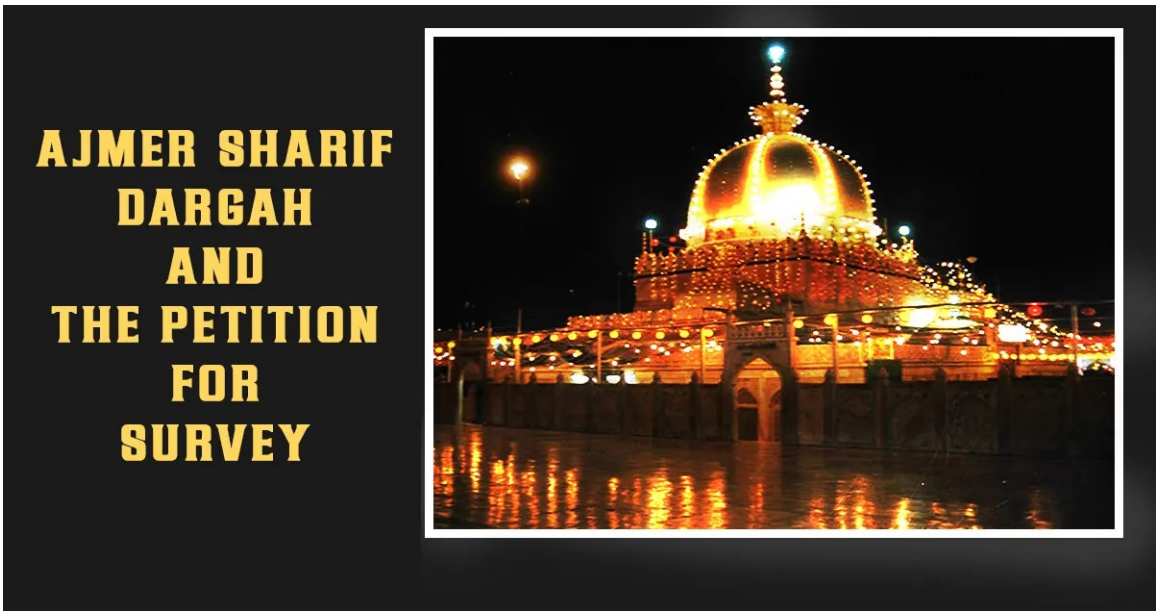
3. Ajmer Sharif Dargah and the Petition for Survey



A recent petition filed in an Ajmer court seeks a survey of the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, claiming it was built over the remains of Hindu and Jain temples that were destroyed.

Historical Context of Ajmer

The city of Ajmer, originally known as *Ajaymeru*, was founded by Raja Ajay Pal Chauhan. It served as the capital of the Chauhan dynasty, a prominent Rajput clan that ruled over parts of present-day Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh between the 7th and 12th centuries CE.

In 1192, after defeating Prithviraj Chauhan in the Second Battle of Tarain, Muhammad of Ghor's forces invaded Ajmer, resulting in the destruction of several temples. The petition cites Har Bilas Sarda's 1911 book, *Ajmer: Historical and Descriptive*, which mentions the destruction of these temples but does not directly associate them with the construction of the dargah.

Formation and Evolution of Ajmer Sharif Dargah

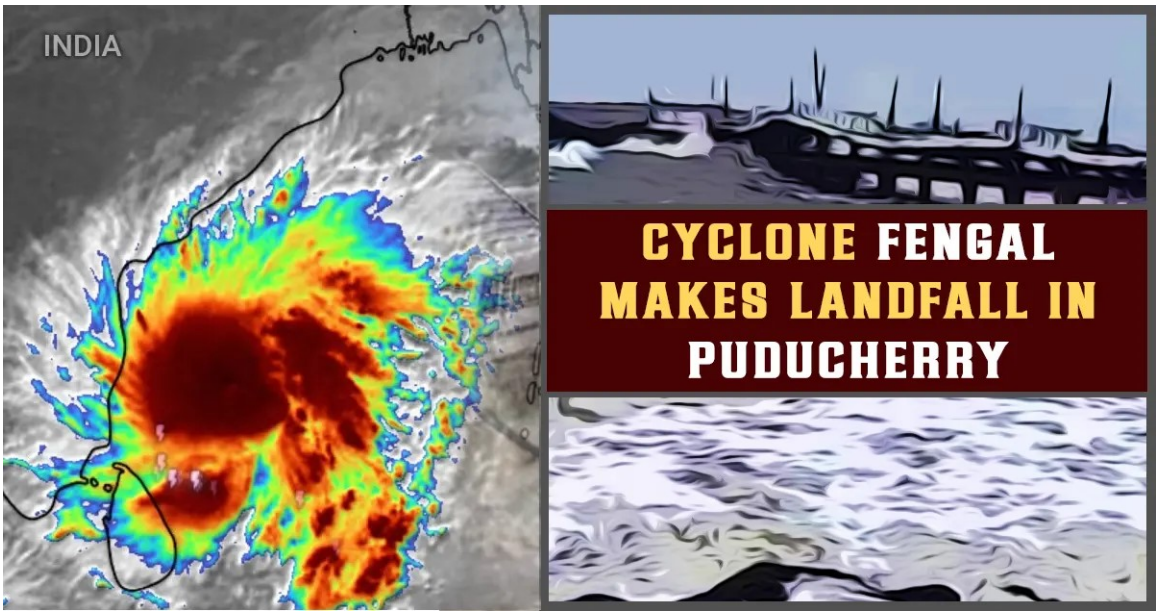
Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, a revered Sufi saint, passed away in 1236 and was buried in a simple cell where he had lived. No significant structure was built immediately after his death, and for nearly 200 years, his presence in Ajmer remained largely unrecognized.

The first formal mausoleum was constructed by Sultan Mahmud Khan Khalji of Malwa and his son Ghiyasuddin. They also built the prominent *Buland Darwaza*. The existing white marble dome was added in 1532 during Emperor Humayun's reign. In 1616, Emperor Jahangir installed a gold railing around the saint's tomb, and further expansions were carried out by Shah Jahan.

The structure exemplifies Indo-Islamic architecture, featuring a dome adorned with a lotus and a golden crown, a contribution from Nawab Haider Ali Khan of Rampur. The dargah complex also houses the *Mehfil Khana*, or royal court, built in 1888, while the *Nizam Gate* was donated by the Nizam of Hyderabad in the 19th century.

The *Urs* festival, commemorating the death anniversary of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, is a significant event held annually over six days.

4. Cyclone Fengal Makes Landfall in Puducherry



Cyclone Fengal recently made landfall in Puducherry, marking the second cyclone to affect India's eastern coastline within two months, following Cyclone Dana.

What is Landfall?

Landfall refers to the moment when a tropical cyclone moves from the sea onto land. According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), a cyclone officially makes landfall when its center, or eye, crosses the coastline.

Even before the eye reaches the shore, the cyclone's outer bands typically bring strong winds, heavy rainfall, and storm surges. It's important to distinguish landfall from a direct hit: a direct hit happens when the eyewall—the zone of strongest winds—comes ashore, even if the cyclone's center remains over water.

Duration and Impact of Landfall

- **Time Duration:** The process of landfall can take several hours, depending on the cyclone's size and wind speed.
- **Post-Landfall Intensity:** Cyclones begin to weaken once they make landfall due to reduced access to moisture and increased surface friction. While this phase is often the most destructive, it also marks the start of the storm's gradual weakening.

5. Farmer ID: Kisan Pehchaan Patra

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW) has directed states and Union Territories to expedite the issuance of **Farmer ID**, also known as the *Kisan Pehchaan Patra*, by organizing special camps.

Key Features of the Farmer ID

1. **Aadhaar-Linked Digital Identity:**
   The Farmer ID is a unique digital identity linked to the farmer's Aadhaar, ensuring authenticity and accuracy.
2. **State and UT Management:**
   The implementation and management of the Farmer ID are handled by state governments and Union Territories.
3. **Comprehensive Data Integration:**
   The Farmer ID connects multiple datasets related to farmers, including:
   - **Land Records:** Details of agricultural land owned or leased.
   - **Livestock Ownership:** Information on livestock possessed by the farmer.
   - **Crops Sown:** Data on the type and extent of crops cultivated.
   - **Benefits and Subsidies:** Records of government schemes and subsidies availed by the farmer.
   - **Demographic and Family Details:** Personal information and family composition.
4. **Farmer Registry:**
   The database created through the Farmer ID is known as the *Farmer Registry*, forming a key component of the **Agri Stack** under the Centre's **Digital Agriculture Mission**.

Significance

The Kisan Pehchaan Patra aims to streamline access to agricultural services, improve the distribution of subsidies and benefits, and enhance overall agricultural governance through digital integration.

6. Places of Worship Act, 1991: Legal and Social Implications

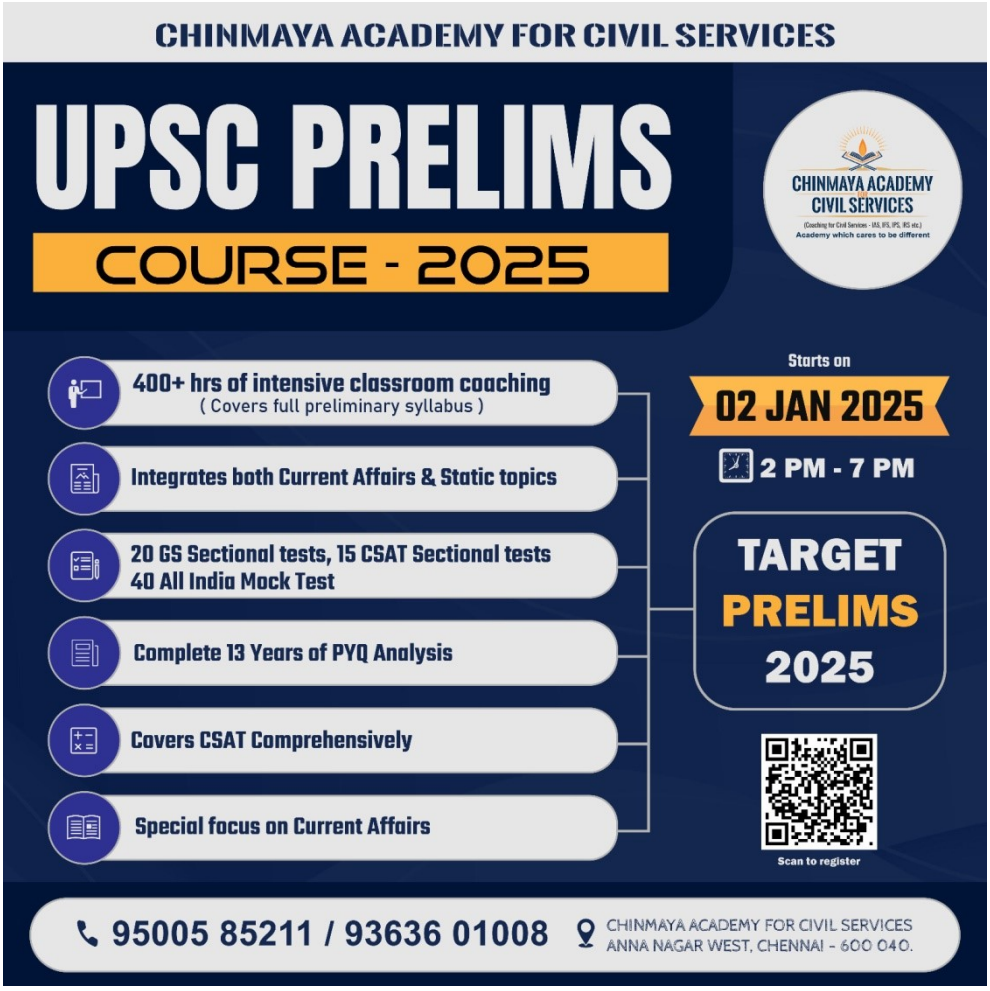
The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, has come under renewed scrutiny due to ongoing legal disputes such as the Gyanvapi mosque case and incidents like the Sambhal violence. These cases have raised critical questions about the Act's scope and its impact on communal harmony in India.

Key Provisions and Legal Interpretations

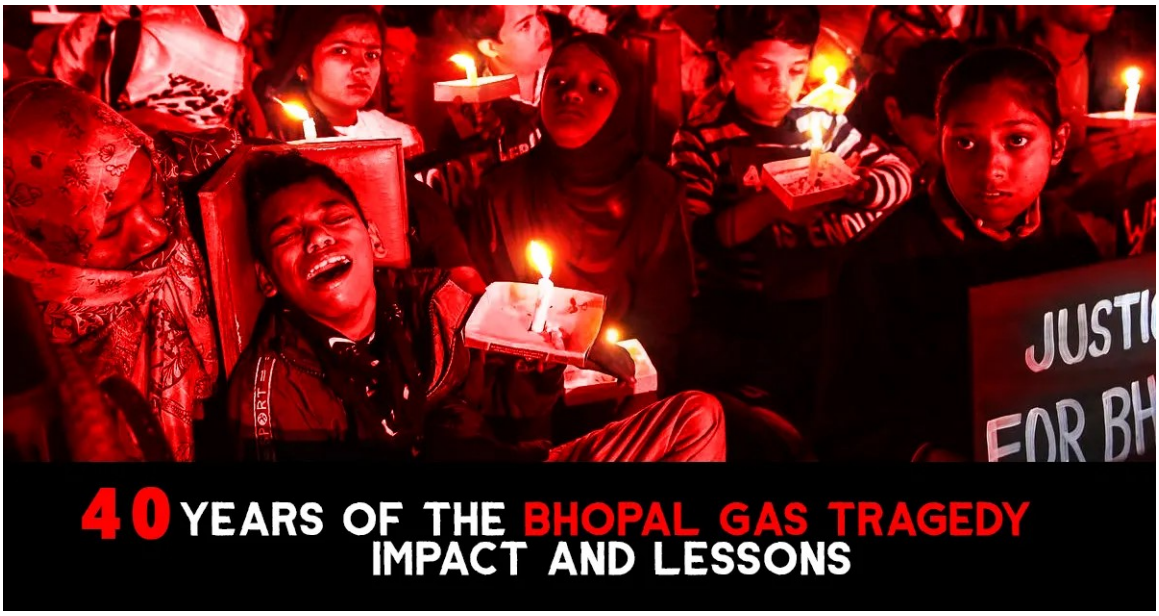
1. **Historical Claims and Religious Sanctity:**
   Under Hindu law, temples retain their sanctity even after destruction, which poses a challenge to the legitimacy of certain mosques under Islamic law. This raises debates over whether the Act allows for inquiries into the "original" status of religious sites or only their altered state.
2. **Rising Civil Suits:**
   Despite the Act's clear prohibition on altering the status of religious places as it existed on August 15, 1947, there has been a surge in civil suits questioning the origins of certain mosques, thereby violating the Act.
3. **Judicial Remarks and Delays:**
   Justice D.Y. Chandrachud's oral observation that the Act does not bar status inquiries has fueled debates about its interpretation. Meanwhile, pending petitions challenging the Act's constitutionality have led lower courts to entertain suits that the Act ostensibly prohibits, further delaying judicial clarity.
4. **Impact on Communal Harmony:**
   Legal disputes over religious sites risk escalating communal tensions, undermining the Act's primary objective of maintaining peace and preventing historical conflicts from being reopened.
5. **Legislative Intent:**
   Legal experts emphasize that the Act was designed to uphold the secular fabric of India by prohibiting the reopening of historical disputes over religious sites.

Way Forward

1. **Judicial Clarity and Finality:**
   The Supreme Court must expedite hearings on the Act's constitutionality to resolve ambiguities and reinforce adherence to its provisions.
2. **Legislative Support:**
   The government should actively defend the constitutionality of the Act to ensure its effective implementation and safeguard communal harmony.
3. **Public Awareness:**
   Educating the public about the significance of the Places of Worship Act is essential to promote its role in preserving the secular and pluralistic character of Indian society.



7. 40 Years of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy: Impact and Lessons



The **Bhopal Gas Tragedy** of 1984, triggered by the leakage of **Methyl Isocyanate (MIC)** from the Union Carbide plant, remains one of the world's worst industrial disasters. Decades later, survivors continue to face severe health issues, as highlighted in a 2010 study by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

Health Impacts of Methyl Isocyanate (MIC)

1. **Severe Organ Damage:**
   MIC exposure leads to inflammation, hemorrhages, and swelling in critical organs such as the lungs, brain, and heart.
2. **Toxic Blood:**
   Victims exhibited *cherry red blood*, indicating hydrogen cyanide poisoning, a direct consequence of MIC exposure.
3. **Neurological Effects:**
   The gas causes brain swelling, neurological disorders, and damage to multiple organs, leading to long-term cognitive and physical impairments.
4. **Chronic Respiratory Issues:**
   Survivors suffer from asthma, respiratory distress, and increased susceptibility to infections, often leading to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
5. **Reproductive Harm:**
   Higher rates of miscarriages, congenital disabilities, and fetal abnormalities have been linked to MIC exposure among affected women.
6. **Eye and Mental Health Problems:**
   The gas caused severe eye irritation, vision impairment, and long-term mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD.
7. **Protein and Antioxidant Damage:**
   MIC alters hemoglobin structure, reduces the efficacy of antioxidants like glutathione, impairs oxygen transport, and increases vulnerability to toxins.

Challenges in Addressing MIC Exposure

1. **Autopsy Findings:**
   Post-mortem examinations revealed extensive organ damage and cyanide poisoning, confirming the toxic impact of MIC.
2. **Delayed Medical Response:**
   Initial failure to recognize hydrogen cyanide as a critical factor led to inadequate early treatment, worsening health outcomes.
3. **Denial by Union Carbide:**
   Union Carbide's denial of hydrogen cyanide involvement delayed the administration of effective antidotes like **NATS (Sodium Thiosulfate)**.
4. **Underutilization of NATS Injections:**
   Despite their proven efficacy in detoxifying cyanide, NATS injections were underutilized due to delayed recognition and administrative hurdles.
5. **ICMR Research Delays (1984–1992):**
   Legal and bureaucratic obstacles hindered the timely publication of research on the irreversible protein damage caused by MIC.
6. **Unknown Toxic Byproducts:**
   MIC pyrolysis produced unidentified toxic substances, complicating long-term health management for survivors.
7. **Carbamoylation:**
   MIC chemically alters proteins and enzymes, leading to permanent structural and functional damage in the body.

Way Forward

1. **Timely Interventions:**
   Rapid identification and treatment of toxins are essential in mitigating the impact of chemical disasters.
2. **Research and Transparency:**
   Unhindered scientific investigations and timely dissemination of research findings are crucial for effective disaster response.
3. **Strengthening Antidote Use:**
   Early administration of effective treatments like NATS should be prioritized in similar incidents to save lives.
4. **Addressing Long-Term Health Issues:**
   Comprehensive healthcare support, including respiratory, neurological, and psychological care, must be provided to survivors to improve their quality of life.

8. Brain Rot: Oxford Word of the Year 2024

The term **"Brain Rot"** has been officially recognized as the **Oxford Word of the Year 2024**. It refers to the gradual decline of mental or intellectual abilities caused by excessive consumption of unchallenging or superficial online content. This word captures growing concerns about the impact of digital culture on cognitive health, language, and societal engagement.

Historical Context

The phrase **"brain rot"** was first used by **Henry David Thoreau** in **1854**, indicating that concerns about intellectual stagnation have long existed. However, in today's context, it reflects the pervasive influence of the digital age on mental sharpness and critical thinking.

Cultural Significance

The selection of "brain rot" highlights a shift in public discourse towards the negative effects of digital overconsumption, such as reduced attention spans, lack of critical thought, and the prioritization of entertainment over intellectual stimulation.

Previous Word of the Year

In contrast, last year's Oxford Word of the Year was **"Rizz,"** a slang term denoting attractiveness or the ability to charm a romantic partner, reflecting the influence of internet slang on contemporary language.

The transition from "Rizz" to "Brain Rot" underscores society's evolving concerns—from online social interactions to the broader cognitive impact of digital consumption.

9. Nazca Lines: Ancient Geoglyphs Unveiled by AI

Recent advancements in **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** have led to the discovery of hundreds of new **Nazca Lines** in **Peru**, expanding our understanding of these enigmatic geoglyphs.

What are the Nazca Lines?

The **Nazca Lines** are a collection of massive geoglyphs etched into the arid plains of southern Peru over **2,000 years ago**. They feature a variety of subjects:

1. **Animal and Plant Depictions:**
    - Representations of animals like birds, monkeys, and whales, along with plants, dominate these designs.
2. **Imaginary Beings:**
    - Some geoglyphs depict mythical or abstract figures, suggesting links to religious or cultural beliefs.
3. **Geometric Shapes:**
    - Triangles, trapezoids, spirals, and straight lines stretch across the desert, with some believed to have **astronomical** or **ritualistic** purposes.

Cultural and Historical Significance

- **World Heritage Site:** The Nazca Lines were designated a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in **1994**, recognizing their cultural importance and the mystery surrounding their creation.
- **Purpose:** While their exact function remains debated, theories suggest they could have been used for religious ceremonies, water-related rituals, or as an astronomical calendar.

10. Harimu Shakti Joint Military Exercise

The **Harimu Shakti** is a bilateral military exercise conducted between the **Indian Army's Mahar Regiment** and the **Royal Malaysian Regiment** of Malaysia.

Key Highlights

1. **Location and Frequency:**
    - The exercise is conducted annually, with hosting duties alternating between **India** and **Malaysia**.
    - The recent edition took place in **Malaysia**.
2. **Objective:**
    - The primary aim is to **enhance the joint military capability** of both nations to conduct **counter-insurgency operations** in **jungle terrain**, a crucial skill for both armed forces.
    - It operates under the provisions of **Chapter VII of the United Nations Mandate**, which pertains to actions related to threats to peace, breaches of peace, and acts of aggression.

Significance

- **Strategic Cooperation:** The exercise strengthens **defense ties** and fosters interoperability between the two nations' armies.
- **Jungle Warfare Training:** Given the dense jungle terrain of Malaysia and parts of India, the exercise provides critical hands-on experience in counter-insurgency and guerrilla warfare.
- **Regional Security:** By enhancing joint capabilities, Harimu Shakti contributes to maintaining peace and stability in the **Indo-Pacific region**.

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