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1. Thailand to become third Asian country to legalise same-sex marriage

Why in News?

The Thai Senate, the upper house of Thailand's National Assembly, passed the Marriage Equality Bill. This puts Thailand on the verge of becoming the first country in Southeast Asia, and third in Asia after Nepal and Taiwan, to legalise same-sex marriage. The Bill now awaits the formal endorsement of Thai monarch King Rama X. The lower house of the National Assembly had already approved the Bill.



The Bill

The new legislation changes references to "men", "women", "husbands" and "wives" in Thai marriage laws to gender-neutral terms such as "spouse" and "person". This means that two persons can marry each other, regardless of their gender.

It also grants same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual couples in areas such as adoption, inheritance, and tax benefits. LGBTQ+ couples effectively possess the same legal powers as their heterosexual counterparts in case of legal incapacitation, from being able to access bank accounts to providing consent for medical treatment.

Situation in rest of Asia

Apart from Thailand, Taiwan, and Nepal, other Asian countries do not fare well when it comes to marriage equality and LGBTQ+ rights.

Situation In India

Last October, a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India refused to alter the Special Marriage Act (SMA) of 1954 to give legal recognition to same-sex marriages, putting the onus on Parliament to legislate marriage equality. Thus far, there has been next to no political backing of the move.

Considered illegal

In fact, at least 20 Asian countries outlaw same-sex sexual activity, with Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Yemen, even prescribing the death penalty. In India,

same-sex relations between consenting adults were decriminalised after a landmark Supreme Court judgment in 2018.

Considered legal

Currently, same-sex marriage is legal in 36 countries (not including Thailand) globally, according to LGBTQ+ rights advocacy Human Rights Campaign. These are: Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uruguay.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Social Issues

Source: Indian Express

2. As a new campus rises at an ancient site, the story of Nalanda

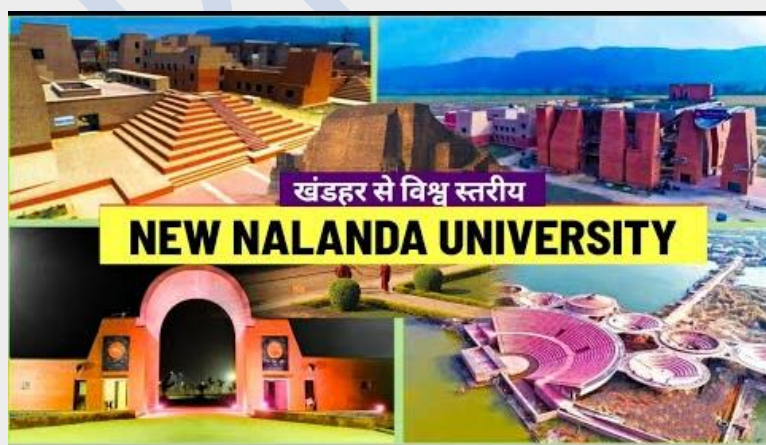
Introduction

The campus of Nalanda University was formally inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Spread across 455 acres, it is located in Rajgir, roughly 100 km from Patna, and merely 12 km away from the ruins of the eponymous ancient Buddhist monastery, considered to be among the greatest centres of learning in all of Antiquity.

'Reviving' Nalanda

It was then President APJ Abdul Kalam who officially proposed 'reviving' Nalanda in 2006. Addressing the Bihar Assembly, he said: "To recapture [Nalanda's] past glory... it has been proposed to establish a Bodhgaya Nalanda Indo-Asian Institute of Learning in partnership with select Asian countries".

In 2007, the proposal to re-establish Nalanda was endorsed at the East Asia Summit in Mandaue, Philippines. This endorsement was re-iterated in the East Asia Summit of 2009, in Hua Hin, Thailand.



In total, 17 countries other than India — Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam — have helped set up of the university. Ambassadors of these countries attended inauguration ceremony.

The Bihar Assembly, in 2007, passed the University of Nalanda Bill to facilitate the creation of a new, international university near the site of the ancient learning centre in Rajgir. In 2010,

Parliament replaced this Act with the Nalanda University Bill, which deemed the proposed university to be one of “national importance”, and laid down rules regarding how it would be governed.

Centre of research, learning

Nalanda University admitted its very first batch of fifteen students in 2014, to the School of Historical Studies, and the School of Ecology and Environmental studies.

Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, who had been associated with the project since 2007, became the University’s first Chancellor, and then-President Pranab Mukherjee became the first Visitor.

Since 2014, four more schools have been established — the School of Buddhist Studies, Philosophy and Comparative Religion, the School of Languages and Literature, the School of Management Studies, and the School of International Relations and Peace Studies. The university currently offers two-year Master’s courses, PhD programmes, and a few diploma and certificate courses.

Campus to behold

By 2022, 90% of the campus’s construction was completed. At the time, the university boasted 800 students, including 150 international students from 31 countries. At full capacity, the campus can accommodate as many as 7,500 students and teachers.

With a built area of only 8%, university officials say that the campus attempts to “match the architectural and geographical setting the ancient Nalanda University would have provided”. In fact, the administrative block specifically recreates the exposed brick architecture, and elevated staircase that is the signature image of the Nalanda ruins.

That being said, the campus is a mix of the modern and the traditional. Natural light streams into classrooms’ smart wideboards and electronic podiums. While air-conditioned, it utilises various methods, such as hollow walls, to provide natural cooling.

Water bodies — Kamal Sagar ponds — cover over 100 acres of the campus’s area. Another 100 acres are covered in greenery. The campus boasts a drinking water treatment plant, and a water recycling plant, as well as a yoga centre, a state-of -the-art auditorium, a library, an archival centre, and a fully equipped sports complex. No cars are allowed inside.

Nalanda Mahavira

Mahavira in Sanskrit/Pali means ‘great monastery’. Nalanda Mahavira was active from the fifth to thirteenth century CE.

The chronicles of seventh century Chinese traveller Hsuan Tsang provide the most detailed description of ancient Nalanda. Hsuan Tsang estimated that at the time of his visit, the monastery housed 10,000 students, 2,000 teachers, and a gargantuan retinue of servants.

Multiple scholars, however, have disputed this figure based on archaeological evidence from the ancient university's ruins. That being said, Nalanda was definitely not an average Buddhist vihara.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

3. What is the Resolve Tibet Act?

Introduction

The United States Congress passed the Promoting a Resolution to Tibet-China Dispute Act, better known as the Resolve Tibet Act. The legislation now awaits assent from President Joe Biden following which it will be ratified into law.

This act is the third notable piece of legislation that the US has taken regarding Tibet, following the Tibetan Policy Act or TPA (2002), and the Tibetan Policy & Support Act or the TPSA (2020). What are the provisions of the Resolve Tibet Act? How is it different from the previous laws passed by Congress?



Key provisions

The Resolve Tibet Act authorises the use of funds to counter Chinese disinformation about Tibet "including disinformation about the history of Tibet, the Tibetan people, and Tibetan institutions, including that of the Dalai Lama."

The act also challenges the Chinese contention that Tibet has been a part of China since ancient times. It urges China to engage in meaningful and direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives, as well as democratically elected leaders of the Tibetan community "without preconditions, to seek a settlement that resolves differences."

Underlining the right of the Tibetan people to self-determination and human rights, the act makes a note of China's duty as a signatory of two covenants — the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights — that advocate the same.

The Resolve Tibet Act seeks to recognise and address the multi-faceted socio-cultural identity of the Tibetan people, in particular their "distinct historical, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity." Finally, it amends the TPA to define the exact geographical areas part of the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

Different from previous legislation

The Resolve Tibet Act is a bold successor to the two acts which preceded it.

Comparison with Tibetan Policy Act

The TPA, the first of its kind explicitly concerning Tibet, took a cautious stance in defining American policy on Tibet. While it flagged the ill-treatment of Tibetans, unlike the 2024 act, it recognised China's claim that Tibet was an integral part of China.

The 2002 act encouraged the Chinese government to pursue dialogue with the Dalai Lama as a "constructive partner," but reiterated lack of intent in pursuing sovereignty or independence for Tibet, stressing instead on his desire for greater autonomy for Tibetans in China.

The TPA even clarified that the US government did not maintain any official relations with the Tibetan government-in-exile, led until 2011 by the Dalai Lama himself, and would only meet him in his capacity as a spiritual leader, and Nobel Laureate.

Tibetan Policy & Support Act

The TPSA of 2020 pushed for constructive dialogue between the PRC and the Dalai Lama or his representatives, or democratically elected leaders of Tibet resulting in a "negotiated agreement", encouraging international support towards the same. The Resolve Tibet Act underlines the need for such talks to be pursued without "preconditions" on the terms to seek a settlement that resolves differences.

The TPSA also stated that the matter of succession of the Dalai Lama was not of China's concern and would best be left to Tibetan Buddhists.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express