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1. What happens during the exposition of sacred relics of Saint Francis Xavier in Goa**Overview**

The decennial exposition of the sacred relics of Saint Francis Xavier, the patron saint of Goa, will begin on Thursday (November 21), and go on till January 5 next year.

Pilgrims, especially from the Catholic community, and tourists will converge in Goa over the next 45 days to pay homage to

the saint, whose mortal remains will be put on public display for veneration. Considered to be a time of spiritual reflection, devotion and celebration, the event will be marked by religious ceremonies including masses, prayer services, novenas, and processions.

What happens during the exposition?

The "incorruptible" mortal remains of the Spanish Jesuit missionary St Francis Xavier, one of the founding members of The Society of Jesus, have been housed at the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa since 1624.

During the exposition, a four-century-old silver glass casket holding the relics will be lowered from its resting place in the mausoleum at the Basilica in a private ceremony. The relics will then be carried in a ceremonial procession from the Basilica to Se Cathedral, some 300 metres away, where they will be kept for the following 45 days for devotees to venerate.

When did this decennial tradition begin?

Although the decennial tradition is relatively new, the relics of St Francis Xavier have long been "exposed" to the public. The body of the revered saint has been looked upon as a miracle among the faithful, given that it showed minimal signs of decay.

In 1782, rumours circulated that the body of the saint was not in Goa, and had been replaced by another body. Following this, a public exposition took place to dispel these rumours. Subsequently, in the latter half of the 18th century, the sacred relics were exposed at irregular intervals on special occasions, which came to be known as the solemn exposition.

This became a more regular event after Goa was liberated from Portuguese rule in 1961, and has been held once every decade since 1964.

And who was St Francis Xavier?

St Francis Xavier, also referred to as “Goencho Saib” (Lord of Goa), arrived in Goa — then a Portuguese colony — in 1542. His primary mission, as ordered by King John III, was to restore Christianity among the Portuguese settlers.

He died in 1552 on Shangchuan island off China’s coast. He was first buried on the island. The following year, his body was exhumed and transported to Malacca, where it was housed in the Church of St Paul for several months. The saint’s body was shipped to Goa in 1554, and kept at St Paul’s college in Old Goa — the first building constructed by Jesuits in Goa. The body was later transferred to Casa Professa near the Basilica by 1613, and placed in the Basilica in 1624.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

2. What is Russia’s nuclear doctrine, newly updated by Vladimir Putin?

Introduction



President Vladimir Putin has approved changes to Russia’s nuclear weapons policy, and Moscow has urged the West to study them closely.

What happened?

Putin signed a decree updating Russia’s nuclear doctrine, last published in 2020. The document, like the one it replaces, says Moscow sees nuclear weapons as a means of deterring its enemies and sets out the scenarios under which it would consider using them.

Why did Russia announce it now?

Putin had spoken publicly about the key points of the new doctrine recently. Recent decree came on the same day that Ukraine fired US-supplied ATACMS missiles into Russia for the first time in the war.

But some security analysts played down the timing, saying it was understandable that the state bureaucracy had taken weeks to draft and publish the document following Putin’s instructions.

How does the new doctrine apply to the Ukraine war?

It states that any aggression against Russia by a non-nuclear state that is carried out with the participation or support of a nuclear state will be considered a joint attack.

It lists additional scenarios under which Moscow would consider a nuclear response, including if it had reliable information about the launch of a massive cross-border air attack on Russia using planes, missiles and drones. Ukraine has staged frequent air attacks, mostly with drones but now also with US missiles, to degrade Russia's ability to strike Ukrainian troops, cities and energy infrastructure.

What are the other key changes?

Much of the language is unchanged from 2020, but there are a number of alterations and additions that in effect lower the threshold for Russian nuclear use.

Russia is officially placing close ally Belarus under its nuclear umbrella. Russia now says it may use nuclear weapons in the event of a conventional attack against itself or Belarus that "creates a critical threat to their sovereignty or territorial integrity". Previously, Russia had said it might meet a conventional attack with nuclear weapons "when the very existence of the state is placed under threat".

Russia says its nuclear deterrent is aimed not only at other nuclear states but also at other countries that allow their land, water or airspace to be used to prepare or conduct aggression against it.

What other threats could prompt Russia to go nuclear?

The document lists several new risks and scenarios which could prompt Russia to consider a nuclear response. These include creation of new military coalitions, or expansion of existing ones, that move enemy military infrastructure closer to Russia's borders, and planning or carrying out large-scale military exercises near Russia's borders, etc.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

3. India's undertrial prisoners

Introduction

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that undertrials who have spent more than a third of the maximum prescribed sentence for the crime they are accused of committing should be released before Constitution Day (November 26). The Supreme Court has already allowed the retrospective application of this provision.

What does Section 479 of the BNSS, which provides relaxed bail standards for first-time offenders, state? What has the Supreme Court said on the matter? And what is the state of undertrials in India?

Section 479 of the BNSS

Section 479 of the BNSS lays down the "Maximum period for which [an] undertrial prisoner can be detained".

It states that a prisoner who is not accused of offences punishable with death or life imprisonment shall be released on bail if she has "undergone detention for a period extending

up to one-half of the maximum period of imprisonment specified for that offence under that law”.


This same standard was provided under the previously applicable Section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC).

But the BNSS has also relaxed the standard further in cases concerning “first-time offenders” — requiring such accused persons to be released on bail after they have spent one-third of the maximum possible sentence in prison.

Exact provision

It states, “Provided that where such person is a first-time offender (who has never been convicted of any offence in the past) he shall be released on bond by the Court, if he has undergone detention for the period extending up to one-third of the maximum period of imprisonment specified for such offence under that law”.

The provision, however, clarifies that an accused “shall not be released on bail by the Court” if there are pending investigations or trials into more than one offence or in “multiple cases” relating to the same person.



SECTION 479 BNSS TO UNDERTRIALS CASES REGISTERED BEFORE JULY 1, 2024 ALLOWED BY SC

HEADLINE	SC ORDERS RETROSPECTIVE APPLICATION OF SECTION 479 BNSS, GRANTS BAIL TO UNDERTRIALS BEFORE JULY 1.
SUMMARY	SC Applies Section 479 BNSS Retrospectively, Allows Bail for Undertrials Serving Considerable Sentence Time.
KEY FACTS	Re-Inhuman Conditions In 1382 Prisons: SC Bench Consists of Justices Hima Kohli and Sandeep Mehta.
LEGAL INSIGHTS	SC: Section 479 BNSS Applies Retrospectively, Eases Bail Conditions for First-Time Offenders and Undertrials.
IMPACT	SC Ruling to Release Undertrials, Addresses Prison Overcrowding, Upholds Personal Liberty and Fair Treatment.
WHY IT MATTERS	Judiciary Commits to Personal Liberty, Fair Treatment, and Legal Reforms for Undertrials and Prisoners.

Top court’s interpretation

In August, a Bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Sandeep Mehta held hearings on the issues faced by undertrial prisoners in the case In re: Inhuman conditions in 1382 prisons.

The case began as a PIL after former Chief Justice of India R C Lahoti sent a letter to the court, highlighting issues such as overcrowding in prisons, unnatural deaths of prisoners, and the

inadequacy of trained prison staff. Since 2013, the court has been hearing issues relating to prisons in this case.

Noting that the new provision was "more beneficial", the court on August 23 ordered that Section 479 would apply "retrospectively" to cases that were registered against first-time offenders even before the BNSS came into effect on July 1, 2024. Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati communicated the Centre's agreement to this measure before the order was passed.

The court ordered all state governments and Union Territories to file affidavits within two months detailing "the number of undertrials who would be entitled to extension of the benefit of Section 479 of the BNSS, the number of applications moved before the concerned Courts for their release and the number of undertrials actually released by the date of filing of the affidavits".

The court also ordered jail superintendents to send reports with this data so that the states and UTs could collect them for their final affidavit.

Notably, Section 479 already places a duty on the superintendent of the jail to send an application to the court for releasing a person on bail under this section once the relevant time period — either half or one-third of the maximum sentence — has elapsed.

However, on October 22, a new Bench comprising Justices Hrishikesh Roy and S V N Bhatti noted that only 19 out of the 36 states and Union Territories had filed responses detailing the steps taken to implement the court's August order.

On November 19, the SC once again ordered all jail superintendents to identify all undertrial prisoners, especially women, who would be entitled to bail under Section 479 of the BNSS so that courts can consider granting bail in these cases.

India's undertrial prisoners

According to the National Crime Records Bureau's report Prison Statistics India 2022 (published in December 2023), of the 5,73,220 people incarcerated in Indian prisons, 4,34,302 are undertrials against whom cases are still pending. That amounts to nearly 75.8% of all prisoners in India.

Of the 23,772 women in prisons, 18,146 (76.33%) are undertrials, the report notes.

The report does not record how many undertrial prisoners were first-time offenders. As of December 31, 2022, around 8.6% of all undertrial prisoners had been in prison for more than three years.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express