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1. Bangladesh court rejects plea to ban ISKCON: All you need to know

Overview



Calls for banning the organisation came in response to violence earlier this week, triggered by the arrest of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das. Assistant government prosecutor Saiful Islam Alif was killed recently in clashes between police and the supporters of Das in Chattogram.

ISKCON Bangladesh general secretary Charu Chandra Das Brahmachari said in a press conference that the organisation was never involved in "communal or conflict-driven activities". Das added that Chinmoy was previously expelled from the organisation for violating its rules and none of his activities were connected to ISKCON.

Who demanded the ban on ISKCON Bangladesh?

Additional Attorney General Aneek R Haque and Deputy Attorney General Asad Uddin informed the High Court (as the top court is called in Bangladesh) that three separate cases have been filed in this regard.

The Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum also staged a protest against the lawyer's killing and demanded a ban on ISKCON. The organisation is associated with Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Leaders of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement, which led the recent student protests in Bangladesh and played a part in the ouster of Hasina earlier this year, called for a ban as well.

To recall, Chinmoy is a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote. He was arrested from Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport as he was about to fly to Chattogram to join a rally advocating for the rights of Hindus in Bangladesh. He was denied bail and sent to jail by the Chattogram's Sixth Metropolitan Magistrate court in a sedition case. Bangladesh Attorney-General Mohammad Asaduzzaman urged the court not to take any decisions on the issue and said the government was acting on the matter. ISKCON Bangladesh also refuted allegations linking the organisation to the lawyer's death.

What is ISKCON and who founded it?

On its website, ISKCON describes itself as belonging to the "Gaudiya-Vaishnava sampradāya, a monotheistic tradition within the Vedic or Hindu culture. Philosophically it is based on the Sanskrit texts Bhagavad-gītā and the Bhagavat Purana, or Srimad Bhagavatam. These are the historic texts of the devotional bhakti yoga tradition, which teaches that the ultimate goal for all living beings is to reawaken their love for God, or Lord Krishna, the "all-attractive one".

Also known as the Hare Krishna Movement, it was founded in New York City in 1966 by AC Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (1896-1977). He hailed from Bengal, which led his organisation to eventually develop a significant presence there, including in present-day Bangladesh.

ISKCON came up when counterculture, a rejection of societal norms, was at its peak in the United States during the 1960s. It was also a period when the Vietnam War led the youth to criticise the political establishment that sought to enlist them into the military, to fight in a faraway conflict. Other social movements, such as civil rights and feminism, were also active.

Many young people in the West sought transcendental experiences through multiple routes, from psychedelic drugs to meditation. In this context, Hinduism and Eastern philosophy emerged as attractive alternatives for many. Renowned American poet Allen Ginsburg was also one of ISKCON's early supporters. The Beatles' member George Harrison is known to have gifted a manor house to the Hare Krishna movement to establish a base in the UK.

What activities does ISKCON engage in?

ISKCON today has 650 temples in more than 80 countries, with guest houses, vegetarian restaurants (in line with its worldview) and other attached facilities. The organisation also engages in relief work at times. During the Covid-19 lockdown, it said it fed 5,500 people in London, daily.

Its website notes historian AL Basham writing of its growth in a short period: "It arose out of next to nothing in less than twenty years and has become known all over the West. This, I feel, is a sign of the times and an important fact in the history of the Western world."

At the same time, it has been criticised for reports of corporal punishment meted out to children within the organisation, as well as child sex abuse allegations (particularly in the '80s).

How has the Indian government reacted?

The Indian government has repeatedly raised concerns over reports of attacks on Hindu temples in Bangladesh, in the aftermath of the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's government. It expressed "deep concern" over Chinmoy's arrest and urged Dhaka to ensure the safety of Hindus and other minority groups.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also expressed concern but refrained from commenting further. Speaking in the State Assembly, she said, "Bangladesh is a different country. The government of India will look into it. It does not come under our jurisdiction. We are not supposed to talk about it or interfere. While we feel sorry inside, we follow the policies set by the Centre." She added that she had spoken with representatives of ISKCON.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues
Source: Indian Express

2. Punjab's paddy procurement hits five-year low: why record acreage couldn't meet the target

Introduction

Punjab's paddy procurement hits five-year low

Punjab, a state renowned for its significant contribution to India's foodgrain pool, is set to witness one of the lowest paddy procurements in the past five years. This development comes despite the state recording the highest-ever area under rice cultivation this year.

The state has procured 172.16 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of paddy so far, significantly below the expected target, while paddy harvesting is nearly complete. While paddy procurement in the state will continue till November 30, only a minimal quantity of paddy has arrived in mandis for this purpose.

Why is Punjab unlikely to meet the target even with ongoing procurement?

The centre has fixed an estimated target of 185 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of paddy for the 2024-25 season, almost similar to last year's figure. This estimate was based on approximately 32 lakh hectares under rice cultivation, including over 25 lakh hectares of paddy (non-basmati) and around 6.4 lakh hectares of Basmati, an aromatic variety not procured by the government. However, paddy arrivals to the state have thus far been a trickle: On November 27, only 50,600 tonnes arrived in mandis, compared to 6-7 lakh tonnes per day during the peak period (October 20 to early November). With arrivals drastically reduced, reaching the target of 185 LMT is impossible.

Punjab is expected to fall short by around 14 LMT, marking one of the lowest procurement levels since 2020.

How does this season compare with previous years?

Here is a look at Punjab's rice area and paddy procurement over the past five years:

Year	Area (Lakh Hectares)	Procurement (LMT)
2024-25	32.00	172.16 (till Nov 27)
2023-24	31.87	184.93

2022-23	30.98	182.96
2021-22	29.69	189.08
2020-21	29.28	204.83

Why is there a shortfall in procurement?

Procurement delays: Early in the procurement season, issues with rice shellers caused delays in procurement.

Rice mills, tasked with the storage of the procured paddy and handing over rice to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) after milling, refused to store it in their respective mills.

Last year the government took the delivery of rice till September 30, 2024, while the next paddy procurement began on October 1. Millers however would take delivery of rice only by March 31st. Thus farmers who brought their crops to mandis in the intervening period were either met with delays or offered ₹150-200 less than the Minimum Support Price (MSP).

Fearing a similar situation, many farmers delayed harvesting their crops hoping to avoid low prices. This delay impacted the moisture levels in paddy, which is critical for achieving higher yields.

Moisture level issues: Paddy is typically harvested at 21-22% moisture level and sold at 17-18% moisture. However, delayed harvesting reduced moisture levels to 14-15%, leading to lower yield. Farmers expected 30-32 quintals per acre but ended up with 2-5 quintals less per acre.

Decline in paddy from other states: The problem was compounded by restrictions on the transport and sale of paddy from states which do not have the MSP facility. Previously, traders would bring large quantities of paddy from other states at a lower rate and sell it at MSP in Punjab's mandis.

Experts believe that stricter enforcement of procurement policies and the absence of paddy from other states significantly contributed to the shortfall in paddy procurement. They added that while Punjab has seen one of the highest areas under paddy this year, multiple systemic issues have led to a significant shortfall in procurement, impacting both farmers' earnings and the state's contribution to the central grain pool.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

3. How scientists took first zoomed-in image of star outside our galaxy

Overview



For the first time, scientists have succeeded in taking a zoomed-in picture of a star in another galaxy. The star, known as WOH G64, seems to be cloaked in an egg-shaped cocoon and is located 160,000 light years away in the Large Magellanic Cloud, one of the small galaxies that orbit the Milky Way.

The scientists have described their observations in the paper, 'Imaging the innermost circumstellar environment of the red supergiant WOH G64 in

the Large Magellanic Cloud', published by the journal *Astronomy and Astrophysics* last week.

How was the picture taken?

Until now, researchers have been able to take pictures of stars in other galaxies that show them as little more than points of light. However, with the help of the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope Interferometer (VLT), they have now revealed a detailed image of WOH G64.

VLT comprises four 8-metre diameter telescopes situated in Cerro Paranal, Chile. It also has an interferometer called GRAVITY that combines the light from the telescopes to achieve the resolution of a much larger telescope.

What do we know about WOH G64?

WOH G64 is believed to be the largest galaxy in the Large Magellanic Cloud. The star is around 2,000 times the diameter of the Sun.

The new photo has revealed that WOH G64 is entering the last stages of its life. In recent years, the star has blown off its outer layer, and it is now surrounded by wreaths and arcs of gas and dust.

Massive stars explode with an energy equivalent to the Sun shining for all of its 10 billion years of life. People have seen these supernova explosions, and astronomers have found some of the stars that exploded in older images. But we have never seen a star change in a way that signals its imminent death.

When big stars like WOH G64 exhaust their nuclear fuel which keeps them burning, their cores collapse. Some massive stars collapse directly to form a black hole — a region in space where gravity is so strong that nothing can escape, including light and matter. Others collapse and lead to an explosion called supernova, which produces many elements such as zinc, silver, tin, gold, mercury, lead, and uranium.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express