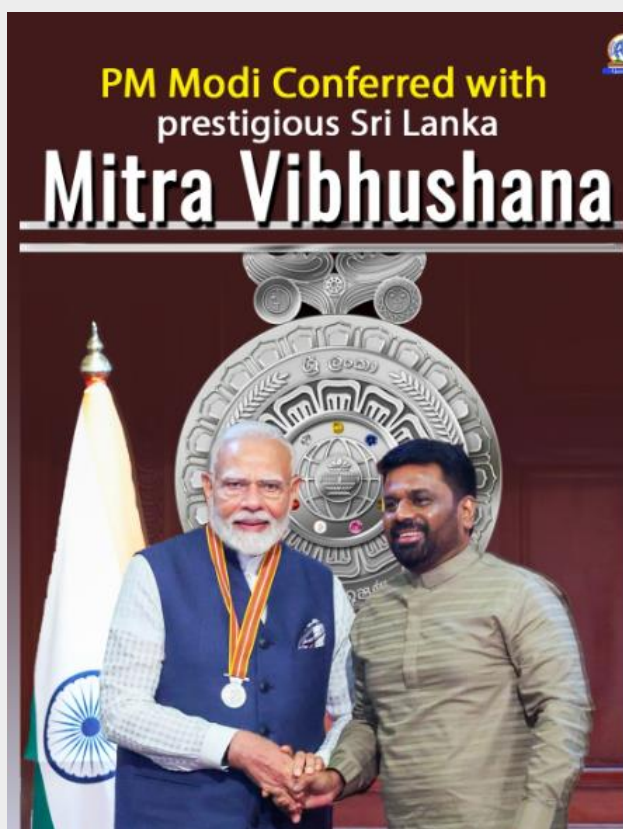


1. PM Modi awarded Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana**Why in News?**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was awarded the 'Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana', the country's highest civilian honour, by Sri Lankan President Anura Kumar Dissanayake.

The two leaders met as part of the PM's state visit following Dissanayake's invitation. According to a social media post from MyGov India, this is the Prime Minister's 22nd international honour.

**What is the Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana?**

The Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana honours Heads of State and government heads with whom Sri Lanka has cordial relations. It appreciates "their friendship towards and solidarity with the people of Sri Lanka".

Instituted in 2008 by then-president Mahinda Rajapaksa, it is the foremost among awards granted to foreigners. According to a 2014 press release, this award ranks higher than the national honours granted by Sri Lanka, including the Sri Lanka Rathna (equivalent to the Bharat Ratna).

Who are the past winners?

The award is granted at the President's discretion. The names of all recipients are recorded in a special register for the purpose. Only four people have been awarded so far.

Former Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, then approaching the end of his reign, became the inaugural recipient of the award in February 2008.

In January 2014, Rajapaksa conferred the honour on Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the former President of Palestine, Yasser Arafat (posthumously). The awards were reportedly presented at a ceremony in Palestine, where the Palestinian government conferred Rajapaksa with its highest state honour, the Star of Palestine.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

2. What is the Gujarat police's GP-DRASTI drone program?

Why in News?

With drones used in several districts of Gujarat for policing activities in recent months, State government announced Phase I of the Gujarat Police – Drone Response and Aerial Surveillance Tactical Interventions. Gujarat police have employed quadcopter drones to track fugitives and find missing children, and under the GP-DRASTI program, they will now be actively used at the police station level, especially for crimes related to bodily harm and violence on the streets of major cities.

In recent years, police across Indian cities have deployed drones to cover crime, as well as citizens' protests.



Quicker response time

An official associated with the program said, "When the control room gets a call, they will not only intimate the local police but also the drone base station on the same channel, ensuring both the air and ground teams are deployed simultaneously. In the pilot programme, the drone reached in less than half the time of the ground teams."

With real-time video footage streamed directly to the base station, officials would identify whether an incident is escalating and order additional deployment of ground forces.

In criminal 'hotspots'

The program is meant primarily for 33 police station jurisdictions of the four cities that are hotspots for "body-related" crimes, including assault, aggravated assault, rioting, unlawful assembly, street violence, shows of weapons, mob lynchings, and so on. They were identified under the police's SHASTRA (Sharir Sambandhi Tras Rokva Abhiyan) program launched in February 2025, with 12 police stations in Ahmedabad, nine in Surat, seven in Vadodara, and five in Rajkot.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: The Hindu

3. Kancha Gachibowli forest issue: All you need to know

Why in News?

The Supreme Court recently directed the Telangana government to stop its “alarming deforestation activities” in the Kancha Gachibowli forested area.

This came after the Telangana government in February announced it plans to auction some 400 acres of forested land adjacent to the University of Hyderabad (UoH) to build IT parks. This decision has since led to massive student protests, and now, got the attention of the highest courts in the land.

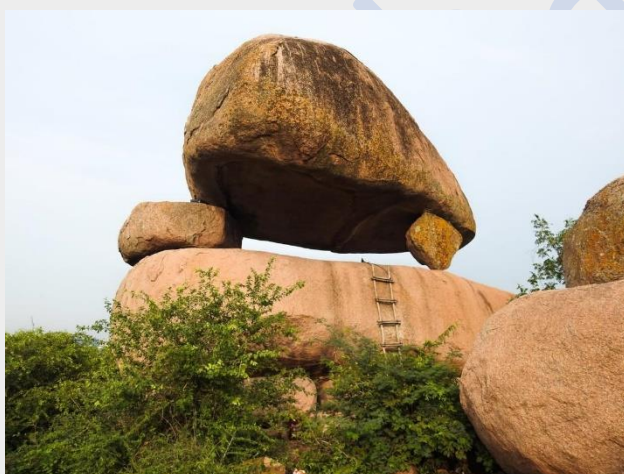
Primely located urban forest

Kancha Gachibowli is one of Hyderabad’s last remaining urban forests. It is rich in biodiversity, home to numerous bird, mammal and reptile species, and beautiful rock formations.

Urban forests such as Kancha Gachibowli help regulate local climates by providing shade, reducing temperatures, and increasing humidity.

View of government

For the government, the forest lies bang in the middle of Hyderabad’s Financial District. Auctioning the land would not only fill government coffers, but also attract potential



investments of Rs 50,000 crore, and generate as many as 5 lakh jobs, the government says. Notably, the Gachibowli IT corridor is one of the most expensive localities in Hyderabad, boasting extremely high property rates.

The Telangana Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (TGIIC) says it has prepared a layout duly preserving rock formations including the so-called ‘Mushroom Rock’ as green spaces.

Mushroom Rock in Kancha Gachibowli

Question of land ownership

Although the 400 acres in question were a part of the 2,300 acre parcel allotted to the UoH when it was established in 1974, legally, the state government is the sole owner of the entire land. Over the years, it has allocated pockets of land from this 2,300 acres for various purposes: constructing a bus depot, a telephone exchange, a IIIT campus, the Gachibowli sports stadium, a shooting range, etc.

The disputed 400 acres were handed over by the then united Andhra Pradesh government to a private sports management firm in 2003, only to be reclaimed in 2006 due to non-use. This triggered a lengthy legal battle, which eventually saw the SC reiterate that the Telangana government was the sole owner of the land.

But the 400 acres have never been demarcated. Nor has it been notified as a forest, even though it is a part of the UoH's larger forest ecosystem. This is at the heart of the current issue.

View of Students and Activists

Students and activists protesting against the Telangana government cite the SC's landmark verdict in *T N Godavarman Thirumulpad v Union of India* (1996). The apex court had held that any land with forest cover qualifies as "forest land", even if the land is not notified as a forest. Some have also called the government to declare the land as a National Park, something that would provide it protection from future deforestation.

Latest escalation, courts get involved

On March 30, the government sent at least 50 earthmovers to the UoH campus to begin clear the forested land for auction. This triggered massive protests in the campus.

As the issue began to get national attention, two public interest litigations (PILs) were filed before the Telangana High Court. The HC issued an interim order directing the state government to stop the felling of trees till the next hearing the day after.

However, the SC took suo motu cognisance of the matter, and sought a ground report from the High Court registrar (judicial). The apex court on sought an explanation from the Telangana government on the "compelling urgency" for clearing the forest, and put a stay on all activities till further orders.

The SC also directed a central empowered committee to visit the site and file a report by April 16.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

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