

1. PM Modi at Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi: All about the 'oldest living tree', linked to an Indian princess**PM Modi Anuradhapura Visit**

As part of his trip to Sri Lanka, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi temple at the historic city of Anuradhapura.

The Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi tree is considered the oldest living cultivated plant in the world, and is believed to have grown from a branch that an Indian princess carried to Sri Lanka.

What is the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi tree?

This Bo (*Ficus religiosa*, Pipal in Hindi) tree is believed to have grown from a branch of the tree in Bodhgaya (in present-day Bihar) under which Gautam Buddha attained enlightenment. The branch was carried to Sri Lanka by Sanghamitta (or Sanghamitra), the Mauryan king Ashoka's daughter and Buddhist nun.

Her arrival in Sri Lanka with the tree is still celebrated as Uduvapa Poya, an annual festival observed on a full moon night in December.

The tree, along with the other Buddhist shrines in the ancient city of Anuradhapura, is a major pilgrimage centre for Buddhists.

UNESCO World Heritage Site

Anuradhapura is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. "Anuradhapura, a Ceylonese political and religious capital that flourished for 1,300 years, was abandoned after an invasion in 993 CE. Hidden away in dense jungle for many years, the splendid site, with its palaces, monasteries and monuments, is now accessible once again," the UNESCO website says. The invasion in 993 CE was by the Chola empire of south India.

Why did Sanghamitta travel to Sri Lanka?

On the invitation of the king, and the suggestion of her brother, Mahendra or Mahinda. During the reign of Ashoka, the Third Buddhist Council is believed to have met, where it was decided to send missionaries to different regions to propagate Buddhism. Missions left for various places including Sri Lanka.

The very successful mission to Sri Lanka was led by prince Mahendra, or Mahinda, Ashoka's son. Mahinda met King Devanampiya Tissa, whose capital was Anuradhapura, and converted him to Buddhism. After a number of royal ladies also wished to join the Buddhist monastic order, Mahinda sent for his sister, Sanghamitta, to come and initiate them.

Both Mahinda and Sanghamitta lived in Anuradhapura for the rest of their lives.

How has the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi tree survived for so long?

Through dedicated care and the fact that the Pipal tree can regrow from its roots and seeds.

The tree has not been immune to attacks — in 1929, a man tried to chop it off in an act of vandalism, while in 1985, LTTE militants went on a rampage in Anuradhapura, gunning down 146 people in the vicinity of the tree.

And what about the Mahabodhi tree in Gaya?

While the original tree under which Lord Buddha meditated was destroyed (in some legends, by one of Ashoka's wives, Tishyarakshita), the existing Pipal tree at the site is believed to have descended from the germplasm (genetic material) of that original tree.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

2. SC judges to publicly declare assets: Recalling the 1997 ethics code which mentioned the idea

Why in News?



Following a significant decision taken during a full court meeting on April 1, all judges of the Supreme Court, including the Chief Justice of India, will publicly declare their assets. It comes on the heels of the discovery of wads of currency notes at the residence of Delhi High Court judge Yashwant Verma last month.

Unlike government officials and politicians, judges are not bound to make this information public, and most have not done so. The recent decision could mark an important shift and is essentially a reiteration of the 1997 Restatement of Values of Judicial Life, a code of ethics that the judiciary adopted in another full court meeting.

This document continues to inform conversations on how judges should conduct themselves while performing their official duties.

Restatement of Values of Judicial Life

Through the code, the SC attempted to create a framework for institutional accountability on multiple issues. It included declarations of judges' assets and investments to the CJI and laying the groundwork for an "in-house procedure" to conduct inquiries against judges who allegedly transgressed these "values" and faced allegations of misbehaviour or corruption.

This 'Restatement' is a numbered, non-exhaustive list of 16 entries enumerating values for judges to uphold and pitfalls for them to avoid, which can be summarised as:

Key points

*Judges must avoid actions that "erode" people's faith in the higher judiciary, as "Justice must not merely be done but it must also be seen to be done";

*Must not contest elections/hold office in clubs, societies, and associations;

*Must avoid close association with "individual members of the Bar" and if any immediate or close family members are members of the Bar, they must not appear before the judge in court or be associated with any case or "cause" she is dealing with;

*Similarly, such family members cannot be permitted to use the judge's residence for professional work;

*Must practice "a degree of aloofness consistent with the dignity of his office", i.e. being impartial by maintaining distance from the case before her;

*Must not hear and decide cases where a family member or friend is involved;

*Must not publicly express views on political matters that may arise for judicial determination;

*Must "let his judgments speak for themselves" and must not give interviews to the media;

*Must not accept gifts or hospitality from anyone besides family and friends;

*Must not hear and decide matters involving a company in which the judge holds shares unless previously disclosed and no objection is raised;

*Must not "speculate in shares, stocks or the like";

*Must not engage in any trade or business "directly or indirectly". This does not include legal publishing or anything "in the nature of a hobby";

*Should not seek any financial benefit connected to her office "unless it is clearly available";

*Must be conscious that she is "under the public gaze" and avoid acts "unbecoming of the high office".

In House Procedure

On the same day, the full court resolved to develop an in-house procedure to take action against judges who "do not follow the universally accepted values of judicial life", including those indicated in the code. A five-member committee developed the procedure in October of that same year, and it was formally adopted in 1999.

Declaration of assets

Notably, they also resolved that all judges must declare to the Chief Justice of the court "all his/her assets in the form of real estate or investments... within a reasonable time of assuming

office". Though the resolution states that this declaration "shall be confidential", this stance has shifted in the decades since.

Following another full court meeting in 2009, the judges decided to declare their assets publicly "purely on a voluntary basis". Then, in 2018, a Constitution Bench held that the assets and liabilities of judges are not "personal information" for the purpose of RTI inquiries.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

3. UGC will issue equivalence certificates for foreign degrees

Why in News?

The University Grants Commission (Recognition and Grant of Equivalence to Qualifications Obtained from Foreign Educational Institutions) Regulations 2025 were notified recently.



These regulations specify the procedure for obtaining equivalence certificates, which are documents certifying that a qualification obtained in an educational institution abroad (like a degree or diploma) is equivalent to a comparable qualification in India.

The UGC made a draft of these regulations public in 2023. The regulations have now been notified after considering the feedback.

What do these regulations apply to?

With some exceptions, the equivalence certificates will be valid for all academic institutions under the UGC, for higher education and research, and for employment in cases where a qualification recognised by the UGC is essential.

What is the process for granting equivalence?

The UGC will maintain an online portal to receive applications for equivalence certificates. Applications will be considered by a standing committee with experts in the field of education. The committee will recommend that an application be accepted or rejected within 10 working days.

The UGC will communicate its decision to the applicant within 15 days of receiving the application. Equivalence certificates will be made available on the portal. In case of rejection, the applicant can apply for a review, which will be considered by a committee constituted by the UGC.

How has equivalence been determined thus far?

Instead of the UGC, at the moment, the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) issues equivalence certificates for degrees from foreign universities, for higher education and employment in India.

The AIU is a registered society with several universities, public and private, as its members. It also issues equivalence certificates for students who completed school examinations from foreign boards.

UGC chairman Kumar said that the AIU's system will be replaced by the UGC's, adding that this is the first time that the UGC has notified a dedicated regulatory framework for recognising foreign qualifications.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: The Hindu

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