

Abeyance of section 124A

- In a brief order delivered in S.G. Vombatkere vs Union of India, a three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India effectively suspended the operation of Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code
- This direction was issued after the Union government filed an affidavit informing the Court that it had decided to re-examine the law.
- “, Section 124A defines sedition as any action “whether by words, signs, or visible representation” which “brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in India”.
- The word “disaffection”, the provision explains, “includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity”. The section carries with it the prospect of life in prison.
- K.M. Munshi argued so forcefully in the Constituent Assembly to delete the use of the “equivocal” word “sedition” as a permitted restriction on free speech
- Munshi’s amendment sailed through. The adopted Constitution did not permit a restriction on free speech on the grounds of sedition.
- In 1962, in Kedar Nath Singh vs State of Bihar, a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court found that Section 124A was defensible as a valid restriction on free speech on grounds of public order.
- However, while upholding the clause, the Court limited its application to “acts involving intention or tendency to create disorder, or disturbance of law and order, or incitement to violence”
- To protect our democracy, we must ensure that the constitutional guarantees to personal liberty and freedom do not go in vain. For that, each of our penal laws must be animated by a concern for equality, justice, and fairness.

THE HINDU

Importance of Lumbini

- The visit is political, since it will, hopefully, put to rest the unnecessary debate on whether the Buddha was born in Nepal, which, for Nepal, is a sensitive issue
- It is strategic, in the face of the growing presence of China in Lumbini, which is close to the Indian border; the largest monastery has been built by the Chinese who sponsor and support international conferences on Buddhism in Nepal

as well as the massive celebrations on Buddhist festivals such as Vesak.

- In pre-COVID-19 times, there was a steady flow of Chinese tourists to Lumbini and reports about potential Chinese investments in the region.
- The Chinese are leaving no stone unturned to exploit the soft power potential of Buddhism, a fast-growing religious tradition that has half-a-billion adherents (largely in East and Southeast Asia).
- India is home to some of the most sacred sites of Buddhism: the place of Lord Buddha's enlightenment, Bodh Gaya; of his first sermon, Sarnath; and of his Mahaparinirvana, Kushinagar.
- And this is not counting Shravasti, where the Buddha preached for many years; Nalanda; and Rajgir, among several others.
- Unfortunately, India remains largely unrepresented in Lumbini, but for a small museum building that was constructed with Indian assistance in the late 1990s.
- Both Lumbini and the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya are UNESCO World Heritage sites they are to Buddhists what Mecca is to Muslims or Kashi is to Hindus, and should be visited at least once in a lifetime. However, the footfalls of Buddhist pilgrims remain low.
- For years there has been talk about developing a Buddhist circuit with seamless connectivity and comfortable travel between the major pilgrimage sites in Nepal and India.
- There is an urgent need to adopt a master plan and develop Bodh Gaya as a sacred place for pilgrimage for both Hindus and Buddhists.
- India can also take the initiative to organize an international conference on the development of the Buddhist circuit; this will give a sense of participation and ownership to Buddhist countries.
- This could be a joint initiative of India and Nepal. India can also establish an international museum of Buddhist traditions in Bodh Gaya and invite all Buddhist countries to participate.

THE HINDU

Finland to join NATO

The story so far:

- The strategic geopolitical ambiguity of Finland has finally come to a halt and taken a hard turn as Finland formally announced its intention of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
- The Finnish security concerns began to heighten post the Russian

Annexation of Crimea in 2014 and have snow-balled now into an immediate existential crisis of sorts after the recent Russian assault on Ukraine.

How has Russia responded to the announcement?

- Official voices from within Russia give a sense of how they perceive the U.S's role as an agent provocateur trying to lure other countries towards NATO.
- The Russian state seems to be going through a sense of mania where officials talk about nuking countries, 'crushing bugs' (referring to the Baltic States), and invading countries in a bid to safeguard their security.
- The full-blown Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began almost three months back, has only resulted in isolating Russia from most countries in the world. They are losing a significant number of troops and scores of military equipment as the war continues
- Finland and Russia share a 1,300 km border and Kremlin's actions against Finland's (and potentially Sweden's) NATO membership may heavily depend on the potential military asset deployment along the border on the Finnish, and potentially Swedish, side.

- The Finns may very well not opt for immediate asset deployment and perhaps would want to use their NATO membership as a signal to Russia but if they continue to feel sufficiently threatened, they may opt for exhaustive asset deployment.

THE HINDU

Long Covid

The story so far:

- Months after the first cases of COVID-19 were detected in the world outside China, concerns about persistent symptoms post infection cropped up.

What is long COVID?

- With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, evidence showed that a considerable proportion of people who have recovered from COVID-19 continue to face long-term effects on multiple organs and system.
- In the absence of a universally-accepted definition, post-COVID Syndrome, by consensus, is defined as signs and symptoms that develop during or after an infection consistent with COVID-19 which continue for more than 12 weeks

and are not explained by alternative diagnosis.

- Technically, post-COVID defines symptoms that persist four weeks after infection and Long COVID, 12 weeks past a COVID-19 infection.

How long does long COVID last for?

- The study, perhaps for the first time, described Long COVID for the longest time possible two years

What is the status in India?

- The government of India developed its own National Comprehensive Guidelines for the management of post-COVID sequelae.
- This document sets out detailed techniques to treat post-COVID complications affecting cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, nephrological, and neurological and respiratory systems.
- Several hospitals set up COVID wards to treat persons who complain of what seemed like post-COVID symptoms.

THE HINDU

Person in News

- Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Sunday assumed charge as the 25th Chief Election Commissioner (CEC).

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