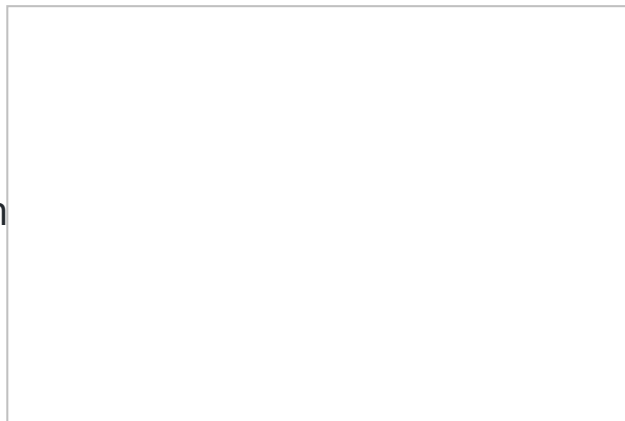# News Analysis (05 Feb, 2019)

Land of Stupas: Sarnath

(This news analysis is based on the article "Stupa-hopping in Sarnath" by art historian Rana Safvi which appeared in The Hindu on 3rd February, 2019.)

Sarnath, Varanasi is known for two things: **Buddha gave his first sermon** and for the **Ashoka Pillar**.

- In ancient times, this place was known by many names — **Rishipatana**, **Mrigadava** and **Mrigadaya**. The word Sarnath comes from a corruption of the name **Saranganatha** (lord of deer).
- The ashes of the Buddha were buried in stupas built at locations associated with important events in the Buddha's life including:
    > **Lumbini** (where he was born), **Bodh Gaya** (where he achieved Enlightenment), **Deer Park at Sarnath** (where he preached his first sermon sharing the Four Noble Truths (also called the dharma or the law), and **Kushinagara** (where he died).
- The choice of these sites and others were based on both real and legendary events.

Stupas at Sarnath

- Two hundred years after Buddha, the **Mauryan emperor, Ashoka**, fought the

battle of Kalinga and, disgusted by the bloodshed, became a Buddhist.
  - Ashoka built many beautiful stupas and monasteries in Sarnath.
  - **Sir Alexander Cunningham (First Director-General of Archaeological Survey of India)**, excavated the **Dhamekh**, **Dharmarajika**, and **Chaukhandi** stupas along with a monastery and temple between 1834 and 1836.

- According to an **inscription at Chaukhandi stupa**, **Humayun** sought **refuge in Sarnath** when he was escaping from the **battle of Chausa**.
- **Note**: The **battle of Chausa** was fought between the **Mughal emperor**, **Humayun**, and the Afghan, **Sher Shah Suri in 1539** at **Chausa** (**modern-day Bihar, India**).

  Many excavations followed these, the most famous among them being the 1904-05 excavation by **Friedrich Oscar Oertel** of the Ashoka Pillar, including **the Lion Capital**.

Invasions and Restorations

- **Dharmarajika stupa** is the one said to have been **built by Ashoka to commemorate Buddha's first sermon**.
- After Ashoka, the other rulers who added to Sarnath's glory were the **Kushans**, the **Guptas** and **Harshavardhana**.
- Under the Guptas, the **Dhamekh stupa** (synonymous with Sarnath) was **encased with stone-carved floral designs**.
- Sarnath suffered from the **Huna invasions**, but **Harshavardhana** later restored some of the earlier buildings. The Chinese pilgrim **Hiuen-Tsang (602-664)** left detailed accounts of the **Dharmarajika stupa** and **Ashoka's lion pillar**.
- Sarnath also suffered when it was attacked by **Mahmud of Ghazni** in the 11th century. After that, **Mahipala**, **the Pala king**, restored the monuments.
- The last great monument of Sarnath, a monastery named **Dharmachakra Jina Vihara** was built in the **11th century by Kumaradevi**, wife of **Govindachanda** of the **Gahadavala dynasty**.

State Emblem

- The **state emblem of India** is an adaptation from the **Sarnath Lion Capital of**

Ashoka.

- In the original, there are **four lions**, standing back to back, **mounted on an abacus** with a frieze carrying sculptures in high relief of an **elephant**, a galloping **horse**, a **bull** and a **lion** separated by intervening wheels over a bell-shaped lotus.
- Carved out of a **single block of polished sandstone**, **the Capital is crowned by the Wheel of the Law (Dharma Chakra).**
- In the state emblem, **adopted by the Government of India** on **26 January 1950**, only three lions are visible, the fourth being hidden from view.
- The wheel appears in relief in the centre of the abacus with a bull on right and a horse on left and the outlines of other wheels on extreme right and left.
- The bell-shaped lotus has been omitted.
- The words **Satyameva Jayate** from **Mundaka Upanishad**, meaning '**Truth Alone Triumphs**', are inscribed below the abacus in **Devanagari script**.

Kerala Sets Up Drug Price Monitor

Kerala has become the **first State** to set up a **Price Monitoring and Research Unit (PMRU)** to track violation of prices of essential drugs and medical devices under the **Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO).**

Composition

- PMRU will be registered as a society with following composition:
    - **State Health Secretary (Chairman)**
    - **Drugs Controller (Member secretary)**
    - State government representative (Member)
    - Representatives of private pharmaceutical companies (Members)
    - Representative from consumer rights protection fora (Member)
- The society would also have an executive committee headed by the Drugs Controller.

Background

- This comes more than five years after the **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) proposed** such a system for the States and the Union Territories.
- The suggestion to set up PMRUs was made against the backdrop of the lack of a field-level link between the NPPA and the State Drugs Controllers and State Drug Inspectors to monitor drug prices.

Objective

- The PMRU will work to develop synergy between the **central and state authorities.**
- It will provide **technical help to the State Drug Controllers** and the NPPA to monitor notified prices of medicines.
- Detect **violation** of the provisions of the **DPCO.**
- Look at **price compliance.**
- To collect test samples of medicines, and collect and compile market-based data of scheduled as well as non-scheduled formulations.

National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority

- NPPA is an organization under **Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers** which was **set up in 1997** to revise the prices of controlled bulk drugs and formulations and to enforce prices and availability of the medicines in the country, under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO), 1995.
- The prices are **now fixed/revised** under **Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO), 2013.**
- It also monitors the prices of decontrolled drugs in order to keep them at reasonable levels.

Important Facts for Prelims (5th February 2019)

Asian Elephant Alliance

- The **Asian Elephant Alliance** has decided to raise about 187 crore rupees to secure 96 out of the 101 elephants corridors across 12 States in India in the next 10 years.
- Asian Elephant Alliance is a joint initiative by **five non-governmental organizations(NGOs).**
- Five NGOs include **Elephant Family**, **International Fund for Animal Welfare**, **IUCN Netherlands**, **World Land Trust** and **Wildlife Trust of India.**

Kisan Credit Cards

- The Government of India has decided to launch a campaign aimed at financial inclusion of farmers by enhancing the coverage of **Kisan Credit Cards (KCC).**

- This campaign will be launched through the **Financial Institutions including Commercial Banks, Cooperative Banks and Regional Rural Banks in collaboration with the State Governments.**
- At present, there are around 6.95 crores active KCCs. However, there are still a large number of farmers who do not have access to institutional credit either because they have not been issued a KCC or the KCC issued earlier have been inactive due to various reasons.
- **Kisan Credit Card (KCC) was introduced in August 1998** to enable farmers in having quick and **timely access to affordable credit.** It was **launched by the NABARD** and **Reserve Bank of India.**
- The scheme aims to reduce farmers' dependency on informal banks for credit, which is often lucrative yet very expensive.

Black Softshell Turtle

- The **black softshell turtle** is being bred in the pond of **Hayagriva Madhab Temple at Hajo in Guwahati, Assam.**
- Locals regard the turtles in the pond as Kurma avatar of Lord Vishnu to whom the Hajo temple is dedicated.
- India hosts 28 species of turtles, of which 20 are found in Assam. Threats to turtles include hunting for meat and eggs, silt mining, encroachment of wetlands and change in flooding pattern have had a disastrous impact on the turtle population.

About Black Softshell Turtle(Nilssonia nigricans)

- IUCN Status: **Extinct in Wild**
- CITES: **Appendix 1**
- Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA): **Schedule IV**
- Habitat: **Bangladesh and Indian state of Assam.**

About Hayagriva Madhava temple

- The Hayagriva Madhava temple is one of the important centers for **Vaishnavism**.
- The temple exists on a hilly place which located at **Hajo nearby Guwahati, Assam.**
- It was estimated that the temple was built during the **Pala period of 10th-12th century A. D.**