



Dharma Chakra Day

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Why in News

The **Ministry of Culture**, Government of India in partnership with **International Buddhist Confederation (IBC)** will celebrate the upcoming **Asadha Poornima on 4th July, 2020 as Dharma Chakra Day.**

Key Points

- The festivities would start off with **chanting of prayers at Sarnath, Varanasi (U.P.)** which will be livestreamed, following which the opening event will be shifted to the Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- The auspicious day of Asadha Poornima falls on the **first full moon day** of the month of **Asadha** as per Indian sun calendar.
 - It is also known as **Esala Poya in Sri Lanka** and **Asanha Bucha in Thailand.**
 - It is the **second most sacred day for Buddhists** after the **Buddha Poornima or Vesak.**
- The day marks **Buddha's first teaching** after attaining Enlightenment to the **first five ascetic disciples (pañcavargika)** on the full-moon day of Asadha at '**Deer Park**', Rīṣipātana in the current day **Sarnath**, near Varanasi, India.

This teaching of Dhamma Cakka- PavattanaSutta (Pali) or Dharma chakra Pravartana Sutra (Sanskrit) is also known as the First Turning of Wheels of Dharma and comprised of the **Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path.**
- The **Rainy Season retreat (Varsha Vassa)** for the Monks and Nuns also starts with this day lasting for three lunar months from July to October, during which they remain in a single place, **generally in their temples (Viharas/ Chaityas)** dedicated to intensive meditation.
- The day is **also observed as Guru Poornima** by both Buddhists and Hindus as a day to mark **reverence to their Gurus.**

Guru Purnima

- According to the Hindu calendar, Guru Purnima generally falls on a **full-moon day** in the **Hindu month of Ashadh**.
- It is dedicated to **Maharshi Veda Vyasa**, the sage who is believed to have edited the sacred Hindu text, the Vedas and created the 18 Puranas, Mahabharata and the Srimad Bhagavatam.
- For Buddhists, the **festival marks the first sermon of Lord Buddha**, which is said to have been delivered at Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, on this very day.
- It is also believed to **mark the onset of monsoons**.

Buddhism and Diplomacy

- **Buddhism** has become an important tool in contemporary geopolitics particularly in Asia, and it has become increasingly evident that whoever controls the Buddhist discourse and activities will sway influence in Asia.
- The celebration of **Dharma Chakra Day** is being pushed as an event **to show India's strong Buddhist heritage** amid **tensions with China**. It will see the virtual participation of leaders from major Buddhist countries, **except China**.
- The timing of the event is particularly important, because this is when both countries would like to **resurrect their linkages with others**. To show that like-minded countries are coming together sends across a message. What is however important is that one has to put in sustained effort at this, and have a **relook at India-China policy with strategic cultural moves**.
- The **Central Tibetan Administration** has asked Tibetan Buddhists to participate in the online event in large numbers to “support and appreciate” the effort.
 - The **Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)** is an organisation headquartered in **McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala, India**. It is also referred to as the **Tibetan Government in Exile** which has never been recognized by China.
 - The position of the CTA is that Tibet is a distinct nation with a long history of independence and it considers **China's administration of Tibet as illegitimate military occupation**.
 - In addition to political advocacy, it administers a network of schools and other cultural activities for Tibetans in India.
- Meanwhile, the **People's Republic of China (PRC)'s World Buddhist Forum (WBF)** has been hosting congregations of **buddhist monks since 2005**. China's extensive infrastructure investment in **Lumbini, Buddha's birthplace in Nepal**, is also seen as a strategic move to claim the Buddhist legacy.

Suggestions

- While Buddhism might have vanished from India as a religion practised by many people, it is **still a critical part of India's civilisational ethos**.
 - There should be more **buddhist corridors** including Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh, apart from Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.
 - There could be **nodal centres for people-to-people exchanges** for those who come from South Korea, Taiwan and other countries.
- Although no other country can take Buddhist leadership away from India, the status of Buddhism in India is quite different now.
 - India **has not been promoting its own Buddhist** streams or strengthening the original Buddhism.
 - Promoting anything else or any other brand than its own limits a genuine outreach. Promoting anything else becomes a subject of contestation, and the essence of using Buddhism as a diplomatic card gets lost.

Way Forward

There are also hundreds of millions of Chinese who have a deep devotion towards Buddhism. India needs to **reach out to those Chinese constituencies too**, for long term gains. After all, India conquered the hearts and minds of Chinese for 200 years without sending a single troop to China.

Source: PIB