



# Salkhan Fossil Park Added to UNESCO Tentative List

## Why in News?

Uttar Pradesh's **Salkhan Fossil Park**, also known as Sonbhadra Fossils Park, has been included in [UNESCO's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites](#).



## Key Points

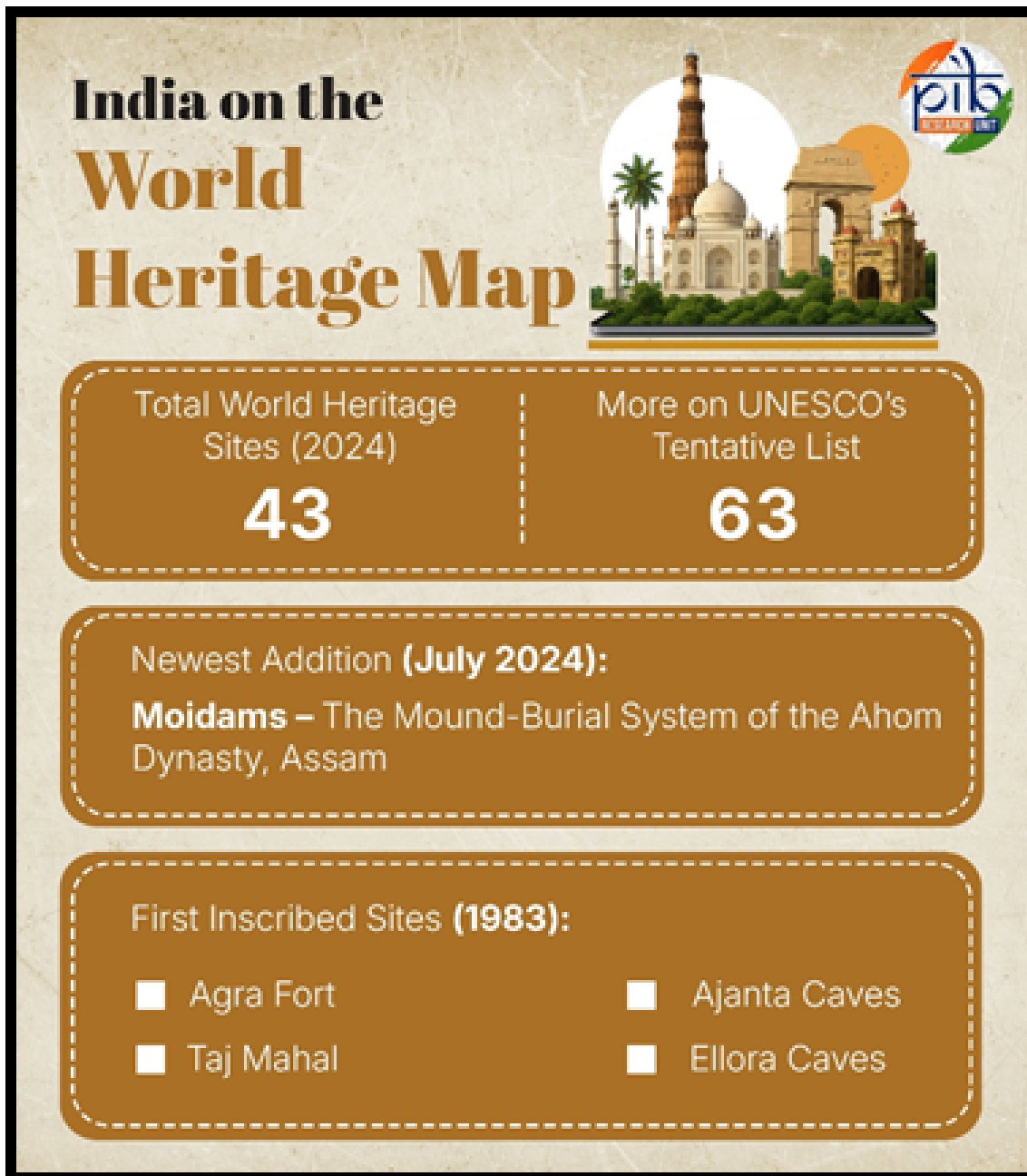
### ▪ About Salkhan Fossil Park:

- Located in Salkhan village in the **Sonbhadra district** of **Uttar Pradesh**, the park spans 25 hectares within the scenic [Kaimur Range](#), adjacent to [Kaimoor Wildlife Sanctuary](#).
- Though geological interest in the site dates back to the 1930s, it was **officially declared a fossil park in 2002**.
- Salkhan Fossil Park preserves [stromatolites](#), rare layered sedimentary structures formed by **ancient cyanobacteria** (blue-green algae).
  - **Cyanobacteria**, emerging around **3.5 billion years ago**, were likely the **first organisms to perform oxygenic photosynthesis**, triggering the [Great Oxidation Event](#) (~2.4 billion years ago), which enriched Earth's atmosphere with oxygen, enabling complex life.
- These photosynthesizing microorganisms belong to the **Mesoproterozoic Era** (1.6–1.0 billion years ago), making the fossils up to 1.4 billion years old.
- Such formations are globally rare, placing Salkhan among the oldest fossil sites in the world, older than **Shark Bay (Australia)** and [Yellowstone \(USA\)](#).

### ▪ Challenging Scientific Assumptions:

- Discoveries at Salkhan have transformed scientific understanding of early life.
- Previously, scientists believed life began around 570 million years ago, but the ancient stromatolites here predate that timeline.

- A key development in this scientific observation was the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**, between the **UP eco-tourism development board** and the **Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences, Lucknow**.
- The fossils provide vital clues into the **Earth's earliest biosphere** and the **evolution of oceanic ecosystems**.



## World Heritage Sites (WHS)

- WHS are locations recognized for their **outstanding universal value to humanity** and are inscribed on the **World Heritage List** for protection and preservation for future generations.
  - These sites may be **cultural, natural, or mixed** in nature. **WHS** are safeguarded under the **World Heritage Convention, 1972**, an international agreement adopted by **UNESCO member countries**.
  - The Convention outlines the responsibilities of **State Parties** in identifying, protecting, and preserving such sites.
  - The list of WHS are maintained by the international '**World Heritage Programme**', administered by the **UNESCO World Heritage Committee**.
  - **India ratified** the Convention in **1977**.

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