

Environment

India Ranks Third in Global Forest Area Gains

Context: India has made significant progress in forest protection. From 2010 to 2020, India added 266,000 hectares of new forest annually. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), this achievement places India as the third country globally in terms of forest area growth.



Global Forest Area Gains

- ❖ China and Australia lead the global rankings, increasing their forest areas by 1,937,000 and 446,000 hectares, respectively. Other countries in the top ten include Chile, Vietnam, Turkey, the United States, France, Italy, and Romania.

India's Initiatives

- ❖ India's efforts to restore degraded lands and promote agroforestry through innovative approaches and supportive national policies have been praised by the FAO.

Deforestation Trends

- ❖ The FAO study highlights a significant decrease in deforestation rates worldwide. In 2023, Indonesia's rainforests shrank by 8.4%, while Brazil's Amazon rainforests saw a dramatic reduction of 50%.
- ❖ Despite positive trends, climate change continues to threaten forests, making them more susceptible to wildfires and pests.
- ❖ Boreal forests contributed significantly to global carbon emissions in 2021. In 2023, wildfires are projected to release 6,687 megatonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Sports

Manolo Marquez Appointed Head Coach of the Indian Football Team

Context: On July 20, the All-India Football Federation (AIFF) announced the appointment of Manolo Marquez as the new head coach of the Indian men's football team. He is set to officially take on the role after the conclusion of the 2024-25 Indian Super League (ISL) season.



Coaching Background

- ❖ Hailing from Barcelona, Spain, Manolo Marquez has an impressive coaching portfolio. His notable achievements in India began with Hyderabad FC, where he guided the club to its first ISL championship in 2022.

Success with Indian Clubs

- ❖ Marquez spent three seasons with Hyderabad FC before moving to FC Goa. Under his leadership, FC Goa secured third place in the league and reached the semifinals of the playoffs last season, further enhancing his reputation in Indian football.

Experience Prior to India

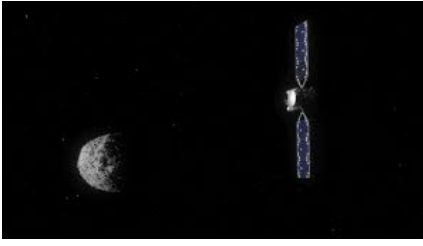
- ❖ Before his tenure in India, Marquez had a substantial coaching career in Spain, working with clubs such as Las Palmas and Espanyol at various levels. He also gained international coaching experience in Thailand and Croatia.

Science & Technology

ESA Prepares RAMSES Mission to Study Asteroid Apophis

Context: The 1994 impact of the Shoemaker-Levy 9 comet on Jupiter heightened global awareness about planetary protection. This event spurred discussions on preventing similar occurrences on Earth. Consequently, planetary defense systems have garnered significant attention worldwide due to the potential threat of asteroid impacts.

- ❖ The European Space Agency (ESA) addresses these risks through its Space Safety program, which focuses on mitigating threats via future missions.



Introduction of RAMSES

- ❖ ESA is currently preparing for the RAMSES mission, the Rapid Apophis Mission for Space Safety.
- ❖ The primary objective of RAMSES is to study asteroid 99942 Apophis during its close approach to Earth in 2029.
- ❖ Apophis, measuring approximately 375 meters in diameter, will pass within 32,000 km of Earth on April 13, 2029, and will be visible to billions of people.
- ❖ This rare event occurs once every 5,000 to 10,000 years, and Apophis poses no collision threat for at least the next 100 years.

Scientific Goals of the RAMSES Mission

- ❖ During its flyby, the RAMSES spacecraft will observe the effects of Earth's gravity on Apophis. This includes examining changes in the asteroid's shape, rotation, and surface features.

- ❖ These observations will enhance our understanding of these characteristics, which are crucial for future planetary defense strategies.
- ❖ Additionally, NASA's OSIRIS-REx spacecraft will pursue Apophis, providing experts with comparative data on the asteroid's state before and after the flyby. This comprehensive approach enables a thorough analysis of any changes.
- ❖ The RAMSES mission exemplifies the rapid deployment of reconnaissance missions to monitor potentially hazardous asteroids. The accurate data collected will inform tactics for deflecting asteroids and preventing impacts, thereby contributing to global planetary defense efforts.

International News

Israel Approves Bill Declaring UNRWA a Terrorist Organization

Context: On July 22, 2024, the Israeli parliament (Knesset) gave preliminary approval to a controversial bill that would label the United Nations Relief

and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as a terrorist organization. This move is part of Israel's ongoing campaign against the UN agency, which it accuses of collaborating with Hamas.



Details of the Bill

- ❖ The proposed law will undergo further discussions in the foreign affairs and defense committees following its first reading.
- ❖ Yulia Malinovsky, the bill's sponsor, described UNRWA as a “fifth column within Israel,” highlighting the longstanding tensions between the organization and Israeli officials.

UNRWA's Role

- ❖ UNRWA is responsible for providing essential services such as education, healthcare, and humanitarian aid to millions of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and several neighboring countries.
- ❖ The agency has had a historically tense relationship with Israel, which has deteriorated further since the recent conflict in Gaza began.

Accusations Against UNRWA

- ❖ Israeli officials allege that many UNRWA employees are affiliated with terrorist groups, particularly Hamas and Islamic Jihad.
- ❖ However, the Israeli government has yet to present evidence of these claims to an independent UN investigation.



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