

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

❖ **Towards legalizing same-sex marriage**

❖ **How do the fresh pleas in the Supreme Court seek to recognize same-sex marriage? What are the existing rights of LGBTQIA+ people in India? Which are the judgments being cited by the petitioners? Where do other countries stand on same-sex marriage?**

❖ **CONTEXT:** A Supreme Court Bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on November 25, issued notices to the Centre and the Attorney General of India, seeking their response to two petitions filed by gay couples to allow solemnisation of same-sex marriage under the Special Marriage Act, (SMA) 1954.

What do the petitions say?

- The SMA provides a civil form of marriage for couples who cannot marry under their personal law, and both the recent pleas seek to recognise same-sex marriage in relation to this Act and not personal laws. The first petition was filed by two men, Supriyo Chakraborty and Abhay Dang, who have been a couple for 10 years.
- Their petition argued that the SMA was “ultra vires” the Constitution “to the extent it discriminates between same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples”. It stated that the Act denied same-sex couples both “legal rights as well as the social recognition and status” that came from marriage. Senior Advocates Niraj Kishan Kaul and Menaka Guruswamy for the petitioners said that about 15 legislations which guaranteed the rights of wages, gratuity, adoption, surrogacy and so on were not available to LGBTQ+ citizens.
- The petitioners emphasised that the SMA “ought to apply to a marriage between any two persons, regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation”. The other petition was filed by a same sex couple of 17 years - Parth Phiroze Mehrotra and Uday Raj Anand. Their counsel, Senior Advocate Mukul Rohatgi, argued that the recognition of same-sex marriage was only a “sequel” or a continuation of the Navtej Singh Johar judgment of 2018 (decriminalising homosexuality) and the Puttaswamy judgment of 2017 (affirming the Right to Privacy as a fundamental right).
- Mr. Rohatgi said the petition did not touch on personal laws but only sought to make the 1954 Act “gender-neutral”. Their plea pointed out that while Section 4 of the SMA permitted the solemnisation of marriage between any two persons, a subsequent section placed restrictions. It said: “The use, in Section 4(c) of the words ‘male’ and ‘female’, as well as the use of gendered language such as the terms ‘husband/wife’ and ‘bride/bridegroom’ in other sections of the Act, limit the access to marriage to a couple comprising one ‘male’ and one ‘female’.”

❖ **Have similar petitions been filed?**

- There are currently a total of nine petitions pending before the High Court of Delhi and Kerala, seeking to recognise same-sex marriages under Acts such as the SMA, the Foreign Marriage Act and codified personal laws. On Friday, the Supreme Court Bench of CJI Chandrachud and Justice Hima Koli transferred the various pending issues before High Courts to itself. One of the new petitions also placed emphasis on another important judgement of the apex court.
- In the NALSA vs Union of India judgment (2014), the Court had said that non-binary individuals were protected under the Constitution and fundamental rights such as equality, non-discrimination, life, freedom and so on could not be restricted to those who were biologically male or female.

❖ **What is the government’s stand?**

- Late last year, while responding to the pleas seeking recognition of same-sex marriages in the Delhi High Court, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta for the Centre had said that as per the law, marriage was permissible between a “biological man” and “biological woman”. In its affidavit opposing the pleas, the Centre had said: “The acceptance of the institution of marriage between two individuals of the same gender is neither recognised nor accepted in any uncodified personal laws or any codified statutory laws”. It also argued against the urgency of the pleas by saying nobody was “dying” in the absence of a marriage certificate.

❖ **What about other countries?**

- A total of 32 countries around the world have legalized same-sex marriages, some through legislation while others through judicial pronouncements. Many countries first recognized same-sex civil unions as the escalatory step to recognize homosexual marriage.
- Civil unions or partnerships are similar arrangements as marriages which provide legal recognition of unmarried couples of the same or opposite sex in order to grant them some of the rights that come with

marriage — such as inheritance, medical benefits, employee benefits to spouses, managing joint taxes and finances, and in some cases even adoption.

- The Netherlands was the first country in 2001 to legalize same-sex marriage by amending one line in its civil marriage law. In some countries, the decriminalization of homosexuality was not followed for years by the recognition of same-sex marriage, for instance, in the U.S. the former happened in 2003 while the latter in 2015.

ECONOMY

❖ **What is the PDS scam that has led to a SC listing controversy?**

❖ **How has the Nagrik Apurti Nigam, the nodal agency for Chhattisgarh's public distribution system, become embroiled in scandal? What are the Enforcement Directorate's accusations against the government?**

- **CONTEXT:** Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud agreed to hear the Nagrik Apurti Nigam (NAN) scam case in the Supreme Court, after a high-octane exchange last week between the Chhattisgarh Government and the Enforcement Directorate over the case's listing in front of a fresh Bench.

❖ **What is the NAN scam?**

- The NAN is Chhattisgarh's nodal agency for procuring and distributing food grains under the Public Distribution System (PDS). In 2015, the Opposition alleged that the government was distributing sub-standard quality grains under the PDS and that officials had received kickbacks from rice millers to allow this.
- The State's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) launched a probe into the matter. While conducting raids at the NAN office, the agency found unaccounted-for cash worth over three crore. It also tested the food samples for their quality, finding many samples of salt and rice unfit for human consumption. It booked 27 persons in the case including two IAS officers, now the main accused, Anil Tuteja and Alok Shukla, (the Chairman and the Managing Director of NAN, respectively) alleging that they had allowed the distribution of sub-standard foodstuffs.
- The ED also started a money laundering probe into the case. Charges were pressed against the officers in 2018. In December 2018, the then government constituting within days a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the matter again. Notably, Mr. Bhagel's administration appointed the two accused IAS officers to government posts and in 2020, the Chhattisgarh High Court also granted anticipatory bail to the two officers.

❖ **Why did the ED want a transfer?**

- Late last year, the ED moved the Supreme Court seeking a retrial out of Chhattisgarh and a transfer of the case to the CBI. The ED, in its petition, alleged that the judiciary and the current Chhattisgarh government were weakening the investigation and helping the accused in the case and asked the Court to allow proof of the same. The ED alleged that its evidence revealed "the nature of the misuse of power" in Chhattisgarh, saying that evidence was tampered with, witnesses were influenced, and that there could be a "potential conspiracy" involving a "constitutional functionary". It said that the main accused had close ties with the current Chief Minister Mr. Bhagel, and that the SIT formed by the State government made "at least seven unsuccessful attempts" to stall the previous trial. The Chhattisgarh government has called the ED's allegations "baseless".

❖ **What was the listing controversy in the Supreme Court?**

- The retired Chief Justice of India U.U. Lalit, along with Justices Ajay Rastogi and S. Ravindra Bhat, were hearing the ED's plea but dropped the case from the Court roster on October 20, citing paucity of time before the end of his term on November 8. On November 14, the case came up before a new Bench with Justices Shah and Hima Kohli.
- However, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the Chhattisgarh government, objected, saying the convention required the case to be listed before either of the two associate judges on Justice Lalit's Bench. Justice Chandrachud responded that he could have constituted a Bench of himself and Justices Rastogi and Bhat but that would mean breaking up two separate Benches, presently headed by the two Justices. On Monday, however, Justice Chandrachud agreed to constitute a Bench headed by himself with Justices Rastogi and Bhat.

❖ **About Public Distribution System (PDS):**

- The Public Distribution System (PDS) is an Indian food security system that evolved as a system for distributing food grains at affordable prices and managing emergency situations. It provides subsidized food and non-food items to India's poor. PDS has become an important part of the Government's policy for managing the country's food economy over the years. PDS is supplemental in

nature and is not intended to meet the entire need for any of the commodities distributed under it to a household or a segment of society.

- The PDS is managed jointly by the Central and State Governments.
- The Food Corporation of India (FCI) has assumed responsibility for the procurement, storage, transportation, and bulk allocation of food grains to state governments.
- The operational responsibilities of the State Governments include allocation within the State, identification of eligible families, issuance of Ration Cards, and supervision of the operation of Fair Price Shops (FPSs), among other things.

PRELIMS

1. Context: Nearly 300 Kuki-Chin-Mizo refugees from Bangladesh flee military-insurgent conflict, cross international border into Mizoram

- Nearly 300 Kuki-Chin-Mizo immigrants who fled the recent conflict between the military and ethnic insurgents in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of neighbouring Bangladesh, have taken shelter in Lawngtlai district of Mizoram.
- “They have taken shelter in Parva village, close to the international border, where they were given accommodation by the local community. Some NGOs and the Border Security Force (BSF) are providing humanitarian aid supplied by the state government,” the official informed.
- Recently, Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga held a meeting on the issue and expressed sympathy for the refugees from Kuki-Chin-Mizo communities. He also announced to provide them with “temporary shelter, food and other relief as per the convenience of the state government.”
- Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) sprawl across 13,000 sq km area in Khagrachari, Rangamati, and Bandarban districts of Bangladesh and share boundaries with Mizoram on its eastern side, Tripura on the northern side, and with Myanmar on the south and south-eastern front. Mizoram shares a 318 km-long international border with Bangladesh.
- Mizoram is already sheltering over 30,000 refugees from Myanmar who sought refuge in the state after a military coup in the Southeast Asian nation in February last year.

2. ‘Har Ghar Gangajal’ scheme

Context: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar launched the ambitious ‘Har Ghar Gangajal’ scheme, under which piped Ganga water will be supplied to every household, at Rajgir in Nalanda district.

- The project has been described as a “lift-store-tame-treat-supply” system.
- A 447-metre approach channel has been constructed on the right bank of the Ganga through which water is taken to an intake-well-cum-pumphouse, which is powered by a dedicated electricity substation and two smaller transformers.
- In the first phase of the ₹4,000-crore scheme under the government’s Jal, Jivan aur Hariyali mission, two districts of Nalanda and Gaya will be covered for supply of Ganga water.
- In the second phase, Ganga water will be reaching the adjoining Nawada district too. About 7.5 lakh households in Nalanda, Gaya and the town of Bodh Gaya will start getting Ganga water from November 28. It is said to be the first of its kind project in the country to “store, treat and supply food waters of the Ganga that the State receives every year during monsoon season, to the districts of Nalanda, Gaya and Nawada”.
- “The Ganga water which now has reached your household will not only be used for drinking but also for bathing, cooking and everything. The ground water-level too will be maintained through this. The temples of the district and the newly opened Nalanda International University too will be getting the Ganga water under the scheme.”

3. Shiveluch volcano:

Context: The Shiveluch volcano in Russia’s far eastern Kamchatka peninsula may be gearing up for its first powerful eruption in 15 years.

- Kamchatka is home to 29 active volcanoes, part of a vast belt of Earth known as the “Ring of Fire” which circles the Pacific Ocean and is prone to eruptions and frequent earthquakes.
- According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), these kinds of eruptions typically happen three or four times a year in Kamchatka.
- Six volcanoes in Russia’s northeast are currently showing signs of increased activity, including Eurasia’s highest active volcano Klyuchevskaya Sopka.
- Shiveluch is one of the largest and most active volcanoes in Kamchatka, having erupted at least 60 times in the past 10,000 years. It has two main parts: Old Shiveluch and Young Shiveluch.

Young Shiveluch lies within an ancient caldera – a large crater-like basin that likely formed when the older part underwent a catastrophic eruption at least 10,000 years ago. It is this part that has become extremely active.

- Domes and fumaroles: Domes are mounds that form from accumulating lava, Fumaroles are openings through which hot sulphurous gases emerge.
- The volcano has been continuously erupting since 1999.

4. Crisis in Darjeeling Tea industry:

➤ **Context: The Tea Board of India admitted that Indian tea had not been able to establish itself globally, and that one of its key brands, Darjeeling Tea, was under acute stress.**

- Darjeeling Tea, called the ‘Champagne of Teas’, was the first Indian product to get the GI (Geographical Identification) tag in 2004 for its distinctive aroma and flavour.
- Over the past few months a lot of gardens in the hills have changed hands because the owners were reeling under higher costs of production and other issues.
- Threat from Nepal’s gardens: A report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee of the Ministry of Commerce, said that unhampered and easy influx of substandard tea from neighbouring countries, especially Nepal is jeopardising the tea industry of India. The document pointed out that inferior quality tea from Nepal was being imported, and then sold and re-exported as premium Darjeeling Tea.
- Under the Revised Treaty of Trade between the Governments of India and Nepal in October 2009, both parties had agreed to exempt from basic customs duty, as well as from quantitative restrictions, the import of mutually agreed primary products.
- Nepal, which shares similar climatic conditions and terrain, produces tea at a lower price because of less input costs, particularly labour, and fewer quality checks. Even though the quality is no match, yet the tea from Nepal posed a serious challenge to Darjeeling Tea.
- Tea production in Darjeeling which used to be around 10-12 million kg a decade back now stands at 6.87 mkg (2021).
- The decline in production is due to multiple factors, which include: climate change, declining yields and high absenteeism among workers.
- Some global factors like the decline in demand from European markets in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war have compounded the problem.
- Because of the hilly terrain of Darjeeling there is no land left for expansion of tea gardens. The tea bushes are older than other parts of the country. Uprooting and planting them is both time and cost intensive.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Highlight the economic and environmental significance of Mangroves. What are the threats facing Mangroves in India?

A Mangrove is a small tree or shrub that grows along coastlines, taking root in salty sediments, often underwater. They are referred to as ‘tidal forests’ and belong to the category of ‘tropical wetland rainforest ecosystem’. India has a total mangrove cover of 4,992 sq km. West Bengal has 42.45% of India’s mangrove cover.

Significance of mangroves:

1. Economic significance

- Productivity: Mangroves are among the most productive terrestrial ecosystems and are a natural, renewable resource. For instance, Sundarbans in the Gangetic delta supports around 30 plant species of mangroves.
- Resource: They supply timber, firewood, medicinal plants and edible plants to local people.
- Employment: They provide numerous employment opportunities to local communities and augment their livelihoods.
- Ecological Niches: Mangroves provide ecological niches for a wide variety of organisms. They serve as breeding, feeding and nursery grounds for fisheries and provide timber and wood for fuel.

2. Environmental significance

- Edge Effect: The mangroves show edge effect, which means that they have large species diversity in comparison to marine or terrestrial ecosystem.
- Act as carbon sink: Mangroves make up less than 2% of marine environments but account for 10-15% of carbon burial.
- Coastal Stabilisation: Mangrove forests stabilize the coastline, reducing erosion from storm surges, currents, waves, and tides.

- **Natural Filters:** Mangrove forests act as water filters and purifiers as well. When water from rivers and floodplains flow into the ocean, mangroves filter a lot of sediments, hence protecting the coastal ecology including coral reefs.

Threats mangroves facing in India:

- **Sea level rise and coastal erosion:** Due to global warming, the sea levels are continuously rising. The rising sea levels have flooded large areas of mangrove forests. This has resulted in their depletion.
- **Commercialisation of Coastal Areas:** Aquaculture, coastal development, rice and palm oil farming and industrial activities are rapidly replacing these salt-tolerant trees and the ecosystems they support.
- **Climate change:** Unusually low rainfall and very high sea surface and air temperatures caused severe threats to the survival of mangrove forests.
- **Pollution:** Mangroves also face severe threats due to fertilisers, pesticides, discharge of domestic sewage and industrial effluents carried down by the river systems.
- **Reduction in river water levels:** The mangroves are more prevalent in areas where the rivers meet the sea. The system requires a fine balance between salt and sweet water to survive. Reduction of river water due to dams has caused destruction of mangroves.

Mangroves are the natural heritage of a country. Owing to its varied economic and environmental significance it is need of the hour to protect them and their surroundings and ensure sustainability. India has joined Mangroves alliance for climate (MAC), Mangroves for the future to increase international cooperation in conservation of mangroves which should be accompanied by encouraging local community participation and adopting traditional conservation practices.

MCQs

1. Consider the following sentences.
 1. Darjeeling Tea was the first Indian product to get the geographical indication tag in 2004.
 2. India is the largest producer of Tea in the world.
 3. Tea is a tropical and sub-tropical plant and grows well in moderately hot and humid climates.
 4. Tea Board is a statutory body under the Ministry of Commerce.

Select the correct answer using the codes below:

 - a) 1 and 3 only
 - b) 1, 2 and 3 only
 - c) 1, 3 and 4 only
 - d) **1, 2, 3 and 4**
2. Section 12 of The Special Marriage Act 1954 deals with which of the following?
 - a) **Place and form of solemnization**
 - b) Conditions relating to solemnization of special marriages.
 - c) Marriage Officers
 - d) Marriage Notice Book and publication
3. Consider the following Statements.
 1. A bust of Mahatma Gandhi will be inaugurated as a gift from India to the United Nations during India's presidency of the Security Council next month.
 2. It will be installed at the headquarters in New York.
 3. The bust, made by renowned Indian sculptor and Padma Shri awardee Ram Sutar, who also designed the Statue of Unity in Gujarat.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

 - a) 1 and 2 only
 - b) Only 2
 - c) **1, 2 and 3**
 - d) 1 and 3 only
4. Which is true about the Public distribution system?
 - a) It is supplemental in nature and intended to available the entire requirement of any of the commodities.
 - b) It is not supplemental in nature and intended to available the entire requirement of any of the commodities.
 - c) **It is supplemental in nature and not intended to available the entire requirement of any of the commodities.**
 - d) None of the above.
5. Consider the following Statements about Har Ghar Gangajal scheme.
 1. It will be launched as part of the state government's Jal, Jeevan, Hariyali scheme.
 2. The first phase of the project will be implemented with an outlay of Rs.4,000 crore.

3. Under this phase, large pumps will lift Ganga water from Hathidah, close to Mokama, to supply water for to some 7.5 lakh homes in Rajgir, Bodhgaya, and Gaya.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - Only 2
 - 1, 2 and 3**
 - 1 and 3 only
6. Which of the following African countries touch boundary with Indian ocean
- Mozambique
 - Kenya
 - Tanzania
 - Ethiopia
- Select the correct answer using the code given below.
- 1 and 3 only
 - 2 and 4 only
 - 1, 2 and 3**
 - 1, 2, 3 and 4
7. Consider the following statements regarding UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation programme:
- It recognises the efforts of private individuals and organisations in restoring, conserving and transforming structures and buildings of heritage value in the region.
 - No Indian site has been recognised or awarded under the programme yet.
- Which of the above statements is/are correct?
- 1 only**
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - None of these
8. Consider the following statements.
- Shiveluch volcano is one of the largest and most active volcanoes situated in Far east region of China.
 - Caldera volcanoes are the most violent Volcanoes.
 - Oceanic trenches are morphological feature of Convergent plate boundaries.
 - The Earth's magnetic poles are inclined approximately 11 degrees from the Earth's rotation axis.
- Select the correct answer using the codes below
- 1, 2 and 3 only
 - 2 and 4 only
 - 2, 3 and 4 only**
 - 1, 2, 3 and 4
9. Consider the following statements, with respect to Electoral Bearer Bond Scheme
- Electoral Bonds may be purchased by any person who is living in India
 - All registered political parties are eligible to receive the Electoral Bonds.
 - The cost of commission and printing of the Electoral Bonds (EBs) is borne by government
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 3 only**
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
10. In the cities of our country, which among the following atmospheric gases are normally considered in calculating the value of Air Quality Index?
- Carbon dioxide
 - Carbon monoxide
 - Nitrogen dioxide
 - Sulphur Dioxide
 - Methane
- Select the correct answer using the code given below
- 1, 2 and 3 only
 - 2, 3 and 4 only**
 - 1, 4 and 5 only
 - 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 only