

SOCIAL ISSUE

❖ **What is India's stand on same-sex marriage?**

➤ **CONTEXT:** Recently, a Bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud referred petitions to legally recognise same-sex marriages to a Constitution Bench of five judges of the Supreme Court. The Court has listed the case for final arguments on April 18.

➤ **What is the case?**

- The Court has been hearing multiple petitioners' requests for legal recognition of same-sex marriages under a special law. Initially, it took up the case of two partners who said the non-recognition of same-sex marriage amounted to discrimination that strikes at the root of "dignity and self-fulfilment" of LGBTQIA+ couples.
- The petitioners cited the Special Marriage Act, 1954, which provides a civil marriage for couples who cannot marry under their personal law, and appealed to the Court to extend the right to the LGBTQIA+ community, by making the "marriage between any two persons" gender neutral.

➤ **Why does the community want this right?**

- Even if LGBTQIA+ couples may live together, legally, they are on a slippery slope. They do not enjoy the rights married couples do. For example, LGBTQIA+ couples cannot adopt children or have a child by surrogacy; they do not have automatic rights to inheritance, maintenance and tax benefits; after a partner passes away, they cannot avail of benefits like pension or compensation. Most of all, since marriage is a social institution, "that is created by and highly regulated by law," without this social sanction, same-sex couples struggle to make a life together.

➤ **Which way are the Courts leaning?**

- The Courts, leaning on Article 21 that guarantees the right to life and liberty, have time and again ruled in favour of inter-faith and inter-caste marriages, directing the police and other rights organisations to give them protection when they were threatened by parents or society, pointing out that "all adults have the right to marry a person of their choice."
- In Navtej Singh Johar (2018), when homosexuality was decriminalised, the Court said, "Members of the LGBT[QIA+] community are entitled to the benefit of an equal citizenship, without discrimination, and to the equal protection of law"; "The choice of whom to partner, the ability to find fulfilment in sexual intimacies and the right not to be subjected to discriminatory behaviour are intrinsic to the constitutional protection of sexual orientation."

➤ **What is the Centre's stand?**

- At depositions in courts and outside, the Centre has opposed same-sex marriage, and said judicial interference will cause "complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws". While filing a counter-affidavit during this hearing, the government said that decriminalisation of Section 377 IPC does not give rise to a claim to seek recognition for same-sex marriage.

- After the K.S. Puttaswamy verdict (2017) which upheld the right to privacy and Navtej Singh Johar (2018) that decriminalised homosexuality, there was hope that same-sex marriages would be legalised, but that has not been the case, prompting many couples to move court.

- In its affidavit filed in the Supreme Court, the government said that the "notion of marriage itself necessarily and inevitably presupposes a union between two persons of the opposite sex. This definition is socially, culturally and legally ingrained into the very idea and concept of marriage and ought not to be disturbed or diluted by judicial interpretation." Despite the decriminalisation of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, the petitioners cannot seek same-sex marriage to be treated as a fundamental right and be recognised under the laws of the country.

- "Parliament has designed and framed the marriage laws in the country, which are governed by the personal laws/codified laws relatable to customs of various religious communities, to recognise only the union of a man and a woman to be capable of legal sanction, and thereby claim legal and statutory rights

Arguments from both sides

WHAT CENTRE SAID

- Family issues are far beyond mere recognition and registration of marriage between persons belonging to the same gender
- Living together as partners and having sexual relationship by same-sex individuals is not comparable with the Indian family unit concept of a husband, a wife and children which necessarily presuppose a biological man as a 'husband', a biological woman as a 'wife' and the children born out of the union between the two

PETITIONERS' RESPONSE

- The government's position is curious given the (Hindu Marriage) Act itself wiped out several recorded Hindu traditions that existed prior to codification. Whoever drafted the response also seems clueless about the 60-odd genders recognised in Hindu historical texts not to mention it has failed to provide any textual basis prohibiting the marriage of these 60-odd genders.
- The progeny argument is particularly ridiculous because it implies any marriage shorn of biological offspring is not a marriage

and consequences” and that “any interference with the same would cause a complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws in the country and in accepted societal values.”

- The government said that even if such a right (allowing same-sex marriage) is claimed under Article 21, the “right can be curtailed by competent legislature on permissible constitutional grounds including legitimate state interest.”
- The government submitted that statutory recognition of marriage as a union between a ‘man’ and a ‘woman’ is inextricably tied to acceptance of the heterogeneous institution of marriage and acceptance of Indian society based on its own cultural and sociological norms acknowledged by the competent legislature.
- **Are the executive and the judiciary on opposing sides on this?**
- With the government saying that the concept of marriage “ought not to be disturbed or diluted by judicial interpretation,” and the Court leaning towards granting equal rights, including marriage of same-sex couples, citing the Constitution and changing norms, it is clear that the two organs of the state are not in agreement on this.
- Even if the Court rules in its favour, the march towards equality for the LGBTQIA+ community will be hard. Enforcing something like same-sex marriage in a diverse country with well-entrenched traditions will not be easy. Rights activists are calling for awareness on sex, gender and constitutional rights from the school level to change things on the ground.
- **Which countries have legalised same-sex marriage?**
- Currently, there are 32 countries globally where same-sex marriage is legal. These are Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uruguay.

PRELIMS

1. Raccoon Dogs

➤ **CONTEXT: A new analysis of genetic data collected from the Huanan seafood market in Wuhan, China has linked the coronavirus to raccoon dogs, raising the possibility that the pandemic originated from infected animals sold there.**

➤ **About**

- Raccoon dogs are neither dogs nor raccoons.
- They belong to the canid family and are closely related to foxes. They are the only canids that hibernate during the winter.
- There are two species of raccoon dogs:
 - ✓ Nyctereutes procyonoides: the common raccoon dog
 - ✓ Nyctereutes p. viverrinus: the Japanese raccoon dog.
- They are omnivores
- They are monogamous
- They often live in pairs
- Food: They like food sources like rodents and fruits.

➤ **Distribution:**

- Raccoon dogs are originally from East Asia.
- They are common in China, Korea and Japan.
- They are known as tanuki.
- They were first brought in by fur traders in Europe during the 1920s.

➤ **Effect on the local ecosystem:**

- Considered a threat to native ecosystems in Europe.
- Tanuki is respected in Japan. In folklore, tanuki is a fun-loving trickster that can change shapes and is often associated with good financial luck.

2. Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)

➤ **CONTEXT: The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has praised the efforts of farmers of Sirsa for showcasing the benefits of PM Matasya Sampada Yojana.**

➤ **About:**

- It is a flagship scheme for focused and sustainable development of the fisheries sector in the country with an estimated investment of ₹20,050 crore for its implementation during 2020-21 to 2024-25 as part of Aatmanirbhar Bharat package.
- Ministry: Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying

- Its aims is to bring about a blue revolution through sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector in India and to double the incomes of fishers and fish farmers, reducing post-harvest losses from 20-25% to about 10% and the generation of gainful employment opportunities in the sector.
- Implementation: It is implemented as an umbrella scheme with two separate components namely
- ✓ Central Sector Scheme: The project cost will be borne by the Central government. The entire project/unit cost will be funded by the Government of India (GoI) (i.e., 100% GoI Funding).
- ✓ Centrally Sponsored Scheme: All the sub-components/activities will be implemented by the States/UTs and the cost will be shared between Centre and State.
- ✚ North Eastern & Himalayan States: 90% Central share and 10% State share.
- ✚ Other States: 60% Central share and 40% State share.

A well-structured implementation framework would be established for the effective planning and implementation of PMMSY.

For optimal outcomes, 'Cluster or area-based approach' would be followed with requisite forward and backward linkages and end to end solutions.

Approach: 'Cluster or Area based approaches and many new interventions such as fishing vessel insurance, Aquaculture in saline/alkaline areas, Sagar Mitras, FFPOs, Nucleus Breeding Centres, etc.

Achievements: From 2019–20 to 2021–2022, the Fisheries sector had an incredible growth of 14.3%.

- ✓ Fish production has increased from 141.64 lakh tonnes in 2019-20 to 161.87 lakh tonnes (provisional) in 2021-22.
- ✓ The sector achieved all-time high exports of 13.64 lakh tonnes, reaching Rs 57,587 crores (USD 7.76 billion), topped by shrimp exports.

➤ **Status of Fisheries Sector**

- The fisheries sector has been recognized as a powerful income and employment generator as it stimulates growth of a number of subsidiary industries and is a source of cheap and nutritious food, at the same time it is an instrument of livelihood for a large section of the economically backward population of the country.
- Fishery sector occupies an important place in the socio-economic development of the country.
- India is the 3rd largest fish producing and 2nd largest aquaculture nation in the world after China.
- The Blue Revolution in India demonstrated the importance of the Fisheries and Aquaculture sector.
- The sector is considered as a sunrise sector and is poised to play a significant role in the Indian economy in near future.

3. **Global Conference on Digital Health**

➤ **CONTEXT: Leveraging India's presidency of the G20 and the prolific actions and commitments of previous presidencies, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the WHO South-East Asia Regional office are organizing a two-day Global Conference on Digital Health – 'Taking Universal Health Coverage to the last citizen' on 20th and 21st March 2023 in New Delhi.**

- Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare, and Chemicals & Fertilizers will chair the Global Conference.
- The conclave will bring together global leaders and health development partners, health policy makers, digital health innovators and influencers, academia and other stakeholders. The objective of the Global Conference on Digital Health is to shift the focus from strategy to achieving a global consensus on a Plan of Action that produces impactful results on the ground in the member countries, through a set of digital health initiatives aiming to accelerate our progress towards UHC.
- The Global Conference will address the issues to accelerate the implementation of connected digital health initiatives and interventions as a cornerstone of building PHC-oriented and resilient health systems. It will also focus on to unlock the potential of delivering and sharing digital health solutions in an ethical, safe, secure, reliable, equitable and sustainable way.
- The conference will also focus on to finding ways to invest, develop and share digital technologies following principles of transparency, accessibility, scalability, replicability, interoperability, privacy, security, and confidentiality. This will help in establishing strategic enablers and technology enablers required for implementing digital health at population scale.
- As part of the Global Conference, five sessions on following aspects have been planned:
 - ✓ Digital health - an imperative for UHC
 - ✓ Digital health population scale – Strategic enablers
 - ✓ Digital health population scale - Technology enablers
 - ✓ Innovations for UHC
 - ✓ Global Digital Goods for UHC
- The conference will also have a ministerial session involving brainstorming on insight and experience on the digital transformation challenges, opportunities and critical success factors along with panel discussions.

4. Poshan Pakhwada

- **CONTEXT:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development will celebrate the fifth Poshan Pakhwada from 20th March to 3rd April 2023 with various activities nationwide.
- The Pakhwada aims to raise awareness about the importance of nutrition and promote healthy eating habits through Jan Andolan and Jan Bhagidari.
Poshan Abhiyaan, launched in 2018, has been instrumental in ensuring people's participation and bringing the discourse on nutrition to the forefront. Poshan Abhiyan was launched with the aim to improve nutritional outcomes in a holistic manner. Behavioral change at individual and community level is an important component to achieve the desired goals of a Kuposhan-mukt Bharat.
- Every year, Poshan Pakhwada is celebrated in the month of March for 15 days. Similarly, the month of September is celebrated as Rashtriya Poshan Maah, across the country. The Poshan Maah and Pakhwada celebrated so far have witnessed wide participation and enthusiasm from all States/UTs, frontline functionaries, converging Ministries as well as public at large.
- Close to 2.96 crore activities were held across the country in the last Poshan Pakhwada 2022. The theme of this year's Poshan Pakhwada 2023 is "Nutrition for All: Together Towards a Healthy India". With the declaration of 2023 as the International Year of Millets, this year the focus of Poshan Pakhwada will be to popularise 'Shree Anna'- the mother of all grains, as a valuable asset to address malnutrition.
- The activities during the Poshan Pakhwada will focus, inter alia, on the following key themes:
 - ✓ **Promotion and popularization of Shree Anna / Millets for nutritional- well-being** through organization of drives to link Millet-based foods with supplementary nutrition, Home visits, Diet consultation camps, etc.
 - ✓ **Celebration of Swasth Balak Spardha:** Celebrate and recognize the 'Swasth Balak' or Healthy Child as per defined criteria by generating a healthy spirit of competition for good nutrition good health and well being
 - ✓ **Popularize Saksham Anganwadis:** Campaigns will be organized to increase awareness and popularise Saksham Anganwadis with upgraded infrastructure and facilities as centers of improved nutrition delivery and early childhood care and education.
- The Ministry of Women & Child Development will be the nodal Ministry for coordinating activities during the Poshan Pakhwada. In the State/UT, Department of Women & Child Development /Social Welfare Department will be the nodal department for Poshan Pakhwada.

5. Background radiation in Kerala

- **CONTEXT:** In parts of Kerala, background radiation levels are nearly three times more than what's been assumed, a pan-India study by scientists at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) has found.
- **What is background radiation?**
 - Background radiation is a measure of the level of ionizing radiation present in the environment which is not due to deliberate introduction of radiation sources.
 - Background radiation originates from a variety of sources, both natural and artificial.
 - Background radiations are the radioactive radiations such as alpha, beta, and gamma.
- **How radiation occurs?**
 - Radiation results from the disintegrating nucleus of an unstable element and these can be from anywhere, including from inside our bodies to the constituents of matter.
 - Gamma rays are a kind of radiation that can pass unobstructed through matter.
 - Though extremely energetic, they are harmless unless present in large concentrated doses.
- **Limitations on radiation exposure:**
 - The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) specifies maximum radiation exposure levels and this has also been adopted by India's atomic energy establishment.
 - Public exposure should not exceed 1 milli-Sievert every year.
 - Those who work in plants shouldn't be exposed to over 30 milli-Sievert every year.
- **Current levels in Kerala:**
 - The present study found that average natural background levels of gamma radiation in India was roughly 0.8 milli sievert/year.
 - This doesn't mean that those at Kollam are being exposed to higher, dangerous levels of radiation.
- **Causes of background radiation in India:**
 - The higher radiation levels in Kollam (Kerala) are attributed to monazite sands that are high in thorium.
 - In southern India, because of the presence of granite and basaltic, volcanic rock has higher levels of radiation from uranium deposits.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Fake news and disinformation give rise to many challenges in Indian society and there is a need for a multi-layered approach to deal with it. Analyse.

Fake news is referred to as false or misleading information presented as news and often aimed at damaging the reputation of an individual or entity or to make money through advertising revenue. National Crime Records Bureau data showed that incidents of fake news and rumour circulation saw nearly a three-fold rise in 2020 over 2019. A total of 1,527 cases of fake news were recorded in 2020, compared to 486 cases in 2019 and 280 cases in 2018. Clearly, fake news and disinformation are a growing menace in India.

Challenges created by fake news:

- **Social conflict:** Propaganda, misinformation, and fake news have the potential to polarise public opinion to promote violent extremism and hate speech. For example, recent migrants' crisis in Tamil Nadu was created because of fake news circulation.
- **Electoral manipulation:** News articles that are intentionally and verifiably false designed to manipulate people's perceptions of reality has been used to influence politics and promote advertising.
- **A means of warfare by foreign agents:** During and after the 2016 election, Russian agents created social media accounts to spread fake news that stirred protests and favoured presidential candidate Donald Trump while discrediting candidate Hillary Clinton and her associates.
- **Internal security challenges:** The drive for higher TRPs and viewership causes media companies to promote sensational news and false headlines. For e.g.: circulation of false videos of showing shocking attacks on the Army in Kashmir Valley.
- **Economic Challenges:** Many times, fake news is used to deceive people who are not digitally literate. E.g., fake news of electronic chip in the 2000-rupee notes after demonetisation created much confusion among the people.

Problems in tackling fake news in India:

- **Multilingual Population:** There are 22 official languages and only 10.67% of the population converse in English. The current fake news detection solutions are most effective for English and might fail to identify and process information in other languages.
- **Instant messaging platform:** Since internet messaging applications are end-to-end encrypted, identifying and quashing false stories is possible only with the support of the users.
- **Digital illiteracy:** Internet penetration in India has risen from 137 million internet users in 2012 to over 600 million in 2019. The surge in Internet penetration accompanied by digital illiteracy has resulted in the rise of fake news online.

Measures to deal with rising menace of fake news:

- **Learning from international practices:** The European Union (EU) has put out the Code of Practice on Disinformation 2022 and UK has proposed enacting an Online Safety Bill which will expect social media platforms to actively monitor problematic content. India should also come out with a robust framework to tackle the root causes of disinformation.
- **Creating awareness and education:** All the sections of the population should be made aware of the realities of fake news and propaganda.
- **Imposing disclosure requirements for targeted advertisements:** Fake news is often propagated using ads focused on polarising issues to amplify existing social divides and partisan conflict. Hence, there is a need to extend advertising disclosure provisions to all issues-based advertising and ads for political candidates or campaigns.
- **Verifying influential accounts and pages:** The issue of inauthentic accounts and pages can be an important driver for propagating fake news. Verification can help in tackling this issue.
- **Creating cyber ombudsman** who can deal with the credibility of sources of news and also handle complaints regarding misinformation.
- **Taking help from technology:** Tech firms should invest in technology to find fake news and identify it for users through algorithms and crowdsourcing.

Fake news has negative implications for all sections of society. Therefore, everyone has a responsibility to combat the scourge of fake news and disinformation. This ranges from reducing financial incentives for fake news to improving digital literacy among the general public.

MCQs

1. Consider the following statements
 1. SC It also decriminalised Section 377 of the India Penal Code (IPC) which considered sex with the same gender as a criminal activity
 2. Homosexual couples currently do not have a right to legally marry in India.
 3. In Asia, Taiwan was the first country to recognize same sex unions in 2019.

- Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2 only b) 2 and 3 only c) 1 and 3 only **d) 1,2 and 3**
2. Consider the following statements with reference to back ground radiation often mentioned in news
1. Background radiation is the radiation that is present in the natural environment
 2. Radionuclides present in Earth's crust.
 3. Most radioactive material in the environment comes from natural sources
- Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?
a) 1 only b) 2 and 3 only c) 1 and 3 only **d) 1,2 and 3**
3. Which of the following are the objectives of 'National Nutrition Mission'?
1. To create awareness relating to malnutrition among pregnant women and lactating mothers.
 2. To reduce the incidence of anaemia among young children, adolescent girls, and women.
 3. To promote the consumption of millets, coarse cereals, and unpolished rice.
 4. To promote the consumption of poultry eggs.
- Select the correct answer using the code given below:
a) 1 and 2 only b) 1, 2 and 3 only c) 1, 2 and 4 only **d) 3 and 4 only**
4. Consider the following statements with reference to Pradhan Mantri Matshya Sampad Yojna
1. PMMSY aims towards the purpose of rural development by utilizing rural resources and boosting rural economy in a rapid way.
 2. The main motto of PMMSY is 'Reform, Perform and Transform' in the fisheries sector.
- Which of the above statement/s is are correct?
a) 1 only b) 2 only **c) Both 1 and 2** d) Neither 1 nor 2
5. MATSYA-6000 recently seen in news is related to which of the following?
- a) A mobile app for fisherman community
 - b) An indigenously developed submarine**
 - c) Research paper on fish diversity across the Indian ocean
 - d) Subsidized fishing vessels for fisherman
6. With reference to India's millet export consider the following
1. The major importing countries were Nepal, UAE and Saudi Arabia in 2021-22.
 2. There is an increase in export of Millets in recent years.
- Which of the above statement/s is/are not correct?
a) 1 only b) 2 only **c) Both 1 and 2** d) Neither 1 nor 2
7. Jhamar Kotra mines recently seen in news are the largest reserve of phosphate in India, located in which of the following state?
- a) Odisha
 - b) Madhya Pradesh
 - c) Gujarat
 - d) Rajasthan**
8. Which of the following statements is/are correct with reference to Raccoon Dogs?
1. They are the only canids that hibernate during the winter.
 2. They are endemic to the Indian subcontinent.
- Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?
a) **1 only**
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2
9. Gadgil Committee report and Kasturirangan report often mentioned in news are related to which of the following?
- a) Appointment of Governer
 - b) Himalayan River system
 - c) Coal mining
 - d) Western Ghats**
10. Zawar is a settlement often mentioned in news, is the oldest zinc smelter in the world, located in which of the following state?
- a) Madhya Pradesh
 - b) Uttar Pradesh
 - c) Rajasthan**
 - d) Kerala