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Same-sex Marriage

Context: The Supreme Court of India has declined to grant marriage equality rights to the LGBTQIA+ community in the country.

- All five judges agreed **there's no fundamental right to marry under the Constitution.**
- Four judges formed the majority opinion, advocating for **civil unions** for same-sex couples.
- A civil union, also called a civil partnership, is a legally acknowledged arrangement akin to marriage, designed mainly to offer legal recognition to same-sex couples.
- Civil unions typically provide most marital rights, but certain exceptions exist, such as child adoption, and they may have a different title.
- Civil unions grant specific rights but lack the same legal recognition as marriage.
- The minority view argued that same-sex couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples.
- A high-level Cabinet committee was proposed to consider rights for non-heterosexual couples.
- The minority opinion invalidated CARA guidelines prohibiting joint adoption by same-sex or unmarried couples.
- **Central Adoption Resource Authority**
 - CARA is a statutory body under the Ministry of Women & Child Development in the Indian government.
 - It serves as the Central Authority for managing inter-country adoptions in line with the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, ratified by India in 2003.
 - CARA's main function is to facilitate the adoption of orphaned, abandoned, and surrendered children through its recognized adoption agencies.
 - In India, children can be placed with families under the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956, Guardians and Wards Act, 1890, and Juvenile Justice Act, 2000.
- **Cases related to LGBTQIA+ in India**
 - **NALSA v Union of India:** Recognition of transgender rights - Upheld the rights of transgender individuals to determine their gender and receive legal recognition of their gender identity.
 - **KS Puttaswamy v Union of India:** Right to privacy - Unanimously recognized the right to privacy as a fundamental right under the Constitution, overruling previous rulings, including one on LGBT rights.
 - **Shafin Jahan v Union of India:** Right to choose a partner - Set aside a judgment annulling the marriage of a woman who converted to Islam and married of her choice, emphasizing the right to choose one's partner as a facet of liberty and dignity.
 - **Shakti Vahini v Union of India:** Prevention of honor killings - Issued directives to prevent honor killings and protect individuals who marry without approval, recognizing the right to choose a life partner as a fundamental right.
 - **Navtej Johar v Union of India:** Decriminalization of homosexuality - Struck down IPC Section 377 to the extent that it criminalized homosexuality, asserting that LGBTQ individuals are equal citizens and discrimination based on sexual orientation is unconstitutional.
 - **Deepika Singh vs Central Administrative Tribunal:** Recognition of "atypical" families - Decided in favor of a woman denied maternity leave for her first biological child, acknowledging the existence and rights of "atypical" families, including queer marriages.

Global Maritime India Summit

Context: During a virtual ceremony conducted on October 17, Prime Minister Narendra Modi officially launched the third edition of the Global Maritime India Summit 2023 (GMIS).

- A significant event focused on the maritime sector that brings together key figures from the industry.
- Aims to explore opportunities, address challenges, and encourage investment in India's maritime sector.
- The third edition of the summit, building on the success of previous events.
- Provides a platform for domestic and international stakeholders and investors in the maritime industry.
- Participation includes ministers from various countries, including Europe, Africa, South America, Asia (including central Asia, Middle East), and the BIMSTEC region.
- The event will also see the presence of global CEOs, business leaders, investors, officials, and other stakeholders.
- Additionally, Indian states will be represented by ministers and dignitaries at the summit.
- **'Amrit Kaal Vision 2047' and Projects:**
 - 'Amrit Kaal Vision 2047' was unveiled, outlining India's maritime blue economy plans.
 - The foundation stone was laid for projects totaling over Rs 23,000 crores aligned with this vision.
 - Emphasizes the importance of India's maritime capabilities in global trade and highlights efforts to strengthen the sector.

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- The summit serves as a platform to attract investment in India's maritime industry, focusing on port development, sustainability, and international collaboration.
- Invites global investors to participate in India's development as the country aims to become a developed nation by 2047.
- Themes of discussions in this edition
 - ✓ **Ports of the Future:** Delving into the development and future potential of ports in the maritime industry.
 - ✓ **Decarbonization:** Investigating sustainable approaches and tactics for lowering carbon emissions in the maritime sector.
 - ✓ **Coastal Shipping and Inland Water Transportation:** Focusing on the importance of efficient coastal and inland water transportation.
 - ✓ **Shipbuilding:** Scrutinizing India's position in shipbuilding and its ambitions to become a leading shipbuilding nation in the next decade.

Marine Cloud Brightening

Context: Researchers in Australia have developed technology to test and measure the response of clouds to marine cloud brightening.

- **Concept:** Marine cloud brightening is a proposed technique to mitigate extreme heat in specific ocean areas by brightening clouds, making them reflect more sunlight and thereby reducing heat absorption.
 - Marine cloud brightening also known as marine cloud seeding and marine cloud engineering is a proposed solar radiation management climate engineering technique that would make clouds brighter, reflecting a small fraction of incoming sunlight back into space in order to offset anthropogenic global warming.
- **Implementation:** It involves using water cannons to spray seawater into the sky, leading to the formation of brighter, whiter clouds, particularly low marine clouds. These clouds reflect sunlight away from the ocean's surface.
- **Goal:** The technique is being explored to protect marine life, especially in areas such as the Great Barrier Reef, from the adverse effects of climate change, like coral bleaching.
- **Research Program:** The Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program in Australia is researching cloud brightening's potential to reduce coral bleaching and is actively conducting tests.
- **Scientific Origins:** The concept of cloud brightening was initially proposed by British cloud physicist John Latham in 1990 as a way to combat global warming by altering Earth's energy balance.
- **Regional Application:** Scientists are considering regional rather than global applications of cloud brightening, particularly over the Great Barrier Reef, to reduce coral bleaching during marine heatwaves.
- **Benefits:** Modelling studies suggest that cloud brightening could delay the decline in coral cover, providing time for the transition away from fossil fuels. It may complement other reef interventions.
- **Environmental Impact:** Cloud brightening is viewed as short-lived and reversible, and the technology can be operated continuously or halted at any time. Sea salt particles introduced into the atmosphere typically persist for only a few days.
- **Brightening Process:** The technique involves spraying microscopic seawater droplets into the air, simulating the creation of sea salt aerosols through wind and waves in the ocean. These aerosols create extra cloud droplets, leading to brighter clouds.
- **Current Practices:** Unintentional aerosol emissions by human activities, like ship exhaust, already influence cloud brightness. The intentional approach seeks to harness this process for conservation purposes.
- **Climate Impact:** Current unintentional aerosol releases from human activities, such as ship emissions, offset a portion of global warming's effects, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- **Marine Cloud Brightening's Potential:** This research aims to determine if cloud brightening can be harnessed in an environmentally responsible and socially acceptable manner for the conservation of ecosystems like the Great Barrier Reef.

Ethics Committee

Context: Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has directed the complaint made by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey against TMC MP Mahua Moitra to be referred to the House Ethics Committee.

- **Rise of Ethics Committees**
 - The idea of Ethics Committees for the two Houses of Parliament in India was first proposed during a Presiding Officers' Conference in Delhi in 1996.
- **Rajya Sabha's Ethics Committee**
 - Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman K R Narayanan constituted the Upper House's Ethics Committee on March 4, 1997. It was officially inaugurated two months later in May.

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- This committee is responsible for overseeing the moral and ethical conduct of Rajya Sabha members and examining cases of misconduct referred to it. The Rules applicable to the Committee of Privileges also apply to the ethics panel.
- **Lok Sabha's Ethics Committee**
 - The Lok Sabha Ethics Committee has a different origin. A study group of the Committee of Privileges of the Lok Sabha visited Australia, the UK, and the US in 1997 to investigate practices related to the conduct and ethics of legislators.
 - It drafted a report for the constitution of an Ethics Committee, which was tabled in the 12th Lok Sabha. However, the Lok Sabha was dissolved before the report could be considered.
 - The Committee of Privileges eventually recommended the constitution of an Ethics Committee during the 13th Lok Sabha.
 - The late Speaker G M C Bhalayogi constituted an ad-hoc Ethics Committee in 2000, and it became a permanent part of the Lok Sabha in 2015.
- **Complaint Mechanism**
 - Anyone can lodge a complaint against a member of either Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha through another Member of Parliament, accompanied by evidence of misconduct and an affidavit confirming the complaint's authenticity.
 - MPs can also file complaints against other members with evidence, without the need for an affidavit.
 - The Ethics Committee does not entertain complaints solely based on media reports or matters sub-judice.
 - The Speaker can refer any complaint against an MP to the committee, which conducts a prima facie inquiry before deciding whether to examine the complaint. After evaluating the complaint, the committee makes its recommendations.
- **Consideration in the House**
 - The committee's report is presented to the Speaker, who then seeks the House's opinion on whether the report should be considered.
 - There is a provision for a half-an-hour discussion on the report in the House.
- **Distinction from Privileges Committee**
 - The work of the Ethics Committee and the Privileges Committee often overlap, especially in cases of corruption allegations against MPs.
 - Both committees deal with serious breaches of privilege and contempt of the House. While the Committee of Privileges safeguards the "freedom, authority, and dignity of Parliament," the Ethics Committee examines only MPs for misconduct.

Iron Beam

Context: Recent online videos appear to depict Israel conducting tests of its newly developed laser-based missile defense system, named Iron Beam.

- Israeli defense manufacturer Rafael, in collaboration with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the US, has been developing High Energy Laser (HEL) weapons for nearly two decades.
- The outcome of this development is the "Magen Or" (Iron Beam) anti-missile system, initially set for introduction in 2025 but fast-tracked for defense against missile attacks.
- Ukraine has sought Iron Beam and other anti-missile systems from Israel.
- Extensive research and development efforts focused on enhancing the power, range, and accuracy of the laser and its operational distance, as well as target detection, acquisition, and independent power generation.
- Successful live-fire tests were conducted in 2022 against various targets, including drones, mortars, rockets, and anti-tank missiles.
- Iron Beam was officially unveiled at the International Defense Exhibition (IDEX 23) in Abu Dhabi.
- Rafael signed a teaming agreement with Lockheed Martin in December 2022 to jointly develop, test, and manufacture Iron Beam and other HEL Weapon Systems (HELWS) in the US and Israel.
- Iron Beam uses a fiber laser to generate a concentrated laser beam capable of destroying airborne targets within a range of 7 to 10 kilometers.
- It works in tandem with conventional anti-missile and air-defense systems, with integrated surveillance systems and tracked vehicle platforms to engage targets effectively.
- Iron Beam is cost-effective, with a low "cost per shot," estimated at approximately \$3 to \$4 per burst.
- **Advantages:**
 - Constant energy supply for the laser ensures sustained defensive capabilities without ammunition depletion.
 - Elimination of traditional ammunition leads to significant cost savings.
- **Disadvantages:**
 - Reduced effectiveness in limited visibility scenarios, such as heavy cloud cover or adverse weather conditions.
 - Ineffectiveness in wet conditions due to atmospheric moisture absorbing the laser's energy.
 - Dependent on a direct line of sight between the system and the target, making placement critical.
 - Slower rate of fire, with approximately five seconds needed to transmit enough energy to destroy the target.
- The adoption of High Energy Laser (HEL) systems is on the rise globally, with various countries, including the US, the UK, Germany, and France, exploring and field-testing air defense HEL systems for land and sea deployment.

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NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Setu Bandhan Scheme



Recently, the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways announced the approval of seven bridge projects in Arunachal Pradesh under the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF).

About Setu Bandhan Scheme:

- The Setu Bandhan Scheme is an initiative of the **Ministry for Road Transport and Highways**.
- Its primary objective is to **enhance inter-state connectivity**, with a special focus on rural areas near state borders where road infrastructure often lacks adequate attention.
- The scheme is designed to replace **railway line Level Crossings (LCs) with Road Over Bridges (ROBs) and Rail Under Bridges (RUBs)** in various states.

About Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF):

- The Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) was established in the year **2000** under the **Central Road Fund Act, 2000**.
- Initially, it was known as the Central Road Fund.
- In **2018**, the Central Road Fund Act, 2000, underwent an amendment that expanded its objectives.

National Highway Authority of India



Recently, the **National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)** get involved as the responsible authority for planting bamboo along the Gap Road of Kochi-Dhanushkodi National Highway to prevent landslides.

About the National Highway Authority of India:

- It was formed under **NHAI Act, 1988**, and administered by the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways**.
- It manages the National Highways Development Project (NHDP), initiated in **1998**, which aims to upgrade major highways.
- It maintains national highways to global standards, promoting economic well-being.
- In **2019-20**, NHAI completed **3,979 km** of national highways.

Bharatmala Pariyojna:

- National Highway Authority of India oversees the development of **27,500 km** of national highways in **Bharatmala Pariyojna Phase-I**.
- This program optimizes freight and passenger movement through various interventions, including **Economic Corridors, Inter Corridors**, and more.

Lymphatic Filariasis



Recently, **Lao PDR** eliminated **lymphatic filariasis**, a disease with severe social and economic impact, as verified by the **World Health Organization (WHO)**.

About Lymphatic Filariasis:

- Lymphatic Filariasis (LF), also known as **elephantiasis**, is a **parasitic disease**.
- It affects the lymphatic system, causing symptoms such as **swelling of body parts**, leading to conditions like hydrocele, lymphedema, and elephantiasis.

Causes: Lymphatic filariasis is caused by **nematode parasites**, specifically **Wuchereria bancrofti**, **Brugia malayi** and **Brugia timori**.

Transmission: The disease is transmitted primarily by certain species of mosquitoes that carry the **infective larvae of the filarial worms**.

Special Marriage Act



Recently, the **Supreme Court's denial of legal recognition for same-sex marriages under the Special Marriage Act (SMA)** has been a significant setback for the queer community.

About Special Marriage Act:

- The Special Marriage Act (SMA), **1954**, is an Indian law designed to facilitate the marriage of individuals from different religions or castes.
- It **governs civil marriages** sanctioned by the state, distinct from **religious marriages**.
- This system is **akin to the UK's Marriage Act of 1949**.
- The Act is applicable to people of all faiths, including **Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains and Buddhists**, across India.
- It **enables marriage registration, granting legal recognition** and benefits like **inheritance, succession** and social security rights to the couple.

Place in News

Leuhan

Recently, an archaeology student conducted excavations on a burial mound in **Leuhan**, dated to the **ancient Bronze Age**.

Location: Leuhan, **western France**, is the site of archaeological excavations.

Discoverer: The burial mound was initially discovered in **1900** by the **French archaeologist Paul du Chatellier**.

Ancient Map: At the Leuhan site, a **carved granite slab** was found, believed to be the oldest map in Europe.



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Place in News

Rafah Crossing

Recently, it is found that the Rafah crossing is the sole route for aid to enter Gaza directly from outside Israel and the only exit that does not lead to Israeli territory.

About Rafah Crossing:

- The Rafah Crossing is the **primary gateway connecting the Gaza Strip to Egypt.**
- It serves as the **sole route** for aid to enter **Gaza** directly from outside **Israel** and as the only exit not leading to Israeli territory.
- It is in the southern part of Gaza, where **2.3 million people live** and surrounded by **Israel, Egypt** and the **Mediterranean Sea.**
- **Egypt is responsible** for the control and operation of the Rafah Crossing.
- Egypt restricts access due to concerns about insecurity in northeastern Sinai, where an Islamist insurgency peaked after **2013.**
- Since Hamas took control of Gaza in **2007**, Egypt has enforced a blockade, tightly regulating the flow of people and goods.



POINTS TO PONDER

- ❖ Which institution developed India's first 'Farmland price index'? - **IIM Ahmedabad**
- ❖ Minister for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying inaugurated the renovated Marine Museum at which city? - **Vishakhapatnam**
- ❖ Which country hosted the 'Annual IAEA General Conference' in 2023? - **Austria**
- ❖ Which institution released the 'Women, power, and cancer' report? - **Lancet Commission**
- ❖ Which country has officially embedded its nuclear weapons status in its constitution? - **North Korea**

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