

# My Notes....

## NATIONAL

### LEGAL RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

The Centre told the **Supreme Court** on 13 March 2023 that the “**legislative understanding of marriage in the Indian statutory and personal law regime**” refers **only to marriage between a biological man and biological woman** — and any interference “would cause a complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws in the country and in accepted societal values”.

#### What the govt. said?

1. Urging the court to **leave the issue to Parliament**, the Centre said that any “**recognised deviation...can occur only before the competent legislature**”.
2. It also said that “**despite the decriminalisation of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**, the Petitioners cannot claim a **fundamental right for same-sex marriage** to be recognised under the laws of the country”.
3. However, **out of the 32 countries in the world that recognize gay marriage**, at least **10 countries have recognized same-sex marriages** by court rulings, whereas the **remaining 22 countries allowed it through legislation**, Human Rights Campaign, a US-based LGBTQ advocacy group said.

#### Countries that allowed same-sex marriages through court rulings:

1. **UNITED STATES:** On 26 June 2015, the US Supreme Court in a **5:4 ruling** in “*Obergefell v. Hodges*” allowed marriage equality to become the law of the land and **granted same-sex couples in all 50 states** the right to full, equal recognition under the law.
2. **TAIWAN:** In 2019, **Taiwan became the first Asian country to recognize same-sex marriage**. However, the legislation was introduced following a court ruling.
3. **COSTA RICA:** On 26 May 2020, **Costa Rica became the first country in Central America to legalize same-sex marriage** following a ruling by the country’s top court in 2018 declaring the **law banning same-sex marriage as “unconstitutional”**.
4. **SOUTH AFRICA:** One year after **South Africa’s highest court** ruled that its marriage laws **violated the constitution’s guarantee of equal rights**, the South African parliament legalized same-sex marriage on 30 November 2006.
5. **AUSTRIA:** The **Constitutional Court of Austria**, in 2017 held the denial of marriage equality to be discriminatory and legalized same-sex marriages. **From 1 January 2019, same-sex marriages were allowed.**

#### Countries that allowed same-sex marriages through legislation:

1. **AUSTRALIA, IRELAND, SWITZERLAND:** Following a **nationwide referendum in 2017**, Australia’s Parliament passed a law recognizing same-sex marriage. The referendum showed overwhelming support — **62% to 38%** — in favour of the law. In **Ireland and Switzerland too**, a popular vote by the majority led to the **formal recognition of LGBTQ marriages**.
2. **ARGENTINA:** On 15 July 2010, **Argentina became the first Latin American country** and the **10th country in the world** to allow **same-sex marriages nationwide**.
3. **CANADA:** **Same-sex couples in Canada** have enjoyed the **legal benefits of marriage since 1999** when the federal and provincial governments extended marriages under the **Common Law to LGBTQ couples**.
4. **GERMANY:** On 30 June 2017, **Germany became the 15th European country** to bring in **legislation allowing same-sex couples to wed**.

## SC ORDER ON CEC AND ECS APPOINTMENT

A **five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court** on 2 March 2023 unanimously ruled that a **high-power committee** consisting of the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India **must pick the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs)**. The Bench headed by Justice K M Joseph ruled on a **batch of petitions** seeking a **selection process** similar to what is followed in the case of the Director, **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)**.

### What was the plea before the Supreme Court?

1. The **public interest petitions** sought a law governing the **appointment of the CEC and ECs**. A **first PIL had been filed in 2015**, and the Supreme Court agreed to hear a **second PIL on the issue filed in 2018** by Delhi BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyaya, and referred the issues to a **Constitution Bench**.
2. The court had heard the case in November last year. On the last day of the hearing, the court had noted that the **appointment of Arun Goel as EC** had been carried out with **“lightning speed”**, with the procedure taking less than 24 hours on 18 November from start to finish.

### How are the CEC and ECs currently appointed?

1. There are just **five Articles (324-329)** in **Part XV (Elections)** of the Constitution. **Article 324** of the Constitution vests the **“superintendence, direction and control of elections”** in an Election Commission consisting “of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners, if any, as the President may from time to time fix”.
2. The **Constitution does not lay down a specific legislative process** for the appointment of the CEC and ECs.
3. The President makes the appointment on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister.

### What are the powers of the Election Commission?

1. The **Constitution of India** gave the **Election Commission sweeping powers without going into the specifics**. Introducing this provision in the Constituent Assembly on 15 June 1949, Babasaheb Ambedkar had said **“the whole election machinery should be in the hands of a Central Election Commission**, which alone would be entitled to issue directives to returning officers, polling officers and others”.
2. Parliament subsequently enacted **The Representation of the People Act, 1950** and **The Representation of the People Act, 1951** to define and **enlarge the powers of the Commission**.
3. The Supreme Court in **‘Mohinder Singh Gill & Anr vs The Chief Election Commissioner, New Delhi and Ors’ (1977)** held that **Article 324** “operates in areas left unoccupied by legislation and the words ‘**superintendence, direction and control**’ as well as ‘conduct of all elections’ are the broadest terms”. The Constitution has not defined these terms.
4. The SC said **Article 324** “is a **plenary provision vesting the whole responsibility for national and State elections**” in the ECI “and, therefore, the necessary powers to discharge that function”.
5. The **Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991 (EC Act)** requires that the EC and CEC must hold the post for a **period of six years**. This law essentially governs the conditions of service of the CEC and ECs.

## JUDICIAL CUSTODY AND POLICE CUSTODY

**Delhi's Rouse Avenue Court** on 6 March 2023 sent former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia to **judicial custody** till 20 March 2023 in connection with a **corruption case** related to alleged irregularities in the **now-scraped excise policy**. Sisodia was arrested on 26 February 2023 and **has been in the custody** of the **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** since then.

### What is judicial custody?

1. **Judicial custody** means that **the person detained by a judicial magistrate is lodged in central or state prison.**
2. In some cases, investigation agencies may not seek police custody immediately and one of the reasons can be the **judicious use of the maximum of 15 days at their disposal.**
3. In some cases, **courts may directly remand a person to judicial custody**, if the court concludes that there is no need for police custody or extension of police custody.
4. The **judicial custody can extend up to 60 or 90 days** as a whole, depending upon the **maximum punishment prescribed for the offense.**
5. According to **Section 436A of CrPC**, a person in judicial custody, who has served **half the maximum punishment** that can be given for an offense, can apply for default bail, if their trial is pending.

### How is judicial custody different from police custody?

1. **Police custody refers to when a person is detained in a police station** or lock-up when he is believed to have committed a crime.
2. However, unlike judicial custody, **police custody requires the accused to be furnished before the magistrate in 24 hours.**
3. Apart from differing in the purview and place of detention, there are some distinctions between the **two forms of custody.**
4. In police custody, **the investigating authority** can interrogate a person while in **judicial custody; officials need the permission of the court for questioning.** In police custody, the person has **the right to legal counsel**, and the right to be informed of the grounds which the police have to ensure.
5. **In judicial custody, the person is under the responsibility of the magistrate**, while the Prison Manual comes into the picture for the routine conduct of the person.

## MIGRANT WORKERS' ISSUES RECUR

**Rumours of migrant workers** being assaulted in **Tamil Nadu** have triggered concern among manufacturers in the state. **Officials have rejected the reports** as fake news, and political leaders and the administration have appealed to workers to **not pay heed to the rumours.** **Bihar and Jharkhand** have sent officials to **Tamil Nadu** to take stock of the situation. There is **inadequate coordination among states** on a **formal exchange of information on migrant workers.** In the absence of data, it is difficult to track labourers during times of crisis.

### What is the legal framework for migrant welfare?

1. The **Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979** looks into the **welfare of the labourers.**
2. The Act **mandates that the establishment** which proposes to employ migrant workers be required to be registered with **destination states.**
3. Contractors will also have to obtain a licence from the concerned authority of the home states as well as the host states. However, in practice, **this Act has not been fully implemented.**

4. This **Act** has been **subsumed into the four broad labour codes** notified by the Centre: **The Code on Wages, 2019**; **The Industrial Relations Code, 2020**; **The Code on Social Security, 2020**; and **The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020**. These have not been implemented yet.

#### Are there any states which have tried to implement the Inter-State Act?

1. In **2012**, with the **help of International Labour Organisation**, an **MoU was signed between Odisha and Andhra Pradesh** to track labourers migrating from 11 districts of Odisha to work in brick kilns in the then united Andhra Pradesh.
2. **Kerala has set up facilitation centres for migrant workers** whom the state refers to as “**guest workers**”.
3. These **facilitation centres maintain data** regarding migrant workers arriving in Kerala as well as help migrant workers navigate any problems they might face.
4. However, **there is no data sharing between Kerala and the migrant workers’ home states**.

## FOREIGN LAWYERS CAN PRACTICE IN INDIA

In a move that **could potentially change the landscape of legal practice** in the country, the **Bar Council of India (BCI)** has **allowed foreign lawyers and law firms to practice in India**. Although **they cannot appear in court**, they can advise clients on foreign law and work on corporate transactions.

#### What do the new rules allow?

1. According to the **Advocates Act**, **advocates enrolled with the Bar Council alone are entitled to practice law in India**.
2. All others, such as a litigant, can appear only with the permission of the court, authority or person before whom the proceedings are pending.
3. The notification essentially allows foreign lawyers and law firms **to register with BCI to practise in India** if they are entitled to practice law in their home countries. However, they cannot practice Indian law.
4. **“The foreign lawyers or foreign Law Firms shall not be permitted to appear before any courts, tribunals or other statutory or regulatory authorities.**
5. They shall be allowed to **practise transactional work /corporate work** such as joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions, intellectual property matters, drafting of contracts and other related matters on a reciprocal basis.
6. They shall **not be involved or permitted to do any work pertaining to the conveyancing of property, Title investigation** or other similar works, the notification states.

#### What is the BCI decision?

1. On 13 March 2023, the BCI **notified in the official gazette** the Rules for Registration and Regulation of Foreign Lawyers and Foreign Law Firms in India, 2022.
2. The **BCI is a statutory body** established under the **Advocates Act, 1961**, and **it regulates legal practice and legal education in India**. For over a decade, BCI was opposed to allowing foreign law firms in India.
3. Now, the **BCI has reasoned that its move will address concerns** about the **flow of Foreign Direct Investment** in the country and **make India a hub of International Commercial Arbitration**.
4. The rules bring **legal clarity to foreign law firms** that currently operate in a very limited way in India.



7. **Indian lawyers working with foreign law firms** will also be subject to the **same restriction** of engaging only in “**non-litigious practice.**”

## SOO AGREEMENT WITH KUKI GROUPS

The **Manipur government** withdrew from the **Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement** with **two hill-based tribal insurgent groups** on 10 March 2023, alleging that they were “**influencing agitation among forest encroachers.**”

### An eviction and a protest

1. Various departments under the **Manipur government** have been sending out notices since August 2022, claiming that 38 villages in the **Churachandpur-Khoumum Protected Forest area** (in Churachandpur district) are “**illegal settlements**” and its residents are “**encroachers.**”
2. While notices were sent to five villages, the government finally set out on an eviction drive in the **K Songjang village** on 20 February 2023. It culminated in clashes between the residents and the police authorities.
3. To protest against the police action, the **Kuki Inpi**, the apex tribal body of the Kukis in Manipur, called for a peaceful rally on 10 March 2023 in the **Kuki-dominated districts of the state:** Kangpokpi, Churachandpur and Tengnoupal. The government clamped down on the protests by imposing Section 144 but to little avail.

### What are the Kuki groups saying?

1. The **tribal groups** have maintained that the **protests had nothing to do with the armed groups.** Instead, they claimed it was a “**peaceful**” protest against the dilution of **Article 371 C**, which confers some administrative autonomy to the tribal-dominated hill areas of Manipur.
2. Ch Ajang Khongsai, the **president of Kuki Inpi**, said the peace rally was purely caused by public discontent, over what he said was the state government’s extreme disregard for **scheduled Hill Areas** and **Article 371C of the Indian Constitution.**
3. The peace rally was a result of extreme disrespect and **exploitation of tribal land rights** in the name of various laws and acts.
4. They are (not only) clearing land, but are **evicting our right to existence** and our customs. We tribals are on the brink of extinction.
5. In a memorandum to the Manipur Governor, the **Kuki Inpi** said that **tribes of Manipur** have always been the “**rightful landholders**” since colonial times and that the aggrieved villagers have been settling in those areas pre-Independence, much before the enactment of the **Indian Forests Act, 1972, Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**, and other Acts the government has cited to carry out the evictions.

### What next for the SoO?

1. This **ceasefire agreement** was signed with two umbrella groups, the **Kuki National Organisation (KNO)** and the **United People’s Front (UPF)**, comprising 25 groups – 17 under KNO and 8 under the UPF.
2. A **tripartite agreement** signed by the Centre, state and the groups, this arrangement meant ending violence and hostilities from all sides and initiated a political dialogue.

## SUPREME COURT DISMISSED CURATIVE PETITION

The **Supreme Court** on 14 March 2023 **dismissed a curative petition** filed by the Centre, seeking **additional funds from Union Carbide Corporations’ successor firms** for extending **higher compensation to victims** of the **1984 Bhopal gas tragedy**, which led to the deaths of 3,000 people and caused significant environmental damage.

### What is the present case about?

1. In the '**Union of India And Others. v. M/s. Union Carbide Corporation And Others**', the Centre sought **Rs. 7,844 crores from the US-based firms** through a **curative petition it filed in 2010**, for additional compensation for the victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy.
2. A **curative petition can be filed after a review plea against the final conviction is dismissed**. It is meant to ensure there is **no miscarriage of justice and to prevent abuse of the process**.
3. The **Centre's claim for a curative petition** was based on a demand for **additional compensation**, in a **reeexamination of the Supreme Court's 1989 order** where compensation was decided as Rs. 750 crores.
4. The plea also sought a **relook at the Court's orders** relating to modes of payment and settlement, on grounds that **the settlement was based on an incorrect estimate of the total number of deaths, injuries, and losses**.
5. The Centre also said that the **environmental damage caused was never factored in**, and thus sought to reopen the settlement on the basis of fresh documents.
6. According to the plea, the **previous figure for deaths stood at 3,000** and for **injuries at 70,000**. However, the Central government contended that the actual number of deaths was 5,295, whereas injuries reached 5,27,894.

#### What is Bhopal Gas Tragedy>

1. After a leak of **toxic methyl isocyanate gas** from **Union Carbide's factory** in Bhopal on the intervening night of 2 and 3 December 1984, that **led to the deaths of over 3,000 people** and affected 1.02 lakh more.
2. The **Union Carbide Corporation**, now **owned by Dow Chemicals**, gave a compensation of USD 470 million (Rs 715 crore in 1989).

### FIRST IAF WOMAN OFFICER TO HEAD FRONTLINE UNIT

The **Indian Air Force** announced 7 March 2023 that it has selected **Group Captain Shaliza Dhami to take command of a frontline combat unit** in the **Western sector**. **Group Captain Dhami** will be the **first woman officer in the IAF** to command a **missile squadron in the Western sector** facing Pakistan. She is currently posted in the operations branch of a frontline command headquarters.

#### What

1. **Commissioned in 2003** as a **helicopter pilot**, Group Captain Dhami has over 2,800 hours of flying experience. She has flown the **Chetak** and **Cheetah helicopters**.
2. A qualified flying instructor, she served as **flight commander of a Chetak unit** at the **Hindon air base**— both firsts for an Indian Air Force woman officer. She has been commended twice by the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief in the past.
3. **Hailing from Ludhiana** – her parents were in government service – she decided very early on joining the Indian Air Force, more so after becoming a cadet of the NCC.
4. The **Indian Air Force** started **inducting women fighter pilots in 2016** – the first batch had three women fighter pilots. They currently **fly the MiG-21, Su-30MKI and Rafale**.
5. The development comes after the **Army cleared as many as 108 women officers** for the **rank of Colonel (selection grade)**, making them eligible for command roles.
6. There are **10,493 women officers serving in the armed forces**, the majority in the medical services.
7. The **Indian Army**, being the **largest of the three services**, has the **largest number of women officers** at 1,705, followed by **1,640 women officers** in the **Indian Air Force**, and **559 in the Indian Navy** – this data was provided by the government to Parliament last year.

## INTERNATIONAL

### BHUTAN GRADUATED FROM THE LDC STATUS

**Bhutan**, the **mountainous, landlocked country** that is **consistently ranked one of the happiest in the world**, will on 13<sup>th</sup> December of this year, become the **seventh nation** to graduate from the **United Nations' (UN) list of Least Developed Countries (LDC.)** While **this promotion** is a cause for celebration, it also raises some concerns, notably **how Bhutan will compensate for the loss of certain trade privileges** associated with being an LDC.

**The UN identifies three criteria for a country to be classified as an LDC:**

1. **First, it must have a gross national income (GNI) per capita** below the threshold of USD 1,230 over a three-year average.
2. **Second, it must perform poorly on a composite human assets index** based on indicators including **nutrition, health and education.**
3. **Lastly, the country must demonstrate economic vulnerability** such as being **prone to natural disasters** and possessing structural economic constraints.
4. Countries **must meet a selection from all three criteria simultaneously** and are reviewed on a **three-year basis by the UN.**

#### What is a Least Developed Country (LDC)?

1. The **LDCs are developing countries listed by the UN** that exhibit the **lowest indicators of socioeconomic development.**
2. The concept **first originated** in the late 1960s and **was codified under UN resolution 2768** passed in November 1971.
3. According to the UN, an **LDC** is defined as **“a country that exhibits the lowest indicators of socioeconomic development, with low levels of income, human capital and economic diversification, high levels of economic vulnerability, and a population that is disproportionately reliant on agriculture, natural resources, and primary commodities.”**

5. Currently, the **UN lists 46 countries** that **qualify as LDCs.** Of those, **33 are from Africa, nine from Asia, three from the Pacific and one from the Caribbean.**

### INDIAN ANTIQUITIES IN ABROAD

An investigation with the **International Consortium of Investigative Journalists** and **Finance Uncovered**, has found that the **catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**, includes **at least 77 items** with links to **Subhash Kapoor**, who is **servicing a 10-year jail term in Tamil Nadu for smuggling antiquities.**

**What is an antiquity?**

1. The **Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972**, implemented on 1 April 1976, defined **“antiquity”** as **“any coin, sculpture, painting, epigraph or other work of art or craftsmanship; any article, object or thing detached from a building or cave; any article, object or thing illustrative of science, art, crafts, literature, religion, customs, morals or politics in bygone ages; any article, object or thing of historical interest”** that **“has been in existence for not less than one hundred years.”**
2. For **“manuscript, record or other document** which is of scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value”, this duration is **“not less than seventy-five years.”**

**What do international conventions say?**

1. The **UNESCO 1970 Convention** on the Means of **Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property** defined **“cultural**

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- property**” as the property designated by countries having “importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science.”
- The Declaration further said that “**the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property** is one of the main causes of the impoverishment of the cultural heritage of the countries of origin of such property and that **international co-operation** constitutes one of the most efficient means of protecting each country’s cultural property.”
  - After that, in 2000, the **General Assembly of the UN** and the **UN Security Council** in 2015 and 2016 also raised concerns on the issue.
  - An INTERPOL report in 2019** said that **almost 50 years after the UNESCO convention**, “**the illicit international traffic of cultural items** and related offences is sadly increasingly prolific.”

#### What do Indian laws say?

- In India, Item-67 of the Union List, Item-12 of the State List, and Item-40 of the Concurrent List** of the Constitution deal with the country’s heritage.
- Before Independence, an **Antiquities (Export Control) Act** had been passed in April 1947 to ensure that “**no antiquity could be exported without license.**”
- In 1958, The **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act** was enacted. Then in 1971, Parliament saw uproar over the theft of a **bronze idol from Chamba** and some important sandstone idols from other places.
- This, along with the **UNESCO convention**, prompted the government to enact **The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 (AATA)**, implemented from 1 April 1976.
- The AATA states, “**It shall not be lawful for any person, other than the Central Government or any authority or agency authorised by the Central Government in this behalf, to export any antiquity or art treasure...** No person shall, himself or by any other person on his behalf, carry on the business of selling or offering to sell any antiquity except under and in accordance with the terms and conditions of a licence.”
- This **licence is granted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**. After the AATA was implemented, the Centre asked traders in antiquities and art objects to declare their possessions of antiquities by 5 June 1976, and individual owners by 5 July 1976.

#### How is ownership proved?

- The **UNESCO 1970 declaration** stated that, “**The requesting Party shall furnish**, at its expense, the documentation and other evidence necessary to establish its claim for recovery and return.”
- The first thing in order to prove the ownership** is the complaint (FIR) filed with the police. **In India**, the problem with missing antiquities is that in many cases, there is no FIR.
- But other proof, like details mentioned by reputed scholars in research papers etc., also works.

## UN SEALS HISTORIC DEAL TO SAVE OCEANS

On 4 March 2023, in **New York City**, the **United Nations** reached a **historic agreement to protect the world’s oceans** and ensure that **people across the globe can benefit from the high seas** while **safeguarding the marine life**. After a marathon of negotiations that lasted for 38 hours, the **UN member nations** agreed on the **wording of the High Seas Treaty agreement**. It is to mention that the **talks began in 2004**.

#### What is High Seas Treaty?

- The **agreement on High Seas Treaty** was reached on 4 March 2023 at UN headquarters in New York. It has been **under discussion since 2004**.
- The “**exclusive economic zone**,” an **area extending 200 nautical miles from the coast**, is under the **legal jurisdiction of coastal nations**, but the **proposed treaty**



would only apply to the international waters that constitute two-thirds of the world's oceans.

3. The negotiations had been going on for decades, partly due to **disagreements about funding, fishing, and mineral rights.**
4. If **ratified** the treaty would put at least **30% of the world's seas** into **Marine Protected Areas.** It would also help in contributing **more money to the conservation of marine life.** Moreover, the agreement would create **fresh rules for seafloor mining.**
5. **High Seas Treaty** will replace the previous **UN ocean treaty,** named the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea** which was **signed in 1982.**
6. At the time, the treaty had established the "**high seas**", which are the **international waters that are open to fishing, shipping, and research by the world.**

## ECONOMY

### SWAMIH INVESTMENT FUND

The **Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH)** Investment Fund I has **raised Rs 15,530 crore** so far to provide **priority debt financing** for the completion of **stressed, brownfield** and **Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA)-registered residential projects** that fall in the affordable, mid-income housing category. **SWAMIH** has so far provided final approval to about 130 projects with sanctions worth over Rs 12,000 crore.

#### What is the SWAMIH investment fund?

1. The **Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) Investment Fund I** is a **social impact fund** specifically formed for completing stressed and stalled residential projects.
2. The Fund is **sponsored** by the **Ministry of Finance, Government of India,** and is **managed** by **SBICAP Ventures Ltd.,** a State Bank Group company.
3. Since **the Fund considers first-time developers,** established developers with **troubled projects,** developers with a **poor track record** of stalled projects, customer complaints and **NPA accounts,** and even projects where **there are litigation issues,** it is considered as the lender of last resort for distressed projects.
4. The Fund's presence in a project often acts as a **catalyst for better collections** and sales primarily in projects that were delayed for years.

#### How many projects so far have been financed by the Fund?

1. **SWAMIH** has so far provided final approval to **about 130 projects** with sanctions **worth over Rs 12,000 crore.**
2. The Fund has **completed 20,557 homes** and aims to complete over 81,000 homes in the next three years across 30 tier 1 and 2 cities.
3. The Fund has been able to complete **construction in 26 projects** and generate returns for its investors, a government release said.
4. The Fund has also played a **critical role in the growth of many ancillary industries** in real estate and infrastructure sector having successfully unlocked liquidity of more than Rs. 35,000 crore.
5. **Launched in November 2019,** it has raised Rs 15,530 crore so far with an aim to provide **priority debt financing** for the completion of stressed, brownfield and RERA-registered residential projects that fall in the **affordable, mid-income housing category.**

- According to the Finance Ministry, **SWAMIH Fund** has one of the largest domestic real estate private equity teams **focused only on funding and monitoring** the completion of stressed housing projects.

### CRYPTO ASSETS BRINGS UNDER PMLA

The Finance Ministry has notified **transactions involving the exchange, transfer and safekeeping of crypto assets** under the **Prevention of Money-laundering Act (PMLA)**. The PMLA coverage is **set to widen the taxation and regulatory net**, as it also covers the **exchange between virtual digital assets and fiat currencies**.

#### What does the notification say?

In the notification dated 7 March 2023, the central government has notified participation in and **provision of financial services**, which are **related to an issuer's offer and sale of a virtual digital asset, under PMLA**. "...the central government hereby notifies that the following activities when carried out for or **on behalf of another natural or legal person** in the course of business as an activity for the purposes of said sub sub-clause, namely:-

- exchange between virtual digital assets and fiat currencies;**
- Exchange between one or more forms of virtual digital assets;**
- Transfer of virtual digital assets;**
- Safekeeping or administration of virtual digital assets** or instruments enabling control over virtual digital assets; and
- Participation in and provision of financial services related to an issuer's offer and **sale of a virtual digital asset**.

#### Why the move?

- The measure is expected **to aid investigative agencies** in carrying out their actions against crypto companies, with the **Enforcement Directorate and Income Tax Department** already probing several such cases against companies running **cryptocurrency exchanges and transactions**.
- While the **cryptocurrency industry** has largely welcomed the move, there are concerns about the **wide ambit of the fresh notification** and its enforcement in the absence of a direct regulator.

### COLLAPSE OF SIGNATURE BANK

**Signature Bank**, a **New York financial institution** with a big real estate lending business that had recently made a **play to win cryptocurrency deposits, closed its doors abruptly** on 12 March 2023, after regulators said that keeping the bank open could **threaten the stability of the entire financial system**. To some extent, **Signature is a victim of the panic around Silicon Valley Bank**, which **regulators seized** on 10 March.

#### What happened to Silicon Valley Bank?

- Silicon Valley Bank**, a **lender to startups**, imploded on 10 March 2023 after **some ill-timed financial decisions left it** struggling to meet customer withdrawal requests — and just as **slowing venture capital funding** prompted fledging companies to tap their accounts more.
- Similarly, **Signature became one of the few banks to welcome cryptocurrency deposits**, just before the overheated industry blew up last year.
- As **word about Silicon Valley Bank's troubles began** to spread last week, business customers of Signature began calling the bank, asking if their deposits were safe.
- Many were worried that **their deposits could be at risk** because, like business customers of Silicon Valley, most had more than \$250,000 in their accounts.
- The **Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.**, the entity that **seized Silicon Valley**, insures deposits only up to \$250,000.

#### What services did Signature bank provide?

1. **The demise of Signature**, with **assets of under \$100 billion**, is a blow to many of the professional services firms that have come to rely on it.
2. The bank long **specialized in providing banking services to law firms**, providing escrow accounts for holding client money and other services.
3. Scott Shay, Joseph DePaolo and John Tamberlane **founded Signature in 1999** with backing from Israel's biggest lender, Bank Hapoalim.
4. One of Signature's specialties was **financing the purchase of taxi medallions**, which **authorize holders to operate cabs**.
5. It was known in New York for **providing banking services to law firms and real estate companies**, and for catering to wealthy families in the area.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### ISRO BRINGS DOWN MEGHA-TROPIQUES-1

**Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** brought down the decommissioned weather satellite **Megha-Tropiques-1** in a **controlled manner** and **burned up in the atmosphere** on 7 March 2023. The ISRO carried out a **series of 20 manoeuvres** from August 2022 **to slowly lower the satellite's orbit**, expending the **120 kg fuel** that remained unutilised even at the **end of the mission life**.

#### What

1. After the **final two manoeuvres** on 7 March 2023 evening – **firing four onboard thrusters** for around 20 minutes each – the satellite entered the denser atmosphere and **disintegrated over the Pacific Ocean**.
2. **Large satellites** likely to survive re-entry through the atmosphere and **shower down debris** are brought down in a controlled manner to ensure that **it does not impact people**.
3. **Megha-Tropiques-1** was developed as a **joint mission by India and France** to study the **tropics' water cycle** and energy exchanges.
4. Like many others developed by the ISRO, the satellite **worked for over a decade, providing valuable data for climate models**. The **1,000-kg satellite** was launched **in 2011** with a **mission life of three years**.
5. The space agency said that the **de-boost manoeuvres were planned** considering several constraints, such as the re-entry being visible from the ground stations, ground impact

#### Flashback

1. The space agency said the **United Nations and Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC)** guidelines recommend that **satellites be deorbited** – either through controlled entry over a safe impact zone as was attempted by Isro with **Megha-Tropiques-1** or by bringing it down to reduce the orbital lifetime – the time it would take for a satellite to drop from a particular orbit by itself – to less than 25 years.
2. It is also recommended that **stored fuel be removed from the spacecraft** to ensure that no accidents break up the satellite in space and create more debris.
3. In the case of **Megha-Tropiques-1**, the **orbit of 867 km** with 20-degree inclination meant an **orbital lifetime of over 100 years**.
4. And **over 120 kg of fuel was left over**, which was estimated to be sufficient to achieve a fully controlled atmospheric re-entry.
5. The **re-entry experiment of MT1** has been undertaken as a part of the ongoing efforts as **this satellite with sufficient left-over fuel presented a unique opportunity** to test the relevant methodologies and understand the associated operational nuances of post-mission disposal by direct re-entry into the earth's atmosphere.

in the targeted zone, and **maximum thrust** and **maximum firing** duration of the thrusters.

- The space agency said satellites such as **Megha-Tropiques-1** were not designed to undergo **such controlled re-entry after the end of life**, making it challenging. Complicating matters further was that the satellite had been sitting in orbit longer and lower than intended, which meant several systems had lost redundancies and their performance had degraded.

## ISRO RECEIVES NISAR SATELLITE

The **US Air Force C-17 aircraft** landed in Bengaluru on 8 March 2023 and **handed over NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) NISAR** to the Indian space agency which marks a **milestone in the US-India ties** in space collaboration. **NISAR**, an **Earth-observation satellite**, is being **jointly developed** by the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)** and the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**.

### What is NISAR?

- NISAR** was envisioned by **NASA and ISRO eight years ago in 2014** as a powerful demonstration of the **capability of radar as a science tool** and help us **study Earth's dynamic land and ice surfaces** in greater detail than ever before.
- It is expected **to be launched in January 2024** from Satish Dhawan Space Centre into a **near-polar orbit**.
- The satellite **will operate for a minimum of three years**. It is a **Low Earth Orbit (LEO) observatory**. **NISAR** will map the **entire globe in 12 days**.
- NISAR will be the first radar of its kind in space** to systematically **map Earth, using two different radar frequencies** (L-band and S-band) to measure changes in our planet's surface **less than a centimeter across**.

### Why NISAR Important?

- NISAR** will provide a wealth of data and **information about the Earth's surface changes, natural hazards, and ecosystem disturbances**, helping to advance our understanding of Earth system processes and climate change.
- The mission will **provide critical information to help manage natural disasters** such as **earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions**, enabling faster response times and better risk assessments.
- NISAR data** will be used **to improve agriculture management and food security** by providing information about **crop growth, soil moisture, and land-use changes**.
- The mission will provide data for **infrastructure monitoring and management**, such as **monitoring of oil spills, urbanization, and deforestation**.
- NISAR** will help to monitor and **understand the impacts of climate change** on the Earth's land surface, including **melting glaciers, sea-level rise, and changes in carbon storage**.

## GPT-4 IS DIFFERENT FROM CHATGPT

**AI powerhouse OpenAI** announced **GPT-4**, the **next big update to the technology** that **powers ChatGPT and Microsoft Bing**, the search engine using the tech, on 14 March 2023. **GPT-4 is supposedly bigger, faster, and more accurate than ChatGPT**, so much so, that it even **clears several top examinations with flying colours**, like the **Uniform Bar Exam** for those wanting to practice as lawyers in the US.



## What is GPT-4?

1. **GPT-4** is a **large multimodal model** created by **OpenAI** and announced on 14 March 2023. **Multimodal models can encompass more than just text – GPT-4 also accepts images as input.**
2. Meanwhile, **GPT-3** and **GPT-3.5** **only operated in one modality, text**, meaning users could only ask questions by typing them out.
3. Aside from the fresh ability to process images, OpenAI says that **GPT-4** also “**exhibits human-level performance** on various professional and academic benchmarks.”
4. The **language model can pass a simulated bar exam** with a score around the top 10 per cent of test takers and **can solve difficult problems with greater accuracy** thanks to its broader general knowledge and problem-solving abilities.
5. For example, it can “**answer tax-related questions, schedule a meeting among three busy people, or learn a user’s creative writing style.**”
6. **GPT-4** is also **capable of handling over 25,000 words of text**, opening up a greater number of use cases that now also include **long-form content creation, document search and analysis, and extended conversations.**

### How is GPT-4 different from GPT-3?

1. **GPT-4 can ‘see’ images now:** The most noticeable change to **GPT-4** is that **it’s multimodal**, allowing it to understand more than one modality of information.
2. **GPT-4 is harder to trick:** One of the **biggest drawbacks of generative models** like **ChatGPT** and **Bing** is their **propensity** to occasionally go off the rails, generating prompts that raise eyebrows, or worse, downright alarm people.
3. **GPT-4 can process a lot more information at a time:** **Large Language Models (LLMs)** may have been trained on **billions of parameters**, which mean **countless amounts of data**, but there are limits to how much information they can process in a conversation.
4. **GPT-4 has an improved accuracy:** OpenAI admits that **GPT-4 has similar limitations as previous versions – it’s still not fully reliable and makes reasoning errors.**

## INDIA RECORDED DEATH BY H3N2 VIRUS

India has **recorded deaths of two people**, one each in Karnataka and Haryana, due to the **Influenza A subtype H3N2 virus**, the government said on 10 March 2023. It added that **around 90 cases of this virus** have been reported across the country.

### What is the H3N2 virus?

1. **Influenza viruses**, which **cause the infectious disease known as flu**, are of **four different types: A, B, C and D. Influenza A** is further classified into **different subtypes** and **one of them is the H3N2.**
2. According to the United States’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), **H3N2 caused the 1968 flu pandemic** that led to the **death of around one million people globally** and about 100,000 in the US.
3. A 2020 study, published in the journal Nature Communications, found that the **strains of the virus** have dramatically evolved in the **past five decades** as people born in the late 1960s and 1970s got infected by it as children.

## MISCELLANEOUS

### HIDDEN CORRIDOR IN THE GREAT PYRAMID OF GIZA

A hidden corridor, **9 m long** and **roughly 2 m wide**, has been **unearthed by scientists** close to the main entrance of the **4,500-year-old Great Pyramid of Giza**. Egyptian antiquities officials confirmed the discovery on 2 March 2023. The discovery was originally made by the **ScanPyramids project in 2016** using a **non-invasive technique** called **cosmic-ray muon radiography**.

#### The greatest pyramid

1. The **Great Pyramid of Giza** is the **largest of the three pyramids in Giza**, originally standing roughly **147 m above the Giza plateau**.
2. Construction was started in **circa 2550 BC**, during the **reign of Khufu**, often considered the **greatest pharaoh of Egypt's old kingdom**.
3. It is estimated that the pyramid was built **using 2.5 million stone blocks**, each **weighing between 2.5 and 15 tonnes** according to The National Geographic.
4. Building the **Great Pyramid** was a feat of engineering unmatched for thousands of years. Of note is **not only the scale of the building** – it was the **tallest structure on the planet** until the **main spire of the Lincoln Cathedral in the United Kingdom overtook it in 1400 AD** – but also its symmetry and perfect alignment to the four cardinal directions (the error is less than **1/15th of a degree**).

#### The latest discovery and the technology used

1. The **initial discovery of a void** was made using a imaging technique known as **cosmic-ray muon radiography**.
2. This method uses the **penetrative power of cosmic subatomic particles** called **muons to scan large structures**.
3. A **muon detector** tracks the **number of muons going through the object from different directions**, to form a **three-dimensional image**.
4. Subsequently, this picture is compared with a **muon image of the “free sky”** – indicating how many muons have been blocked. The final picture is essentially a **shadow of the object**, in the **light of cosmic muons**.
5. Further tests were then carried out with **radar and ultrasound** before a **6 mm-wide (0.24 in) endoscope** was fed through a tiny joint between the stones that make up the chevrons. The footage from this camera was unveiled during **Waziri's news conference**.

### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2023

**International Women's Day 2023 (IWD)** was celebrated on 8 March under the theme **“DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality”**. The **United Nations** has highlighted **the need for inclusive technology and digital education**. It plans to have discussions on the **role of all stakeholders** in improving access to **digital tools**. With the

**IWD's origins linked to women workers' movements**, it is important to note that **women's lack of access to technology** and **digital tools** makes them less likely to be a part of the wider domains of **Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics** – collectively termed the **STEM fields**.

#### Why does women's underrepresentation in STEM fields matter?

1. Across the world, there has been a **marked absence of women** in the professional realm of **STEM subjects** – including the **IT sector, environment and climate, medical sciences**, etc.
2. This underrepresentation is of note because **developments in STEM fields**, particularly in **technology**, are increasingly shaping all aspects of modern life – from **chatbots like ChatGPT** that are expected to replace workers in various settings to the ubiquity of social media which shapes identities and public discourse.
3. Furthermore, from a career perspective, these fields are generally lucrative for workers. A **typical STEM worker** earns two-thirds more than those employed in other fields, according to Pew Research Center.
4. Therefore, the **underrepresentation of women in STEM** impacts the overall gender pay gap as well – women are typically **overrepresented in lower-paying jobs** and **underrepresented in higher-paying jobs** such as in STEM fields.

#### Why does the gap exist?

1. **Multiple factors** determine **how women choose to work** and the options available to them. These include the presence of existing resources such as mentors and programmes offering scholarships, as well as, on a broader level, **general societal attitudes on women's education** that do not encourage families to invest in it as much as they do for boys.
2. The UNICEF points to **gender bias in curricula**. For instance, in India, **more than 50 per cent of illustrations in math and science textbooks** in primary show boys and only 6 per cent show girls.
3. **In the UK**, over a quarter of girls say they have been put off a career in tech as it is too male-dominated and only 22 per cent can name a famous female working in the field.
4. **In the US**, **26 per cent of tech startups** have at least **one female founder**, and in Europe, only 21 per cent of tech founders are female. But it points out that numbers are increasing — potentially creating more role models for girls and women.

#### What is the 'gender gap' in STEM?

1. Globally, **18 per cent of girls in higher-level education are pursuing STEM studies**, compared with **35 per cent of boys**.
2. Even within the STEM fields, there lies a **gender divide**, with similar numbers of boys and girls pursuing natural sciences while far more boys looked to engineering, manufacturing and construction.
3. **In India**, the **enrolment of girls in engineering programmes is significantly lower** when compared to their male counterparts.
4. Overall in UG, PG, MPhil and PhD engineering programmes, the total enrolment is 36,86,291 where **71 per cent of enrolled students were males and 29 per cent were females**, according to data from the **All India Survey of Higher Education for 2020-2021**.

## IEA'S METHANE GLOBAL TRACKER REPORT

According to the **International Energy Agency's (IEA) annual Methane Global Tracker report**, fossil fuel companies **emitted 120 million metric tonnes of methane into the atmosphere in 2022**, only slightly below the record highs seen in 2019. **75 per cent of methane emissions from the energy sector can be reduced** with the help of **cheap and readily available technology**.

### What are the findings of the report?

1. The **energy sector accounts for around 40 per cent** of the **total average methane emissions** from human activity, as oil and natural gas companies are known to release **methane into the atmosphere** when **natural gas is flared or vented**.
2. The greenhouse gas is also released through leaks from valves and other equipment during the drilling, extraction and transportation process.
3. **More than 260 billion cubic metres (bcm)** of natural gas (mostly composed of methane) is **wasted through flaring and methane leaks globally today**.
4. Although it's impossible to avoid this entire amount, the right policies and implementation **can bring 200 bcm of additional gas to markets**.
5. In the **oil and gas sector**, emissions **can be reduced by over 75 per cent** by implementing **well-known measures** such as **leak detection** and **repair programmes** and upgrading leaky equipment, the report pointed out.
6. It further mentioned that **80 per cent of the available options** to curb the release of methane could be implemented by the **fossil fuel industry at net zero cost**.

### How are methane emissions driving climate change?

1. **Methane is a greenhouse gas**, which is **responsible for 30 per cent of the warming since preindustrial times**, second only to carbon dioxide.
2. A report by the **United Nations Environment Programme** observed that **over a 20-year period, methane is 80 times more potent** at warming than carbon dioxide.
3. In recent years, scientists have repeatedly **sounded the alarm** regarding the **increasing amount of methane** in the atmosphere.
4. Last year, the **US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)** said that the atmospheric levels of methane **jumped 17 parts per billion in 2021**, beating the previous record set in 2020.

## WILDFIRE-INDUCING 'HOT LIGHTNING' STRIKES

**Soaring global temperatures** could lead to **more "hot lightning" strikes** in many parts of the world, a new study has found. It added that **this type of lightning** is more likely to **ignite wildfires than typical lightning**. Published in the **journal Nature Communications**, the study, **'Variation of lightning-ignited wildfire patterns under climate change'**, has been done by the Institute of Astrophysics of Andalusia (Spain) and the Institute of Atmospheric Physics (Germany).



### What are the findings of the study?

1. The researchers analysed **5,858 selected lightning-ignited fires** based on **satellite images** of US wildfires between 1992 and 2018 and found that **approximately 90 per cent of them might have started by “hot lightning” strikes**.
2. Also known as **long continuing current (LCC)**, this type of lightning strike can last from around **40 milliseconds** to **nearly a third of a second**.
3. With the help of **computer simulations**, the researchers also looked at the **frequency of “hot lightning” strikes** and observed that as the atmosphere warms, there might be an **increase of 41 per cent** in the incidents of LCC strikes by 2090.
4. This means that the **rate of such lightning flashes could jump** from three strikes per second globally to **four strikes per second**.
5. Meanwhile, the frequency of **all cloud-to-ground strikes might increase** to nearly eight flashes per second, a 28 per cent jump.

### What is lightning and how does it occur?

1. **Lightning is a rapid and massive electrical discharge** that takes place between **storm clouds and the ground**, or **within the clouds themselves**.
2. Scientists believe that for lightning to occur, **positive and negative charges must separate within a cloud**.
3. This happens, according to the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)**, when the **water droplets in the bottom part of the cloud are moved upwards**, where the **much colder atmosphere freezes them into small ice crystals**.
4. As these **small ice crystals continue to go up**, they gain more mass and eventually become so heavy that they **start to fall down to Earth**.
5. This causes a system in which **ice crystals going down collides with the water vapours** coming up, leading to the **accumulation of positive charges on the top of the cloud** and **negative charges gathering at the base**, while the atmosphere between them in the cloud acts as an insulator.
6. When the **positive and negative charges grow large enough**, their strength overpowers the insulating properties of the properties. As a result, the two kinds of charges meet with each other and produce lightning.
7. Although **most of the lightning takes place within the clouds**, sometimes it is **directed towards Earth also**.
8. With the base of the cloud becoming negatively charged, **positive charges start to accumulate on tall objects**, like trees, poles and buildings.
9. A **“stepped leader” of negative charge descends** from the cloud seeking out a path toward the ground...As the **negative charge gets close to the ground**, a positive charge, called a **streamer**, reaches up to meet the negative charge. The channels connect and we see the lightning stroke,” NOAA said.

**FACT TO REMEMBER:**

1. SC ORDER ON CEC AND ECS APPOINTMENT
2. LEGAL RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE
3. JUDICIAL CUSTODY AND POLICE CUSTODY
4. SOO AGREEMENT WITH KUKI GROUPS
5. BHUTAN GRADUATED FROM THE LDC STATUS
6. UN SEALS HISTORIC DEAL TO SAVE OCEANS
7. SWAMIH INVESTMENT FUND
8. ISRO BRINGS DOWN MEGHA-TROPIQUES-1
9. GPT-4 IS DIFFERENT FROM CHATGPT
10. INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2023

**QUESTIONS IN LAST YEAR (2022) PT FROM MY NOTES**

**SCAN QR CODE**

