

The Supreme Court Refers Same-Sex Marriage Issue



THE SUPREME COURT REFERS SAME-SEX MARRIAGE ISSUE TO A CONSTITUTION BENCH

CONTEXT

- The Supreme Court's decision to refer the issue of granting legal recognition to same-sex marriages to a Constitution Bench is seen as a step towards gender equality.
- Petitioners view legal status for same-sex marriages as a natural consequence of the 2018 judgment decriminalising homosexuality.
- The government argues that there is no need to depart from the heteronormative understanding of marriage and any change must come from the legislature.

INTERPRETATION OF MARRIAGE LAWS

- The question before the Court is whether it should interpret provisions of marriage laws in India, especially the Special Marriage Act, 1954, as permitting marital unions between same-sex couples.
- The Act allows the solemnisation of a marriage between any two persons and is used by those who are unable to register their marriages under their respective personal laws.
- The Union government argues that the decriminalisation of consensual relations between adults of the same sex has not conferred the right of marriage and that the state is entitled to limit its recognition to marriages involving heterosexual couples.

EQUALITY NORM AND RELIGIOUS/CULTURAL VALUES

- The central question is whether no civil right available to married heterosexual couples ought to be denied to those who belong to the same gender.
- The Centre's argument, invoking religious norms and cultural values, against recognising same-sex marriages is weak and inadequate.
- It is futile to argue that recognising same-sex marriages will undermine faith or rock societal values.

REMEDY AND LEGISLATIVE ACTION

- Whether the remedy ought to take the form of recognition of same-sex marriages, and, if so, whether it should be through judicial intervention or legislative action, is the question.
- Legislative inaction on burning social issues will legitimise and invite judicial intervention.
- A responsive government that wants to treat this as a matter of policy and not cede space to the courts would act on its own to consider the right of any two people, regardless of gender, to marry or found a family.

Saudi Arabia and Iran sign an agreement to re-establish diplomatic ties



SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN SIGN AN AGREEMENT TO RE-ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC TIES

CONTEXT

- On March 10, 2023, Saudi Arabia and Iran, represented by their national security advisers, signed an agreement in Beijing, China, to re-establish diplomatic ties, respect each other's sovereignty and maintain non-interference in the other's domestic affairs.

THE CONTENT OF THE AGREEMENT

- Saudi Arabia and Iran have agreed to re-establish diplomatic ties.
- The agreement aims to respect each other's sovereignty and maintain non-interference in domestic affairs.
- The agreement reinstates two previous accords, one on security cooperation signed in 2001 and the other in 1998 dealing with economic, technical, scientific and cultural ties.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE AGREEMENT

- Saudi Arabia and Iran have been in diplomatic estrangement for seven years.
- During this period, they have confronted each other in proxy wars in Syria and Yemen.
- The two countries carried out media campaigns of mutual hostility, often on sectarian basis.
- They have on occasion come close to direct conflict, particularly in 2019 when suspected Iranian agents attacked Saudi oil facilities.

RUN-UP TO THE DEAL

- Meetings in Baghdad and Muscat: Saudi and Iranian officials met in Baghdad and Muscat in 2021 and 2022, but no progress was achieved on Syria, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia's concerns about Iran's mobilisation of Shia communities.
- Pursuing interests without the U.S.: Regional states are losing faith in US security. Due to its energy, economic, investment, and technological linkages with West Asia, China is an attractive partner due to its substantial energy, trade, investment, and technology ties with West Asia.
- Importance of West Asia to China's Belt and Road Initiative: Regional states are crucial to the realization of China's Belt and Road Initiative, with their logistical connectivity, investment, consultancy, and contracting partnerships being key components. However, until recently, China had been hesitant to engage in regional competitions and confrontations.

CHINA'S NEW APPROACH IN WEST ASIA

- China has signaled changes in its approach to West Asia, focusing on quasi-mediation diplomacy to promote its broad commercial, diplomatic, and political interests.

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- President Xi Jinping conveyed this message during his three summits in Riyadh in December 2022, aiming to consolidate consensus on global governance, development, security, and other crucial issues.
- The Saudi-Iran accord is the first manifestation of this new approach, which reduces regional tensions and puts in place the bases for further dialogue.
- Saudi-Iran differences will be difficult to resolve, but China's active engagement with the two regional powers could help assure Saudi Arabia of Iran's benign intentions.



DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGES

- Revival of JCPOA: Revival of nuclear agreement (The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and managing Israel's aggressiveness are important for regional security.
- IAEA Director General visited Tehran and obtained agreement for monitoring activities, paving the way for renewed talks on JCPOA.
- Doubts on renewal due to U.S. and Israeli politics: US's domestic politics and Israel's hostile posture towards Iran could obstruct the renewal of JCPOA.
- China's role in West Asia increasing: China's active role in West Asian affairs poses challenges for Indian diplomacy.
- Work together: India needs to engage with China in West Asia to further mutual and regional interests such as energy security, free and open sea lanes, logistical connectivity, and regional stability.

THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION (JCPOA)

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a multilateral agreement reached in 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 group of world powers (United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany). The agreement aimed to ensure that Iran's nuclear program would be exclusively peaceful and to lift sanctions on Iran in return.

IPCC Meeting to Finalize 6th Assessment Cycle Report on Climate Change



IPCC MEETING TO FINALIZE 6TH ASSESSMENT CYCLE REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

CONTEXT

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is meeting to finalize the Synthesis Report, the last report of its sixth assessment cycle.
- The report is expected to set the tone for upcoming climate change discussions.
- The IPCC is a UN-backed scientific body that provides periodic assessments of climate science to inform global climate action.

WHAT IS THE SYNTHESIS REPORT?

- The Synthesis Report is a non-technical summary of the previous reports released in the sixth assessment cycle since 2018.
- It addresses policy-relevant scientific questions related to climate change, but in a non-prescriptive manner.
- It is aimed at policymakers around the world.
- Finalization of the Synthesis Report is expected to be a complex exercise, as authors have to condense voluminous information and accommodate concerns of governments and civil society groups.

IPCC'S PREVIOUS REPORTS

- The IPCC published three comprehensive reports in the sixth assessment cycle, including one on scientific evidence for climate change, the other on impacts and vulnerabilities, and the third exploring mitigation options available.
- Special reports on the feasibility of keeping global temperature rise within the 1.5 degree Celsius limit and the connections between land, ocean, and cryosphere were also released.
- Together, these reports form the most comprehensive understanding of the earth's climate system and the actions needed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

EXPECTED EMPHASIS ON 1.5 DEGREE CELSIUS THRESHOLD

- The Synthesis Report is expected to emphasize the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold as the main global goal, unlike the Paris Agreement that seeks to restrict temperature rise to below 2 degree Celsius.
- Average annual temperatures have already gone above 1.2 degree Celsius from pre-industrial times, and a breach of the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold is a real possibility in just the next five years.

IPCC Meeting to Finalize 6th Assessment Cycle Report on Climate Change



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IPCC MEETING TO FINALIZE 6TH ASSESSMENT CYCLE REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

- More evidence on the pressing need to stick to the 1.5 degree Celsius target has presented itself in the five years since the first report of this cycle was released in 2018.

UPCOMING MEETINGS ON CLIMATE CHANGE:

- The release of the Synthesis Report on March 20 will be followed by a ministerial-level meeting in Copenhagen to discuss ways to implement decisions taken at last year's climate meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh.
- The UN 2023 Water Conference will take place later next week, with climate change as one of the most important agendas.
- Two G-20 meetings around the climate change theme are also scheduled towards the end of this month, one in Udaipur, Rajasthan, and the other in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

Current Climate Impacts

- Climate impacts are already hurting population groups, with extreme weather events becoming the norm.
- This year's February in India was the hottest ever, and unusually hot weather continues to prevail in many parts of the country.
- The sustained focus on climate change is not surprising as the situation is similar in several other parts of the world.
- Despite repeated predictions of an impending catastrophe, countries have been found wanting in terms of climate action.
- The current level of actions is not even commensurate with the effort required to meet the 2 degree Celsius target.
- There is disagreement even on something as basic as a commitment to phase out fossil fuels, one of the main contributors to global warming.

IPCCC

- It is the international group tasked with evaluating the science of climate change.
- It was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide policymakers with regular evaluations of the scientific basis of climate change, its current and future risks, and adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- The IPCC assessments provide a scientific foundation for governments at all levels to establish climate-related policies, and they underpin deliberations at the UN Climate Conference — the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).