



Current Affairs for UPSC IAS Exam –21 & 22 March 2021 | Legacy IAS Academy

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ART NOT APPROPRIATE FOR LIVE-IN OR SAME SEX COUPLES

Context:

A report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare on the Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) (Regulation) Bill, 2020 said that ART is not appropriate for live-in or same sex couples.

Relevance:

GS-II: Social Justice (Issues Related to Women, Governance and Government Policies, Issues Arising Out of Design & Implementation of Policies)

Dimensions of the Article:



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1. What is Assisted reproductive technology (ART)?
 2. Risks Involved in ART
 3. Highlights of the ART (Regulation) Bill, 2020
 4. Why is the ART Regulation bill needed?
 5. What are some of the Criticisms or Concerns with the Bill?
 6. What the Parliamentary Panel's views on allowing ART for live-in or same sex couples?

What is Assisted reproductive technology (ART)?

Assisted reproductive technology (ART) includes medical procedures used primarily to address infertility.

This subject involves procedures such as:

1. In-Vitro fertilization,
2. Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI),
3. Cryopreservation of gametes or embryos, and/or
4. The use of fertility medication.

When used to address infertility, ART may also be referred to as fertility treatment.

- ART mainly belongs to the field of reproductive endocrinology and infertility.
- Some forms of ART may be used with regard to fertile couples for genetic purpose (see preimplantation genetic diagnosis).
- ART may also be used in surrogacy arrangements, although not all surrogacy arrangements involve ART.

Risks Involved in ART

- The majority of IVF-conceived infants do not have birth defects; however, some studies have suggested that assisted reproductive technology is associated with an increased risk of birth defects.



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- Early studies suggest that there could be an increased risk for medical complications such as low birth weight, placental insufficiency, chromosomal disorders, preterm deliveries, etc., with both the mother and baby.
 - ART carries with it a risk for heterotopic pregnancy (simultaneous intrauterine and extrauterine pregnancy).

Highlights of the ART (Regulation) Bill, 2020

1. The Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) (Regulation) Bill, 2020 makes provisions for safe and ethical practice of assisted reproductive technology services in the country.
2. The Bill will ensure confidentiality of intending couples and protect the rights of the child born through ART.
3. The bill makes Pre-Genetic Implantation testing mandatory, which allows doctors to test embryos for any possible abnormal chromosomes before they are transferred to the uterus and helps to avoid any genetic diseases in the population born through these technologies.
4. The bill provides for a National Board which will lay down a code of conduct to be observed by those operating ART clinics and also formulate minimum standards for laboratory and diagnostic equipment and practices to be followed by human resources employed by clinics and banks.
5. The Bill also mandates Regulatory Boards at State Level which shall have the responsibility to follow the policies and plans laid by the National Board for clinics and Banks in the State.
6. The Bill also Provides for a national registry and registration authority, which will maintain a database to assist the national Board to perform its functions.
7. The Bill proposes for a stringent punishment for those practising sex selections, sale of human embryos or gametes, running agencies/rackets/organisations for such unlawful practices.
8. The bill has a provision that those involved in trafficking and sale of embryos will be fined Rs 10 lakh at first instance and in second instance the person could be imprisoned for up to 12 years.

Why is the ART Regulation bill needed?

- India is among countries that have seen the highest growth in the number of ART centers and ART cycles performed every year, hence, there is a need for proper regulation.
- India has become one of the major centers of the global fertility industry (ART), with reproductive medical tourism becoming a significant activity and this has also introduced a plethora of legal, ethical and social issues and reporting is still very inadequate.



Therefore, there is a need for standardization of protocols.

- The select committee of the Parliament that examined the Surrogacy Regulation Bill, 2019 has said that it would be prudent to bring the ART Bill before the Surrogacy Bill, 2019, to establish a regulatory mechanism for ART clinics.
- At present there are only six IVF (in vitro fertilisation) clinics in the government sector while the remaining thousands of IVF centres were in the private sector, thus there is a need to enable the common poor masses to avail the services of ART.

What are some of the Criticisms or Concerns with the Bill?

- The Bill allows for a married heterosexual couple and a woman above the age of marriage to use ARTs and excludes single men, cohabiting heterosexual couples and LGBTQ+ individuals and couples from accessing ARTs.
- The Bill seems to violate Article 14 of the Constitution and the Right to Privacy jurisprudence of Puttaswamy, 2017, where the Supreme Court held that “the sanctity of marriage, the liberty of procreation, the choice of a family life and the dignity of being” concerned all individuals irrespective of their social status and were aspects of privacy.
- The Bill does little to protect the egg donor. Harvesting of eggs is an invasive process which, if performed incorrectly, can result in death.
- The Bill restricts egg donation to a married woman with a child (at least three years old). Even here, egg donation as an altruistic act is possible only once a woman has fulfilled her duties to the patriarchal institution of marriage.
- Unlike the SRB, there is no prohibition on foreign citizens accessing the ARTs but not all of the Indian citizens which is an illogical result which fails to reflect the true spirit of the Constitution.
- A woman receives no compensation or reimbursement of expenses for loss of salary, time and effort. Failing to pay for bodily services constitutes unfree labour, which is prohibited by Article 23 of the Constitution.
- The Bill requires pre-implantation genetic testing and where the embryo suffers from “pre-existing, heritable, life-threatening or genetic diseases”, it can be donated for research with the commissioning parties’ permission.
- Although the Bill and the SRB regulate ARTs and surrogacy, respectively, there is considerable overlap between both sectors and they do not work in tandem. Both Bills set up multiple bodies for registration which will result in duplication or worse, lack of regulation. For example, a surrogacy clinic is not required to report surrogacy to the National Registry.

What the Parliamentary Panel’s views on allowing ART for live-in or same sex couples?



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- The Committee in its report added that keeping the best interest of the child born through ART services and other parentage issues in case of their separation, it would not be appropriate to allow live-in couples and same sex couples to avail the facility of ART.
 - According to the Panel: the rights of people in same sex relationship and live-in relationships frequently keep getting redefined, however, the ART Bill endorsed the recommendations of Select Committee on Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill 2019, wherein the definition of “couple” has been retained and live-in couples and same sex couples have been excluded from availing surrogacy services.

-Source: The Hindu

WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT 2021

Context:

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network for the United Nations released the World Happiness Report 2021, before the International Happiness Day.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (International Organizations and their Reports)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About World Happiness Report
2. Highlights of the World Happiness Report 2021
3. What is Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)?
4. About International Happiness Day



About World Happiness Report

- The World Happiness Report is released by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network for the United Nations, ranking 149 countries by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be.

The rankings are based on polling (Gallup World Poll) which looks at six variables:

1. Gross Domestic Product Per Capita (Purchasing Power Parity).
2. Social Support.
3. Healthy life expectancy at birth.
4. Freedom to make life choices.
5. Generosity.
6. Perceptions of corruption.

Highlights of the World Happiness Report 2021

- Finland has been ranked as the happiest country in the world for the fourth consecutive year, followed by Iceland, Denmark, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and Norway.
- Afghanistan (149) is the most unhappy country, followed by Zimbabwe (148), Rwanda (147), Botswana (146) and Lesotho (145).
- India has been ranked 139, out of 149 countries evaluated – compared to being ranked 144 out of 156 countries surveyed in 2020.
- India's neighbors Pakistan (105), Bangladesh (101) and China (84) are ranked higher than India.



What is Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)?

- The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) was launched in 2012 by the UN to mobilize global scientific and technological expertise and to promote practical problem solving for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement.
- The SDSN and the Bertelsmann Stiftung have been publishing the annual SDG Index & Dashboards Global Report since 2016.

About International Happiness Day

- The International Happiness Day is celebrated every year on 20th March to highlight the importance of happiness in the diurnal lives of people.
- Theme of International Happiness Day 2021 is "Happiness For All, Forever".

-Source: Indian Express



FOSSILS HELP TO STUDY THE CLIMATE BEYOND 25 MILLION YEARS AGO

Context:

Four fossil assemblages helped to study the climate during 65, 57, 54, and 25 million years ago, showing that Indian monsoon 25 million years ago resembled present-day Australia's.

Relevance:

GS-I: Geography (Physical Geography – Climatology, Geomorphology)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Introduction to the changing scenario since 180 Million years ago
2. About the research regarding Fossils and Climate pattern
3. Significance of the Findings:

Introduction to the changing scenario since 180 Million years ago

- About 180 million years ago, India separated from the ancient supercontinent Gondwana and took a long northward journey of about 9,000 km to join Eurasia.
- During this journey, the subcontinent moved from the southern hemisphere, crossed the Equator to reach its current position in the northern hemisphere.
- Due to these changing latitudes, it experienced different climatic conditions, and a new study has now tried to map these climatic variations using leaf fossils.



About the research regarding Fossils and Climate pattern

- Morphological characters of fossil leaves collected from Deccan Volcanic Province, East Garo Hills of Meghalaya, Gurha mine in Rajasthan and Makum Coalfield in Assam were studied.
- The four fossil assemblages were found to be from four different geological ages and helped to study the climate during 65, 57, 54, and 25 million years ago respectively.
- It has been observed from across the globe that plant leaf morphological characters such as apex, base and shape are ecologically tuned with the prevailing climatic conditions to adapt for all the seasons throughout the year.

Significance of the Findings:

- **The results indicated that the fossil leaves from India were adapted to an Australian type of monsoon and not the current Indian monsoon system during its voyage from southern hemisphere to the north.**



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- Since India was the only subcontinent to have crossed from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere, it is a laboratory to study bio-geo changes and understand how the flora and fauna changed accordingly.

Recently in news: Fossils of 'Dickinsonia' found at Bhimbetka - proof of the similar paleoenvironments

- Recently, researchers have discovered three fossils of the earliest known living animal, the 550-million-year-old 'Dickinsonia' on the roof of the Bhimbetka Rock Shelters.
- This finding could help scientists better understand the interaction of geology and biology that triggered the evolution of complex life on Earth.
- This is further proof of the similar paleoenvironments and confirms assembly of Gondwanaland by the 550 Ma (mega annum), but not reconstructions adjusted for true polar wander.

[Click Here to read more about Dickinsonia, Continental Drift Theory and Proofs](#)

-Source: The Hindu

INDIA SEALS MYANMAR BORDER

Context:

Mizoram Chief Minister held a virtual meeting with Foreign Minister of Myanmar as India has sealed all entry points along the border with the southeast Asian neighbour and is closely monitoring to prevent any Myanmar nationals from entering the country.

Relevance:



GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, International Developments and Policies affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Recent Developments in India-Myanmar ties after the Military Coup in Myanmar
2. India-Myanmar Border:
3. Issues in India-Myanmar ties

Recent Developments in India-Myanmar ties after the Military Coup in Myanmar

- Following the February 1 coup when the Myanmar military overthrew the democratically elected government, around 300 Myanmarese nationals including many policemen have crossed into India and sought refuge.
- There is considerable support and sympathy among the people of Mizoram over the situation in Myanmar as many have relations across the border.
- India and Myanmar have an arrangement called Free Movement Regime (FMR) which allows locals on both sides to go upto 16 km across the other side and stay upto 14 days, however, FMR was suspended due to COVID-2019 and no one has been being allowed since.
- The fallout of this suspension of FMR was that there has been an increase smuggling across the border as the livelihood of people has been disrupted due to the pandemic.
- Recently, no one is being allowed to enter India from Myanmar and the Assam Rifles, which is the border guarding force there, is keeping a close watch after the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) directive.
- However, the border is porous as, (unlike the Bangladesh border of which more than 60% is fenced) the Myanmar border is unfenced and completely blocking it not possible given the tough terrain.
- For central agencies and Assam Rifles on the ground, it is a tricky situation in maintaining a delicate balance in executing the MHA orders and maintaining the cordial relations with the States agencies and the locals.

India-Myanmar Border:



- The international border between the India and Myanmar (formerly Burma) is almost 1500 kms long in length and runs from the tripoint with China in the north to the tripoint with Bangladesh in the south.
- The precise location of the tripoint with China is unclear owing to the Sino-Indian border dispute - at present, the de facto tripoint is located just north of the Diphu Pass.
- From here the border proceeds to the south-west through the Mishmi Hills, except for an Indian protrusion at the Chaukan Pass, then continuing through the Patkai and Kassom Ranges.
- At the south-east corner of Manipur, it turns sharply westwards along various rivers for a period over to the Tiau River.
- It then follows this river southwards for a long stretch down to the Chin Hills, before turning west and proceeding to the Bangladeshi tripoint via a series of irregular lines.



Issues in India-Myanmar ties

1. **The Rohingya crisis:** India does not directly engage with the issue of Myanmar's treatment of its Rohingya Muslim minority. But India condemned the recent terrorist attacks in northern Rakhine State in a measure of support to Myanmar. Further both sides agreed that there will be no glorification of terrorists as martyrs.
2. **China factor:** As China's profile continues to rise in India's vicinity, New Delhi would



like to enhance India's presence by developing infrastructure and connectivity projects in the country. India has found it difficult to counter Chinese influence in Myanmar.

3. **Project Delays:** India is losing friends because of widespread discontent over continuing delay in completion of flagship projects — Kaladan and the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway. Conceived over a decade back, they are scheduled to be completed by 2019.

[Click Here to read more about Myanmar military Coup d'état, India-Myanmar relations and more](#)

-Source: *The Hindu*

PHILIPPINES ACCUSES CHINA OF 'INCURSION' IN SCS

Context:

The Philippines accused China of "incursion" after more than 200 militia boats were spotted near a disputed reef in the South China Sea, in a rare rebuke of its superpower neighbour.

Relevance:

GS-II: International Relations (India's Neighbors, International Developments and Policies affecting India's Interests)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Where is the South China Sea?



2. Significance of South China Sea as a Geopolitical Water Body
3. Dispute in the South China Sea
4. How is China Exploiting the South China Sea?
5. China's Authority and Disregard to Judgements

Where is the South China Sea?

- The South China Sea is a marginal sea that is part of the Pacific Ocean that extends from the Strait of Malacca in the southwest, to the Strait of Taiwan in the northeast.
- The littoral countries of the South China Sea are China, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam.



Significance of South China Sea as a Geopolitical Water Body

- It is the connecting link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. (Strait of Malacca)
- The South China Sea is a busy international waterway, one of the main arteries of global trade worth more than \$5 trillion and is growing year on year. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) one-third of the global



shipping passes through it.

- South China Sea has one-third of the entire world's marine biodiversity and has significant fisheries as a huge contributor to food security in the region.
- Oil and gas reserves beneath the South China Sea are also believed to exist
- It is a rich source of hydrocarbons and natural resources.
- It contains numerous shoals, reefs, atolls and islands. The Paracel Islands, the Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Shoal are the most important.

Major crude oil trade flows in the South China Sea (2016)

total 15.0 million barrels per day

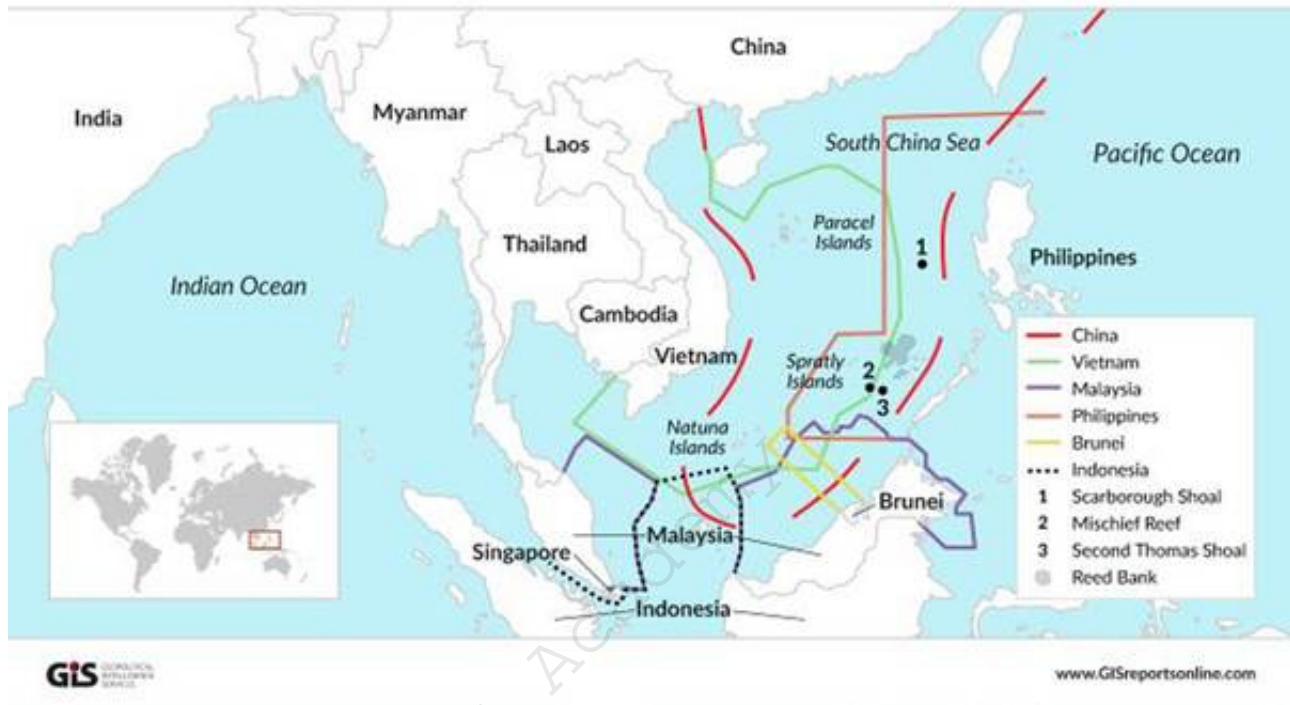


Dispute in the South China Sea

- The South China Sea is an area of growing conflicts due to territorial claims by different countries.
- With respect to the Spratly Islands, different geographic features are reportedly occupied by claimants such as Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, China, and Malaysia.
- The Paracels Islands are claimed by China, Vietnam, and Taiwan.



A tangled web in the South China Sea



How is China Exploiting the South China Sea?

Growing Chinese muscularity in the SCS is visible in

1. Increased patrolling and live-fire exercising by Chinese naval vessels
2. Ramming and sinking of fishing vessels of other claimant countries
3. Renaming of SCS features
4. Building of runways, bunkers, and habitation for possible long-term stationing of personnel on the atolls claimed by China
5. Chinese exploration and drilling vessels competing aggressively with those of other littoral countries in the disputed waters.

China's Authority and Disregard to Judgements

- The Philippines invoked the dispute settlement mechanism of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 2013 regarding the disputed Spratlys, to which the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) passed a Judgement that China's position in the



matter was NOT legal.

- China had aggravated the situation by undertaking land reclamation and construction, and had harmed the environment and violated its obligation to preserve the ecosystem.
- The award implied that China violated the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). China dismissed the judgment as “null and void.”
- Philippines had not followed up on the PCA judgment because the Philippines could not afford to fight China.
- Not one country challenged China, which agreed to settle disputes bilaterally, and to continue work on a Code of Conduct with countries of the ASEAN.

Views of other countries

- No state can claim sovereignty over underwater features unless they are within 12 nautical miles of land. So, it can be claimed that China is ignorant of this or deliberately trying to overturn international law.
- China has ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which is very clear on what states can and cannot claim as territory. Yet China seems to be going against UNCLOS by asserting sovereignty in very faraway places.
- In recent years, Beijing has stepped up its territorial claims in the South China Sea by building artificial islands and a heavy military presence, making it a flashpoint for geopolitical tensions.
- Vietnam claimed the move “seriously violated” its territorial sovereignty in the area.
- The United States warned China not to take advantage of the coronavirus pandemic to assert itself in the South China Sea.

-Source: The Hindu