

Bharatmala Phase 1 deadline extended by Six years to 2027-28

- Bharatmala Pariyojana, launched under **Ministry of Road Transport & Highways**, is an umbrella program for **highways sector**.
 - ⊕ **Phase I was approved in 2017** to focus on bridging critical infrastructure gaps through **development of 34,800 km of National Highways by 2022**.
 - ⊕ Till November-2023, **42% of project has been completed**.
- **Objectives of Bharatmala Pariyojana**
 - ⊕ **Optimize efficiency of freight and passenger movement** across country by bridging critical infrastructure gaps.
 - ⊕ **Improving connectivity in North East**.
 - ⊕ **Improving efficiency of existing corridors** through development of Multimodal Logistics Park.
- **Features of Bharatmala Pariyojana**
 - ⊕ **Satellite mapping of corridors** to identify upgradation requirement.
 - ⊕ **Technology-based automated traffic surveys** of overmore than 1,500 points.
 - ⊕ **Origin-Destination study of freight movement** across 600 districts.
- **What are the gaps in highway infrastructure?**
 - ⊕ **Inadequacy in optimization of National Highway network & Road network** due to resource constraints and absence of a national plan.
 - ⊕ **Lack of integrated planning** in connectivity of major corridors and ports with hinterland.
 - ⊕ **Presence of Congestion Points**, with multiple points of local congestion present even on already developed corridors.
 - ⊕ **Lack of accident response infrastructure**.

Components of Bharatmala Phase-I

- **Economic Corridors (9000 km):**
To unlock full economic potential
- **Inter Corridor and Feeder Route (6000 km):**
Ensuring holistic connectivity
- **National Corridors Efficiency Improvement (5000 km):**
Enhancing efficiency
- **Border Roads and International Connectivity (2000 km):**
Boosting Border Connectivity
- **Coastal Roads and Port Connectivity (2000 km):**
Leveraging Ports for Progress
- **Green field Expressways (800 km):**
Express speeds for Express gains
- **Balance NHDP works (10,000 km):**
Boosting all round connectivity

Tribunals cannot direct government to frame policy: Supreme Court

- SC sets aside **Armed Forces Tribunal direction** to make a policy to fill up the post of Judge Advocate General.
 - ⊕ SC ruled that a **tribunal subject to High Court's jurisdiction under Article 226 of Constitution cannot be permitted by law, to direct framing of policy** by Government.
 - ⊕ Also, SC said that **making policy is not in domain** of Judiciary.
- Tribunal, **quasi-judicial body**, aims to **reduce case load of judiciary** or to bring in subject expertise for technical matters.
 - ⊕ Tribunals are incorporated by Act of Parliament under **Article 323A or 323B** through **42nd Amendment Act, 1976** on recommendation of **Swaran Singh Committee**.
 - ◆ **Article 323-A** deals with **Administrative Tribunals**.
 - ◆ **Article 323-B** deals with **tribunals for other matters**.
 - ⊕ Tribunals have to **follow the principles of natural justice**, and are **vested with powers of Civil Court**.
 - ⊕ In **L Chandra Kumar v Union of India 1997**, SC ruled that orders of tribunals under Article 323A and 323B of Constitution are subjected to **Writ Jurisdiction of High Court**.
- **Significance of tribunals**
 - ⊕ **Reducing pendency** in courts and **improving efficiency** of judicial system.
 - ⊕ **Faster, inexpensive and decentralized delivery** of justice.
 - ⊕ **Providing expertise** and specialization on technical cases.

Concerns with tribunals

- **Non-filling of vacancies or delays** in appointment especially of technical members.
- **Short tenure of members** affecting independence of tribunals.
- **Executive interference** in appointments.

India, Russia ink pacts on construction of future power units of Kudankulam nuclear powerplant (KNPP)

- It was announced after the meeting of the **External Affairs Minister of India with the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia.**
 - ⊕ Other agreements in the areas of **medicines, pharmaceutical substances, and medical devices** were also signed.
- **KNPP is India's largest nuclear power plant** built in Tamil Nadu with the **technical assistance of Russia.**
 - ⊕ **Two 1,000 megawatt (MW) units** were constructed in phase one of the project.
 - ⊕ An additional **four units are under construction** in the second and third phases of the project expected to be completed by 2027.
- India started its commercial **nuclear power production in 1969**, with a nuclear power program conceived in three sequential stages.
- **India's three stages nuclear power program**
 - ⊕ **First stage:** Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) will be used to produce **energy from natural uranium**. They also produce fissile **plutonium (Pu)-239**.
 - ⊕ **Second stage:** Using **Fast Breeder Reactors** fueled by Pu-239 to produce energy and more of Pu-239. Here, the reactor produces more fissile material than it consumes.
 - ⊕ **Third stage:** Use of Pu-239 recovered from the second stage, in combination with thorium-232, to produce **energy and U-233**. U-233 would then be used as fuel.

Uranium

- Natural uranium as found in the Earth's crust is a mixture largely of two isotopes: **uranium-238 (U-238), accounting for 99.3% and uranium-235 (U-235) about 0.7%.**
- **Low Enriched Uranium** contains a U-235 concentration between 0.711 percent and 20 percent and is used for energy production. **Highly Enriched Uranium** contains a U-235 concentration greater than 20 percent and is used in naval propulsion reactors, nuclear weapons, etc.

Reserve Bank of India released the Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2022-23

- It is a statutory publication in compliance with **Section 36 (2) of the Banking Regulation Act, of 1949.**
- The report presents the **performance of the banking sector** during 2022-23 and 2023-24 so far.
- **Key highlights:**
 - ⊕ **The Gross Non-Performing Assets (GNPA) ratio** of Indian scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) fell to a decadal low of **3.9% at end-March 2023.**
 - ⊕ The consolidated balance sheet of **SCBs** grew by 12.2% in 2022-23, the **highest in nine years.**
 - ⊕ In 2022-23, the combined balance sheets of **Urban Co-operative Banks (UCBs) expanded by 2.3%** while that of **NBFCs** expanded by 14.8%.
- **Concerns raised:**
 - ⊕ **Lack of asset diversification, and geographical concentration** of Small Finance Banks (SFBs).
 - ⊕ **Concentration risks** of corporate credit in NBFCs and **significant exposure of banks to NBFCs.**
 - ⊕ **Long tenure of directors, absence of comprehensive risk management policy and deficient compliance culture** in UCBs.
- **Recommendations:**
 - ⊕ Strengthening of **quality of governance** of co-operative banks based on three pillars of **compliance, risk management, and internal audit.**
 - ⊕ NBFCs should focus on **broadbasing their funding sources** and reduce overdependence on bank funding.
 - ⊕ **Capital Adequacy Framework** accounting for risks to SFBs.

Dual Citizenship is a challenge in India: Union External Affairs Minister

- **Dual or Multiple Citizenship:** It grants an individual legal status as a citizen of two or more countries simultaneously.
- **Benefits**
 - ⊖ Can hold passports of both countries.
 - ⊖ Can participate in the political affairs of both countries.
 - ⊖ Obtain visa exemptions for travel.
 - ⊖ Engage in employment in either nation.
- **Countries offering dual citizenship:** United States, Finland, Albania, Israel, and Pakistan, etc.
- **The Indian Constitution prohibits** dual citizenship for nationals.
- **Alternative to dual citizens in India**
 - ⊖ India offers the **Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) program to Persons of Indian Origin (PIO)**, excluding those who migrated to Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- **Benefits for OCI cardholders**
 - ⊖ **Multi-purpose, multiple entry, lifelong visa** for visiting India.
 - ⊖ **Exemption from registration with local police authority** for any length of stay in India.
 - ⊖ **Parity with NRIs** in respect of economic, financial, and education fields **except in matters relating to the acquisition of agricultural/plantation properties.**
- **Foreign national eligible to apply for OCI**
 - ⊖ Who was **eligible to become a citizen of India** on 26.01.1950.
 - ⊖ Was a **citizen of India on or at any time** after 26.01.1950.
 - ⊖ Who is a **child or a grandchild or a great-grandchild** of such a citizen given above.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) permits lending and borrowing of Government Securities (G-Secs)

- RBI implemented **Government Securities Lending (GSL) Directions, 2023.**
- **GSL refers to lending of eligible G-Secs, for a fee, by owner (lender) to a borrower, on collateral of other G-Secs, for a specified period of time.**
 - ⊖ Under **GSL transaction, G-Secs issued by Central government excluding Treasury Bills (T-Bills) shall be eligible for lending/borrowing.**
 - ⊖ **Also, G-sec issued by Central Government including T-Bills and State Governments bonds shall be eligible for placing as collateral under GSL transaction.**
- **Permitting lending and borrowing of G-Secs will-**
 - ⊖ **Add depth and liquidity to G-sec market, aiding efficient price discovery.**
 - ⊖ **Expand participation in securities lending market by investors.**
 - ⊖ **Enhance operational efficiency of government bonds by insurers.**
- **G-Sec is a tradeable instrument issued by Central or state Governments.** It acknowledges government's debt obligation.
 - ⊖ **Such securities are short term** (usually called T-Bills, with maturities of less than one year) (State government cannot issue treasury bills) **or long term** usually called Government bonds or dated securities with maturity of one year or more.
 - ⊖ G-Secs carry **practically no risk of default** and, hence, are called **risk-free gilt-edged instruments.**

Also in News



SAMARTH Programs

- The government has launched six SAMARTH-curated training programs on iGOT Karmayogi Platform for State Government officials.
- ⊖ It includes **SAMARTH Blocks, SAMARTH Zila, SAMARTH Rajya, SAMARTH Rajya Sachiva, SAMARTH Policy and SAMARTH Procurement**
- **Aim:** to elevate the skills and competencies of government officials, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet the evolving needs of governance.
- **iGOT Karmayogi** is a **comprehensive online learning platform for the capacity building** of government officials.
 - ⊖ The portal combines six functional hubs for **online learning, competency management, career management, discussions, events, and networking.**



Migration and Mobility Agreement

- Cabinet approved the **Migration and Mobility Agreement between India and Italy.**
- **Agreement would:**
 - ⊖ **Enhance people-to-people contacts, foster mobility** of students, skilled workers, business people, and young professionals and
 - ⊖ **Strengthen cooperation on irregular migration between the two sides.**
- **Key provisions include:**
 - ⊖ **Indian students, after completing academic/vocational training in Italy may be granted temporary residence for up to 12 months.**
 - ⊖ For workers, the Italian side has **reserved a quota for non-seasonal and seasonal Indian workers** for 2023, 2024, and 2025 **under the current Flows Decree.**



Smart India Hackathon (SIH)-2023

- The 6th edition of the Smart India Hackathon was recently held.
- It is an initiative of the Government of India to help various government departments, private organizations get solutions for some of their pressing problems through students.
- It is jointly organized by the Ministry of Education's Innovation Cell, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Persistent Systems, and i4c.
- **New in SIH 2023:** Open its door for school-going students of class 8th and above.



Ammonia (NH₃)

- **Ammonia gas** was leaked from an underwater supply pipeline to an industrial unit in Chennai's Ennore, Tamil Nadu.
 - ⊖ It led to **ammonia breaching its acceptable levels** both in air (400 micrograms) and the sea (5 mg/l).
- Ammonia is a colourless and pungent gas composed of nitrogen and hydrogen.
 - ⊖ It is **produced in human body** (essential for making proteins) and is commonly found in soil.
 - ⊖ It is used in agriculture as fertilizer; manufacture of plastics, explosives, fabrics, pesticides, dyes and other chemicals. It is
 - ⊖ very **corrosive** and damages human cells.



Huntington Disease

- Research has been conducted to understand how Huntington's disease progresses at the molecular level.
- Huntington disease is an **inherited disorder** that causes nerve cells (neurons) in parts of the brain to gradually break down and die.
 - ⊖ It attacks areas of brain that help to **control voluntary (intentional) movement**, as well as other areas.
- **Symptoms:** Forgetfulness, loss of balance, experiences difficulty in speaking, swallowing, and walking.



Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC)

- Scientists have discovered an **ancient underwater mountain range** hidden within the world's strongest ocean current, the ACC.
- It was observed in the area of the **Southern Ocean**.
 - ⊖ Southern Ocean comprises southernmost waters below 60 degrees south latitude. It encircles the entire Antarctic continent.
- **About ACC**
 - ⊖ It is **only current that flows completely around the globe**.
 - ⊖ it **encircles the Antarctic continent and flows eastward** through the southern portions of the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans.



Lantana Camara (Lantana)

- Lantana is one of the **worst invasive species** in the world and a species of High Concern for India.
- Lantana, a **tropical American shrub**, was introduced in India as an **ornamental plant by the British in the 1800s**.
 - ⊖ It threatens around **40% of India's tiger range**.
 - ⊖ Eradicating lantana is **difficult due to its rapid spread, infestation intensity, allelopathy, and resistance to cutting and burning**.
- Invasive species are animals, plants or other organisms that are **introduced outside their natural range**, negatively impacting native biodiversity, ecosystem services or human well-being.



Copra

- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has **approved increase in Minimum Support Price for Copra for 2024 season**.
- Copra refers to the **dried coconut kernels from which coconut oil is expelled**.
 - ⊖ **Milling copra** is used to extract oil, while **ball or edible copra** is consumed as a **dry fruit** and used for religious purposes.
 - ⊖ **Kerala and Tamil Nadu are major producers** of milling copra, whereas ball copra is produced predominantly in **Karnataka**.

Places in News



Malaysia (Capital: Kuala Lumpur)

Cabinet approved MoU for Cooperation between Prasar Bharati and Radio Televisyen Malaysia.

- **Political features**
 - ⊖ **Country of Southeast Asia.**
 - ⊖ Composed of two non-contiguous regions:
 - ◆ **Peninsular Malaysia (West Malaysia)** is on Malay Peninsula.
 - ◆ **East Malaysia (Malaysia Timur)** is on island of Borneo.
 - ⊖ **Bordering countries:** Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and Brunei.
 - ⊖ **Bordering water bodies:** Strait of Malacca, South China Sea.
- **Geographical features**
 - ⊖ Lying just **north of Equator**.
 - ⊖ **Major Rivers:** Pahang, Rajang, Kinabatangan.
 - ⊖ **Highest Point:** Gunung Kinabalu (4100m).

