

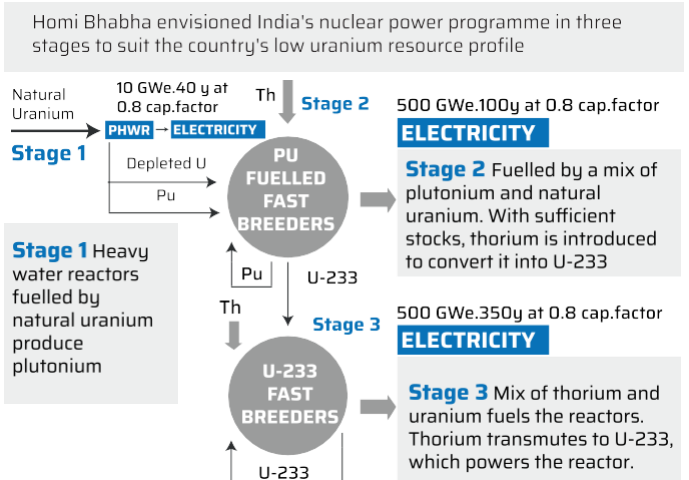
- ▶ Italy was the only G7 nation to join BRI in 2019.
- ▶ Reason for Italy's withdrawal from BRI
 - ⊕ Widening trade deficit (19 billion euros to 32.4 billion euros).
 - ⊕ Decreasing FDI from China (\$650 million in 2019 to \$33 million in 2021).
 - ⊕ Beijing's alignments with Moscow have made European countries more skeptical of China's intentions.
- ▶ Earlier, Sierra Leone in 2018 and Philippines in 2023 has announced their exit from BRI.
- ▶ Launched in 2013 as One Belt One Road, BRI is China-led infrastructure project to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.
 - ⊕ It aims at deepening regional integration, promoting trade, and stimulating economic growth.
 - ⊕ Two primary components: Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road.
- ▶ Concerns associated with BRI
 - ⊕ Unsustainable debts by China to partner countries lead to debt trap making them vulnerable to China's influence.
 - ⊕ Implementation problems like corruption scandals, labour violations, environmental hazards etc.
- ▶ India's concerns
 - ⊕ BRI passes through Gilgit Baltistan region and thus violates India's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
 - ⊕ Undermine India's influence over smaller South Asian countries and Indian Ocean littoral states.



China launches the world's first fourth-generation nuclear reactor

- ▶ It uses gas (helium) for cooling unlike conventional power plants that use pressurised water. It can produce heat, power, and hydrogen and uses a Small Modular Reactor (SMR) design.
- ▶ SMRs: These are advanced nuclear reactors with power capacity of up to 300 MW(e) per unit. These are:
 - ⊕ Small: physically a fraction of the size of a conventional nuclear power reactor.
 - ⊕ Modular: making it possible for systems and components to be factory-assembled and transported as a unit to a location for installation.
 - ⊕ Reactors: harnessing nuclear fission to generate heat to produce energy.
- ▶ SMRs advantages over traditional reactors:
 - ⊕ Low cost and construction time due to factory-built SMRs, not being built on-site.
 - ⊕ Simpler and Safer due to reduced fuel requirements.
 - ⊕ They can be deployed incrementally to match increasing energy demand.
 - ⊕ Have increased safety and lower impacts in case of accidents.
- ▶ Nuclear power in India: India has 22 operating reactors, with an installed capacity of 7480 MWe.
 - ⊕ India is currently on the second stage of its three-stage nuclear programme (See infographic).

INDIA'S THREE-STAGE NUCLEAR PROGRAMME



in Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs)

- ▶ University Grants Commission (UGC) draft guidelines are in line with National Credit Framework (NCrF) as specified in National Education Policy 2020.
- ▶ **Objective of Guidelines**
 - ⊕ Integrating skilling into higher education at all levels and introducing short-term industry-relevant courses (certificate courses) in HEIs to bridge skill gap and boost student's productivity at workplace.
 - ⊕ Provide holistic and specialised education with focus on practical training.
- ▶ **Key highlights**
 - ⊕ Anyone who has passed 10+2 or Senior Secondary examination or its equivalent is eligible for admission to short-term courses. HEIs will offer credit-linked Short-Term Skill Development (STSD) certificate courses of 3-6 months.
 - ⊕ HEIs can offer STSD courses in several areas including Robotics; Cloud Computing; Cyber Security; 5G Connectivity;
 - ⊕ Architectural Drafting; Basic 3D design; etc.
- ▶ **Need to bridge skill gap**

Promote better employability, diversity and equal opportunities for all graduates.

 - ⊕ Acquire new-age skills as per fast evolving job market. Develop
 - ⊕ Human Capital to facilitate demographic dividend. Foster more
 - ⊕ collaborative Industry Academia linkage.
- ▶ **Initiatives for skilling in HEIs**

Scheme for Higher Education Youth in Apprenticeship and Skills (SHREYAS) provides industry apprenticeship opportunities.

 - ⊕ Earn-while-learn scheme (proposed by UGC) help socio-economically disadvantaged students to earn and get skilled.
 - ⊕

Government banned using 'sugarcane juice and sugar syrup' for ethanol production

- ▶ The directive has been issued as per Sugar (Control) Order 1966 for the 2023-24 supply year.
- ▶ Sugar (Control) Order 1966 provides power to the Government to regulate the production of sugar, restrict sales, etc.
- ▶ The government has allowed the use of 'B-molasses' for ethanol production.

Molasses is a viscous, dark, and sugar-rich by-product of sugar extraction from the sugarcane. It is of different

 - ⊕ types like A, B, and C molasses depending on the stage of extraction.
- ▶ **Other byproducts of the sugarcane industry:** cane tops, bagasse, and filter muds
- ▶ **Rationale of the decision:** to maintain adequate domestic sugar availability and price stability, due to an estimated fall in sugar production.
- ▶ Ethanol is one of the principal biofuels, which is naturally produced by the fermentation of sugars by yeasts or via petrochemical processes such as ethylene hydration.
- ▶ **Initiatives to promote the production of ethanol:**

National Policy on Biofuels - 2018: to enable the availability of biofuels in the market thereby increasing its blending percentage.

 - ⊕ Ethanol blending Program with the target of 20 percent ethanol blending in petrol by 2025.
 - ⊕ PM JI-VAN YOJANA for providing financial support for setting up second-generation (2G) ethanol projects.
 - ⊕

50 Indian cough syrup manufacturers fail to clear quality tests: Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) Report

- CDSCO report stated that around 6% of samples taken for testing from 54 firms did not meet required standards.
- ▶ Earlier, World Health Organisation had raised concerns over substandard quality of Cough syrups exported from India which were allegedly responsible for children's death in Gambia, Uzbekistan etc.
 - ▶ From 1st June 2023, Director General of Foreign Trade has made it compulsory to test samples and obtain
 - ⊕ Certificate of Analysis from designated laboratories for export of Cough syrups.
 - ▶ **Drug regulation in India**

It is based on Drugs and Cosmetics Act (DC Act), 1940 and Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945.

 - ⊕ DC Act 1940 created CDSCO under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to prescribe standards for ensuring safety, efficacy and quality of drugs, cosmetics, diagnostics and devices in India.
 - ◆ Drug controller general of India (head of CDSCO) approves licences for specified categories of drugs such as blood and blood products, Vaccine etc.
 - ▶ **Challenges in effective drug regulation**
 - ▶ **Absence of centralised drugs database:** For effective surveillance of Pharma companies.
 - ⊕ **Multiplicity of regulators:** Nearly 36 regional regulators for drugs.
 - ⊕ **Less emphasis on Good Manufacturing Practice Standards (GMPS):** Only 2,000 of 10,500 manufacturing units in India have compliance to WHO-GMPS.
 - ⊕

Commerce

- The Ministry has exercised powers conferred by section 55 of the **Special Economic Zones Act, 2005**.
- According to the amendment, the Board of Approval may **permit the demarcation of a portion** of an Information Technology Enabled Services Special Economic Zone as a **non-processing area**
 - ⊕ The processing area in an SEZ is for **manufacture of goods or rendering of services**. The non-processing area is for **supporting infrastructure**.
- The **repayment of tax benefits already incurred** is to be calculated in proportion of the built-up non-processing area to the total built-up processing area.
- **Significance of the move:**
 - ⊕ **Increases flexibility** in carrying out business in SEZs **Protect the interest** of both developers as well as occupiers of SEZ
 - ⊕ The freed-up space will lead to **better utilization** for a diversified set of occupiers
 - ⊕ Will help to **diversify the tenant base** in SEZs.
- **What are SEZs?**
 - ⊕ The SEZ is a specifically **delineated duty-free enclave, deemed to be foreign territory** for trade operations and duties and tariffs.
 - ⊕ **Any private/public/joint sector or State Government** or its agencies can set up SEZ.
 - ⊕ SEZs provide several advantages, including **tax benefits, duty-free imports, state-of-the-art infrastructure**, etc.

Significance of SEZ:



Also in News

Mera Gaon Meri Dharohar (MGMD) Project

Launched by the Ministry of Culture (MoC) to **document and map the cultural diversity inherent in villages across the country**.

- Mapping is done under the **National Mission on Cultural Mapping (NMCM)**, in coordination with the **Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA)**.
- MGMD seeks to **compile comprehensive information detailing the life, history, and ethos of Indian villages**.
- **NMCM:** Launched to develop a comprehensive database of artists, art forms, and cultural resources gathered from organizations, Ministries, and States.

Mycoplasma pneumonia

- Pneumonia cases in AIIMS Delhi have no link to recent surge in respiratory infections in children in China.
- Mycoplasma pneumoniae bacteria **commonly cause mild infections of respiratory system (throat, lungs, windpipe)**.
 - ⊕ It is one of **smallest self-replicating organism**, has a **highly stable genome**, lacks cell wall and grows slowly.
 - ⊕ It is a **common bacterial cause of community acquired pneumonia**.
 - ⊕ It spreads by **coughing or sneezing**.

Meftal

- The **Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC)** has issued a drug safety alert regarding **Adverse Drug Reactions (ADR)** associated with the painkiller Meftal.
- Meftal **contains mefenamic acid** and is commonly used for **menstrual cramps and rheumatoid arthritis**.
- It can trigger adverse reactions like **DRESS syndrome**.
 - ⊕ Drug rash with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms (DRESS) syndrome is a **severe idiosyncratic response to a medication, marked by a protracted onset period**.
- IPC is an Autonomous Institution of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to set **standards of drugs**.

Urban flood mitigation project

- Prime Minister has approved the **urban flood mitigation project** under National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF),
 - ⊕ It is for **'Integrated Urban Flood Management (IUFM) activities for Chennai Basin Project'**.
 - ⊕ This mitigation project will **help make Chennai flood-resilient**.
 - ⊕ This is the **first in a series of urban flood mitigation efforts** and will help develop a broader framework for urban flood management".
- IUFM is a holistic approach that stresses on the interrelationship between **socioeconomic development, environmental sustainability, and flood-risk management**.



Article 99 of U.N. Charter

- U.N. Secretary-General invoked **Article 99 of UN Charter** to warn UN Security Council of impending Humanitarian crisis in Gaza.
- Article 99** states that the **Secretary-General may bring to the attention of Security Council any matter** which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.
 - Article 99 has been invoked on **only four occasions in the past**.
- UN Charter is **founding document of United Nations**, signed in **1945 in San Francisco**.
 - It **codifies major principles of international relations** like sovereign equality of States etc.



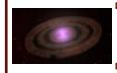
India's Logistics Efficiency

- Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade held a meeting with the World Bank to showcase initiatives for logistics.
- Significant Initiatives:**
 - Land Port Management System (LPMS)** to digitise operations at the Integrated check posts (ICPs).
 - National Logistics Portal, Marine**, as a maritime single window platform for complete end-to-end logistics solutions.
 - FASTag-based** electronic toll collection.
 - e-Air WayBill (e-AWB)** and **e-Cargo Security Declaration** to facilitate end-to-end paperless air cargo transportation.
 - 35 multi-modal logistics parks (MMLPs)** planned by the Ministry of Road and Transport.



Cyber Insurance

- Number of Cyber Insurance (CI) policies sold in 2023 are 35-40 percent higher than 2022.
- Cyber Insurance is **designed to guard businesses from potential effects of cyber –attacks**.
 - It is designed to cover **fees, expenses and legal costs associated with cyber breaches that occur after an organisation has been hacked**.
- In India, CI covers **Malware intrusion; Financial loss due to unauthorized and fraudulent use of bank account, credit card and mobile wallets; Legal expenses arising out of any covered risk; etc**.
 - It **does not cover** attacks due to **accessing restricted sites, Crypto currency transactions, etc**.



Direct Ice mapping

- Astronomers have created a two-dimensional ice inventory of a **planet-forming disk** of dust and gas that surrounds a young star **HH 48 NE**.
- They used the **James Webb Space Telescope**.
- This is the **first time a direct ice map** of a protoplanetary disc around a young star was captured.
- The **starlight collides** with many molecules of the disk and **creates absorption spectra** which can be used to identify its composition.
- The direct mapping of ice in a planet-forming disk **provides important input to understand the formation of our Earth and other planets**.

Places in news



Seychelles (Capital: Victoria)

- Seychelles declares state of emergency after explosion amid flooding.
- Political features**
 - Island republic in **western Indian Ocean**, comprising about 115 islands.
 - Major islands** of Seychelles are located **east of Kenya** and **northeast of Madagascar**.
- Geographical features**
 - Highest point:** Morne Seychellois
 - Consists of both **coral and rocky islands** with **narrow coasts**.
 - Climate:** Wet Tropical.
 - Drainage system consists of only small streams and lake.



Clarification: In News Today Dated **7th December 2023**, under the article '**Two bills on Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) passed in Lok Sabha**', it was mentioned that 'Bill increases the total number of seats to 90 from 83'. The complete Information is that the 'Bill increases the **total number of seats to 114 from 107** (24 seats of the Assembly will remain vacant until the occupation in PoK ceases'. This makes the effective strength of Assembly to 90).