

# NEWS TODAY

## 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 over more 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 power plant (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 (NH<sub>3</sub>)

- **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).

