

# NEWS TODAY

## Brazil decided against joining China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Brazil will be the second member of the BRICS after India not to endorse the BRI.

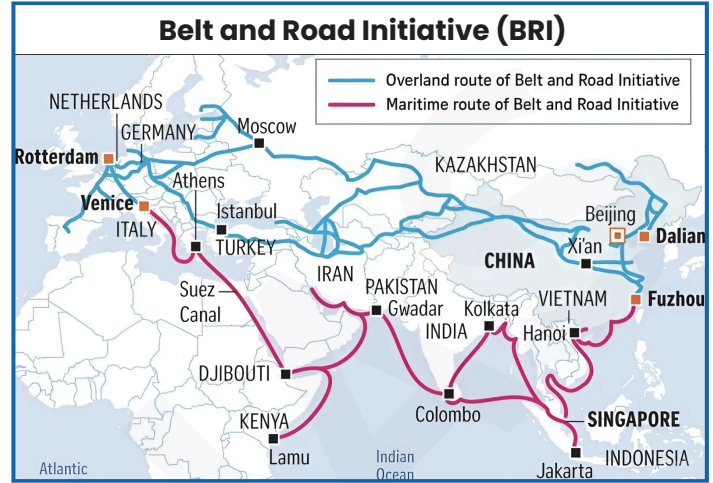
- Previously countries like Italy and Philippines have announced to withdraw from BRI.

### About Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

- **Genesis:** Initiated as 'One Belt One Road' in 2013, seeks to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks.
- **Aim:** Improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth.
- **It comprises:**
  - ⊕ **Silk Road Economic Belt** (A trans-continental passage)
  - ⊕ **Maritime Silk Road** (A sea route)
- It involves major investments in **infrastructure projects** such as ports, etc.

### Key Concerns of India regarding BRI

- **Undermining India's sovereignty and territorial integrity:** China's BRI project, the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** passes through Gilgit Baltistan region of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- **Competition:** BRI's financial incentives and low-interest loans for infrastructure may undercut Indian influence in South Asia.
  - ⊕ Unsustainable debts by China to partner countries lead to **debt trap** making them vulnerable to China's influence.
- **Security:** China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region is perceived by India as a security threat (**String of Pearls Policy**).



### Key Steps taken to counter BRI

- **Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)** and **Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership** by G7 group
- **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**, launched during India's G-20 Presidency
- **International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, Connecting India Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea.

## Review of Maritime Transport 2024 - Navigating Maritime Chokepoints Report Released

Report has been released by the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UN Trade and Development)**.

### Key findings

- Global maritime trade grew by 2.4% in 2023, recovering from a 2022 contraction, but the recovery remains fragile.
- Key maritime **chokepoints**, like the Suez and Panama Canals faced unsettling disruptions.

### About Chokepoints

- A chokepoint is a geographical feature or passageway (Includes valley, strait etc.) that is narrow and strategic.
- **Geo-strategic Significance**
  - ⊕ **Facilitates Connectivity:** E.g. **Suez Canal** (Connects the **Mediterranean Sea** with the **Red Sea**) is crucial for trade between Europe and Asia.
  - ⊕ **Energy Security:** E.g. **Strait of Hormuz** (Connects the **Persian Gulf** with the **Gulf of Oman** and the **Arabian Sea**) witness significant world's petroleum transportation.
- **Key Reasons behind disruptions**
  - ⊕ **Climate-induced** low water levels. E.g. **Panama Canal** (connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans)
  - ⊕ Geopolitical tensions and conflicts. E.g. Yemen's Houthi rebels attacked ships in **Bab al-Mandeb Strait** (Connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean)
- **Impacts of disruptions:**
  - ⊕ Straining supply chains (such as energy supplies for India) and raising costs, etc.
  - ⊕ Rising shipping costs due to long routes. E.g. Rerouting around the **Cape of Good Hope** (southern tip of Africa)

### Other Key Chokepoints of the World

- **Strait of Gibraltar:** Links the Mediterranean Sea with the Atlantic Ocean
- **Strait of Malacca:** Connects the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea
- **Turkish Straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles):** Connects the Black Sea with the Mediterranean Sea



## Key decisions taken to strengthen Gram Panchayats across the country

The decisions were taken by **Central Empowered Committee (CEC)** of the **Revamped Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)**.

### Challenges faced by Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

- **Skilling and Training gaps:** lack of adequate skills hinders competency in rural governance and undermines capacity-building efforts
- **Lack of support staff:** such as secretaries, junior engineers, computer operators, and data entry operators.
- **Lack of digital Infrastructure especially in rural areas:** leads to **Urban Rural digital divide**
- **Other challenges:** service delivery issues, **lack of literacy** etc.

### Initiatives taken by CEC to address these challenges

- **Adoption of a Standardized Honorarium System under RGSA:** to ensure fair compensation and bring consistency in training.
- **Funding for long-term domestic training programs:** to train panchayat officials in spatial planning, disaster management etc.
  - ⊖ **Elected Representatives of Panchayats to be trained in Smart Classrooms**
- **Augmenting Panchayat Infrastructure:**
  - ⊖ construction of **Gram Panchayat Bhawans with Common Service Centers** to improve infrastructure and promote digital governance
  - ⊖ **Investment in Panchayat Infrastructure in the Vibrant Villages of the Border Areas of North East and Jammu and Kashmir.**

### Revamped Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA).

- Revamped **RGSA** aims to develop **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)** as vibrant center's of local self-governance with focus on **localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
- **Type: Centrally Sponsored Scheme**
- **Tenure: 2022-23 to 2025-26**
- **Coverage:** All States and UTs and also includes institutions of rural local government in non-Part IX areas, where Panchayats do not exist.

## Biological Diversity Rules, 2024 Notified

**Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** notified them in accordance with the **Biological Diversity Act of 2002**.

- New Rules will replace **Biological Diversity Rules, 2004**.
- Also these rules will ensure the implementation of the **Biological Diversity (Amendment) Act, 2023**.
  - ⊖ Amendment of 2023 was done to facilitate fast-tracking of processes for research, encouraging Indian system of medicine etc.
- Rules outline various provisions related with **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)**, Penalties, etc.

### Key Highlights of the Rules

- **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA):**
  - ⊖ Chairperson shall be appointed by the Central Government, will hold office for a term of **three years'** and shall be **eligible for re-appointment**.
  - ⊖ **General Functions of the NBA**
    - ◆ Administering the **National Biodiversity Fund (NBF)**, established under the Act of 2002.
    - ◆ Granting approvals for **biodiversity-related agreements**.
    - ◆ Providing **technical guidance** and support to state bodies.
    - ◆ Developing and maintaining databases related to biological resources and traditional knowledge.
- **Intellectual Property Rights:** Approval of Authority will be required before the actual grant of the IPR.
- **Penalties for Contraventions:** Penalties for violations range from ₹1 lakh to ₹50 lakh, with additional fines for repeated violations.
  - ⊖ All penalties collected go to the NBF or relevant state funds, supporting biodiversity initiatives.

### About Biological Diversity Act 2002

- The Act was enacted to help India meet the objectives of the **United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 1992**.
- Act provides for a decentralised **three-tiered mechanism** for regulation.
  - ⊖ NBA at the national level,
  - ⊖ State Biodiversity Boards (SSB) at the state level, and
  - ⊖ Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC) at the local body level.



## New Study explores Diamond Dust as a potential Geoengineering Strategy for Cooling of Planet

It proposes that spraying about 5 million tonnes of diamonds into Earth's upper atmosphere annually for 45 years could lower global temperatures by 1.6 °C.

### Benefits of using diamond dust

- **Enhanced Properties:** It reflects light and heat effectively, remains airborne longer, and is less likely to clump together in atmosphere
- **Safer Alternative:** Unlike sulfur dioxide, which poses risks like acid rain and ozone depletion, diamond dust is chemically inert

### What is Geoengineering /Climate Engineering ?

- It is large-scale intervention in the Earth's climatic system, with an aim of **reducing global warming**.
- There are **two main categories** of geo-engineering:-
  - ⊕ **Carbon Dioxide Removal:** It reduces CO2 in the atmosphere by enhancing carbon sinks of the ocean/terrestrial biosphere or by directly capturing CO2 from the atmosphere.
    - ◆ **Direct Air Carbon Capture and Storage (DACCS):** uses chemical processes to capture, separate and then store CO2 directly from ambient air.
    - ◆ **Ocean fertilization:** Addition of nutrients(e.g iron) to enhance the growth of phytoplankton that remove CO2.
  - ⊕ **Solar Radiation Management :** It offsets effects of greenhouse gases by causing earth to absorb less solar radiation.
    - ◆ **Stratospheric aerosol injection:** Injecting reflective particles such as sulfate aerosols into the stratosphere to reflect incoming radiation
    - ◆ **Marine cloud brightening:** injection of salt spray into shallow marine clouds to brighten them, increasing their reflection of sunlight

### Concerns associated with Geo-engineering technology

- **Undermine existing climate policies** and divert funding from vital emission reduction and adaptation efforts.
- **High cost** of developing and deploying these tools
- Initiation of a chain reaction with risks to **human, oceans, global temperatures etc**

## The 2024 Report of the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change Released

The annual report provides an independent **assessment** of progress towards the **goals of the Paris Agreement**

### Key findings

- **Increased in Temperature:** Annual mean surface temperature reached 1.45°C above pre-industrial levels in 2023, close to breaching the 1.5°C limit set by the Paris Agreement.
- **Health Impacts:** Heat-related mortality among people over 65 years by 167% since the 1990s. It also affects physical activity, sleep quality etc.
  - ⊕ Indians faced **moderate to serious risk of heat stress for 100 days/year**, amounting to **2,400 hours of heat (2023)**
- **Economic Losses:** The average annual economic losses from weather-related extreme events increased by 23% from 2010–14 to 2019–23, to US\$227 billion.
  - ⊕ **181 billion** potential labour hours were lost due to heat exposure in 2023 in India
- **Inadequate Adaptation:** Many countries lack sufficient health emergency management capacities, with only 68% reporting high implementation rates. Only 35% have early warning systems for heat-related illnesses.

### Key Recommendations

- **Complete Vulnerability and Adaptation Assessments:** Ensure that countries fulfill their commitments to better understand and address the health impacts of climate change.
- **Implement Health-Focused Climate Policies:** Develop and enforce policies that prioritize health in climate action
- **Encourage Sustainable and Rapid Energy Transition:** to clean energy sources, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, and promoting renewable energy technologies.

## Also in News



### World Food Programme (WFP)

The WFP warns that the humanitarian crisis in Gaza could escalate into a famine.

### About United Nations WFP(HQ-Rome)

- **Genesis:** 1961.
- It is the **world's largest humanitarian agency** and saves lives in emergencies and uses food aid to create a path to peace, stability, and prosperity for those recovering from conflict, disasters, and climate change effects.
- **Funding:** voluntary donations from governments, corporates and private donors.
- It has been operating in India since 1963 and has a presence in over 120 countries and territories.
- WFP is awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize in 2020**



### Transfer Pricing

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has released a notification related to tolerance limit for transfer pricing.

### About Transfer Pricing

- Transfer pricing is a method used by multinational companies to move profits from the countries where they do business to tax havens.
- It is done by selling goods and services to themselves at inflated prices.
- CBDT sets tolerance limits to keep it as per **arm's length transaction**

### About Arm's Length Transaction

- It is a valuation principle commonly applied to commercial and financial transactions between related companies.
- It says that transactions should be valued as if they had been carried out between unrelated parties, each acting in his own best interest.



### U-WIN portal

Prime Minister of India launched U-WIN portal.

#### About U-WIN

- It captures each & every vaccination event of all pregnant women & children under **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)**.
  - ⊖ UIP is a part of the **Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) Program** under **National Health Mission (NHM)**.
- It will ensure timely administration of life-saving vaccines to pregnant women and **children (from birth to 16 years)** against 12 vaccine-preventable diseases.



### Civil Registration System (CRS)

Union Home Minister recently launched Civil Registration System (CRS) mobile application.

- Application is developed by the **Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India**, the app is expected to reduce the time required for these registrations seamlessly.

#### About CRS

- It is a unified system for continuous, **mandatory**, and permanent documentation of vital events, including births, deaths, and stillbirths, along with their associated details.
- The Registration of **Births and Deaths Act, 1969** mandates that all births and deaths must be officially registered
- It operates under the authority of the **Registrar General and Census Commissioner** of India
- It is included in the **concurrent list** under Schedule Seven.



### Raigad Fort

This year's **Rashtriya Ekta Diwas** theme celebrates the heritage of Raigad Fort.

#### About Raigad Fort:

- Hill fort situated in Raigad district, Maharashtra.
- **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** established his **capital** here in 1674 and he was also coronated in this fort.
- Surrounded by **valleys shaped by the Kal and Gandhari rivers**.
- labeled as **Gibraltar of the east** by British historians.
- Nominated for **UNESCO World Heritage** under the "**Maratha Military Landscapes of India**".
- **Main gates: Nanne Darwaza and Maha Darwaza.**



### Hydrogels

A new way discovered to create hydrogels using tiny protein fragments of just **five amino acids from the SARS-CoV-1 virus**.

- It could help improve targeted **drug delivery** & reduce side effects.

#### About Hydrogels

- These are **crosslinked polymer chains with three-dimensional (3D) network structures**, which can absorb relatively large amounts of fluid.
- These are known to be **suitable for drug delivery** because of their swelling behaviour, mechanical strength and biocompatibility.
- These materials could revolutionize **tissue engineering**, potentially aiding in **organ regeneration**.



### Artemis Mission

NASA has recently revealed 9 potential landing sites for Artemis III mission

#### About Artemis III

- It will take humans to the Moon's South Pole for the first time.
- Artemis III (followed with two test missions) planned for 2026, will **mark humanity's first return to the lunar surface in more than 50 years**
- **Artemis Program** includes **sending the first woman and first person of color** on the Moon
- India had become the **first country** to land a spacecraft (Chandrayaan-3 mission) in the moon's south polar region.
- **Aim:-**
  - ⊖ Search for the Moon's water and use it.
  - ⊖ Study the Moon to discover its mysteries.
  - ⊖ Learn how to live and work on the surface of another celestial body
  - ⊖ Test technologies we need before sending astronauts on missions to Mars



### Standard Veterinary Treatment Guidelines

Recently, the **Ministry of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries** released **Standard Veterinary Treatment Guidelines(SVTG)**

#### What are SVTG:

- It is a **comprehensive framework** outlining the best practices for veterinary care.
- The guidelines aim to **enhance animal health and productivity** while **supporting the national action plan against antimicrobial resistance**.
- The guidelines **promote use of ayurveda**, and regulate the use of antibiotics in veterinary treatments.

## Place in News



### Armenia (Capital: Yerevan)

As per reports, Armenia has emerged as India's one of leading defence export destination.

#### Political Boundaries

- **Location:** Landlocked country of **Transcaucasia** (populated region to the south of the Caucasus Mountains).
- **Border:** Azerbaijan, Turkey, Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (an exclave of Azerbaijan), Georgia, and Iran.
- ⊖ **Nagorno-Karabakh** is a disputed territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

#### Geographical features

- **Highest Peak:** Mount Aragats (Alaghez)
- **Rivers:** Aras River



AHMEDABAD



BENGALURU



BHOPAL



CHANDIGARH



DELHI



GUWAHATI



HYDERABAD



JAIPUR



JODHPUR



LUCKNOW



PRAYAGRAJ



PUNE



RANCHI