

International Relations This Week: Episode 96

International relations is a very important segment of the [UPSC syllabus](#). In this series, we present an analysis of the most important international issues and developments that occurred over the past week relevant for the IAS exam. In this article, you can learn more about the 2023 Republic Day Chief Guest, Russia's offer of advanced nuclear fuel to India, U.K. work visas and Russia's nuclear icebreakers and militarisation of the Arctic.

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1. Egypt's President to be Republic Day Chief Guest

Context: According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi will be the chief guest at the [Republic Day](#) celebrations in January 2023.

Diplomatic significance:

- It is a very symbolic gesture made by India. Being the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day is the highest honour that the country accords to a guest in terms of protocol.
- They are given the ceremonial guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan followed by a reception hosted by the President of India in the evening.
- It provides a great opportunity and becomes a powerful tool to forge and renew ties between India and the nation concerned, having greater political and diplomatic significance as well.
- This is the first time that the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt will be the Chief Guest on India's Republic Day.

How is the Chief Guest chosen?

- The choice of chief guest every year is dictated by a number of reasons — strategic and diplomatic, business interests and international geopolitics.
- Another factor that has historically played a role in the choice of the Chief Guest is the association with the [Non-Aligned Movement \(NAM\)](#) which began in the late 1950s and early 1960s.
 - The NAM was an international political movement of newly decolonised nations to stay out of the squabbles of the Cold War and support each other in their nation-building journeys.
- The first Chief Guest of the parade in 1950 was President Sukarno of Indonesia, one of the five founding members of the NAM alongside Nasser (Egypt), Nkrumah (Ghana), Tito (Yugoslavia) and Nehru (India).
- Al-Sisi's invitation invokes the history of the NAM and the close relationship India and Egypt have shared for 75 years.
- In 2018, the entire Association of Southeast Asian Nations ([ASEAN](#)) leadership comprising 10 heads of state was present at the Republic Day parade.
- In 2022, leaders of five Central Asian countries were invited as chief guests for the Republic Day parade and celebrations on January 26.
- Former US President Barack Obama (2015), Russian President Vladimir Putin (2007), former French presidents Nicholas Sarkozy (2008) and Francois Hollande (2016) have also been chief guests at the Republic Day celebrations in the past.

India and Egypt:

- India and Egypt share close political understanding based on a long history of contact and cooperation in bilateral, regional, and global issues.
- The year 2022 is of particular significance since it marks the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Egypt.
- Egypt and India were founding members of the movement for non-alignment and Egyptian leaders have traditionally maintained cordial ties with New Delhi.
- Bilateral trade between both countries has expanded rapidly in 2021-22, amounting to \$7.26 billion registering a 75% increase compared to FY 2020-21.

2. Russia offers advanced nuclear fuel to India

Context: Russia has recently offered a more advanced fuel option to India's largest nuclear power station at Kudankulam.

Introduction:

- Recently, the Russian state-owned Nuclear Energy corporation Rosatom has offered a more Advanced Fuel Option to India's largest nuclear power station at Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu.
- It will allow its reactors to run for an extended two-year cycle without stopping to load fresh fuel.
- Rosatom's nuclear fuel division named the TVEL Fuel Company is the current supplier of TVS – 2 M fuel for the two VVER 1,000 MWe reactors generating power in the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project.
- The fuel which is being supplied currently has an 18-month fuel cycle i.e the reactor has to be stopped for fresh fuel loading once every 18 months.
- TVEL has now offered the more modern Advanced Technology Fuel (ATF), which has a fuel cycle of 24 months.
- The use of ATF will help in increasing the efficiency, ensure additional power generation on account of prolonged operation and also save foreign exchange required to buy fresh fuel assemblies from Russia.

Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant:

- The [Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant \(KKNPP\)](#) is the largest nuclear power station in India, situated in Kudankulam in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu.
- It is a Civilian Nuclear Power Plant, built by India in joint collaboration with Russia.
- KKNPP is scheduled to have 6 VVER-1000 reactors built in collaboration with Russia and NPCIL, with an installed capacity of 6,000 MW of electricity.
- There are a total of 7 operating nuclear power plants in India, and all of these facilities are a part of India's Critical Information Infrastructure.

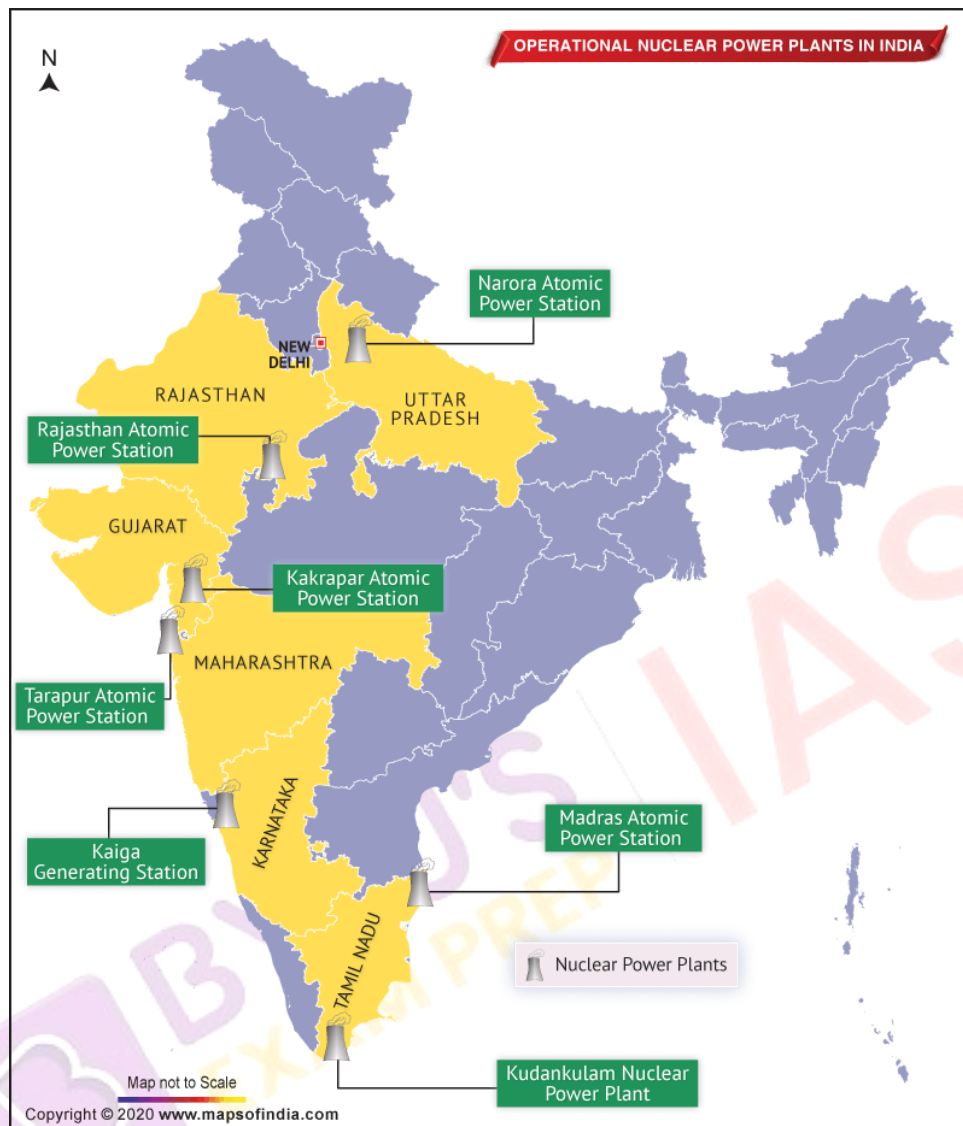


Image Source:mapsofIndia

Nuclear cooperation between India and Russia:

- Nuclear cooperation between India and Russia can be traced back to the 1960s.
- The Soviet Union agreed to supply heavy water to India for Canadian-built reactors, and throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Moscow remained crucial for the survival of India's nuclear program by supplying fuel during the country's global nuclear isolation.
- Russia was one of the few major powers which never opposed India's pursuit of nuclear weapons.
- India has struck deals with the Soviet Union and then Russia to build two gigawatt pressurised light water reactors.
- By 2018, Russia had agreed to supply six more reactors to India.

- Russian exports dominate the global export market for civilian nuclear energy. Despite the United States normalising India's civilian nuclear program, Russia has been the biggest benefactor of the market for foreign nuclear suppliers in India.
- India expects that nuclear cooperation with Moscow would significantly enhance India's industrial manufacturing capacity in the realm of sophisticated technology.
- Localization of manufacturing in India for the Russian-designed Nuclear Reactor Units provided for indigenous manufacturing of equipment and fuel assemblies for Russian-engineered nuclear plants in India.
- Russia is also collaborating with India in the manufacture of a nuclear-powered submarine.
- The Indo-Russian partnership in nuclear energy is constantly expanding in scope which can be seen in its recent move to extend its benefits to third parties. For Example, India, Bangladesh and Russia signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) for cooperation in the construction of the Rooppur nuclear power plant in Bangladesh in 2018.

3. UK work visas

Context: Indian nationals received the largest number of the total 'Worker' visas granted by the United Kingdom.

Introduction:

- As per the British government, Indian nationals with over 39% of the total work-related visas granted by the UK for the year ending September 2022 have received the largest number of work-related visas issued by the U.K.
 - Out of the total 1,45,258 work-related visas issued by the U.K., Indians have received 56,042, which has witnessed a 90% increase as compared to the pre-pandemic figure of 29,552 in 2019.
- India is followed by countries such as the Philippines, Nigeria, and the US as the visa-seeking nations seeking work visas.
- Indians along with the US and South Africa, have featured in the top three nationalities that were granted “Skilled Worker” visas from the U.K.
- During the same period, the U.K. further granted about 1,27,731 student visas to Indian nationals, which also saw an increase of 93,470 from the 34,261 visas granted in 2019.
- However, the issue of pending visa applications has impacted the flow of people from India to the U.K. in the recent past. If the situation improves, more Indians are expected to be granted work-related and student visas in the future.

- India has now overtaken China as the largest nationality being issued sponsored study visas in the UK.

Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement:

- In 2021, UK and India signed the Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement which will allow young British and Indian nationals to work and live in each other's countries and accelerate the removal of illegal migrants. It will now be formally launched in early 2023.
- This acknowledges that human exchanges and migratory movements help to bring people together and are a factor of economic, social and cultural development for both the participant countries.
- It helps in resolving to facilitate temporary and circular mobility, ensuring that UK and Indian nationals may enhance their skills which they can deploy in their countries of nationality.
- Recently, the Rishi Sunak government has given a go-ahead to the new youth mobility partnership scheme that offers as many as 3,000 visas to young professionals from India to live and work in the UK each year.
 - It was signed as part of the UK-India Migration and Mobility Partnership (MMP).
- Under the new youth mobility partnership scheme, as many as 3000 young Indian professionals will be offered visas every year to stay and work in the country for up to two years. The reciprocal scheme will also involve British nationals living and working in India.
- The deal comes at a time when the UK is facing a massive labour shortage. Currently, sectors including hospitality, construction, and manufacturing are facing labour shortages in the UK.

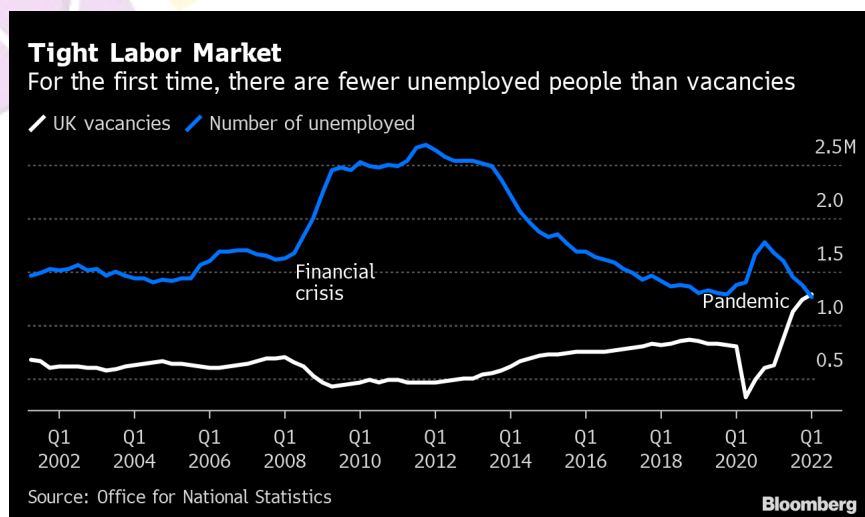


Image Source: bloomberg

4. Russia's nuclear icebreakers in Arctic

Context: Russia recently unveiled two nuclear-powered icebreakers at St. Petersburg and has claimed that such icebreakers are of “strategic importance”.

Key Details:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin virtually presided over the launch and flag-raising ceremony of two nuclear-powered icebreakers in St. Petersburg on November 22, 2022.
- The icebreakers were laid down as part of their large-scale, systematic work to reequip and replenish the domestic icebreaker fleet, to strengthen Russia's status as a “great Arctic power”.
- As climate change opens up the Arctic giving access to new routes and resources, there is a race by adjoining countries to build up their militaries.
- Among the two icebreakers unveiled, the 173.3-metre Yakutia, has a displacement of up to 33,540 tonnes, the ability to break through the ice of up to three metres and is expected to enter service in 2024.
- The flag-raising ceremony also took place for another vessel named Ural, which is expected to become operational in December 2022.
- Russia already has two other icebreakers of the same series in service named the Arktika and the Sibir.
- Another icebreaker named the Chukotka is expected to enter service in 2026.
- Further, a super-powerful nuclear Rossiya icebreaker which is of 209-metres with a displacement of up to 71,380 tonnes and the ability to break through ice four metres thick would be completed by 2027.

India in the Arctic region:

- India started its Arctic research programme in 2007 and about 13 expeditions have been undertaken to date.
- Recently in March 2022, India announced its first Arctic policy named “India and the Arctic: building a partnership for sustainable development”.
- India is also one of the observer states of the [Arctic Council](#) and is leading the intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation in the Arctic.
- India plans to enhance its capabilities and augment its capacities with the Arctic, from science and exploration to seafaring and economic cooperation, which will be supported by the development of a robust human, institutional and financial base to make India self-reliant (Atmanirbhar Bharat).



Image Source: Geospatialworld

