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### 1. Travelling with cash during polls? Here are the EC rules to keep in mind

#### Why in News?

With the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in force across the country since the announcement of Lok Sabha elections on March 16, law enforcement agencies are on high alert for movement of cash, liquor, jewellery and other freebies that could be used to influence voters.

#### What are the rules for carrying cash and other items?

The EC's efforts are meant to keep an eye on campaign expenditure by candidates, which is capped at Rs 95 lakh per constituency in bigger states, and Rs 75 lakh per constituency in smaller ones. However, this adversely affects citizens as well.

For Parliamentary Constituencies (PCs)	
Earlier expenditure limit (2014)	Enhanced expenditure limit now
Rs. 70 Lakh	Rs. 95 Lakh
Rs. 54 Lakh	Rs. 75 Lakh

For Assembly Constituencies (ACs)	
Earlier expenditure limit (2014)	Enhanced expenditure limit now
Rs. 28 Lakh	Rs. 40 Lakh
Rs. 20 Lakh	Rs. 28 Lakh

For instance, according to EC instructions, the CISF or police authorities at airports are supposed to "instantaneously report to the Income Tax Department" anyone carrying cash worth more than Rs.10 lakh, or more than 1 kg in bullion. The Income Tax Department then has to "make necessary verification as per the Income Tax Laws and take necessary measures if no satisfactory explanation is given." This means that cash or bullion can be seized till verification is completed, in order to ensure that it is not related to any political party or candidate.

At check-posts controlled by the surveillance teams, the EC makes it clear that "if cash of more than Rs 10 lakh is found in a vehicle, and there is no suspicion of commission of any crime or linkage to any candidate, agent or party functionary, then the SST shall not seize the cash, and [simply] pass on the information to the Income-Tax authority, for necessary action under Income Tax Laws."

However, if a vehicle carrying a candidate, or his/her agent or party worker is found with over Rs 50,000 in cash or drugs, liquor, arms, or gift items worth over Rs.10,000, then the cash or other items will be seized. If during checking, there is any suspicion of a crime, the seizure will be done under the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) and an FIR will be filed within 24 hours.

When it comes to carrying liquor across state borders, the excise laws of the respective state apply. For instance, some states allow two bottles of sealed liquor to be carried in.

### **What happens after a seizure?**

In case any cash or other items are seized, authorities are meant to return them if they are not related to any candidate or a crime.

"After seizure, the seized amount shall be deposited in such manner as directed by the Court and a copy of seizure of cash, in excess of Rs 10 lacs shall be forwarded to the Income Tax authority, engaged for the purpose," the EC says.

A district-level committee will look at grievances, "in order to avoid inconvenience to the public and genuine persons". The Committee, comprising the district election office's nodal officer for expenditure monitoring, and the district treasury officer, shall suo-motu examine each case of seizure where no FIR/complaint has been filed, or where the seizure is not linked with any candidate, political party or election campaign. Moreover, it shall take immediate steps to return any cash seized, as per SoP given by the EC.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## **2. The push for nuclear energy as climate solution**

### **Nuclear Energy Summit**

Last week, Brussels hosted a first-of-its-kind Nuclear Energy Summit that was billed as the most high-profile international meeting on nuclear energy ever, boasting the attendance of representatives from 30 countries, including a few heads of state. This day-long meeting on March 21 was the latest in a series of efforts being made in the last few years to pitch nuclear energy as an important solution to global problems like climate change and energy security. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which organised last week's event, called it a "landmark" and a "turning point" in the efforts to expand the use of nuclear energy for generating clean electricity.

The meeting was not meant to produce any decisions or finalise any agreement. Rather, it was another attempt to build momentum for a greater acceptance of nuclear energy which many countries continue to have apprehensions about.

### **Concerns about nuclear energy use**

Such apprehensions were aggravated by the Fukushima accident in 2011. The continuing crisis at the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant in Ukraine, the first nuclear facility to have been caught in a dangerous armed conflict, has also been a source of grave concern.

But global nuclear advocates, led by the IAEA, an intergovernmental organisation that works for the safe and peaceful use of nuclear science and technology, have been very active in the last few years in highlighting the potential of nuclear power to accelerate the clean energy transition that the world so desperately needs to achieve its climate change goals.

The IAEA has launched an 'Atoms4Climate' initiative to talk about this and has begun an engagement with the climate community, especially at the COPs or the annual year-ending climate conferences. Two years ago, at COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, IAEA set up a pavilion for the first time, and at COP28 in Dubai last year, about 20 countries pledged to work towards tripling global nuclear energy installed capacity by 2050.

### **The case for nuclear energy**

The case for nuclear energy as a possible substitute for fossil fuels, at least for electricity generation, is not without merits. It is a clean source of energy with a minimal carbon footprint. There is negligible release of emissions during the electricity generation process.

Even when the entire life cycle is considered – accounting for activities like reactor construction, uranium mining and enrichment, waste disposal and storage, and other processes – greenhouse gas emissions are only in the range of 5 to 6 grams per kilowatt hour, according to IAEA. This is more than 100 times lower than coal-fired electricity, and about half the average of solar and wind generation.

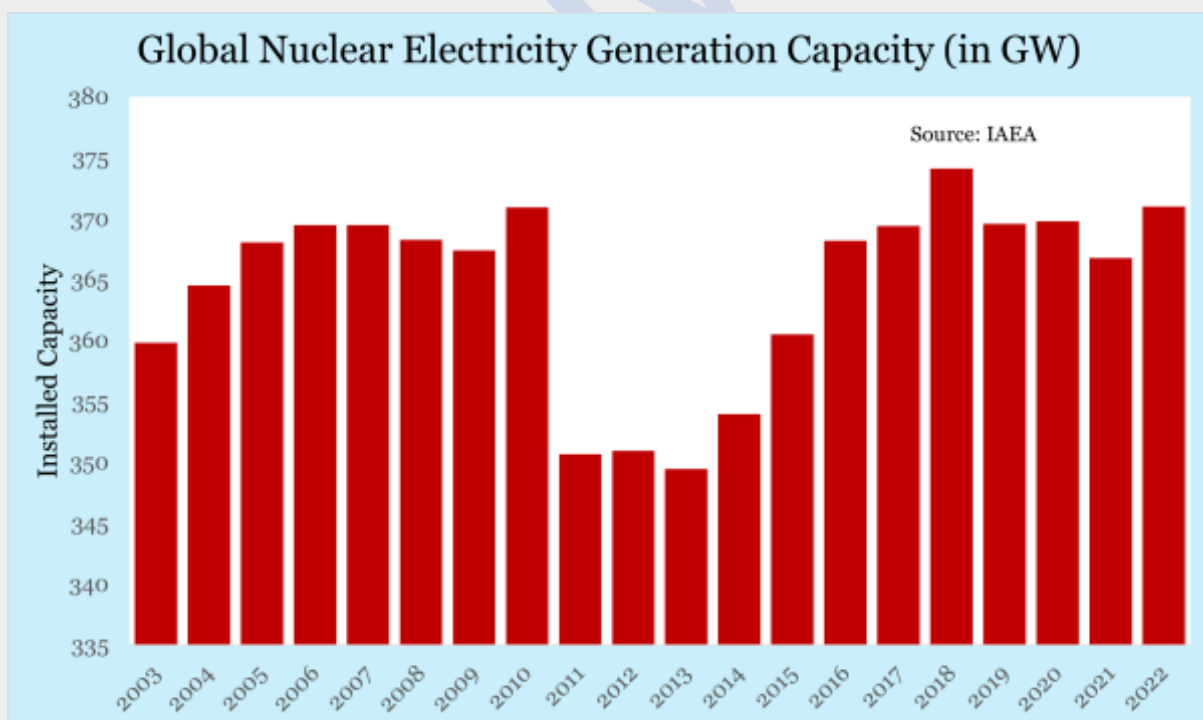


Chart 1 shows the global nuclear energy generation capacity in GW.

The other great advantage of nuclear is its perennial availability, unlike wind or solar which are season or time-dependent. It is thus suitable for baseload electricity generation that solar or wind projects are unable to do unless breakthroughs in battery storage technologies come along.

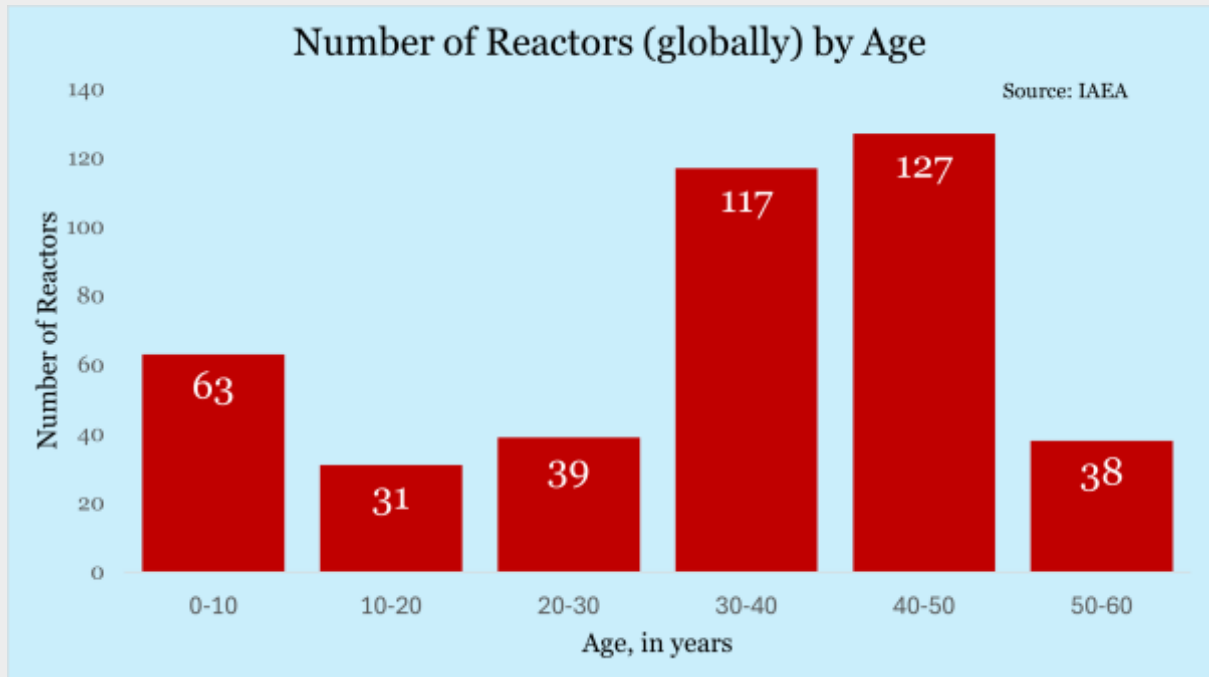


Chart 2 shows the number of reactors worldwide by age.

#### What explains the poor uptake of nuclear energy?

But despite these advantages, there has been a serious lack of enthusiasm for the accelerated deployment of nuclear energy. Only 31 countries in the world use nuclear energy for generating electricity. And barely seven more are working towards joining this club.

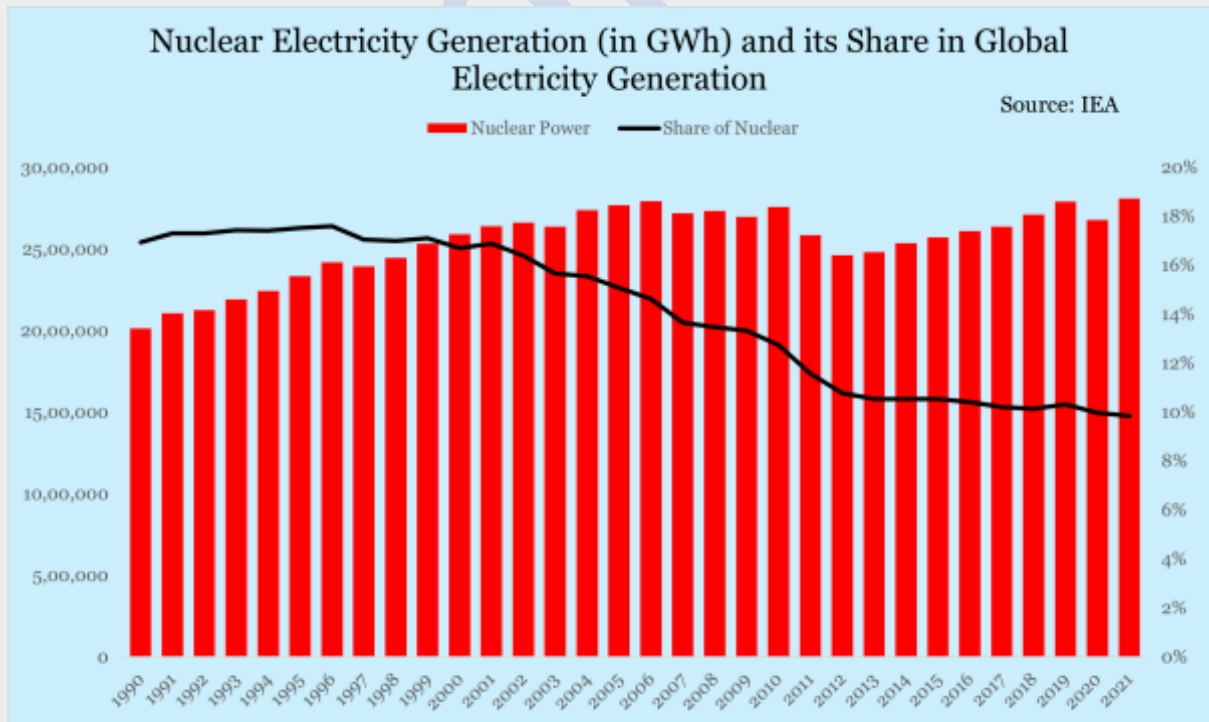


Chart 3 shows the nuclear energy generation (in GWh) and its share in global electricity generation.

The number of operational nuclear reactors has actually come down in the last 20 years, from 437 in 2003 to 411 now, IAEA data shows. The average life of these reactors is more than 31 years, which highlights the fact that few new reactors have come onboard in the last decade. The total installed electricity generation capacity has shown only a marginal increase during this period, from about 360 GW in 2003 to 371 GW now. Nuclear energy accounts for less than 10 per cent of global commercial electricity generation, and its share has been declining for almost three decades now.

Safety concerns are not the only reason for the poor uptake of nuclear energy in recent years, though those would be some of the most important, particularly after the Fukushima accident. Nuclear power also happens to be the costliest electricity right now.

Nuclear reactors require high investments and technology base, take years to build, and have to operate under a variety of regulations and constraints, making them unattractive for countries wanting to quickly ramp up their electricity generation in an affordable manner.

The kind of technology breakthroughs that have driven down the costs of solar and wind in the last decade, thus enabling rapid adoption, have not happened in the nuclear sector. The much-discussed technology of small modular reactors is far from being mature.

### **What is India's position on nuclear energy?**

India, which currently has 23 operational nuclear reactors, does acknowledge the role of nuclear energy in its decarbonisation plan and is planning for a rapid expansion in the coming years, even though the share of nuclear energy in electricity generation is likely to remain extremely modest in the foreseeable future.

The currently operational reactors have a combined installed electricity generating capacity of 7,480 MW (about 7.5 GW). At least ten more reactors are under construction, and the capacity is supposed to triple to 22,480 MW by 2031-32. The share of nuclear energy in total electricity generation capacity is just about 3.1 per cent, among the lowest in countries that do use nuclear energy.

Only Brazil and Iran have a lower share of nuclear energy in their electricity generation mix. Even after expansion, this share is not expected to go beyond 5 per cent.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

### **3. How do internet shutdowns affect the daily lives of citizens, particularly in regions where they are frequently imposed? What are the primary reasons cited by the Indian government for imposing internet shutdowns?**

#### **Why in news?**

For five straight years, India has topped the global list of countries imposing internet bans, with about 60% of all blackouts recorded in the world, between 2016 and 2022 having been in India. State imposed shutdowns in the last decade have cited national security and threats

to public order. However, rights groups have argued that these shutdowns also violate court directives.

### **Internet shutdowns**

The Indian government imposed a total of 780 shutdowns between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2023, according to data collected by the Software Freedom Law Centre (SFLC). Shutdowns flared up during the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019, the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, and the introduction of Farm Bills in 2020. Data shows India shut down the internet for over 7,000 hours in 2023.

Indian States and Union Territories can impose an internet shutdown only in case of a “public emergency” or in the interest of “public safety”, according to the Indian Telegraph Act. However, the law does not define what qualifies as an emergency or safety issue. The Supreme Court, in the landmark *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India* case, reiterated that internet shutdowns violate fundamental rights to freedom of expression and shutdowns lasting indefinitely are unconstitutional. Moreover, Courts have asked governments to make shutdown orders public, a provision poorly complied with, experts have noted.

### **British-era law**

Regionally, Jammu and Kashmir saw the highest number of shutdowns — at 433 — in the last 12 years. The longest blackout in 2023 took place in Manipur from May to December, amid ethnic clashes.

Between 2015 and 2022, more than 55,000 websites were blocked, according to SFLC data. On social media, almost 30,000 social media URLs (including accounts and posts) were blocked between 2018 and 2022, with the majority of requests sent to X.

A commonly cited reason for blocking websites is the escalating threat of cybercrime. As compared to 5,693 cases in 2013, India recorded more than 65,000 cases last year. Cases have risen by almost 434% between 2016 and 2022, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

### **India and global trends**

Global Internet freedom has declined for the 13th consecutive year, and the environment for human rights online has deteriorated in 29 countries, according to the latest Freedom House report. India’s ranking has hovered around the same benchmark in the last three years. This is a dip from 2016 and 2017, when India scored 59 points, to 50 points in 2023.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu