



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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India's Stand on RCEP

Syllabus: GS2/ International Relation/GS3/Economy

In News

- **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** Secretary-General has said that Southeast Asian countries **wants India to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**

What is RCEP?

- It is a **China-led initiative** for a **regional trading bloc** that will comprise one third of the world's population and 29% of the world's GDP.
 - A regional trading bloc is a co-operative union where a group of countries **agree to protect its member nations from imports of other non-members.**
- RCEP is a **free trade area (FTA)** consisting of **10 ASEAN members** and **five of the bloc's dialogue partners** — China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. It was signed in **2020**.

- **Objective:** To give **preferential treatment for trade** between the member countries either through lower tariffs, preferential market access, customs union or free trade in specific sectors.
- **India's Stand:** India decided not to join the RCEP due to concerns about the **potential impact on its domestic industries**, especially agriculture and manufacturing.

Arguments in favor of India not Joining RCEP

- **Concerns about Trade Imbalances:** It raises the possibility of a surge in imports, especially from China, which could lead to trade imbalances.
 - The elimination of tariffs could flood the Indian market with cheaper goods, potentially hurting local industries.
- **Agricultural Concerns:** Increased competition from RCEP countries, particularly in agriculture, could negatively impact Indian farmers.
- **Manufacturing Concerns:** There were fears that Indian manufacturing industries might struggle to compete with more efficient and lower-cost producers in the RCEP region.
- **Trade Remedies and Safeguards:** India sought stronger provisions for safeguard measures to protect domestic industries from a sudden surge in imports. Negotiations on these provisions did not meet India's expectations.
- **Geopolitical Concerns:** Given the ongoing geopolitical tensions with China, there were apprehensions about entering into a trade agreement that included China without sufficient safeguards.
- **Concerns about Services Sector:** India, being a significant services-oriented economy, sought more favorable terms for its services sector. The final agreement did not provide the assurances that India was looking for in this regard.

Arguments Against India not Joining RCEP

- **Increased Market Access:** Joining RCEP would provide India with improved access to the markets of the other member countries, fostering increased trade and investment opportunities.
- **Trade Diversification:** RCEP covers a diverse range of economies, each with its strengths and resources.
 - Being part of the agreement could help India diversify its export destinations and sources of imports, reducing dependence on any single market.
- **Supply Chain Integration:** Joining the agreement could enable India to become part of regional supply chains, promoting efficiency and competitiveness in its industries.
- **Reduction in Trade Barriers:** India could benefit from lower tariffs on its exports, making its products more competitive in the regional market.
- **Enhanced Economic Growth:** Increased trade and investment resulting from RCEP membership could contribute to India's economic growth.
- **Attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** The agreement may make India a more attractive destination for foreign investors looking to benefit from the larger regional market.
- **Political and Strategic Importance:** Joining RCEP could enhance India's geopolitical standing and strengthen its economic ties with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Conclusion

- It's important to note that while India did not join the RCEP in its current form, there were discussions about the possibility of India rejoining the agreement in the future **if its concerns could be adequately addressed.**
- The decision not to join RCEP was a complex one, reflecting the **need to balance economic opportunities with domestic concerns.**

ASEAN

- It is a **regional intergovernmental organization** comprising **ten countries** in Southeast Asia **established in 1967**, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (also known as the Bangkok Declaration)
- **Members:** Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia.
- **Principles and Objectives:** It operates on the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, consensus-building, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and cooperation for mutual benefit.
- **ASEAN Plus Three** includes ASEAN members, China, Japan, and South Korea.
- **The East Asia Summit** involves ASEAN Plus Three countries, along with **Australia, India, New Zealand, Russia, and the United States.**

Source: [TH](#)

Right to Repair Framework

Syllabus: GS3/Indian Economy

In News

- The government is in the process of replacing the 'use-and-throw' design philosophy of products with a '**right to repair**' framework.

About Right to Repair

- It is a framework to **enable consumers** to independently repair and customize their products, even when manufacturers typically mandate the use of their services.
- It aims to harmonize trade between the **original equipment manufacturers (OEMs)** and the third-party buyers and sellers, emphasizing on developing sustainable consumption of products and reduction in e-waste.
- To enable this, OEMs will have to mandatorily share product details with the consumers.
- It originated in the **United States** with the **Motor Vehicle Owners' Right to Repair Act of 2012**, which mandated that manufacturers must furnish the essential documents and information for anyone to repair their vehicles.
- It has gained **recognition** in numerous countries worldwide, including the **United States, United Kingdom, and European Union.**
- The government has called on **112 companies**, such as Maruti Suzuki, Volkswagen, and Philips, to guarantee that consumers retain the ability to repair their products.

Sectors and Categories of product identified for Right To Repair:

- **Farming Equipments:** Tractor parts, Harvesters, Water Pump Motor
- **Mobiles / Electronic Displays / data storage components:** Mobiles, Tablets, Wireless headphones and Ear buds, laptops, Universal Charging ports/cables, Batteries, Servers and Data Storage, Hardwares & Softwares, Printers.
- **Consumer Durables:** Water Purifiers, Washing Machines, Refrigerators, Televisions, Integrated / Universal Remote, Dishwashers, Microwaves, Air Conditioners, Geysers, Electric Kettles, Induction Cooktops, Mixer Grinders, Electric Chimneys
- **Automobile equipment:** Passenger vehicles, 2 wheelers, Electric vehicles, Three Wheelers, Cars.

Need for Right to Repair

- **Reducing E-Waste:** India faces a growing e-waste problem, and promoting repair can help extend the lifespan of electronic devices, reducing the environmental impact of electronic waste.
 - ❖ According to reports, India generated around 1.6 million tonnes of e-waste in 2021-22, of which only a third of it was recycled.
 - ❖ It is also crucial for India to achieve carbon neutrality by 2070 alongside the LiFE movement.
- **Consumer Empowerment:** Allowing consumers to repair their own devices or choose independent repair providers empowers them to make cost-effective choices and promotes consumer rights.
- **Supporting Local Businesses:** Encouraging repair businesses and independent technicians can stimulate local entrepreneurship and create job opportunities in the repair sector.
- **Digital Divide Mitigation:** The right to repair can help bridge the digital divide by making technology more accessible and affordable for a broader segment of the population.
- **Promoting sustainability:** In alignment with India's sustainability goals, it contributes to resource conservation and supports the country's commitment to environmental protection.

Challenges

- **Resistance from Manufacturer:** Due to concerns about intellectual property protection, potential impacts on their revenue streams from repair services, and perceived risks to product safety.
- **Limited Access to Spare Parts:** Manufacturers often control the availability of spare parts, making it difficult for independent repair providers to access components needed for repairs.
- **Data Privacy Concerns:** Repairing electronic devices often involves handling user data, which raises concerns about data privacy and security if not done correctly.
- **Use of Counterfeit Parts:** It can pose risks to product safety and reliability.
- **Environmental Concerns:** While right to repair can help reduce e-waste, there is a need to ensure that repairs are conducted in an environmentally responsible manner, and this may require regulatory oversight.

Way Forward

- Governments should consider enacting a comprehensive right-to-repair framework that mandates manufacturers to provide repair manuals, diagnostic tools, and spare parts to consumers.
- Encourage manufacturers to embrace the right to repair as a consumer-friendly and environmentally responsible practice.
- Raise awareness among consumers about their rights to repair and the benefits of repair over replacement.

Source: LM

Rapid Innovation and Startup Expansion (RISE)

Syllabus: GS3/ Economy

Context

- AIM, NITI Aayog launched a new accelerator called **Rapid Innovation and Startup Expansion (RISE)** to support **Australian and Indian circular economy startups**.

About

- **Objectives:**
 - The RISE Accelerator focuses on startups, small and medium enterprises(SMEs) in India and Australia that are working on circular economy technologies and solutions.
 - The program aims to address shared challenges in both economies, with a particular focus on environmental and climate technology.
- **Program Structure:**
 - The accelerator program, spanning nine months, is designed to assist startups in navigating the early stages of entering a new region.
 - It aims to facilitate connections with the right partners, customers, and talent while building credibility for success in international markets.
 - The first round of the RISE Accelerator program is inviting startups and SMEs with mature technologies and innovative business models related to circular economy practices.
 - Participating startups may be eligible for up to INR 40,00,000 as non-equity grants.
 - The program will be delivered virtually, offering startups flexibility in participation. However, there will be opportunities for travel between Australia and India.



Significance

- **Help Startups:**
 - To gain valuable exposure to both country's market, cultural and regulatory insight.
 - Fast track connections to the right partners and customers.
 - To grow and have benefits of scale.
 - Access to new technologies and research.
- **Strategic Significance:** The program is seen as a means to strengthen diplomatic ties between India and Australia.

Circular economy startups

- These are the businesses that operate within the framework of a circular economy, which is an economic system designed to minimize waste and make the most of resources.
- In a circular economy, products and materials are reused, refurbished, remanufactured, and recycled to extend their lifespan and reduce the overall environmental impact
- They focus on developing innovative solutions and business models that align with the principles of circularity

Source: [PIB](#)

OECD Report on Climate Finance

Syllabus: GS3/Environmental Impact Assessment

In News

- **The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** has released its **assessment report on Climate Finance**.

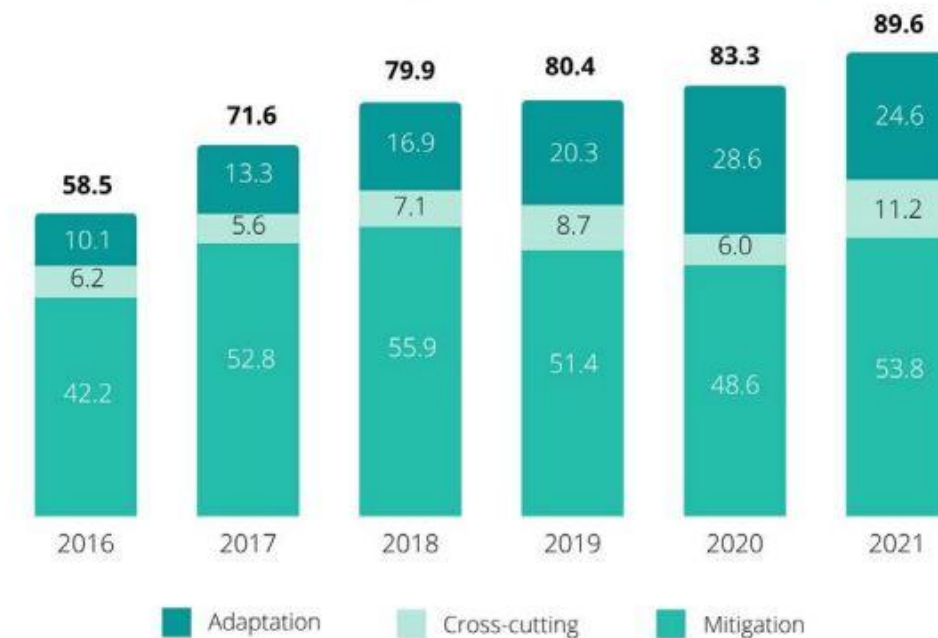
About

- The report presents **aggregate trends of annual climate finance** provided and mobilised by **developed countries for developing countries** for the period **2013-2021**.
- Climate finance refers to the **financial resources provided and mobilized** to support activities that **mitigate or adapt to climate change**.
- At the request of developed countries, the OECD **since 2015** is assessing the progress towards the goal for developed countries **to provide USD 100 billion** of climate finance **annually** for climate action in developing countries under the **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change**.

Major Findings of the Report

- **Target of 100 Billion USD:** Developed countries, for the first time, may have met their overdue target of **mobilising \$100 billion**.
 - The climate finance provided and mobilised by developed countries reached **\$89.6 billion in 2021** which is close to an **8% increase over 2020**.
 - While the amount falls **\$10.4 billion** short of the goal, preliminary data suggests it will be met by **2023**.
- **Financing Trends: Mitigation** continued to represent the **majority (60%)** of total climate finance provided and mobilised as against **27% for adaptation** and **13% for cross-cutting actions**.

Figure 2. Climate theme of climate finance provided and mobilised in 2016-2021 (USD billion)



- **Drop in Adaptation Finance:** Adaptation finance dropped by **\$4 billion (-14%)** in 2021, resulting in a decrease in its share of total climate finance from **34% to 27%**.
- **Financing as Loans: Two-thirds of public climate financing was provided as loans**, it means the conditions attached to such financing could further exacerbate debt stress in poorer countries.
 - So while poorer countries shell out money towards repayment and interest, **the loan is still counted as climate finance** provided by the developed world.
- **Recommendations: By 2025**, developing countries are estimated to need around **USD 1 trillion annually** for climate investments, rising to roughly USD 2.4 trillion each year between 2026 and 2030.
 - To close this investment and financing gap, they will need to harness a range of financial sources across public, private, domestic, and international finance.
 - Although public finance can only contribute a share of these extensive needs, **increased involvement of international providers is key.**

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

- It is an **international treaty** established to address the **global challenge that came** into force in **1994**.
- **Aim: To stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations** in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.

Key features of the UNFCCC:

- **Parties and Membership:** The Convention has **198 members**.
- **Conference of the Parties (COP):** It is the **supreme decision-making body** of the UNFCCC and COP meetings are **held annually**.

- **Funds to Developing Countries:** Industrialized nations agree under the Convention to support climate change activities in developing countries by **providing financial support** for action on climate change-- **above and beyond any financial assistance** they already provide to these countries.
- **Kyoto Protocol:** It was adopted in **1997** and establishes **legally binding emission reduction targets** for **developed countries**.
 - It operates under the framework of the UNFCCC and has its own decision-making body, the **Meeting of the Parties** to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP).
- **Paris Agreement:** Adopted in **2015 at COP21** in Paris, it is an international treaty that builds upon the UNFCCC.
 - It aims to limit global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, with efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
 - The Paris Agreement emphasizes **nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** and encourages all countries to take climate action.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

- It is an international organization that came into force in **1961**, and currently has **38 member countries**. **India is not a member**.
- **Objective:** To promote policies that improve economic and social well-being, fostering economic growth, contributing to world trade, and enhancing the living standards of people in member countries.
- **Headquarters:** Paris, France.

Source: [TH](#)

Facts In News

Sant Mirabai Janmotsav

Syllabus: GS1/ Indian Modern History

In Context

- ‘Sant Mirabai Janmotsav’ is being organized to celebrate the **525th Birth Anniversary of Sant Mirabai**.

About Sant Mirabai

- She was a 16th-century Hindu mystic poet and **devotee of Krishna**. She is a celebrated **Bhakti saint**, particularly in the North Indian Hindu tradition.
- Her devotion was to such an extent that social mores and traditions of the time didn't matter to her and for this, she was even persecuted according to legend.
- Many bhajans are attributed to Mirabai that are still popular today.

Source: [PIB](#)

Earth's E Prime Layer

Syllabus: GS1/ Physical Geography

In News

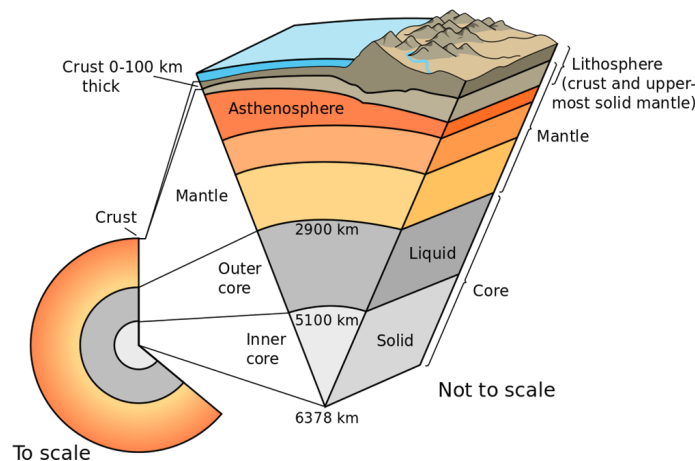
- Recently, researchers have made a groundbreaking discovery of a **mysterious layer** – the **E prime layer** – positioned above Earth's core.

About

- The Research attributed to Earth's surface water reaching the **metallic liquid core which undergoes a transformative chemical reaction**, forming a hydrogen-rich film and dispersing silica crystals, further impacting seismic observations and the global water cycle.
- The Earth's outer core's composition, predominantly **containing iron and nickel**, **plays** a pivotal role in generating Earth's magnetic field. This field acts as a shield, safeguarding the planet from solar winds and radiation.

Earth's Inner Layer

- Earth is composed of four distinct layers, based on their density. The outermost layer is called crust, then comes the mantle, followed by the outer core and finally, the inner core.



Source: TOI

Financial Burden of Cancer

Syllabus: GS2/ Health

Context

- Recent study highlighted the financial burden on cancer patients in India is significant.

Financial impact of Cancers

- **Out-of-pocket expenditure:** Despite the provision of health insurance under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) for cancer patients is exceptionally high.
 - Delays in government hospitals force patients to seek private care, adding to their financial strain.
- **Transportation and Accomodation:** Since cancer care is concentrated in major cities, patients from rural areas have to travel long distances. Accommodation costs in cities add to the financial burden.
- **Government Initiatives to deal with this**
 - Free transport in public buses for cancer patients in Haryana.
 - Concessions on public bus tickets in Kerala.

- Arogya Kosh scheme in Delhi providing free cancer tests in private health centers.
- **Way Forward**
 - Long-term solution involves establishing publicly funded cancer care centers across the country.
 - Further it is required to financially support affected individuals and their families like done for TB patients under Direct Benefit Transfer scheme - Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY).

Do you know?

- **Cancer Burden in India is Increasing**
 - Cancer is the third leading cause of death in the country.
 - It is estimated that by 2040, 20 lakh people a year will be diagnosed with cancer in India.

Source: [TH](#)

SATHEE Portal

Syllabus: GS2/Education

In News

- Entrance exam preparation portal **SATHEE** (Self Assessment Test and Help for Entrance Exams) has been launched by **the Ministry of Education and IIT-Kanpur**.

About

- It is an **open learning platform** available to students **at no cost**.
- The portal uses **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** to interact with students, and can be **customised** to each student's pace of learning.
- The preparation material will be available in **English, Hindi and other regional languages** to prepare for **competitive exams like JEE and NEET**.
- SATHEE hosts lectures and video content prepared by **Professors and students of the IITs**, and the **All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)**.
- The initiative is in line with the **National Education Policy**, with the goal to provide **inclusive, high quality education** even to remote parts of the country.

Source: [TH](#)

International Tropical Timber Council

Syllabus: GS2/ Government Policies & Interventions; GS3/Conservation

In Context

- The 59th International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC) was recently concluded.

About the International Tropical Timber Council

- **About:**

- The IITC is the governing body of the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), which aims to promote sustainable management and conservation of tropical forests.
 - ITTO was established under the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), which was sponsored by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and was ratified in 1985.
- ITTC is a group that meets at least once a year to discuss a wide-ranging agenda.

- **59th ITTC:**

- It was **held in Thailand** to decide the **future of IITC**, whether it should continue and how to proceed.
- It was **aimed** at promoting **sustainable tropical forest management** and the trade of sustainably produced tropical timber.
- The countries agreed to endorse eight projects related to **sustainable forest management and related objectives**.
- The session also approved and adopted a budget of \$7.1 million for the coming financial year 2024-25.
 - The work programme for 2024-25 was also adopted.

Source: TH

International Space Station (ISS) Completes 25 Years

Syllabus: GS3/ Space

Context

- The International Space Station passes 25 years since the first module Zarya launched into orbit on 20th November 1998.
 - It was the brainchild of former **US President Ronald Reagan**, who in 1984 proposed building a permanently inhabited spacecraft in cooperation with a few other countries.

About International Space Station (ISS)

- **Operational Space Laboratory:** The International Space Station, currently the sole operational space laboratory, orbits the Earth at an altitude of approximately **400 km**.
- **International Collaboration:** Operated by a consortium of more than 15 partner countries, the ISS is a collaborative effort involving nations such as **Russia, the United States, Canada, Japan**, and members of the **European Space Agency**.
- **Impressive Orbital Characteristics:** The football-field-sized ISS hurtles through space at a remarkable speed of approximately **28,000 km per hour**.
- **Frequent Orbital Circuits:** Completing one orbit around the Earth in about one and a half hours, the ISS conducts about 16 trips around the world in a single day.

Significance

- **Advancing Scientific Research:** The ISS serves as a unique microgravity environment for scientific experiments, fostering research across various disciplines, including biology, physics, and materials science.
- **International Collaboration:** The ISS stands as a symbol of global cooperation, with over 15 partner countries contributing to its operation. This collaborative effort enhances diplomatic ties and shared achievements in space exploration.
- **Technological Innovation:** The development and maintenance of the ISS necessitate cutting-edge technologies, driving innovation in fields such as robotics, life support systems, and space-based infrastructure.
- **Human Spaceflight Experience:** Serving as a long-term habitat for astronauts, the ISS provides invaluable insights into the challenges and effects of extended human spaceflight, essential for planning future deep-space missions.
- **Educational Outreach:** The ISS offers educational opportunities, engaging students worldwide and inspiring the next generation of scientists, engineers, and space enthusiasts through educational programs and live communication with astronauts.

India's Space Station Plan

- India is aiming to build a **Bharatiya Antariksha Station** (Indian Space Station) by 2035.
 - China has recently joined the list with its **Tiangong space station**.

Source: [TOI](#)

Exercise Vajra Prahar

Syllabus: **GS3/ Defence**

In Context

- The 14th Edition of the Indo-US Joint Special Forces exercise “**VAJRA PRAHAR 2023**” commenced at the Joint Training Node, Umroi, Meghalaya.

About

- Ex Vajra Prahar aims at sharing best practices and experiences in areas such as joint mission planning and operational tactics.
- The first edition was conducted in the year 2010 in India.
- Both forces are going to rehearse a series of Special Operations, Counter Terrorist Operations, and Airborne operations in simulated conventional and unconventional scenarios in mountainous terrain.

Other Military Exercises between India-USA

- **Yudh Abhyas:** Indian and USA armies
- **Cope India:** Indian and USA Air Forces
- **Malabar Exercise:** Navies of India, USA, and Japan.

Source: [PIB](#)

Nitrogen-9

Syllabus: **GS3/ Science & Technology**

Context

- Recent study published in Physical Review Letters, presents strong evidence for the existence of an unusual **nitrogen-9 isotope**.

About

- **Nitrogen-9:** It is an isotope characterized by seven protons and two neutrons, resulting in an unusually high proton-to-neutron ratio. This unique characteristic affects the isotope's stability and decay processes.
- **Experimental Setup to detect:** It involves an energized beam of oxygen-13 atoms directed at a target of beryllium-9 atoms. This collision produced nitrogen-9 atoms with different energy configurations or resonant states.
- **Implications of existence of Nitrogen-9:**
 - The study provides strong evidence for the existence of nitrogen-9, challenging previous interpretations in nuclear physics.
 - The discovery adds a new point to the nuclide chart, opening up possibilities for more isotopes at the limits defined by drip lines.
 - The study opens avenues for further exploration and contributes to our understanding of the fundamental building blocks of matter.

Keywords

- **Isotopes:** Isotopes are atoms of a particular element that differ solely in the number of neutrons they possess.
 - Unstable isotopes, particularly those with an insufficient number of neutrons in relation to protons, are frequently observed.
 - These unstable isotopes have a relatively short lifespan and tend to undergo decay, releasing energy in the process to attain a more stable configuration.
- **Drip Lines and Stability Limits:** Physicists use drip lines to understand stability limits in atomic nuclei. Beyond these lines, the nucleus becomes unstable.
- **Nuclides and Nuclide Chart:** Scientists use a table or chart of nuclides to represent isotopes and their characteristics. The chart is a two-dimensional graph with axes representing the number of neutrons and protons in each atomic nucleus. Each point on the graph represents a nuclide, providing a quick way to understand relationships between isotopes.

Source: [TH](#)