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1. Indian Foreign Minister S.Jaishankar visit to Maldives and Sri Lanka (March 29, 2022)

Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishanker is on an official visit to Maldives and Sri Lanka from 26 to 30 March 2022.

Maldives

- On the first leg of his visit he visited Maldives on 26 and 27 March 2022. He met the Maldives foreign minister Abdulla Shahid and President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.
- The President Solih assured Jaishankar that his government will follow India first policy.

What is India First Policy of Maldives

Maldives like Sri Lanka is a battleground of India and China to increase their area of influence in the region. During the previous regime of president Abdulla Yameen in Maldives, the influence of China became very strong and he followed anti-India policy. He was ousted from power in 2018 and was put in jail on corruption charges.

He is now out of jail and is leading a vehement anti-India campaign "Out India" in Maldives.

The current regime of Solih is considered a close friend of India and is following a "India First Policy".

Highlights of the Jaishankar Visit

- He met the Maldives foreign minister Abdulla Shahid at Addu City , in Maldives.
- India and the Maldives also agreed to mutually recognise the COVID-19 vaccine certificates issued by each other, a move that will facilitate easier travel between the two countries and give a boost to the tourism sector.
- Both countries signed an agreement linking India's National Knowledge Network and the Maldives' Higher Education Network. National Knowledge Network is a multi-gigabit national research and education network, whose purpose is to provide a unified high speed network backbone for educational and research institutions in India. The network is managed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- Jaishankar also inaugurated a police training academy and a drug rehabilitation center built with Indian financial assistance at Addu.

Sri Lanka Visit

Foreign Minister S Jaishankar will be in Sri Lanka from 28 to 30 March 2022. He went to Sri Lanka on the invitation of the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister GL.Peiris.

Highlights of his visit

He met the Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. He assured them of India's help to Sri Lanka which is facing a severe economic crisis.

- Since January, India has extended \$2.4 billion in assistance by way of a currency swap, loan deferment and credit lines for essential imports to help Sri Lanka cope with a stifling dollar crisis and shortages.
- Along with the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa he virtually inaugurated the Jaffna Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka ,built with an Indian grant of \$11 million.
- They also virtually toured a camp in Jaffna where “Jaipur foot “ was being fitted. Jaipur Foot is an artificial low cost prosthetic foot made of rubber and it is made by Bhagwan Mahavir Viklang Samiti, Jaipur.
- **He also attended the Foreign Ministers meeting of the BIMSTEC held on 29 March 2022.**

2. India to provide fresh \$1 billion line of credit to Sri Lanka (March 19, 2022)

The Government of India has agreed to provide another **USD 1 billion** line of credit to Sri Lanka. An agreement was signed between the **State Bank of India and Sri Lankan government** on 17 March during the visit of the Sri Lankan finance minister's **Basil Rajapakse to India.**

- The loan has been given to Sri Lanka to buy **food, medicine and other essential items.**
- This is the second visit of the Sri Lanka Finance minister’s Basil Rajapakse who is the brother of the Sri Lankan President Gotbaya Rajapakse and the Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, since December 2021.
- Sri Lanka's economy is facing a huge economic crisis and ever increasing foreign debt. It has to repay USD 7 billion of foreign loans this year and it is facing an unprecedented food and fuel shortage. It is dependent on imported food and fuel and it has almost no foreign exchange reserves to buy food or fuel. Almost 10% of its external debt is to China.
- The main source of foreign exchange earner for the Sri Lankan economy is tourism. Due to covid situation there has been no flow of international tourists to Sri Lanka in the past two years.

Helping Hand of India

The government of India has provided loans to Sri Lanka to deal with its economic crisis, under its neighbourhood first policy. During Basil Rajapakse's visit to India on December 21, India agreed to help Sri Lanka under its neighbourhood policy. The decision included a four pillar initiative to help Sri Lanka.

The four pillar initiative comprises-

- India will provide loans to Sri Lanka to enable it to purchase food, medicines and fuel from India.
- A **currency swap agreement** to deal with **Sri Lanka's balance of payment issues,**

- An “early” modernisation project of the **Trincomalee oil farms** that India has been pursuing for several years, and
- Sri Lankan commitment to facilitate Indian investments in various sectors

Excluding this loan amount of USD 1 billion, India has provided USD 1.4 billion support to Sri Lanka in 2022. It has provided USD 500 million for import of fuels, deferred repayment of USD 500 billion debt repayment and extended a \$400-million RBI currency swap facility.

Fact File Sri Lanka

- Officially it is called the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka .
- It is a country in the Indian Ocean and is separated from India by the Palk Strait.
- It was called Serendib by the Arabs and the Europeans called it Ceylon .
- It officially became Sri Lanka in 1972.
- It became independent in 1948 from Britain.

Capital : Sri Jayewardenepura

President : Mahinda Rajapakse

Currency : Sri Lankan Rupee

3. National News from 12 Dec to 18 Dec (Dec. 19, 2021)

1. Prime Minister inaugurates Saryu Nahar National Project

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **₹9,800 crore Saryu Nahar National Project in Balrampur district of Uttar Pradesh.**
- The 6,623-kilometre-long canal system will provide assured water for irrigation of over 14 lakh hectares of land to the benefit of about 29 lakh farmers of nine districts in the region – Bahraich, Shravasti, Gonda, Balrampur, Siddharthnagar, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Gorakhpur, and Maharajganj.
- Five rivers—Ghagra, Saryu, Rapti, Banganga, and Rohini—have been interlinked under the project to ensure optimum usage of water resources of the region.

2. Vice President Inaugurates exhibition on ‘Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat’ in Hyderabad

- The **Vice President of India Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu** inaugurated an exhibition on **‘Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat’ (EBSB) in Hyderabad city on 12 December 2021.**
- Exhibition has been **organised by the Regional Outreach Bureau, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.**
- This exhibition would highlight the various interesting aspects of the paired states of Haryana and Telangana like art forms, cuisine, festivals, monuments, tourism spots etc,
- The Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB) programme was launched by the Prime Minister on 31st October, 2015 on the occasion of the 140th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, is a unique initiative by the Government to promote the spirit of

national integration and to strengthen the fabric of emotional bonds between the people of our country.

3. India International Science Festival 2021

- **Theme of the 7th IISF : "Celebrating Creativity, Science, Technology and Innovation for a prosperous India .**
- The Festival is being held at **Panaji, Goa from 10-13 December 2021.**
- IISF 2021 is being organised jointly by the Ministry of Earth Science, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Biotechnology, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, in collaboration with Vijnana Bharati.

4. PM Inaugurates Kashi Vishwanath Corridor

- The Prime Minister inaugurated the **400 metre long Kashi Vishwanath Corridor in Varanasi** connecting the ancient temple to the western banks of the Ganges on 13 December.
- **The ₹800-crore project started with Mr. Modi laying the foundation stone on March 8, 2019**
- The **project cost is Rs 339 Crores** and is spread over a massive area of about 5 lakh square feet.
- The **architect** of the project is **Mr. Bimal Patel.**

5. Swarnim Vijay Parv

- Inaugurated by the Defence Minister Mr. Rajnath Singh, it is a 2-day event commemorating the valor & professionalism of the Armed Forces and their contribution to the liberation of Bangladesh in the Indo-Pak 1971 war, at India Gate Lawns in New Delhi. It marks 50 years of India's victory in the war.
- It will also mark the culmination of the year-long journey of the Victory Flame, the Swarnim Vijay Mashal which, having traversed the length and breadth of the country and collected soil samples from the villages of the gallant soldiers of the war.

6. India's Harnaaz Sandhu crowned Miss Universe 2021

- **Punjab's Harnaaz Sandhu (21) won the Miss Universe 2021 pageant on 12 December 2021,** beating contestants from 79 countries to bring the title back to India after 21 years.
- **Nadia Ferreira** of Paraguay was the first Runners Up.
- The 70th edition of the event was **held in Israel's resort town of Eilat.**

7. Chola Sarva Shakti Policy launched by Equitas Bank for women

- Equitas Small Finance Bank Ltd. has partnered with Cholamandalam MS General Insurance to introduce the Chola Sarva Shakti Policy, a women-specific health insurance policy.
- Any Employed /Self Employed/ Unemployed Woman in the age group of 18 -65 years who is a resident of India can buy the policy.
- The policy is of Cholamandalam General Insurance which will also be sold through the Equitas branch to the bank account holder of the Equitas bank.

- **Equitas Small Finance bank was founded in 2016 with its headquarters at Chennai.**

8. PM addresses depositors in “Depositors First” programme

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi addressed a function on **“Depositors First: Guaranteed Time-bound Deposit Insurance Payment up to Rs. 5 Lakh”** in New Delhi on 12th December 2021. Union Finance Minister Mrs Nirmala Sitharaman , and **RBI Governor Mr. Shakti Kanta Das** were among those present on the occasion.

Highlights:

- Deposit insurance covers all deposits such as savings, fixed, current, recurring deposits, etc. in all commercial banks, functioning in India. Deposits in State, Central and Primary cooperative banks, functioning in States/Union Territories are also covered. In a path breaking reform, Bank deposit insurance cover was enhanced from Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 5 lakh.
- Earlier where there was no time limit for refund, now the government has made it mandatory within 90 days i.e. 3 months. That is, even in the event of a bank failing , the depositors will get their money back within 90 days.
- With deposit insurance coverage of Rs. 5 lakh per depositor per bank, the number of fully protected accounts at end of previous financial year constituted 98.1% of the total number of accounts, as against the international benchmark of 80%.

9. Over half of UAPA detainees are under 30 age

The Union Home Minister Mr. Amit Shah informed the Lok Sabha that:

- Nearly **53% of persons arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 1967**, in 2018, 2019, and 2020 **were below the age of 30.**
- In 2020, the maximum number of arrests under UAPA of persons below 30 years of age was made in Uttar Pradesh (205) followed by Jammu and Kashmir (166), Manipur (113), and Jharkhand (35).

10. Border disputes between States and Union Territory

The Union Home Ministry has informed the Lok Sabha that **11 States and one Union Territory have boundary disputes between them** arising out of demarcation of boundaries and claims and counterclaims over territories.

The following states and UT’s are involved in border disputes-

- **Andhra Pradesh-Odisha,**
- **Haryana-Himachal Pradesh,**
- **Union Territories of Ladakh-Himachal Pradesh,**
- **Maharashtra-Karnataka,**
- **Assam-Arunachal Pradesh,**
- **Assam-Nagaland,**
- **Assam-Meghalaya,**
- **Assam-Mizoram**

Union Home Minister - Amit Shah

Union Home Secretary - Ajay Kumar Bhalla

11. Supreme Court directed all States and UT's to issue ration cards to sex workers

- The **Supreme Court directed States and Union Territories** to immediately start the process of issuing voter ID cards, Aadhaar and ration cards to sex workers across the country.
- The Supreme Court observed that **every person is guaranteed their fundamental rights irrespective of vocation (type of work or a way of life of an individual)**. Depriving any individual of availing the same is an abridgment of their fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.
- The court directed that **authorities can take assistance from the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) and State AIDS control societies**, which would, in turn, prepare a list of sex workers after verifying the information provided to them by community-based organizations.

12. World famous Durga Puja of Bengal Included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list

- The **UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has included 'Durga Puja in Kolkata' on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity during its 16th session, held virtually from 13 to 18 December 2021.**
- Durga Puja is an annual festival celebrated in September or October, most notably in Kolkata, in West Bengal of India, but also in other parts of India and amongst the Bengali diaspora. It marks the ten-day worship of the Hindu mother-goddess Durga from Mahalaya to Vijaya Dashami.

13. President Ramnath Kovind on a 3-day State Visit to Bangladesh

Indian President Ramnath Kovind was on a **3-day State visit to Bangladesh from December 15 to 17, 2021.**

- **Bangladesh is observing the golden jubilee celebrations of its independence from Pakistan in 1971. Notably, President Kovind is the only foreign head of state invited to join the celebrations.**
- He visited the National Martyrs' Memorial and paid tributes to the martyrs of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. The Indian President also planted an 'Ashoka' sapling at the memorial garden.
- Subsequently, he visited the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum, Dhaka where he paid homage to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the nation of Bangladesh.
- The President will also witness the Victory Day parade and attend the Victory Day reception hosted by the President of Bangladesh to mark the conclusion of the "Mujib Borsho (March 17, 2020, to December 16, 2021)" celebrations.

"Swarnim Vijay Varsh Special" Train

- Indian railway has launched a special **"Swarnim Vijay Varsh train"** for the visiting Bangladeshi freedom fighters (Mukti Jodha) and Armed Force personnel.
- The train which will start from Safdarjung station, Delhi will take the guests to Agra and Ajmer.

- The Bangladeshi are visiting India to take part in the events as part of the “Swarnim Vijay Varsh” celebrations organised to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war.

14. Supreme Court approves Bullock Cart Race in Maharashtra

- The Supreme Court has allowed the resumption of the **traditional rural bull racing sport popular as ‘bailgada’, ‘sharyat’, ‘chakkadi’ and ‘shankar path’**.
- **A 2-judge Supreme Court (SC) Bench of Justice A.M. Khanwilkar and Justice C.T.Ravikumar** gave the nod to resume bullock cart races in Maharashtra that were prohibited since 2017, in response to an application filed by the Maharashtra government.
- SC said the amended rules notified by the Maharashtra State under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960 would apply to the conduct of the races until a final decision of SC’s constitutional bench on the 2018 Jallikattu case arrives.

15. Foundation Literacy and Numeracy Index

The report on the **State of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy** in India which highlights the importance of early education years in the overall development of a child was released by the **Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)**.

- **Foundation Literacy and Numeracy refers to basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills of children aged below ten years in India.**
- The index includes these five pillars:

- (a) Educational Infrastructure,
- (b) Access to Education
- (c) Basic Health
- (d) Learning Outcomes
- (e) Governance.

States and UT (Union Territory) were grouped into four categories, i.e. Large States, Small States, Union Territories and North Eastern States.

- Among the Large State Category , **West Bengal (58.95)** topped the ranking followed by **Tamil Nadu (55.49)** and **Maharashtra (53.11)** and Bihar was at the bottom.
- Among the Small States category, the top ranked state was **Kerala (67.95)** followed by **Himachal Pradesh (57.36)** and **Punjab (56.17)**.
- Among the Union Territories category, the top ranked UT was **Lakshadweep (52.69)** followed by **Delhi (50.74)** and **Puducherry (50.08)**.
- **Mizoram (51.64) is the top North-Eastern State.**
- The **poor performing** states in the overall index were **Jharkhand (45.58)**, **Odisha (45.28)**, **Madhya Pradesh (38.69)**, **Uttar Pradesh (38.49)**, **Bihar (36.81)**.

16. National Conference on Women winning against Tuberculosis (TB)

- It was organised by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in New Delhi and Vice President Venkaiah Naidu was the chief guest.
- Speaking on the occasion Vice President, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, called for making people 'key partners' in the campaign for 'TB Mukht Bharat' by 2025.
- Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani stated that in India, women account for nearly 36% of the total TB cases. TB among women often goes unreported as women do not come forward to seek medical care due to societal stigma & lack of awareness.

17. Installed Nuclear Power capacity in India

- The Government of India has informed the Parliament about the status of the Nuclear Power Plant in India.
- The **present nuclear power capacity of 6780 MW is planned to be increased to 22480 MW by 2031.**
- At present the share of nuclear power in the **total electricity generation in the country is about 3.1% in the year 2020-21.**
- Government has given **approval** to the setting up of **six nuclear power reactors of 1650 MW each in technical cooperation with France** which would make it the largest nuclear power generating site with a total **capacity of 9900 MW at Jaitapur in Maharashtra.**

18. CCI revoked Amazon deal with Future group

- The Competition commission of India has revoked its earlier approval to Amazon's 2019 deal with Future Coupons, a subsidiary of Kishore Biyani-led Future Group.
- In 2019, Amazon.com NV Investment Holdings, a direct subsidiary of Amazon.com Inc, signed an agreement with the Future Coupons Private Limited (FCPL) for buying 49 percent of its shares for Rs 1431 crore .
- Later ,Future Coupon Private Limited (FCPL) and the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) complained to the CCI to cancel the approval for the 2019 deal between Amazon and Future Coupons on the grounds that Amazon had "concealed facts" at the time of seeking approval for its investment.
- The CCI held Amazon guilty of concealing the facts and imposed a penalty of Rs. 200 crore on Amazon and cancel the deal
- Future Group is the owner of the popular departmental stores like Big Bazar Central etc.

19. ICMR Approved CoviDelta Diagnostic Kit

- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has approved the CoviDelta diagnostic kit**, developed indigenously by **Pune based GenePath Diagnostics.**
- The kit detects all current variants of COVID19 and detects Delta and Omicron variants in a single test.
- **It was used to detect the presence of the first Omicron case in Pune.**

20. Bill to raise women's legal age of marriage to 21

- The Union Government next week is going to introduce "**The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021**".
- The bill will **amend The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.**

- The bill seeks to **raise the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years** and bring it at par with men.