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1. UGC allows students to pursue two full-time academic programmes simultaneously (April 13, 2022)

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has now allowed students to pursue two degree courses simultaneously.

- Now the UGC has decided to issue guidelines to the students to pursue two academic programs at the same time.
- The UGC said in this context that this decision is in line with the National Policy on Education (NEP) 2022, which emphasises the need to facilitate multiple pathways for learning.
- This will help develop various skills in the students. Online and offline mode will be used for this new provision.
- The UGC Chairman said that the UGC has come up with new guidelines for various physical university courses to help students identify their unique potential. He said that it would provide multidisciplinary and holistic education in all fields.

UGC Guidelines

- A student can pursue 2 full-time academic programs in physical mode, given that the class time of one program does not overlap with that of the other programme.
- Also, not only two courses in physical mode, students can do one course in full-time physical mode either online or in open, distance learning mode.
- In addition, students can pursue one online program with another online program.
- The guidelines will be implemented after an announcement on the UGC website on 13 April 2022.

Part of NEP vision

- The rationale behind the decision to allow students to pursue two academic degrees simultaneously is to help them gain diverse skills, according to the UGC.
- It is also aimed at translating the NEP's vision of breaking down interdisciplinary separations.
- It remains to be seen how the proposal is received by the academia and student community.

2. India-Australia Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircraft (Mpra) Coordinated Operations (April 12, 2022)

A P8I Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircraft of the Indian Navy have arrived at Darwin, Australia. The aircraft and its crew would be undertaking an operational turnaround at Darwin.

- P8 aircraft from both the countries, would be conducting coordinated operations in Anti-Submarine Warfare and surface surveillance, to enhance maritime domain awareness.
- In recent times, increased interaction between the two maritime nations, through bilateral and multilateral exercises at sea, has enhanced inter-operability and fostered bridges of friendship.

- The P8 aircrafts, with their demonstrated long reach, have operated jointly during Malabar and AUSINDEX series of exercises, and have a common understanding of operating procedures and information sharing.
- The maritime waters between Indonesia and Northern Australia is an area of mutual interest to both countries, being a gateway into the Indian Ocean Region.
- Both India and Australia share strategic interests, promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific and rules based order in the region.

3. India US 2+2 ministerial dialogue (April 12, 2022)

India and the United States of America will hold the 4th 2+2 ministerial dialogue in the United States on 11 April 2022.

- The dialogue will be held between **Defence Minister Rajnath Singh** and **External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar** with **US Secretary of State Antony Blinken** and **Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin** respectively.
- India and the United States decided to start 2+2 dialogue during Prime Minister Narendra Modi Visit to the U.S in June 2017.
- The first meeting was held in September 2018.
- India holds 2+2 meeting with Australia and Japan also

In the United States Foreign Minister is called the Secretary of State and the Defence Minister is called the Secretary of Defence.

4. Shehbaz Sharif elected as the new Prime Minister of Pakistan (April 12, 2022)

The Pakistan Parliament has elected the 70 year old Shehbaz Sharif as the 23rd Prime Minister of Pakistan on 11 April 2022. He secured 174 votes in a 342 lower house called the National Assembly. He is the leader of **Pakistan Muslim League (N)**.

- He was elected unopposed as the other candidate, former Foreign Minister Shah Mehmmod Qureshi boycotted the poll after his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, boycotted the voting and staged a walkout.
- Sharif was administered the oath of office by the Senate chairman Sadiq Sanjarani after the Imran Khan supported President Arif Alvi went on a sick leave.
- Shehbaz Sharif is the younger brother of former Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif. He has been three times the Chief Minister of the Pakistani province of Punjab.
- The 100 members of Imran Khan's PTI party later announced their resignation from the National Assembly in protest against the removal of the PTI leader Imran Khan Government. Imran Khan has called for nationwide protests and called for early elections in the country.
- The Imran Khan Government had to resign after a vote of no confidence was passed against the government in Pakistan's National Assembly on 10 April 2022.

- Imran Khan alleged that America wanted to remove him from the office due to his policy of supporting China and Russia and not acceding to the American demand for military bases for operations against Taliban in Afghanistan. America has denied such accusations.
- The Imran Khan government was becoming increasingly unpopular in Pakistan due to the serious economic crisis in the country and rising prices of daily essential commodities.
- No Prime Minister in Pakistan has completed its five year terms. Imran Khan is the only Prime Minister who has to resign after the passage of a no confidence motion against his government.

Important for Exam

Pakistan Parliament Name : **It is called as Majlis e-Shoora**

It consists of two Houses. The Upper House is called the Senate and the Lower House is called the National Assembly.

President of Pakistan : **Arif Alvi**

Capital : **Islamabad**

Currency : **Pakistani Rupee**

5. Shahbaz Sharif elected next Prime Minister of Pakistan (April 11, 2022)

The Parliament of Pakistan (National Assembly) has elected Shahbaz Sharif as the new Prime Minister of the country on 11 April. The political crisis that had been going on for the last few days came to an end after the vote on the no-confidence motion moved against Imran Khan on April 10, in which he was removed from the post of Prime Minister.

Nawaz Sharif's younger brother:

Shahbaz Sharif, nominated as the new Prime Minister of Pakistan, is the younger brother of three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Nawaz Sharif was disqualified as prime minister in 2017.

There were many contenders for the post of Prime Minister:

The session of the Pakistan National Assembly has begun. Opposition candidate and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) president Shahbaz Sharif and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf vice-president and former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi are in the race for the new prime minister's post.

6. Canada made Indian bananas and baby corn accessible to its market (April 11, 2022)

The Negotiations between the National Plant Protection Organizations of India and Canada on the issue of market access for Indian bananas and baby corn have resulted in these items gaining access to the Canadian market.

- In a meeting held between Shri Manoj Ahuja, Secretary (DA&FW) and H.E. Cameron MacKay Canadian High Commissioner on 07.04.22, Canada informed that export of fresh baby corn from India to Canada may begin from April 2022 after updation of directive D-95-28: Plant Protection Import and Domestic Movement Requirements for Corn and the Automated Import Reference System (AIRS).
- Further, based on the technical information provided for fresh banana by India, Canada has approved, banana for entry into Canada with immediate effect.
- This decision of the Government of Canada would immensely benefit the Indian farmers growing these crops and would also enhance India's export earnings.

Boost to India's agricultural exports:

- Along with this, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry informed that India's agricultural exports have crossed USD 50 billion in the year 2021-22 despite the logistical challenges arising out of Corona like high freight rates and lack of containers etc.
- According to the provisional data released by the Directorate General of Commercial Information and Statistics (DGCI&S), agricultural exports grew by 19.92 percent to USD 50.21 billion during 2021-22, the ministry said.

7. Historic agreement between Assam and Meghalaya to resolve boundary dispute (March 29, 2022)

The Assam and Meghalaya government signed an agreement in New Delhi on 29 March 2022 to resolve the border disputes. The agreement was signed in the presence of Union Minister Amit Shah.

- A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Assam Chief Minister **Himanta Biswa Sarma**, and Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad **Kongkal Sangma** to resolve the border dispute between the two states.
- The dispute arose when Meghalaya was created a State in 1972 by dividing Assam. Both the States had different perceptions of their borders and soon both the states started claiming certain portion of area as there's, leading to dispute in 12 locations in the border areas.
- In August 2021, Assam and Meghalaya had formed three committees each to go into the boundary question, following two rounds of talks between Sarma and Sangma during which the states resolved to settle the border dispute in a phased manner.
- The governments of the two states had come up with a draft resolution to resolve their border disputes in six of the 12 "areas of difference" along the 884-kilometre boundary.
- In the six places, there are 36 villages, which cover an area of 36.79 square kilometres. Assam will keep 18.51 square kilometres of land, and will give Meghalaya 18.28 square kilometres of land, according to the proposed recommendations for the 36.79 square kilometres of land.
- The six disputed sectors are Tarabari, Gizang, Hahim, Boklapara, Khanapara-Pillangkata and Ratacherra under the Kamrup, Kamrup (Metro) and Cachar districts of Assam and the West Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi and East Jaintia Hills districts of Meghalaya.

- Apart from Meghalaya, Assam has boundary disputes with Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. All these States, two as Union Territories initially, were carved out of Assam between 1963 and 1972.
- The two Chief Ministers have expressed hope that the remaining six points on border issues will be resolved soon.

8. NITI Aayog and FAO launches a Book : Indian Agriculture towards 2030 (March 29, 2022)

Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Shri Narendra Singh Tomar released a book titled "Indian Agriculture towards 2030: Pathways for Enhancing Farmers' Income, Nutritional Security and Sustainable Food and Farm Systems".

- The book is published by Springer
- The book captures the outcomes of a national dialogue by NITI Aayog and the Ministries of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare; on Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, which was facilitated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.
- Indian Agriculture towards 2030 covers the following themes:
 - Transforming Indian Agriculture
 - Structural Reforms and Governance
 - Dietary Diversity, Nutrition and Food Safety
 - Managing Climate Risks in Agriculture
 - Science, Technology and Innovation
 - Symbiosis of Water and Agricultural Transformation in India
 - Pests, Pandemics, Preparedness and Biosecurity
 - Transformative Agroecology-Based Alternatives for a Sustainable and Biodiverse Future
- The book includes a Foreword by the Hon'ble Vice President of India Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu.

9. Foreign Ministers meeting of BIMSTEC held in Sri Lanka (March 29, 2022)

The foreign ministers of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was held in **Colombo**, Sri Lanka on 29 March 2022.

- It was hosted by the Sri Lankan foreign minister **G.L.Peiris** and was attended by the foreign ministers of member countries.
- The foreign ministers of member countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan India, Maldives ,Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand were present in Colombo while the **foreign minister of Myanmar participated virtually**.
- India was represented by the foreign minister S. Jaishankar.

- The foreign ministers meeting was held to prepare for the BIMSTEC summit meeting which will be held on 30 March 2022.

BIMSTEC

It was set up as Bangladesh, India Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) on 6 June 1997 at Bangkok, Thailand .

- It was renamed as Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation on 31 July 2004 when the first summit meeting was held in Bangkok, Thailand .
- The member countries are Bangladesh, Bhutan India, Maldives ,Myanmar ,Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand .
- The group was formed to promote economic cooperation between the member countries
- **Headquarters : Dhaka, Bangladesh**

10. 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.**