

International Relations This Week: Episode 67

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 visit of the Chinese foreign minister to India, new developments in the India-Maldives relationship, BIMSTEC and other latest developments in IR.

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1. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's Visit to India

- IR experts and practitioners of diplomacy have speculated whether this visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister is a signal that China is reviewing her antagonistic relationship with India after the military clash in Galwan.
- Even after the [border clashes](#), the trade volume between the two countries has remained unaffected and, in fact, it has increased as the Covid pandemic has made India more dependent on China's supply chain. India depends on supplies of pharmaceuticals, electronic goods or telecommunications from China. This dependence has created a trade imbalance between the two countries.
- The recent sanctions on Russia over the [invasion of Ukraine](#) by western countries have provoked China to rebalance its relationship with India. This recent visit is also seen in the backdrop of the Russian-India trade in the present situation. There has been a talk that if Russians have been excluded from using the [SWIFT payment system](#) and dollar payment system for oil, India might reconsider using the rupee-ruble in trade and even oil can be bought using the Chinese currency Yuan. This might help China as it is already trying to create a parallel system of payments with respect to the dollar exchange system.
- But Indian experts and analysts have different views on the Sino-Indian relationship. Hawks believe that China cannot be trusted. The attempt by China to improve trade relations is to create a false sense of security. They suggest that it has occupied territory in Ladakh. And even the tensions continue as patrolling in those areas occupied by China continues. There have been 15 rounds of talks between military commanders and diplomats. But these talks have not made a difference on the ground situation. The situation in Ladakh depends on climate as when winter comes, we see lulls in the situation and once the snow thaws tension increases.

- It is also argued that Wang Yi is not making a special visit. It is a regular visit as he visited Kabul and Islamabad before this visit. Also, China has not recognized the [Taliban](#) regime but supports it on the side because it puts America outside this region. It also leaves India outside as it was not invited to the talks organized by Tehran. The fact remains that the China and AF-Pak triangle remains strong which has security implications for India.
- But Wang Yi was not met by PM Modi; only by his counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and the NSA. India has publicly signalled that it was interested in the normalization of the relationship with China which depends on the normalization of relationships on the border and wants some credible confidence-building measures.
- China sees her national interest only as the Chinese Foreign Minister's visit to India is followed by his visit to Nepal. The only country that he has left during these visits is Sri Lanka. That is because there is a deepening economic crisis in Sri Lanka as it is facing protests over the rising shortages in food and fuel. Such a crisis is laid on China's debt trap on Sri Lanka.
- India has recalibrated its policy towards Sri Lanka by investing 2.5 billion dollars since January 2022. India is not only focusing on Jaffna Tamils but expanding its involvement in other areas like the present economic crisis. For example, it has suggested that Indians could visit Sri Lanka to help with its foreign exchange crisis.

2. Development in India-Maldives Relationships

- Compared to China, Maldives is a small country in the Indian Ocean, close to Sri Lanka and India's Lakshadweep. It is a small spec in the Indian Ocean that is hardly noticed. But like India-China, the Maldives-India relationship has seen great ups and downs. The former President of Maldives was saved by India and ever since there has been a kind of love-hate relationship with India. This attempt was seen as an ability of India to interfere in the Maldives whereby it can either bring stability or destabilize the government.
- Also, the problems like drug abuse and corruption that the Maldives faces internally are seen as resulting from India's interference. India is seen as the reason for many problems in the country; the fundamentalist groups particularly see India as anti-Muslim. The former president, Yamin, who was released recently after he was jailed for corruption charges, is anti-India. He blames India for capturing Maldives' territory. During his term, he had cancelled contracts with Indian companies and granted them to China.
- Despite these problems, the country is important for India for security reasons as terrorists can take shelter in the Maldives. The Maldives has historically been influenced by Islam as the population practises Islam. The rise of Islamic terrorism globally has made it a significant country for India as it is home to the second-largest Muslim population. In the past, it has been observed that arms have been smuggled from the Maldives and used by insurgents in India.
- India has committed half a billion US dollars investment to connect Male with other cities of Maldives. India has built police headquarters and made other investments like giving two aircraft and some coastal boats to the Maldives. All these investments are misinterpreted and seen as hurting the sovereignty of the country.

- India's involvement in the Maldives is as important as with Sri Lanka. It wants a friendly regime in the country and also facilitate Maldivian students to come to India and avail educational opportunities. India can also provide health care facilities and help for the tourism industry.
- The greatest interest that these two countries share is climate change. If the temperature rises, the Maldives might disappear because of the rise of the sea level. There are other areas like fisheries where the two countries can cooperate. That the Indian foreign minister has made the Maldives a priority in its foreign trade is a good sign that such a relationship can broaden.

3. Nepal PM Sher Bahadur Deuba's visit

- Sher Bahadur Deuba assumed power in Nepal after Prasad Sharma Oli was forced to resign having lost a vote of confidence. Oli's party was in coalition with communist parties like Prachanda's Maoist Party.
- After the British defeated Gorkhas in the early 19th century, Nepal continued to be a sovereign state but under the principle of Paramountcy under the British Government. It had to accept a British resident and accept British rule over foreign affairs and currency. The British snatched Sikkim and Darjeeling from Nepal and gained control over Garhwal and Kumaon after the Treaty of Sugauli. But it was a remote area and a kind of a land of history and romance. The British recruited Gorkhas and used them in many wars and also to suppress nationalist movements in India. For example, in 1857. Since then many Nepalese have served in the Indian army.
- There are great affinities between Nepal and India in terms of religion, culture, language, art, and tantra. They have porous borders and shared rivers and traditions. But there are sovereignty issues as Nepal accuses India of using these ties to interfere in Nepal's internal affairs. Even a small issue like birthplace becomes controversial. But Ram Katha unites these two countries since Sita's birth land is of importance to Indians and is believed to be in Nepal. Likewise, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed in 1950 after the Rana autocracy ended led to Indian domination. A lot of tax and excise duties were evaded by Indians. They would locate a factory in Nepal and re-export those materials to India and avoid paying tariffs.
- Likewise, China is seen as interfering in Nepal. Ever since the monarchy ended and the Maoist govt came to power, China's influence has increased. But Nepal has played the Chinese card for centuries. Prithvi Narayan Shah presented Nepal as a 'Yam between two boulders', India and China. It has tried to position itself as a buffer state between India and China and survive happily.
- The fact remains that there has been a divide between the mountainous elites of Kathmandu - the higher caste Kshatriyas, the Gorkhas, and the people of Madhesh who think they have been denied a share in political power. There have been issues regarding the representation of minorities in the constitution. These minorities include tribals like Sherpas, Limbu, Thakali and others.

- This political uncertainty has been used by the Chinese to create influence in Nepal. But Deuba has tried to restore balance with respect to China. He accepted half a million dollars in aid from America. It is going to cut China's influence with the [One Road One Belt](#) initiative.
- India has opposed the use of humanitarian aid for political gains. It has provided aid to Nepal during the earthquake as well as during the pandemic. But China remains a concern for India as it is creating anti-India feelings among the Nepalese. Deuba's visit to India should be an opportunity to take fresh stock of the relationship. Political uncertainty does not bode well for India as it is exploited by China. Nepal is a special neighbour because of shared cultural and geographical ties and efforts shall be made to deepen it.

4. Developments Related to BIMSTEC

- India seems to be giving more significance to the countries that are part of the [BIMSTEC](#). It was seen in Foreign Minister Jaishankar's statement when he said that he would participate physically in the BIMSTEC.
- But there are problems in the member countries of this group. For example, in Myanmar, the military junta has been accused of carrying out the genocide of Rohingyas. It has also sentenced Aung San Suu Kyi to four years and suppressed the democratic movement.
- India has to maintain a balance between the military junta and the democratic movement to further its political interests. But given the peaceful situation in the North East, does India need to be supportive of the Junta or can it criticize it and support the democratic movement?

5. Protests in Bangladesh

- There have been protests in Bangladesh that demand that the killing of millions of Bangladeshis by the Pakistani army during the 1970s should be treated as a genocide like the holocaust is treated in the European theatre.
 - After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the term genocide is getting a lot of currency. The protestors ask why should only European genocides be recognized as genocides. Why cannot this term be applied to all the acts of violence done against any race across history? For example, the extinction of aborigines done in Australia and also the extinction of other races and people in other parts of the world.
 - The parties in Bangladesh who are raising such a demand are sympathetic to India-Bangladesh friendly relationships. This might create trouble between the two countries because there is also anguish against India in Bangladesh because of anti-Muslim violence and laws like the [Citizenship Amendment Act](#) and the National Population Register which are perceived to be anti-Muslim and have raised tensions between the two countries.
 - India can speak loudly against genocide everywhere. But its national interest might make it difficult for it to do so in the present time.
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