

International Relations This Week: Episode 71

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 UK PM's visit to India, developments in the Arctic, the visit of the Mauritius PM and other important developments.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/8ZuCXdVFe6M>

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1. Introduction

- Recently, the Russian Foreign Minister arrived in India for a two-day official visit.
- Besides, the foreign ministers of Britain and Russia also visited India as the Prime Minister seeks to maintain ties with both Moscow and Western nations.
- The most significant visits are from the Prime Ministers of the UK and Mauritius who visited India to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties.
- Let's take a look at the major visits of prime ministers to India amid the [Russia-Ukraine conflict](#) along with some other significant developments.

2. PM Boris Johnson's Visit to India

Context:

- Recently, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, made an official visit to India.
- Boris Johnson is the first British Prime Minister to visit the western Indian state of Gujarat. The visit to Gujarat is significant because a large number of Gujaratis live in the UK and it's the home state of India's PM Narendra Modi.
- Know more about the [India-UK Relationship](#).

Key Takeaways from the Visit:

- During the visit, two memorandums of understanding (MoU) were exchanged on the implementation of the India-UK Global Innovation Partnership and the Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP).
- In the context of the 'Road Map 2030', heightened defence and security cooperation is envisaged.
- The UK is offering support for Atmanirbhar Bharat in all sectors of manufacturing, technology, design and development in defence.
- India commended the United Kingdom's participation in the Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative's (IPOI) Maritime Security pillar and committed to strengthening bilateral ties in the Indo-Pacific area.
- During this visit, the U.K. announced an [Open General Export Licence \(OGEL\)](#) for India.
- The UK has agreed to help India combat threats in the air, space and sea. Both countries have also shared interests in keeping the Indo-Pacific region open and free.

Significant Aspects of PM Boris Johnson's Visit to India:

- **Terrorism:** Prime Ministers of India and Britain expressed "zero tolerance" for [terrorism](#) in all its forms and reiterated their condemnation of the Mumbai and Pathankot terror attacks. They agreed to constitute a sub-group on countering extremism in order to further enhance cooperation between India and the UK.
- **Economic Fugitives:** British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that economic offenders who want to use the UK's legal system to evade the law in India are not welcome in the United Kingdom. India has been pressing the United Kingdom to extradite Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi to face trial in India for their alleged involvement in cases relating to financial fraud.
- **Issue of Khalistan:** India raised the issue of Khalistan with Prime Minister Johnson during this. The UK is sensitive to India's concerns and said that there will be zero tolerance for this issue.

Major Irritants in the India-UK Relations

- **Colonial Legacy:** India's post-colonial engagement with Britain has been riddled with multiple contradictions. India's lingering post-colonial resentments and the UK's unacceptable claim for a special role in the subcontinent generated unending friction. Both India and the U.K. are serious about overcoming legacy issues and engaging in robust dialogues.
- **Ukraine Crisis:** Both the countries stand differently on the Ukraine crisis but Prime Minister Boris Johnson underlined that India and the UK are sticking together and confronting their shared anxieties about the "autocratic coercion" around the world. He highlighted India's stand over the Bucha incident and appreciated India's stand on the Bucha killings. Britain plans to reopen its embassy in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv soon.

- **FTA Negotiations:** During the bilateral talks, PM Modi and PM Johnson held discussions on the ongoing FTA negotiations. Both sides agreed to cooperate on energy, green hydrogen, trade, and defence. The [India-UK FTA](#) is still under negotiations.
- **Domestic Politics of the UK:** Johnson's visit to India to talk trade and diplomacy has been overshadowed by the domestic crisis over whether he is fit to lead the country. His personal standing has plummeted in recent months, primarily over revelations of parties held at his office during lockdowns. Opponents say he misled the British parliament about the events.

Significance of PM Boris Johnson's Visit to India:

- Mr. Johnson's visit to India underscores India's importance in the dynamically changing global order, as India prepares to host a number of foreign leaders in the coming months and to hold the G20 presidency in 2023.

Know more about the [Significance of the British Prime Minister's visit to India in AIR Spotlight](#).

3. Developments in the Arctic

Context:

- Three nuclear-powered missile submarines broke through thick ice and surface in the Arctic Ocean simultaneously, according to a screenshot from footage released by the Russian Defence Ministry in 2021.
- China's growing interest in the Arctic has become a source of concern as the country seeks to expand its military presence in the region.
- Plastic has been discovered inside the bellies of Arctic char, a fish that is an important part of Inuit culture.

Policies of Significant Countries involved in the Arctic Region:

- **USA:**
 - The strategic location of the United States near Russia and neighbouring Canada necessitates the management of a long maritime border with Russia that stretches into the Arctic Ocean.
 - The Arctic Policy of the USA is being shaped by three major factors:
 - **Geopolitical** drivers of great power competition with Russia and China;
 - **Environmental** factors are transforming the Arctic maritime and terrestrial space at rates that scientists are baffled by;
 - **Economic** factors that are strongly linked to global commodity prices.

- These factors, as well as USA's important domestic economic role in providing vital energy, mineral, and fishery resources, drive US policy toward the Arctic.
- **Russia:**
 - Russian interest in the Arctic dates back to the sixteenth century which was fueled by the never-ending search for more resources and secure trading routes.
 - The current Russian posture in the Arctic is integral to the country's overall confrontation with the West, with Europe serving as the primary battleground.
 - The 'Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic to 2035' was approved by Russia in 2020. For the next 15 years, the new policy document defines Russia's Arctic interests, goals, and implementation mechanisms.
 - The Arctic is important for Russia, which sees melting ice as an opportunity for its natural resource-based economy.
- **China:**
 - China's ambitions to play a larger role in the Arctic are likely to exacerbate tensions.
 - At the same time, China is providing funding to Russia for energy exploration in the Arctic, which is facing Western sanctions.
 - Beijing announced plans to build the "Polar Silk Road," an Arctic shipping network, in 2018.
- **Other Countries:**
 - The changing Arctic has also raised political and security concerns.
 - The five Arctic coastal states (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States) discuss Arctic maritime issues exclusively among themselves and seek limited dialogue with other Arctic Council members on issues of common interest.
 - The Arctic states should collaborate more broadly on Arctic issues that qualify as public goods.

Arctic Council:

- The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental organisation whose goal is to promote cooperation among Arctic states and residents. Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States are members of the Arctic Council.
- Their goal is to protect and develop the Arctic region, which is subject to harsh climates and extreme weather conditions.

Know more about [Arctic Council](#).

India's Response

- The major transformation of global shipping routes and increased availability of mineral and hydrocarbon resources is likely to have an immense impact on the geopolitical landscape of the world, including India.

- India's Arctic Policy, released in 2022, fulfils a longstanding need for a clear articulation of a rapidly transforming Arctic.
- The relevance of the Arctic for India can be broadly explained under three categories:
 - Scientific Research, Climate Change and Environment
 - Economic and Human Resources
 - Geopolitical and Strategic

Know more about [India's Draft Arctic Policy](#)

4. Visit of Mauritius PM

Context:

Recently, Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth visited India with an aim of strengthening ties between the two countries.

Key Takeaways from the Visit:

- The agreement for the extension of the US\$ 190 million Line of Credit to Mauritius for the Metro Express was exchanged.
- An agreement was also signed for other infrastructure projects and an MoU on the Implementation of Small Development Projects.
- The PM of both countries inaugurated the Social Housing Project.
- They also laid the foundation stones for a Civil Service College and an 8 MW Solar PV Farm project.

Significance of Visit of Mauritius PM

- India and Mauritius enjoy uniquely close ties, bound by shared history, culture and heritage.
- The upcoming visit will further strengthen the vibrant bilateral ties.
- The recent visit will also help mitigate the climate challenges that Mauritius faces as an island country with India's proactive coordination.
- Know more about the [Significance of the PM's Visit to India - Mauritius Ties](#)

Strengthening India-Mauritius Trade Ties:

- Since 2007, India has been one of Mauritius's most important trading partners and exporters of goods and services.
- In May 2016, India offered Mauritius a US\$ 353 million Special Economic Package for five priority projects.

- The majority of India's exports to Mauritius are petroleum products.
- Pharmaceuticals, cereals, cotton, shrimp and prawns, and frozen boneless bovine meat are among India's main exports to Mauritius, in addition to petroleum products.
- Mauritius' main exports to India include medical/surgical instruments and apparatus, needles, and aluminium alloys, among other things.

Know more about [India-Mauritius Relations](#).

Strategic Significance of Mauritius for India:

- In recent years, several external powers, including China, have made increasing inroads in Africa and Mauritius.
- In 2021, China's Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Mauritius came into effect which will help China expand the Belt and Road strategy in Africa.
- China's growing influence in the region will raise difficult questions for India.
- Thus, India continues to enhance its engagement with the island country of Mauritius in order to counter China and maintain peace and a rule-based order in the Indian ocean.
- Mauritius is a prime example of India's approach to development partnership which is based on the needs and priorities of our partners and respects their sovereignty.

5. Developments in the South Pacific

Context:

Recently, China signed a security pact with the Solomon Islands.

Solomon Islands Deal

- As per the provisions of the agreement, the Solomon Islands can request police and military personnel from China "to assist in maintaining social order".
- It also allows China to make ship visits and use Solomon Islands ports for logistics.
- The agreement is the first of its kind that China has agreed with any country.
- **Know more about [this issue in International Relations This Week Episode 52](#).**

Concerns associated:

- The recent announcement of a new security agreement between China and the Solomon Islands has rattled leaders in the US, Australia and other Indo-Pacific capitals.
- The nations fear it opens the door to a Chinese military presence in the southern Pacific.

- The Solomon Islands had switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China. This was a major win for China which considers Taiwan to be part of its territory and has vowed to retake it at any cost.
- Besides, the deal will also strengthen China's growing presence in the region, thereby threatening the free and open Indo-Pacific.

Know more about [the Solomon Island Deal and its implications on India.](#)

