

International Relations This Week: Episode 84

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 latest developments in Bangladesh, Africa, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and other issues.

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1. Visit of Indonesian President to China

Introduction: Indonesian President Joko Widodo visits China on the first leg of a three-country tour of Asia. This is the first trip by a foreign leader to China since the Winter Olympic Games in February 2022 due to its adoption of an ultra-strict “zero Covid” policy that has limited visits by foreign dignitaries.

Indonesia-China relations:

- The relations between China and Indonesia commenced during the 7th century or earlier. Indonesia was part of the maritime silk road connecting China with the Arab world.
- Both countries established diplomatic relations in 1950 which were suspended in 1967 with the beginning of the capitalist ‘New Order’ in Indonesia. It was revamped in 1990 after Premier Li Peng’s visit to Indonesia on invitation.
- Both are among the largest nations in Asia in terms of both area and population.
- China is the most populous nation in the world, while Indonesia has the 4th largest population. Both nations are members of the G20 and APEC.

Trade relations:

- Trade between both countries is on the rise, especially after the implementation of

ASEAN-China Free Trade Area in early 2010.

- China's growth as a manufacturing factory in the 21st century has led to an increase of foreign investments in the bamboo network, a network of overseas Chinese businesses operating in the markets of Southeast Asia that share common family and cultural ties.
- China is Indonesia's largest trading partner, with two-way trade and inward investment reaching \$110 billion and \$3.2 billion, respectively, last year.
- Inflow of cheap products from China has caused apprehensions about free trade with China in Indonesia.
- China is also the second-largest donor of foreign aid to Indonesia after Singapore.

Geo-Political implications of Indonesia-China relationship:

- Indonesia is a collection of 17500 islands which spreads across the Indian ocean from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to Papua New Guinea. Therefore, Indonesia support is crucial for China's 21st century Maritime Silk Road.
- It is one of the regionally dominant countries in ASEAN and a very resource rich country.
- It has the largest number (about 209 million) of Muslim population in the world, where 87.2% of the population identifies as Muslim. And 5th largest populous country globally.
- Indonesia currently holds the annual presidency of G20.
 - The G-20 is a valued grouping for China, because it includes both developed countries of the West and major middle-income nations such as China, India and Brazil.
 - The 'zero Covid' policy in China is affecting investment in Indonesia and wants China's cooperation to kick start the economy.
- China has also financed and developed several infrastructure projects in Indonesia including Jakarta-Bandung High Speed railway project to create more growth in its economy.
- Indonesia is set to assume leadership of ASEAN. Close relationship with Indonesia might help China in resolving its South China sea dispute with other ASEAN members.

2. Developments in Bangladesh and D8 Summit in Dhaka



2022 Summit in Dhaka

- Business leaders and officials from 08 developing nations met in Dhaka and discussed the road ahead to overcome depleting foreign currency reserves, supply chain disruptions and a growing energy crisis
- They also discussed alternative trade financing such as cross currency swap, barter and blockchain to address their foreign currency reserves vulnerabilities.
- The Group also discussed ways to boost energy security with members such as Iran and Nigeria among the world's top oil producers.

Read more on [Developing 8](#)

Economic crisis in Bangladesh:

- Bangladesh has put in a request for a bailout package of \$4.5 billion after it was severely affected by the high import prices and a fall in exports due to global economic slowdown.
- It is the third in south Asia to seek a financial rescue package from the IMF after Pakistan and Sri Lanka .
- It also has around \$7.5 billion in its Forex reserves.
- It has also been hit by devastating natural calamities. It is estimated that recent floods have caused damage worth \$9 billion to Bangladesh.
- It is also suffering from the influx of Rohingya refugees.

Impact on India:

- From tourism and trade to bilateral relations, the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal may hurt India in multiple ways.
- The evolving crisis in the neighborhood has also given India an opportunity to regain preeminence in regional matters by creating mutually beneficial, people-oriented, regional frameworks for stability and prosperity.
- And in the geopolitical stand-off with China, the importance of maintaining positive influence with India's neighbors cannot be understated.

3. Developments in Africa

Introduction:

- French President Emmanuel Macron recently completed his three-nation tour of African states in the first trip to the continent since winning re-election as he seeks to reboot France's post-colonial relationship with the continent.
- Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, visited several African countries aimed at rallying support for Russia in the Ukraine war.
- US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is also visiting Africa as part of a competition between Russia and Western powers for support from African countries over the war in Ukraine.

Macron in Africa: Renewing relationship with African Continent

- Emmanuel Macron visits Cameroon, Benin and Guinea-Bissau.
- France is working to revive its economic relationship with Cameroon – where French economic influence has been dwindling. In the 1990s, French companies represented 40 % of the economy, whereas in 2021, that figure has dwindled down to 10%.
- Other countries, especially Turkey, China and Russia are emerging in Africa seeking a foothold in areas that France considers part of its sphere of influence.
- There is also a rise in anti-French sentiment in countries like Chad, Mali and the Central African Republic.
- Despite the decline in French investments, it still hosts 200 companies and subsidiaries of French groups, in various sectors such as timber, oil exploitation, agro-industry or distribution.

Sergei Lavrov's visit to Africa:

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited several countries in Africa to strengthen Russia's ties with a continent that has refused to join Western condemnation and sanctions over the Ukraine war.

- Russia is currently the largest exporter of weapons to the African continent.
- Russia also carved a niche selling nuclear technology to developing nations. Zambia, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Egypt and Nigeria are among those in the market for Russian-built nuclear power plants.

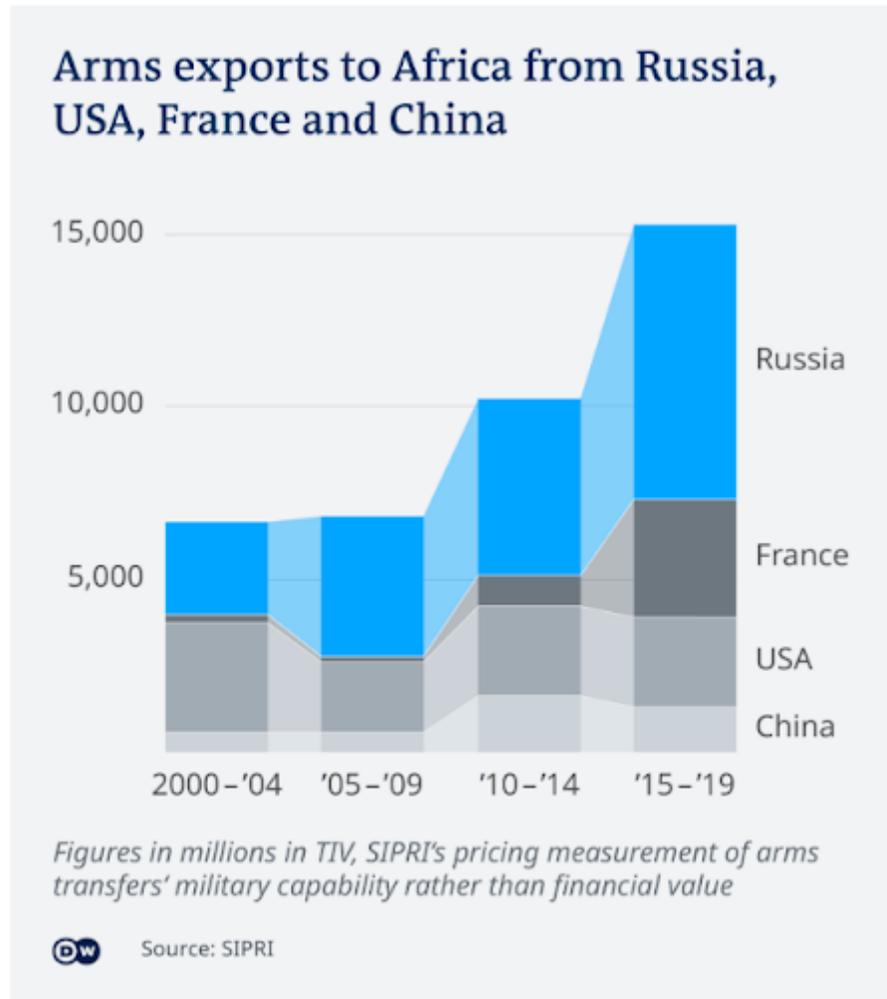


Image Source: Dw.com

Conclusion:

African countries have mutually beneficial relations with both the West and Russia. Many African countries import Russian grain and energy but they also buy Ukrainian grain and benefit from Western aid flows and trade ties. While western countries have blamed Russia for the food and fuel shortage whereas Russia points fingers at Western sanctions for the crisis. With African nations refusing to join block politics, both blocks are seeking to rally African nations on their side as they are one of the largest defense and food importers from these countries. Read about [India-Africa relations](#)

4. Developments in Sri Lanka

Introduction:

- Prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was elected as Sri Lanka's new president by the MPs despite his unpopularity with the public.
- Mr Wickremesinghe is now incharge of leading Sri Lanka out of its economic collapse and restoring order after months of mass protests.
- Sri Lanka's ex-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled to the Maldives and then Singapore after thousands of protesters stormed his presidential residences and other government buildings, calling for his resignation.
- His foremost responsibility is to restore political stability so the country can resume negotiations with the International Monetary fund for a bailout package.
- He also extended a national state of emergency order to avoid any further escalations in mass protests.

5. Monkeypox

Introduction:

- Recently, the World Health Organization has officially declared the global monkeypox outbreak a "public health emergency of international concern, one step below that of a "pandemic".
- Recent outbreak has affected over 14,500 people and killed 03 people in 72 countries.
- European and American countries have reported the highest numbers of cases currently.

What does the declaration as a 'public health emergency of international concern' mean?

- The declaration represents "an extraordinary event, which constitutes a public health risk to other states through international spread".
- The current declaration on monkeypox is "temporary" and reviewed every three months.
- The guidelines direct countries to step up surveillance, spread awareness, and ensure that at-risk groups are not stigmatized.