

## International Relations This Week: Episode 86

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 about India-Bangladesh relations, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and Xi Jinping's visit to Central Asia.

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#### 1. India- Bangladesh relations

##### **Context:**

- Visit of the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina to India.

##### **Major developments during the visit:**

- During the recent visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister, the two countries signed seven agreements including the conclusion of the first water sharing agreement in 26 years, Kushiyara river water sharing agreement.
  - Kushiyara is a distributary of the Barak River (India's National Waterway-16), which flows through the state of Assam in India and into Bangladesh. The agreement will benefit southern Assam in India and Sylhet in Bangladesh (for cultivation of Boro rice in winter season).
- The two countries also launched free trade agreement talks.
  - Bangladesh remains India's largest trading partner in the region. However, there remains a huge trade deficit for Bangladesh creating imbalance in the trade relation. The free

trade agreement (comprehensive economic partnership agreement) will aid both sides.

- The leaders of the two countries inaugurated infrastructure and connectivity projects.
  - Maitree power plant with Indian development assistance
  - Rupsha bridge, Khulna-Darshana railway line link and Parbatipur-Kaunia railway line were the important connectivity projects
- Training and capacity building agreements between the judiciary and railways has been signed between the two countries.
- Agreement for collaboration in science and technology and space sector in particular.

### **Significance of Bangladesh:**

- The two countries share more than 50 trans-boundary rivers and also share a very long land boundary.
- Bangladesh due to its location holds immense significance for India in terms of security scenario in the North east (Insurgency threat) and also for connectivity to India's north eastern states from India's mainland.

### **Challenges to the bilateral relation:**

- Teesta river dispute remains unaddressed and the talks of sharing water between the two countries has been a major irritant between the two countries.
- Increasing influence and footprint of China in Bangladesh.

## **2. Commonwealth- History, relevance and India's ties**

### **Context:**

- The recent death of Queen Elizabeth II has reignited the discussions in certain countries of a possible transition into a Republic, by holding a referendum to remove the British Monarch as their head of state.

### **Commonwealth of Nations:**

- The Statute of Westminster in 1931 marked the founding of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The London Declaration of 1949 established the modern Commonwealth.
- The Commonwealth group consisting of 56 member countries, the vast majority of which are former British colonies.
- 14 Commonwealth countries continue to recognize the monarch as their head of state despite being democracies. They constitute the "Commonwealth realms".

**India and the Commonwealth of Nations:**

- Despite the grouping coming across as a legacy of colonialism and imperialism, India decided to be part of this grouping at the time of its independence as it provided India an opportunity to build links with the group's other member states in Africa, Asia and other regions.
- Also being part of the grouping would help the newly independent country to secure British support in negotiations with the princely states following independence and also neutralize any possible support to Pakistan, which too had already decided to remain in the Commonwealth.
- Hence India had pragmatic economic and political considerations to join the grouping.
- In recent years (mostly post 1991), India has been losing interest in the Commonwealth a clear signal being the decision of Indian leaders to not take part in Commonwealth summit meetings. The Indo-Commonwealth relations has been prone to periodic fluctuations.

**3. Indo-Pacific Economic Framework****Context:**

- Ministerial meeting held in the U.S. on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)
- The U.S. launched the initiative ahead of the Quad summit of May 2022 to counter the increasing economic might of the Chinese in the critical Indo-Pacific region.
- 14 countries are part of this initiative.

**Details:**

- The IPEF is not a free trade agreement but brings together like minded countries to promote economic ties and collaboration.
- There are four main pillars of the IPEF:
  - Fair and resilient trade
  - Supply chain resilience
  - Infrastructure and decarbonisation
  - Tax and anti-corruption

**India's take:**

- India was represented by the Commerce Minister and India has accepted three out of four pillars of the IPEF.
- India has agreed to provisions related to supply chains, tax and anti-corruption and clean energy. India has said it is waiting for "contours to emerge" on one pillar, which deals primarily with trade and commitments to the environment, labour, digital trade and public procurement.

#### 4. Floods in Pakistan: India- Pakistan Disaster Diplomacy

##### Context:

- Massive floods in the Indus river basin has wreaked havoc across Pakistan. The Indian Prime Minister has expressed his condolences for Pakistan. This marks a chance for bringing back normalcy to the India-Pakistan relationship amidst the high strain in the relationship.
- Notably, Pakistan's Finance Minister has pointed out to the possibility of resuming trade to manage food shortage in the country.

##### Disaster diplomacy:

- When countries are faced with natural disasters, countries reach out to other countries with offer of help. This helps improve the bilateral relationship between the countries due to the goodwill.

#### 5. Xi Jinping's visit to Central Asia

##### Context:

- Chinese President Xi Jinping is visiting Uzbekistan for the SCO summit and would also be visiting other Central Asian countries. Notably, this would be his first overseas visit since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak.

##### Significance of Central Asia for China:

- The region is resource rich in terms of minerals.
- The strategic location of Central Asia helps it act as a bridge between Asia and Europe.
- The region is key for China to tackle any extremism in the restive Xinjiang region.

##### Challenges for India vis-à-vis Central Asia:

- Connectivity links remain a concern. No direct land access route to the region.
- Increasing Chinese influence in the region poses serious challenges for India's interests in the region.