

International Relations This Week: Episode 100

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 Vajpayee's role in improving India – China Relations, Zelenskyy's 10-point peace plan, Nepal's new PM and Taliban's treatment of women.

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1. Vajpayee's role in improving India – China Relations

Context: As India – China tensions remain high, it's worthwhile to note how former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee played an important role in the normalisation of Sino-Indian ties. His birthday on December 25th is observed as national 'Good Governance Day'.

Key Details:

- From the 1998 nuclear tests that angered China to initiating a new boundary talks mechanism in 2003, Atal Bihari Vajpayee is regarded here as an architect of India's China policy, according to Chinese scholars.
- Vajpayee first visited China in 1979 as India's Foreign Minister under Morarji Desai's government.
- Although the two countries didn't sign any consequential treaty, the visit, in Vajpayee's words, unfroze the border issue, which had come to a stand-still after the 1962 Sino-Indian war.

- Vajpayee held high-level talks with Chinese leadership, including Premier Hua Guofeng, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping and Foreign Minister Huang Hua and the nations agreed to maintain tranquillity along the border.
- Successive Indian leaders would in the future build upon this to establish a new era in India-China relations.
 - In 1988, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China, initiating the process of normalisation of bilateral relations.
 - In 1992, Indian President R. Venkataraman visited China. He was the first President who visited China since the independence of the Republic of India.
 - In 1993, Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited China. An agreement between the Government of China and the Government of India on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas was signed.

Vajpayee's China Visit in 2003:

- Vajpayee's visit to Beijing in 2003 during his Prime Ministership brought India and China closer.
- It took place against the backdrop of a soured relationship after India conducted nuclear tests in 1998 under his leadership.
 - The Pokhran tests by India were seen as an attempt to secure nuclear deterrence mainly against China and raised concerns in Beijing.
- Both countries signed pacts which improved social, political and economic relations, and these efforts from the former PM ushered in a new era of cooperation between the two countries.
 - The visit also saw an important breakthrough in trade relations — bilateral trade started rising rapidly thereafter.
- India-China signed the Declaration on the Principles and Comprehensive Cooperation in China-India Relations.
- The two sides agreed that pending an ultimate solution, they should work together to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas, and reiterated their commitment to continue implementation of the agreements signed for this purpose, including the clarification of the Line of Actual Control.
- This led to the appointment of Special Representatives (SRs) on both sides for negotiating border disputes.
- Both sides agreed to hold regular high-level exchanges to enhance mutual understanding and expand bilateral relations.
- With a view to deepening their coordination and dialogues on bilateral, regional and international issues, both sides agreed on the need for annual meetings between the Foreign Ministers of the two countries.

- During the visit, India for the first time recognised that “the Tibet Autonomous Region is part of the territory of the People’s Republic of China”.
- In return, China recognised Sikkim as part of India by agreeing to “designate Changgu of Sikkim state as the venue for the border trade market”.
 - This allowed India to reopen the strategic Nathu La Pass in Sikkim in 2006.
 - It is a Himalayan pass at 14,500 feet on the Sino-India border which was once part of the historic 'Silk Route'.
 - The pass was closed for the last 44 years, following the Sino-Indian War.

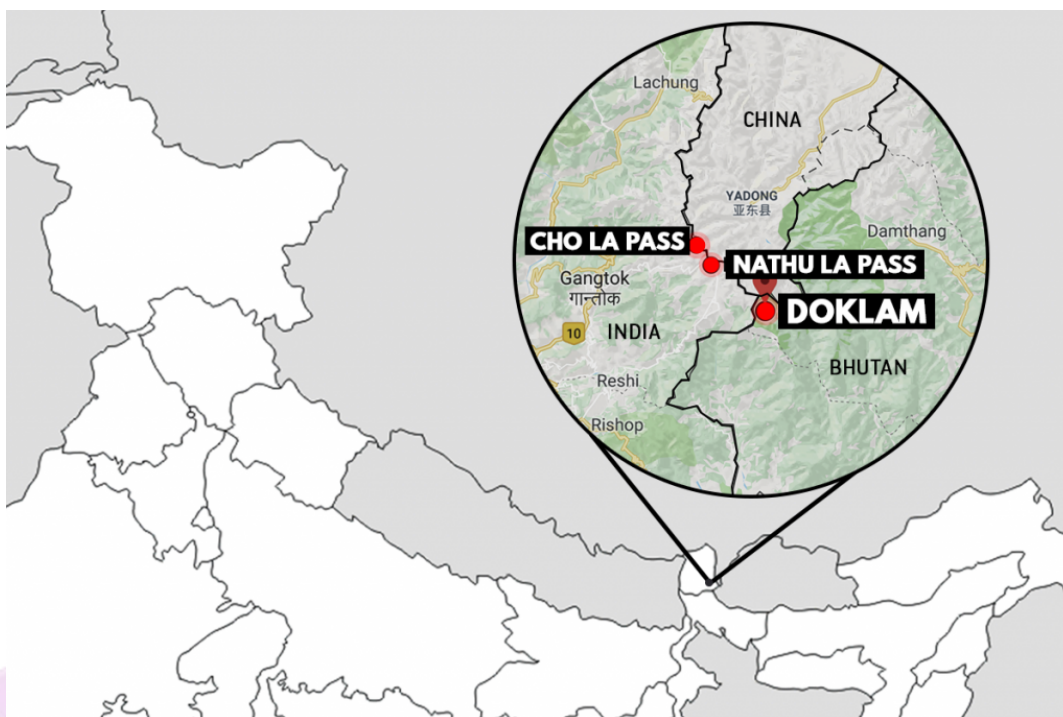


Image Source: The Print

- The two countries signed several agreements on making visa processes simpler, exchange of legal information, export of Indian mangoes to China, establishing cultural centres in Delhi and Beijing, and mutual recognition of academic degrees.

SR Mechanism:

- The Special Representative mechanism on the India-China boundary question (SR/SRM) was constituted in 2003 to "explore from the political perspective of the overall bilateral relationship the framework of a boundary settlement".
- The special representatives engage in dialogue to find the earliest possible fair, reasonable, and mutually acceptable resolutions to the border issue.
- Under the SR mechanism, 22 rounds of talks have been held, the last of which was hosted by New Delhi in December 2020.

- SRM has been successful in reducing border transgressions along LAC along the western border, but does not include eastern borders.
- The talks under the mechanism have been slow and have hit several roadblocks due to bilateral issues.

Conclusion:

The decade between 2000 and 2010 was the best period in India-China relations which saw the flourishing of both large Asian countries as fast-growing economies. Both could not ignore each other and kept aside their tensions and collaborated to work together as emerging developing economies.

2. Zelenskyy's 10-point peace plan

Context: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reached out to PM Modi seeking India's help with his 'peace formula'.

Introduction:

- Zelenskyy first announced his peace formula in November 2022 at the [G20](#) Summit.
- He has been vigorously promoting his 10-point peace plan and has discussed it with U.S. President Joe Biden among others, and has urged world leaders to hold a Global Peace Summit based on it.
- In a telephonic conversation with prime minister Narendra Modi on December 26, 2022, Zelenskyy sought India's help in the "peace formula" in the context of the ongoing [Russia-Ukraine war](#).
- Urging both sides to return to dialogue and diplomacy, PM Modi conveyed India's support for "any peace efforts".
- Russia has rejected Zelenskyy's peace proposal and reiterated that it would not give up any territory it has taken by force, which is about a fifth of Ukraine, which it says it has annexed.

What is Zelenskyy's 10-point peace plan?

- In December 2022, Zelenskyy urged the leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) nations to support his idea for a global peace summit that would focus on the peace plan "as a whole or some specific points in particular".

The 10-point peace plan calls for:

1. Radiation and nuclear safety, focusing on restoring safety around Europe's largest nuclear power plant, Zaporizhzhia in Ukraine, which is now Russian-occupied.

2. Food security, including protecting and ensuring Ukraine's grain exports to the world's poorest nations.
3. Energy security, with a focus on price restrictions on Russian energy resources, as well as aiding Ukraine with restoring its power infrastructure, half of which has been damaged by Russian attacks.
4. Release of all prisoners and deportees, including war prisoners and children, deported to Russia.
5. Restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity and Russia reaffirming it according to the U.N. Charter, which Zelenskiy said is "not up to negotiations".
6. Withdrawal of Russian troops and cessation of hostilities, restoration of Ukraine's state borders with Russia.
7. Justice, including the establishment of a special tribunal to prosecute Russian war crimes.
8. Ecocide, protection of the environment, with a focus on demining and restoring water treatment facilities.
9. Prevention of escalation of conflict, and building security architecture in the Euro-Atlantic space, including guarantees for Ukraine.
10. Confirmation of the war's end, including a document signed by the involved parties.

3. Prachanda sworn-in as Nepal PM

Context: Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" was sworn in as Nepal's new Prime Minister.

Introduction:

- CPN-Maoist Centre Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, popularly known as 'Prachanda' was sworn in as Nepal's new Prime Minister ending the month-long political upheaval, after the elections held in November 2022 failed to produce a clear winner.
- This is Prachanda's third stint as the head of government in the 14 years since Nepal's monarchy was abolished.
- Before joining mainstream politics in 2006, he had led the Maoist revolt in Nepal for over a decade.
- Earlier, Prachanda was in a pre-election alliance with former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba.
- This five-party alliance, led by Deuba's Nepali Congress, was the frontrunner after the elections, winning the largest number of seats in a fractured mandate.
- However, Prachanda walked out of the alliance at the last moment and made an alliance with K P Sharma Oli's Communist Party of Nepal—Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) along with other smaller parties.
- Notably, Prachanda and Oli have struck an agreement to govern the country on a rotational basis, with Oli agreeing to make Prachanda Prime Minister first as per the latter's demand.

China Factor:

- Strong China-Nepal relations have political and strategic implications for India.
- India has had old ties with Mr. Prachanda because he spent a significant amount of time in India during his exile when he fought the forces of the King.
- However, Mr. Prachanda joined hands with Mr. Oli in early 2020 during the [Kalapani dispute](#) between India and Nepal which was triggered after India published a new political map that showed that the regions of Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura were a part of the sovereign Indian territory.
- Delhi views Oli as pro-China, and the coming together of Communist forces to form the government is a turning back of the clock from its point of view.
- China was also instrumental in stitching up the Communist alliance of 2018 between K P Oli and Prachanda — which fell through in 2021.
- Nepal is also a challenge for India on its ethnic question – the controversy between the Nepali and Madhesi (Indian-origin Nepalese of the Terai region) identities.
- In recent years, there has been a gradual shift in China's focus towards South West China such as Tibet, Quinhai, Guansu, Sichuan, Kunming and Xinjiang, which are immediate neighbourhoods of Nepal.
 - Nepal is assuming a new geo-strategic eminence as a buffer zone between India and China, particularly for the defence build-up in the Tibetan plateau, construction of the Karakoram highway, and rail link from Beijing to Lhasa and now from Lhasa towards Nepal and Sikkim.

India's Concerns:

- As close neighbours, India and Nepal share unique ties of friendship and cooperation. With regular exchanges of high-level visits and interactions, the two nations have further elevated their strategic relation.
- From India's perspective, the continuation of the Deuba-led government is the best scenario.
- The Nepali Congress has old ties to India, and under his prime ministership, India-Nepal ties recovered to a great extent from the low to which they had sunk under Prime Minister K P Oli's watch.
- Among the immediate concerns for Delhi would be the fate of the West Seti hydropower project, which the Deuba government awarded to India. Oli's UML had opposed the decision.
 - India will be taking over the 750 MW West Seti hydropower project nearly four years after China withdrew from it, ending a six-year engagement between 2012 and 2018.

4. Taliban's treatment of women

Context: Taliban ban women from working for NGOs.

Introduction:

- Afghanistan's [Taliban](#)-run administration ordered all local and foreign NGOs to stop female employees from working.
- As per the order, female employees of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were not allowed to work until further notice because some had not adhered to the administration's interpretation of the Islamic dress code for women.
- Earlier the administration ordered universities to close to women, prompting global condemnation and sparking some protests and heavy criticism inside Afghanistan.
- These latest restrictions on women are likely to undermine the Taliban-run administration's efforts to gain international recognition and clear sanctions that are severely hampering the economy.

Historical wrongdoings:

- During their first rule in Afghanistan (1996–2001), the Taliban were considered notorious internationally for their misogyny and violence against women.
- Since 1996, women have been forced to wear the burqa at all times in public.
- In systematic segregation sometimes referred to as gender apartheid, women were not allowed to work, and they were not allowed to be educated after the age of eight.
- Women seeking an education were forced to attend underground schools, where they and their teachers risked execution if caught.
- They were not allowed to be treated by male doctors unless accompanied by a male chaperone, which led to illnesses remaining untreated.
- They faced public flogging and execution for violations of the Taliban's laws.
- The Taliban allowed and in some cases encouraged marriage for girls under the age of 16.
- Over the past 12 months, human rights violations against women and girls have mounted steadily.
- Despite initial promises that women would be allowed to exercise their rights within Sharia law—including the right to work and to study—the Taliban has systematically excluded women and girls from public life.
- Women hold no cabinet positions in the de facto administration, which has also abolished the Ministry of Women's Affairs—effectively eliminating women's right to political participation.
- The Taliban has also banned girls from attending school past the sixth grade and barred women from working most jobs outside the home.

- In November 2022, women were banned from gyms, public baths, public parks, and amusement parks.

India's approach to the Taliban regime:

- During the first Taliban regime (1996-2001) India neither extended its recognition nor had a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan.
- India did not engage Taliban officials. It also supported the anti-Taliban resistance at the time.
- After the Taliban's ouster from power, India supported successive governments in Kabul and extended massive aid toward the country's socioeconomic development.
- India provided training to Afghan security forces, police, civilian officials, and teachers. Reflecting its large role in Afghanistan was its sizable diplomatic presence; in addition to an embassy in Kabul, India had consulates in Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Mazar-e-Sharif.
- India shut down its consulates and embassy and evacuated its officials and nationals from Afghanistan during the present Taliban 2.0 regime.
- While no country recognises the Taliban officially, many openly engage with the regime leaders. Many countries, including India, have diplomatic missions.

Implications of India's Policy:

- India's policies have made it more comfortable for the Taliban to continue to rule, while giving shelter to terrorist organisations, including those that target India.
- India's decision to cancel all visas to Afghans, hurt female students seeking an education in India the most.
- Extending aid and developing trade and diplomatic ties with the Taliban regime are seen as ways to prevent it from acting against Indian interests.
- Indian officials have clarified that a diplomatic presence in Kabul does not mean recognition of the regime.

Way Forward:

- The international community must review its current policy towards the Taliban 2.0 regime considering the ongoing repressive decrees by the Taliban.
- Countries can also create platforms outside Afghanistan for non-Taliban Afghan leaders, particularly women who had been elected in the past, to regroup, organise and voice an alternative vision to the current regime.
 - Countries can also curtail engagement with the Taliban, which depends on external assistance to run its government structures.

- India, as a regional leader, must review its “hands-off” approach to the people of Afghanistan who have suffered many deprivations in the past year.