



## The India-UK Relationship

*This editorial is based on [“A New Shine To Old Ties”](#) which was published in Indian Express on 19/04/2022. It talks about the recent developments in India’s bilateral relations with the UK and major irritants in their ties.*

**For Prelims:** India’s UK Relations, Indo-UK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2021, 2030 Roadmap for India-UK Relations, India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, India-UK FTA, UK’s Indo-Pacific Tilt, Brexit

**For Mains:** India’s Bilateral Relations with UK, India-UK FTA and its significance, Challenges in Indo-UK Ties, Strengthening India-UK Ties.

The current status of [India’s relations with the United Kingdom](#) stands in contrast to the entrenched pessimism in the two about their prospects.

The **bitter legacies of colonialism** had made it impossible for the two sides to pursue a sensible relationship in the past. But over the last couple of years, India and the UK have begun a **promising and pragmatic engagement devoid of sentiment and resentment**.

The two bureaucracies have been working on a roadmap to **transform bilateral relations by 2030** under the supervision of the External Affairs Minister of India and his British counterpart.

### What are the Recent Developments on India’s Relations with the UK?

- Despite the challenge posed by the [Ukraine crisis](#), the India-UK relationship has been on an upward trajectory, exemplified by the conclusion of a [Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2021](#).
  - The agreement also established a [2030 Roadmap for India-UK relations](#), which primarily outlines the partnership plans for the bilateral relationship.
- The **UK Foreign Secretary**, in her **recent visit, emphasised** countering Russian aggression and **reducing global strategic dependence** on the country by underlining the importance of **democracies working cohesively to deter aggressors**.
- The Secretary furthered the **talks on defence-related trade** and **deepening cyber security** and defence cooperation between the two countries.
  - **A new joint cyber security programme** is set to be announced to protect online infrastructure in India and the UK
  - India and the UK also plan to hold the **first Strategic Tech Dialogue**, a ministerial-level summit on emerging technologies.
- Additionally, the UK and India have agreed to strengthen their cooperation in the maritime domain as the **UK will join [India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative](#)** and become a major partner on maritime security issues in Southeast Asia.
- In January 2022, India and the UK managed to **conclude the first round of talks for an**

### [India-UK Free Trade Agreement.](#)

- The negotiations reflected shared ambitions to secure a comprehensive deal between the **fifth (UK) and sixth (India) largest economies in the world** as technical experts from both sides covered over 32 sessions encompassing 26 policy areas.

## What is the Role of Other Countries in Enhanced India-UK Relations?

- **US:** The US is **central to transforming the bilateral ties** between India and UK. Its **recognition of India as an emerging global power** and an important partner in the Indo-Pacific diverted the UK's focus towards India.
  - It was the US that first **recognised India's rapidly-growing relative weight in the international system**. By the end of the 20th century, the US unveiled a **policy of assisting India's rise** with a view that a stronger India will serve US interests in Asia and the world.
- **China:** For the US, the strategic commitment to assist India's rise was rooted in the **recognition of the dangers of a China-dominated Asia**.
  - In the last two decades, the UK and China shared excellent bilateral ties; the former **declared a "golden decade" in relations with China** in 2015.
  - However, the [Chinese expansionist policies](#) and US' confrontation with the Chinese power led to the **UK unveiling its own "Indo-Pacific tilt"** with India, again, as an important partner.

## Why is Indo-UK Partnership Important?

- **For UK:** India is a **key strategic partner for the UK** in the Indo-Pacific both in terms of market share and defence, as was underscored by the signing of the Defence and International Security Partnership between India and the UK in 2015.
  - For Britain, a successful conclusion of an FTA with India would provide a **boost to its 'Global Britain' ambitions** as the UK has sought to **expand its markets beyond Europe** since [Brexit](#).
  - Britain has been trying to seize opportunities in the growing economies of the Indo-Pacific to cement its place on the global stage as a serious global actor.
    - The British would be **better able to achieve this goal with good bilateral relations with India**.
- **For India:** The UK is a **regional power in the Indo-Pacific** as it **possesses naval facilities in Oman, Singapore, Bahrain, Kenya, and British Indian Ocean Territory**.
  - The UK has also confirmed £70 million of British International Investment **funding to support the usage of renewable energy in India**, which will help in building renewable energy infrastructure and developing solar power in the region.
  - India has sought **easy market access for Indian fisheries, pharma, and agricultural products** besides **duty concession** for labour-intensive exports.

## What have been the Major Irritants in the India-UK Relations?

- **Colonial Prism:** 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.
  - The **consequences of Partition** and the [Cold War](#) made it harder for the two countries to construct a sustainable partnership.
  - However, the recent regional and international upheavals provide a new basis for mutually beneficial engagement.
- **Pakistan Angle:** Pakistan also has been one of the major obstacles in the bilateral relations of India with Britain. Britain's advocacy of Pakistan has always been a matter of concern for India.
  - Unlike the **US and France, which are committed to an "India first"** strategy in South Asia, the UK remains torn between its new enthusiasm for India and the **inertia of its historic tilt towards Pakistan**.
- **Britain's Domestic Politics:** The domestic dynamics of Britain have also tended to sour ties with India.

- It was a reigning assumption in Delhi that the Labour Party was empathetic to India while the Conservative Party was not. Although this view turned out to be quite the opposite, **antipathy towards India existed in one way or the other.**
  - The Labour Party had become rather hostile on India's internal matters, including on [Kashmir](#).

## How can India-UK Ties be Strengthened?

- A **post-Brexit Britain** needs to make the best of its historic ties; having walked out of Europe, the country needs all the partners it can find and a **rising India is naturally among the top political and economic priorities.**
  - Both India and the UK are serious in **overcoming legacy issues** and **engaging in robust dialogues to promote cooperation** on strategic and defence issues both in the Indo-Pacific as well as at the global level.
  - India meanwhile has become supremely self-assured in dealing with the UK; with the **Indian economy set to become larger than Britain's** in the next couple of years, **it is and shall be no longer defensive about engaging Britain.**
- Britain remains the fifth-largest economy, a **permanent member of the UN Security Council**, a **global financial hub**, a centre of [technological innovation](#), and a leading cyber power. It has a significant international military presence and wide-ranging political influence.
  - India should try harder to **leverage these British strengths for India's strategic benefit.**
  - The **forthcoming visit of the British Prime Minister** to India signifies the importance of **India's role in the dynamically changing global order** as the latter prepares itself to host multiple foreign leaders in the upcoming months and the [G20 presidency in 2023](#).
  - In the upcoming visit, **furthering the negotiations on the India-UK FTA** should be one of the key focus areas.
  - The newer areas of cooperation — namely, **fintech, market regulation, sustainable and green finance, and cyber security** could emerge as the **new frontiers of this engagement.**

### ***Drishti Mains Question***

“New geopolitical realities demand a new strategic vision from the UK and India. It is time to seize the moment and to lay the foundations of a partnership that can respond adequately to the challenges of the 21st century”. Comment.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

**Q. Consider the following countries: (2014)**

- (1) Denmark
- (2) Japan
- (3) Russian Federation
- (4) United Kingdom
- (5) United States of America

Which of the above are the members of the 'Arctic Council'?

- 1, 2 and 3
- 2, 3 and 4

1, 4 and 5

1, 3 and 5

**Ans: (d)**

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