



India-UK Relations

This article is based on [“Could Modi-Johnson meet improve unsteady Indo-Brit ties?”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 04/05/2021. It talks about the new opportunities in India-UK relations.

India and the United Kingdom share a modern partnership bound by strong historical ties. The bilateral relationship that was upgraded to a strategic partnership in 2004 and further strengthened by the successive government.

Recently, the Prime Ministers of both the countries held a virtual bilateral meeting. While the health sector will necessarily dominate the conversation, India and the UK must tap into the enormous potential for bilateral strategic cooperation

India & UK: Both Needing Each Other

- **Rise of India:** India is undergoing a transition that could have significant consequences for the UK. India is already the third largest economy in the world (at purchasing power parity exchange rates) and is expected to become the second largest in the coming decades.
 - As its economy is transformed, its political, military and cultural power is also likely to increase, elevating India to a 21st Century superpower.
 - As Jim O’Neill has written, India will soon be ‘one of the biggest influences on the world’. It is looking for new partners in the global race. This represents a great opportunity for the UK.
- **Re-surg-ing UK:** UK has much to offer India in education, research, civil society and the creative sector.
 - The massive growth of India’s English-speaking middle classes offers a critical window of opportunity for the UK to become a partner of choice for trade, diplomacy, culture and education before India’s next generation turns its attention elsewhere.

Associated Challenges

While India’s relations with countries as different as the US and France have dramatically improved in recent years, ties with Britain have lagged. Following reasons can be cited for this:

- **Colonial Prism:** One reason for this failure has been the colonial prism that has distorted mutual perceptions.
 - Anti-colonial resentment against Britain is always seething barely below the surface among the Indian political and bureaucratic classes.
 - Britain has found it difficult to shed its own prejudices about India.
- **Legacy of Partition:** The bitter legacies of the Partition and Britain’s perceived tilt to Pakistan have long complicated the engagement between India and the UK.

- Further, many former Prime Ministers of India have accused Britain of creating the Kashmir problem.
- **Recent Attitude of the Labour Party:** While there is no way of fully separating South Asian and British domestic politics, India's problems have been accentuated by the British Labour Party's growing political negativity towards India.
 - The Labour Party had become rather hostile on India's internal matters, including on Kashmir.

Way Forward: New Opportunities

- **Managing Pandemics:** Britain and the G-7 are well-positioned to help transform India's internal capabilities as well as benefit from them in the management of future global pandemics.
 - The possibilities range from ramping up vaccine production to the structuring of a strong public health system in India.
- **Converging Trade:** Both countries are on the rebound from their respective regional blocs. Britain has walked out of the European Union and India has refused to join the China-centred Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.
 - Although both will continue to trade with their regional partners, they are eager to build new global economic partnerships.
- **Strategic Convergence:** While remaining a security actor in Europe, Britain is tilting to the Indo-Pacific, where India is a natural ally.
 - India, which is looking at a neighbourhood that has been transformed by the rise of China, needs as wide a coalition as possible to restore a semblance of regional balance.
- **Domino Effect:** As they deepen their bilateral partnership and expand regional and international cooperation, India and the UK may find it easier to manage the irritations over Pakistan and South Asian diaspora politics in Britain.
 - India and the UK are said to be exploring an agreement on "migration and mobility" to facilitate the legal movement of Indians into Britain.

Conclusion

The profound ties of culture, history and language already give the UK a potentially strong foundation upon which to further deepen its relationship with India.

With a whole new set of circumstances, India and Britain should recognise that they both need each other to achieve their larger goals.

Drishti Mains Question

With a whole new set of circumstances, India and Britain should recognise that they both need each other to achieve their larger goals. Discuss.