



Bridging Gaps in India-UK Ties

This editorial is based on [“Crafting a new phase in India-UK defence ties”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 19/01/2024. The article discusses the Defence Minister’s visit to the UK which offers plenty of opportunities for the two countries to forge new plans for a joint naval vision i.e., India-UK Electric Propulsion Capability Partnership. Apart from this, it also delves into different contemporary aspects of India-UK ties.

For Prelims: India-UK Free Trade Agreement Negotiations, [India-UK Free Trade Agreement \(FTA\)](#), [European Free Trade Association \(EFTA\)](#), [Intellectual Property Rights \(IPR\)](#), [Sea Lines of Communications \(SLOCs\)](#), People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), Royal Navy (RN), India-UK Electric Propulsion Capability Partnership, [Indian Ocean Region \(IOR\)](#)

For Mains: India’s Bilateral Relations with UK, India-UK FTAs and its significance

India’s Defense Minister recently visited the United Kingdom (UK) after a 22-year hiatus, marking a significant shift in diplomatic engagements. The past two decades have seen increased opportunities, primarily driven by the growth of Chinese military power and its expansion into the [Indian Ocean](#), posing threats to India and crucial [Sea Lines of Communications \(SLOCs\)](#) vital for the UK.

What are the Recent Developments in 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.
- Both the countries held talks on defence-related trade and **deepening [cyber security](#) and defence cooperation.**
 - 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.**

Why is the 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 a **Free Trade Agreement (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 USD 70 million of British International Investment funding to support the usage of renewable energy in India.
 - Funding will help in building renewable energy infrastructure and developing solar power in the region.
- India has sought easy market access for Indian fisheries, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products besides duty concession for labour-intensive exports.



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

- **USA:** 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 lead to the UK unveiling its own ["Indo-Pacific tilt" with India](#), again, as an important partner.

How can the Indian Navy Benefit from Defence Ties With the UK?

- **Indian Navy's Capability Needs and Strategic Priorities:**
 - The Indian Navy faces capability-related challenges compared to the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).
 - The Defence Minister's visit focused on addressing these shortfalls, particularly by securing key technologies from the UK to bridge the technological gap against the Chinese military.
 - The evolving strategic landscape in the Indian Ocean has prompted both nations to reassess their priorities.
- **Electric Propulsion Technology:**
 - **Establishment of the India-UK Electric Propulsion Capability Partnership:**
 - A joint working group named the "India-UK electric propulsion capability partnership" was established in February 2023.
 - Subsequent discussions focused on transferring technical know-how and sharing the Royal Navy's experience in maritime electric propulsion.
 - **Cooperation in EPT for Aircraft Carriers:**
 - A key aspect of India-UK collaboration involves **electrical propulsion technology** for aircraft carriers.
 - The Indian Navy currently lacks this technology, while the Royal Navy's Queen Elizabeth Class carriers utilise electric propulsion.
 - The partnership aims to leverage British expertise to enhance the Indian Navy's capabilities in this crucial area.
 - While the PLAN faces challenges in adopting this technology, there are indications of its integration into Chinese warships.
 - **Strategic Significance of Electric Propulsion:**
 - The Indian Navy recognizes the importance of not falling behind in acquiring EPT, given its advantages.
 - Warships equipped with this capability **offer a lower acoustic signature and enhanced electrical power generation**, providing a strategic edge in maritime operations.
 - **Progress and Future Plans of the Partnership:**
 - The partnership made progress in November 2023, discussing the integration of EPT into the Indian Navy's future warships.
 - The British committed to train, equip, and assist in establishing the necessary infrastructure.
 - Initial testing is expected on landing platform docks, followed by surface vessels with a displacement of over 6,000 tonnes.

What are the Challenges in India-UK Relations?

- **Historical Contradictions in India-UK Relations:**
 - India's post-colonial relationship with Britain has been marked by contradictions and lingering resentments.
 - The UK's unwarranted claim for a special role in the Subcontinent has fueled continuous friction.
 - The consequences of Partition and the Cold War further complicated efforts to establish a

sustainable partnership between the two nations.

▪ **Pakistan's Influence on India-UK Bilateral Relations:**

- Pakistan has emerged as a significant obstacle in India's bilateral relations with Britain.
 - The UK's historical advocacy for Pakistan raises concerns for India, particularly as it remains torn between new enthusiasm for India and historical ties with Pakistan.
 - Unlike the US and France, the **UK struggles to adopt a clear "India first" strategy in South Asia.**

▪ **Shifting Dynamics in India-UK Relations:**

- Recent regional and international upheavals have provided a new foundation for mutually beneficial engagement between India and the UK.
- The internal dynamics in Britain, encompassing political allegiances and historical prejudices, have at times created tensions in its relationship with India.
 - Instances such as the **Indian demand for the Kohinoor Diamond and the former British Prime Minister's refusal to apologise for the [Jallianwala Bagh Massacre](#)** contribute to these strains.

▪ **Extradition of Indian Economic Offenders:**

- The issue is the extradition of **Indian Economic Offenders** who are presently seeking shelter in Britain and using the legal system to their advantage.
 - Certain economic offenders have long taken shelter under the British system despite clear cut Indian cases against them which warrant extradition.

▪ **Political Affiliations and Internal Matters:**

- Assumptions in Delhi about the Labour Party's empathy and the Conservative Party's antipathy towards India have proven to be misguided.
- The Labour Party, traditionally perceived as sympathetic, has displayed hostility towards India, particularly on internal matters such as **Kashmir**.
 - This unexpected shift in political dynamics adds complexity to the overall India-UK relationship.

What Steps can be Taken to Improve the India-UK Relations?

▪ **Migration and Mobility Partnership:**

- Implementation of the **migration and mobility partnership** "covering movement of students and professionals as well as irregular migration keeping in view the UK's new skills based immigration policy" is the need of the hour.
 - This should include a **young professionals scheme** to allow 3,000 young Indian professionals to come to the UK each year.

▪ **Cooperation on Climate Change:**

- Strengthening bilateral dialogues and partnerships on **climate change** is required. This includes the ministerial-level energy dialogue and the joint working groups on climate, power and renewables.

▪ **India-UK Health Partnership:**

- Countries need to expand the "breadth and depth" of the **India-UK health partnership** to enhance global health security and pandemic resilience and show leadership on **antimicrobial resistance (AMR)**.
 - They should also promote healthy societies and strengthen both our health systems through increased collaboration on clinical education, health worker mobility and digital health.

▪ **UK-India Science and Innovation Council:**

- Starting a biennial ministerial **UK-India science and innovation council** to set the agenda for the two governments' science, research and innovation collaborations will improve relations.
 - Aligning with wider-shared priorities and delivering in partnership the UK Science and Innovation Network in India is much needed.

▪ **Collaboration at WTO:**

- Both countries must deepen cooperation at the **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** on "shared goals, including restoring confidence and trust in the multilateral system".

▪ **India-UK Civil Nuclear Cooperation:**

- Reaffirming the desire to strengthen India-UK civil nuclear cooperation, including the UK's "renewed collaboration" with India's Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership can

promote ties.

Conclusion

The Defence Minister's recent visit to the UK signifies a pivotal moment in India-UK relations, highlighting the evolving strategic landscape. The threat posed by China's military expansion, particularly in the Indian Ocean, has prompted both nations to collaborate on addressing India's defence technological gaps. **The focus on electric propulsion technology, a key area of cooperation, is crucial for India to maintain maritime technological parity with China.** Despite historical challenges, including legacy issues and geopolitical complexities, both countries recognise the imperative of forging closer ties in the face of shared security concerns.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the evolving dynamics of India-UK relations, emphasising recent developments, strategic imperatives, and collaborative initiatives, particularly in defence and maritime technology.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question

Prelims:

Q1. We adopted parliamentary democracy based on the British model, but how does our model differ from that model? (2021)

1. As regards legislation, the British Parliament is supreme or sovereign but in India, the power of the Parliament to legislate is limited.
2. In India, matters related to the constitutionality of Amendment of an Act of the Parliament are referred to the Constitution Bench by the Supreme Court.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (c)

Q2. 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'?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3
- (b) 2, 3 and 4
- (c) 1, 4 and 5
- (d) 1, 3 and 5

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q1. The judicial systems in India and the UK seem to be converging as well as diverging in recent times. Highlight the key points of convergence and divergence between the two nations in terms of their judicial practices. **(2020)**

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