

India-UK Bilateral Relations

Why in news?

The Labour party won in the recent UK elections, which throws up new challenges and opportunities for the India-UK relationship.

What are the pillars of India-UK relations?

- **Historical connections** - The *British East India Company* established control over India in the 18th century, culminating in British Crown rule after the 1857 rebellion.
- The colonial period profoundly *impacted India's socio-economic and political landscape*.
- **Political relations** - At the International Atomic Energy Agency's general conference in 2022, *India backed AUKUS* although it was opposed by Russia and China.

Aukus, is a trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific region between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

- The UK government commits to *support India's permanent membership of United Nations Security Council*.
- **Trade relations** - As of 2023, the *UK is India's 14th largest trade partner for goods* and 3rd for services, while India is the UK's 12th largest overall trading partner.
- India is the second largest foreign investor in the UK.
- The *Joint Economic and Trade Committee* (JETCO) was inaugurated aimed at boosting two-way bilateral investments.
- **Defence** - *India is among the top importers* of UK defence equipment.

Exercise Name	Military	Frequency
Ex Ajeya Warrior	Army	Biennial
Ex Konkan	Navy	Annual
Ex Cobra Warrior	Air Force	-
Ex Indra Dhanush	Air Force	-

- **Education** - It is an important pillar as envisaged under *India-UK Roadmap 2023*, which was released in 2021.
- Since 2025-16, number of first year enrolment of Indian students in the UK universities have been increasing.
- Under *UK-India Education and Research Initiative* (UKIERI) launched in 2005, Britain's universities collaborate with Indian partners and send UK students to India.
- **Science** - *Science and Innovation Council* (SIC), is the apex body to review overall bilateral scientific cooperation between the two countries.

- It is being held once in two years alternatively in India and the UK.
- **Health** – India-UK bilateral cooperation in mitigating the effects of Covid-19 Pandemic has been significant.
- UK-based AstraZeneca and Serum Institute of India had developed *Covishield vaccine*.
- **Climate change control** – The *India-UK Green Growth Equity Fund* is attracting institutional investments into India's renewable energy, waste management, electric mobility, and environmental sectors.
- **Nuclear cooperation** – In 2010, both nations signed a *Civil Nuclear Cooperation Declaration* to promote and facilitate nuclear trade and collaboration between their scientific institutions.
- **People to people connect** – The *Migration and Mobility Partnership (MMP) Agreement* was signed in 2021 to allow swift movement of working professionals.
- In 2022, *Young Professional Scheme* was announced to provide 3000 visas every year to graduates to get 2-year visa to live and work in either country.
- **Diaspora** – The UK has a large Indian diaspora of 1.864 million as per 2021 Census and forms *3.1% of the total population of UK*.
- As per the census, 3.7 Lakh persons holding Indian passport.

In 2024, as many as 26 Indian-origin UK politicians have been elected to the new UK parliament, including outgoing UK PM Rishi Sunak.

What are the challenges in India-UK relations?

- **Historical legacy** – Legacy of British colonial rule in India creates a backdrop of *distrust and historical grievances* that can occasionally influence diplomatic relations.
- A Parliamentary Standing Committee of India noted in its report to seek the *return of Kohinoor diamond*, which is currently embedded in the crown of British monarch.

*The 108-carat **Kohinoor diamond** was presented to the then British monarch, Queen Alexandra, in 1850 after the Anglo-Sikh wars, in which Britain gained control over the Sikh empire in the then undivided Punjab.*

- **Trade imbalances** – There are *issues in concluding a Free Trade Agreement* between the two countries.
- **UK's protectionist measures** – They have stringent labour and environmental standards for bilateral trade.
- **BREXIT challenge** – Changes in visa and immigration policies may impact the mobility of Indian professionals and students.
- **Frictions in foreign policy** – Differences in foreign policy, especially regarding *issues like Russia, China, and climate change* lead to different stances in global arena.
- **Climate issues** – India will likely face *tougher negotiations on climate* from a Labour government, which has repeatedly cornered the Tories for deviating from the UK's 2030 net zero goals.
- **Controlling extremists** – There are increased activities of *anti-Indian elements in the UK*.

What lies ahead?

- **Use post-Brexit opportunities** - It opens the potential for enhanced bilateral trade agreements with the UK, while also requiring adjustments to new trade and investment conditions.
- **Strengthen economic ties** - Promote a balanced trade relationship by addressing trade imbalances and reducing barriers.
- Encourage mutual investment opportunities and create conducive environments for businesses.
- **Promote strategic dialogue** - High-level strategic dialogues to manage and align divergent foreign policy interests.
- It should also focus on areas of common interest such as regional stability and global governance.
- **Improve visa and immigration policies** - This may facilitate easier travel for students, professionals, and tourists.
- **Enhance cultural ties** - Foster people-to-people contacts through cultural exchanges, educational programs, and tourism initiatives.
- **Collaborate on global issues** - Strengthen counter-terrorism efforts through intelligence sharing and joint operations.
- Support joint research and innovation in *green technologies and climate adaptation strategies*.

References

1. [Economic Times| New challenges and opportunities in Indo-UK ties](#)
2. [HCILondon| India-UK Relations](#)