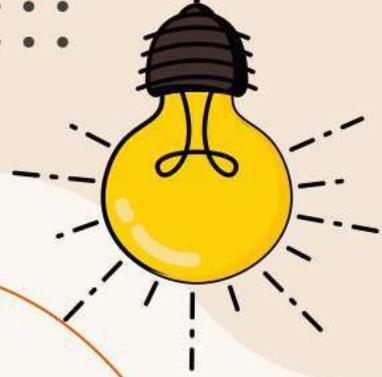




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27. Strong bilateral ties between like-minded nations such as India and Australia will remain critical to shaping the Indo-Pacific security architecture. Analyse.

Introduction

The bilateral relationship between Australia and India has changed recently. People-to-people contacts, rising number of Indian students attending Australian universities for higher education, increasing travel and tourism, and developing sports ties, particularly cricket, have all contributed significantly to the improvement of bilateral ties between the two nations. Despite this, Australia and India's strategic relations continue to fall short of expectations.

Bilateral ties between India-Australia

- **S&T:** An Australia-India Strategic Research Fund (AISRF), which was established in 2006, supports scientists in India and Australia to collaborate on leading-edge research.
- AISRF consists of India Australia Biotechnology Fund; India-Australia Science & Technology Fund; Grand Challenge Fund and Fellowship Schemes.
- **Economic and commercial ties:** In 2018–19, there was \$30.3 billion bilateral trade between India & Australian goods and services.
- **Defence:** Both parties signed a Strategic Partnership and an Agreement on Civil Nuclear Cooperation in the area of defence and security.
- **Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA):** The economic relationship, already robust, could potentially be transformed if the promise of the new Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) is realized.
- **Strategic:** The India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit, attended by the Hon. Prime Minister of India, launched the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Critical to shaping the Indo-Pacific security architecture

- **Quad:** India and Australia are also members of the recently formed Quad, also comprising the US, and Japan, to further enhance cooperation and develop partnerships across several issues of common concern.
- **Regional forum:** In addition to being founder members of the United Nations and participating in regional organisations like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the ASEAN Regional Forum, both countries are also members of the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations.
- **Freedom of navigation** is a requirement, according to the Australian foreign policy blueprint, for the stability and openness of the Indo-pacific. Both nations have an interest in upholding international law, particularly as it relates to maritime security and freedom of navigation.
- The idea of a “**free and open Indo-Pacific**” with a rules-based order and open market economies is shared by Australia and India.
- **Concerns over China's assertiveness** and forceful foreign policy have forged a deeper relationship between the two democracies. Both have an interest in the idea of an Indo-Pacific area that is free, open, inclusive, and governed by laws.
- **FIPIC:** In the South Pacific, Australia's Pacific Step Up and India's Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) strengthen their partnership.

Way Forward

- Australia and India should renegotiate the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) in order to enhance trade and market access.
- There is a need to address the gaps in India and Australia's educational collaboration, as well as the related concerns of attacks on Indian students.
- It is also necessary to promote and publicise Australia's New Colombo Plan, which promotes Australian undergraduates to study in Indo-Pacific nations in general and India in particular.

Conclusion

There are strategic differences between Australia and India, but they are outweighed by their shared interests. The time has come for a sincere assessment of these differences and contemplation on how to develop a better bilateral strategic partnership. The Australian government issued an India Economic Strategy last year that outlined the economic relationship's flaws and proposed avenues for advancing it.