

INDIA - AUSTRALIA BILATERAL RELATIONS

I. OVERVIEW

- 1) The India-Australia bilateral relationship has undergone evolution in recent years, developing along a positive track, into a strategic partnership. The two nations have much in common, underpinned by shared values of a pluralistic, Westminster-style democracies, Commonwealth traditions, expanding economic engagement and increasing high level interaction. The long-standing people-to-people ties, ever increasing Indian students coming to Australia for higher education, growing tourism and sporting links have played a significant role in further strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries.
- 2) The **historical ties** between India and Australia started immediately following European settlement in Australia from 1788. All trade to and fro from the penal colony of New South Wales was controlled by the British East India Company through Kolkata. India and Australia established diplomatic relations in the pre-Independence period, with the establishment of India Trade Office in Sydney in 1941. The end of the Cold War and simultaneously India's decision to launch major economic reforms in 1991 provided the first positive move towards development of closer ties between the two nations. With the passage of time, the relationship gained momentum towards a strategic relationship, alongside the existing economic engagement.
- 3) **India-Australia Strategic Relationship:** With the changing global scenario, Australia has come to look at India as an important partner in promoting regional security and stability. This led to upgradation of bilateral relationship to a '**Strategic Partnership**', including a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in 2009. Over the years an array of institutional mechanism has been put in place to promote bilateral co-operation. Bilateral mechanisms include high level visits, Annual Meetings of Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue, Joint Trade & Commerce Ministerial Commission, India-Australia '2+2' Foreign Secretaries and Defence Secretaries Dialogue, Defence Policy Talks, Australia-India Education Council, Defence Services Staff Talks, Energy Security Dialogue, JWGs on different issues etc.
- 4) **Australia's White Paper on Foreign Policy** released in November 2017 sees India in the front rank of Australia's international partnerships. It says, "Beyond an increasingly important economic relationship, our security interests are congruent, particularly in relation to the stability and openness of the Indian Ocean. Both the countries have common interests in upholding international law, especially in relation to freedom of navigation and maritime security".

II) POLITICAL INTERACTION

- 5) **Visit at the level of HoS:** President of India visited Australia on 21-24 November 2018. It was the first ever visit of the President of India to Australia. During the visit, Australian Prime Minister announced support to its India Economic Strategy's priority recommendations, including to take measures to increase Australian investment in India from A\$10 billion to 100 billion by 2035. Five MoUs, which also included MoU on cooperation in Disability sector and MoU between Invest India and AUSTRADE to promote bilateral investment, were exchanged during the visit. Rashtrapati's visit to Australia was preceded by the visit of Governor General of Australia to India in March 2018 to attend the founding conference of the International Solar Alliance.
- 6) **Prime Ministerial Visits:** The two-way Prime Ministerial visits in 2014 built significant momentum in the bilateral relationship. Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott visited India from 04-05 September 2014, During the visit, four Agreements/ MoUs on **Civil Nuclear Cooperation**, Sports, Water resources and Skills were signed. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited Australia for G20 Leaders' Summit at Brisbane in November 2014, followed by bilateral visit from 16-18 November 2014. During the visit, he addressed a joint sitting of both the Houses of Parliament, the first by an Indian PM. **Framework for Security cooperation between India and Australia** and five other Agreements/MoUs on Social security, Tourism, Arts & Culture, Sentenced persons and combating Narcotics were signed on this occasion. **Former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull** paid a State

Visit to India from 09-12 April 2017. Six bilateral agreements / MoUs on Cooperation in combating International terrorism & transnational organized crime, Health and Medicine, Sports, Environment, Climate and Wildlife, Civil Aviation society and Space technology were signed during the visit. **Prime Ministers of both the countries had met twice during 2019** - on 29 June 2019 on the margins of G20 Summit in Osaka and on 04 November 2019 on the margins of EAS in Bangkok.

- 7) **Foreign Ministers' Meeting:** Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue (**FMFD**), the central mechanism for advancing the bilateral agenda, is held annually, alternatively in India and Australia. Foreign Minister Ms Julie Bishop visited India on 18-19 July, 2017 for the annual FMFD in New Delhi. **Foreign Minister Marise Payne visited India on 08-09 January 2019 and again on 15-16 January 2020** to participate in the Raisina Dialogue. She also held bilateral meetings with EAM and NSA during her India visit. External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar met his Australian counterpart Senator Marise Payne four times for bilateral meetings in 2019 - on 10 July 2019 on the sidelines of Commonwealth Foreign Ministerial Meeting in London; on August 02 2019 on the sidelines of ASEAN related meetings in Bangkok; on 26 September 2019 on the sidelines of UNGA in New York and 23 November 2019 on the sidelines of the G20 Foreign Ministers meeting in Nagoya, Japan.
- 8) **Other Recent Ministerial visits:** A number of high-level delegations at the Ministerial level visited Australia during the last two years. Minister of Health & Family Welfare Shri J. P. Nadda visited Australia from February 18 to 21, 2018 to participate in the Inaugural Meeting of the Global Digital Health Partnership in Canberra and International Digital Health Symposium in Sydney. Minister of Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, Shri Suresh Prabhu visited Canberra and Sydney from June 24 to 26, 2018 for the 15th India-Australia Joint Ministerial Commission, which was held on 25th June 2018 in Canberra. Shri Prakash Javadekar, Minister for Human Resource Development visited Australia from June 28 to July 03, 2018 to participate in the 4th meeting of Australia-India Education Council. Minister of State for Home Affairs Shri G. Kishan Reddy visited Melbourne on 07-08 November 2019 for attending 'No Money for Terror Ministerial Conference'. A high-level delegation led by Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Raosaheb Patil Danve visited Australia from 14-21 December 2019 in pursuance of a collaborative project on consumer protection.
- 9) Australia's Minister for Resources and Northern Australia Matt Canavan visited India on 26-29 August 2019 where he met with his Ministerial counterparts and resource industry leaders. Australia's Education Minister Den Tehan led a delegation of senior leaders from the education sector to India from 19 - 21 November 2019 and held meeting with Minister for Human Resource Development Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'. He also co-chaired 5th Australia-India Education Council meeting along with his Indian counterpart in New Delhi.
- 10) **India-Australia '2+2' Foreign Secretaries and Defence Secretaries Dialogue:** India and Australia agreed in 2015 to hold annual meetings of Foreign and Defence Secretaries (2+2) to enhance foreign policy and security cooperation; The 3rd Dialogue was held in New Delhi on 09 December 2019.
- 11) **India-Australia-Japan Trilateral Dialogue:** The inaugural Secretary-level trilateral talks between India, Australia and Japan was held in New Delhi in June 2015. The second Foreign Secretary level trilateral talks were held in Tokyo on 26 February 2016 and the third took place in Canberra on 29 April 2017. The 4th India-Australia-Japan Trilateral Dialogue was held in New Delhi on 13 December 2017.
- 12) **Indonesia-Australia-India Trilateral Dialogue:** The 1st Indonesia-Australia-India Senior Officials' Strategic Dialogue was held in Bogor, Indonesia on 27th November 2017. The second dialogue in Canberra on September 21, 2018 and the 3rd in New Delhi on 19 November 2019.
- 13) **Other recent Important Bilateral Mechanisms Talks:** The sixth round of **India-Australia Dialogue on East Asia**, which is held at senior official level, was held in Canberra in June 2018. On 01 November 2018, India and Australia held bilateral **consultations on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament issues** in Canberra. **Defence Policy Talks** were held on 14 March 2019. JWG on Tourism was held in Sydney on 15 April 2019. The senior officials-level **Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism** met in Canberra on 24 May 2019. The 3rd **India-Australia Bilateral Dialogue**

on **Global Cyber Issues** was held in New Delhi on 04 September 2019. **5th India-Australia Maritime Dialogue** was held in New Delhi on 19 November 2019.

- 14) India and Australia co-operate in various **multilateral fora**. **Australia supports India's candidature in an expanded UN Security Council**. Both India and Australia are members of the Commonwealth, IORA, ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia Pacific Partnership on Climate and Clean Development, and have participated in the East Asia Summits. Both countries have also been cooperating as members of the Five Interested Parties (FIP) in the WTO context. **Australia is an important player in APEC and supports India's membership of the organisation**. In 2008, Australia became an Observer in SAARC.

III) BILATERAL ECONOMIC AND TRADE RELATIONSHIP

- 15) The India-Australia economic relationship has grown significantly in recent years. India's growing economic profile and commercial relevance to the Australian economy is recognized, both at the federal and state level in Australia. As part of its efforts to develop strong economic relationship with India, the Australian side accepted some recommendations of the **India Economic Strategy**, prepared by Australian Think Tank, to define a pathway for Australia to unlock opportunities offered by Indian Economic growth. The strategy aims for a clear exposition of the kind of relationship Australia should aspire to have with India out to 2035. The paper was released on July 12, 2018. The Paper identifies ten key sectors (Education as flagship sector; Agribusiness, Resources and Tourism as lead sectors; Energy, Health, Financial Services, Infrastructure, Sports, Science & Innovation as Promising Sectors) and ten states in India (Andhra Pradesh, Delhi NCR, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, UP and West Bengal) where Australia should focus efforts. During the Rashtrapati's visit to Australia in November 2018, Australia's Prime Minister announced the response of the Australian government to the IES Report providing in-principle support to the Strategy's 20 priority recommendations, as well as agreeing to an initial round of measures under an ongoing implementation plan. Government of India has also tasked CII to prepare an **Australia Economic Strategy Paper (AES)**, which is expected to be released in 2020.
- 16) **India-Australia Joint Ministerial Commission**: **India-Australia Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC)** was established in 1989 to enable interaction at a Government and business level on a range of trade and investment related issues. JMC meetings are held regularly. Minister of Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, Shri Suresh Prabhu visited Canberra and Sydney on 24 -26 June 2018. He co-chaired the 15th India-Australia Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC), which was held on 25 June 2018 in Canberra, with Australian Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment. In Canberra, the Commerce Minister called on Prime Minister. He also had extensive bilateral meetings with the Treasurer, Agriculture & Water Resources Minister and Foreign Minister. In the second leg of his visit, the Commerce Minister addressed representatives of about 25 Australian Superfunds in Sydney on 26 June 2018. Australia's Trade Minister Simon Birmingham is scheduled to visit India on 23 February 2020 for the next round of JMC.
- 17) **Bilateral Trade**: India is the 5th largest trade partner of Australia with trade in goods and services at A\$ 29 billion representing 3.6% share of the total Australian trade in 2017-18, with export at A\$ 8 billion and import at A\$ 21 billion. Overall trade increased 13.1% on yoy basis. While imports increased 9.7% on yoy basis, export increased by an impressive 23.3% although on a lower base. India's main exports to Australia are Refined Petroleum, medicaments, Railway vehicles including hover-trains, Pearls & Gems, Jewellery, made up textile articles, while our major imports are Coal, copper ores & concentrates, Gold, vegetables, wool & other animal hair, fruits and nuts, lentils and education related services. The two countries are also discussing a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).
- 18) **India-Australia CEO Forum** is a mechanism for business from both nations to engage directly on ways to build the bilateral trade and investment relationship (It was established in 2011 and revitalised in November 2014) . The Forum includes heads of Indian and Australian business from a broad range of sectors, including energy and resources, agribusiness, financial sector, telecommunications, IT, education and pharmaceuticals. **The last meeting (CEO Dialogue) was held in Sydney in November 2018 during the visit of Rashtrapati to Australia.**

IV) CIVIL NUCLEAR CO-OPERATION

- 19) A Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement between the two countries was signed in September 2014 during the visit of the Australian Prime Minister to India. The agreement came into force from 13 November 2015. The Australian Parliament passed the “Civil Nuclear Transfer to India Bill 2016” on 01 December, 2016 which ensures that Uranium mining companies in Australia may fulfil contracts to supply Australian uranium to India for civil use with confidence that exports would not be hindered by domestic legal action challenging the consistency of the safeguards applied by the IAEA in India and Australia’s international non-proliferation obligations. It also ensures that any future bilateral trade in other nuclear-related material or items for civil use will also be protected.

V) DEFENCE CO-OPERATION

- 20) Former Raksha Mantri Shri A. K. Antony paid the **first ever official visit by an Indian Defence Minister to Australia** during 04-05 June 2013. Recently in November 2019, Defence Ministers of both the countries held bilateral meeting in Bangkok on the sidelines of the ADMM plus.
- 21) During the visit of India's Prime Minister to Australia in November 2014, both sides decided to **extend defence cooperation** to cover research, development and industry engagement and agreed to hold regular meetings at the level of the Defence Minister, conduct regular maritime exercises and convene regular service-to-service talks. As a result, the then Australian Defence Minister Mr. Kevin Andrews visited India during 01-03 September 2015 for bilateral talks. Our CNS Admiral RK Dhowan visited Australia during 02-07 October 2015 for bilateral talks, attended Sea Power Conference 2015 in Sydney and signed a **Technical Agreement on White Shipping Information Exchange**. Defence Policy Talks and Service to Service Staff talks are also held regularly.
- 22) The first-ever **Bilateral Maritime Exercise, AUSINDEX 15**, was conducted in Visakhapatnam (the Bay of Bengal) in September 2015. The second bilateral maritime exercise, **AUSINDEX 2017** was conducted off the coast of Fremantle, Australia during 17-19 June 2017 in which three Indian Naval Ships participated. **AUSINDEX 2019** was held in the Bay of Bengal in April 2019. In 2018, Indian Air Force participated for the first time in **the Exercise Pitch Black** in Australia from 27th July – 17th August. INS Sahyadri participated in **Kakadu**, the biennial Exercise of the Australian Navy held from 30th August to 15th September 2018, in which 27 nations participated. The 4th edition of **AUSTRAHIND** (Special Forces of Army Exercise) was held in September 2019.

VI) AGRICULTURE, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

- 23) **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**. The fund, where each side contributes equally, supports large-scale research projects designed to deliver practical solutions, focussing on energy, food and water security, health and the environment. **Joint Committees on S&T and Biotechnology** have been established to administer the Fund. The Australian side is also cooperating in our **Clean Ganga Project** as agreed during visit of our PM to Australia in 2014. Secretary (Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation) led a delegation to Australia during 19-25 June 2016 for bilateral cooperation on water resource management, including discussion on Ganga Rejuvenation. A four-member delegation led by Shri U. P. Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation visited Canberra for attending 4th India-Australia JWG Meeting on July 11, 2018.

VII) RESOURCES AND ENERGY SECURITY

- 24) **Shri Piyush Goyal, the then Minister of State (I/C)** for Coal, Power and New & Renewable Energy, accompanied by a business delegation, visited Australia during 08-11 February 2016 to participate in the **India-Australia Energy Security Dialogue**, jointly chaired by him and Minister of Resources, Energy and Northern Australia Mr. Josh Frydenberg. He also held bilateral talks with Mr. Andrew Robb, the then Minister for Trade and Investment, NSW Premier Mr. Mike Baird and attended the five Roundtable events on Energy Security and renewable energy issues. Shri Goyal again led a

delegation to Australia in October 2016 for bilateral discussion with Federal Minister for Resources Mr. Matthew Canavan and addressed the Roundtable events on Clean Energy renewables and LNG.

- 25) **A Joint Working Group on Energy and Minerals** was established in 1999 to expand bilateral relationship in the energy and resources sector. **The 8th JWG meeting** held in New Delhi in June 2013. As energy is one of the central pillars of economic cooperation, both sides agreed during the visit of our Prime Minister to Australia in November 2014 to cooperate on transfer of clean coal technology and welcomed Australia's desire to upgrade the Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad. **The 9th JWG meeting** in Brisbane in June 2015, provided the opportunity to discuss resources and energy policy developments and reforms, including opportunities and challenges in mining; petroleum and gas; power; new and renewable energy, as well as challenges in skills, science and innovation and infrastructure. The JWG also concluded Research agreement on beneficiation between CSIRO and NMDC and MoU on cooperation and development between CSIRO and ISM, Dhanbad.
- 26) During her visit to India in July 2017, Foreign Minister Ms Julie Bishop signed a framework agreement for Australia to join the **International Solar Alliance**, led by the Governments of India and France. In December 2017, the Australian government formally ratified the agreement.

VIII) EDUCATION, SPORTS, ART AND CULTURE

- 27) The **Joint Working Group on Education** between the two countries has identified several key areas for co-operation, including collaborative research in education policy, student exchange programmes, capacity building in vocational education and distance learning in higher education. The number of **Indian students currently enrolled for studying in Australia** is around 90,000. Under the **New Colombo Plan** of Australian government, Australian undergraduates have studied and completed internships in India.
- 28) **Australia-India Education Council meeting**: Shri Prakash Javadekar, Minister for Human Resource Development (HRM) visited Australia from June 28 to July 03, 2018 to participate in the 4th meeting of Australia-India Education Council (AIEC). Australia's Education Minister Den Tehan led a delegation of senior leaders from the education sector to India from 19 - 21 November, 2019 and held meeting with Minister for Human Resource Development Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'. He also co-chaired 5th Australia-India Education Council meeting along with his Indian counterpart in New Delhi.
- 29) Australia has also agreed to help in establishing a world class **Sports University in India**. Secretary (Sports) Sh. Rajiv Yadav led a delegation to Australia during 07-11 October 2016 for study and discussion with Australian Sports University for setting up National Sports University in India. A MoU on Cooperation in **Sports** was signed during visit of former PM Turnbull to India in April 2017. A MoU in the field of **Tourism** was signed between the two countries during the visit of PM Modi to Australia in November 2014.

IX) CONSULAR COOPERATION

- 30) The **Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) and the Extradition Treaty** between India and Australia, which were **signed in June 2008**, have been ratified by both the Governments, and have entered into force on 20 January 2011. A **Joint Working Group on Visas, Passports, and Consular Matters** was established during the visit of Foreign Minister Stephen Smith to India in September 2008. Regular meetings of the JWG are held, with the last **5th India-Australia JWG** taking place in Canberra during 20-21 October 2015. Issues relating to Bio-metric, Border Management and illegal migration, Extradition, MLAT, Surrogacy, Visa etc are part of the discussion between the two nations. India and Australia signed a **Social Security Agreement** on the eve of our PM's visit to Australia in November 2014. The Agreement has been ratified by both countries and came into force with effect from 1 January 2016.

X) INDIAN COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA

- 31) The Indian community in Australia continues to grow in size and importance, with the population of nearly half seven lakhs. India is one of the top sources of skilled immigrants to Australia. There is a

constant flow of students and tourists from India. The number of Indian students continue to grow with approximately 90,000 students presently studying in Australian universities. India is now the third largest source of immigrants to Australia, after UK and New Zealand and the largest source of skilled professionals for Australia. The growing significance of the community is reflected in the large-scale celebration of Indian festivals in Australia, especially Deepawali.

XI) FUTURE PROSPECTS OF BILATERAL RELATIONS

- 32) In coming years, the overall relationship between India and Australia will continue to grow and has the potential to assume greater prominence. The prospects for bilateral relationship are recognised in both countries as strategically useful, economically productive and aligned with each other's new agenda. The several commonalities and closely aligned values in principles of democracy, liberty, the rule of law, human rights, freedom of speech, free press and multiculturalism serve as a foundation for a closer co-operation, multifaceted interaction and enhancement of bilateral relationship.

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