

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**❖ **The India-Australia relationship: Strategic and trade ties; the China factor**

➤ **CONTEXT:** After a visit to the cricket stadium in Ahmedabad with Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese tweeted about the fierce but friendly sporting rivalry between the two nations.

- Albanese, the first leader of his country to make a bilateral visit to India since Malcolm Turnbull in 2017.
- The first in-person India-Australia Annual Summit will be held on 10-3-23.

➤ **Historical perspective**

- The India-Australia bilateral relationship has been underpinned by the shared values of pluralistic, Westminster-style democracies, Commonwealth traditions, expanding economic engagement, and increasing high-level interaction.
- Several common traits, including strong, vibrant, secular, and multicultural democracies, a free press, an independent judicial system, and English language, serve as the foundation for closer co-operation and multifaceted interaction between the two countries.
- The end of the Cold War and beginning of India's economic reforms in 1991 provided the impetus for the development of closer ties between the two nations. The ever-increasing numbers of Indian students travelling to Australia for higher education, and the growing tourism and sporting links, have played a significant role in strengthening bilateral relations.
- With the passage of time, ties evolved in the direction of a strategic relationship, alongside the existing economic engagement. In recent years, the relationship has charted a new trajectory of transformational growth. With greater convergence of views on issues such as international terrorism, and a shared commitment to a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region, the two democracies have taken their cooperation to plurilateral formats, including the Quad (with the United States and Japan).

➤ **Strategic ties**

- In September 2014, Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott visited India, and in November 2014, Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to make an official visit to Australia after Rajiv Gandhi in 1986. He also became the first Indian PM to address a joint sitting of the Parliament of Australia.
- At the India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit in June 2020, Modi and Prime Minister Scott Morrison elevated the bilateral relationship from the Strategic Partnership concluded in 2009 to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).
- Modi and Morrison spoke by phone on three occasions in 2021, and met in person in Washington DC and at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow. At the 2nd India-Australia Virtual Summit in March 2022, several key announcements were made, including on a Letter of Intent on Migration and Mobility Partnership Arrangement to foster the exchange of skills, and a Letter of Arrangement for Educational Qualifications Recognition to facilitate the mobility of students and professionals.
- Prime Ministers Modi and Albanese met thrice last year. There has been a series of high-level engagements and exchange of ministerial visits in 2022 and in 2023. The External Affairs Minister travelled to Australia on February 18, and his Australian counterpart Penny Wong visited from February 28 to March 3. Australia's Education Minister Jason Clare also visited.

➤ **China factor**

- Ties between Australia and China were strained after Canberra in 2018 banned Chinese telecom firm Huawei from the 5G network. Later, it called for an inquiry into the origins of Covid-19, and slammed China's human rights record in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. China responded by imposing trade barriers on Australian exports, and by cutting off all ministerial contact.
- India has been facing an aggressive Chinese military along the border. India and Australia have been assessing the Chinese challenge since 2013.
- In a speech at the Centre for Policy Research in 2022, former Australian envoy Peter Varghese said: "China's abandonment of hide and bide, its ambition to become the predominant power in the Indo-Pacific if not beyond, its use of economic coercion and its desire to recreate the Middle Kingdom where harmony was hierarchy with China at the top: all of this is leading other countries to balance and constrain China. And India is seen as an important element in these strategies."
- He also added "both Australia and India support a rules-based international order", and that they are partners "in seeking to forge regional institutions in the Indo-Pacific which are inclusive, promote further economic integration, and can help to manage the tensions as economic growth across the region shifts strategic weight and relativities". The countries' participation in Quad is an example of their convergence of interests, based on shared concerns.

➤ **Wide cooperation**

- **Economic cooperation:** The Economic Cooperation Trade Agreement (ECTA) (the first free trade agreement signed by India with a developed country in a decade) entered into force in December 2022, and has resulted in an immediate reduction of duty to zero on 96% of Indian exports to Australia in value (that is 98% of the tariff lines) and zero duty on 85% of Australia's exports (in value) to India.

- ✓ Bilateral trade was US\$ 27.5 billion in 2021; with ECTA, there is potential for it to reach around US\$ 50 billion in five years.
- **People-to-people ties:** India is one of the top sources of skilled immigrants to Australia. As per the 2021 Census, around 9.76 lakh people in Australia reported their ancestry as Indian origin, making them the second largest group of overseas-born residents in Australia.
- ✓ To celebrate India@75, the Australian government illuminated more than 40 buildings across the country, and Prime Minister Albanese issued a personal video message.
- **Defence cooperation:** The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue was held in September 2021, and the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister of Australia visited in June 2022. The Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) was concluded during the Virtual Summit in June 2020, and the two militaries held several joint exercises in 2022. Australia will host military operations with India, Japan, and the US in the “Malabar” exercises off the coast of Perth in August, and has invited India to join the Talisman Sabre exercises later this year.
- ✓ Albanese visited INS Vikrant on Thursday, and declared “there has never been a point in both of our country’s histories where we’ve had such a strong strategic alignment”.
- **Clean energy:** The countries signed a Letter of Intent on New and Renewable Energy in February 2022 which provides for cooperation towards bringing down the cost of renewable energy technologies, especially ultra low-cost solar and clean hydrogen. During the Virtual Summit in March 2022, India announced matching funds of AUD 10 million for Pacific Island Countries under Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS) and of AUD 10 million for Pacific Island Countries under International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- **Education:** The Mechanism for Mutual Recognition of Educational Qualifications (MREQ) was signed on March 2 2023. This will facilitate mobility of students between India and Australia. Deakin University and University of Wollongong are planning to open campuses in India.
- ✓ More than 1 lakh Indian students are pursuing higher education degrees in Australian universities, making Indian students the second largest cohort of foreign students in Australia.
- **Indian educational degrees to be recognised in Australia: What this means**
- Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese recently announced an ‘Australia-India education qualification recognition mechanism’. He also announced that Geelong’s Deakin University will be the first overseas university to open its branch campus in India, apart from a new ‘Maitri’ scholarship for Indian students to study in Australia for up to four years.
- **What exactly is the ‘Australia-India education qualification recognition mechanism’?**
- The new mechanism will mean that degrees obtained in Australia will now be recognised in India, and, vice-versa, degrees obtained in India will be recognised in Australia.
- “This new mechanism means that if an Indian student studying or have studied in Australia, that person hard-earned degree will be recognised when he/she return India and Indian qualification will be recognised in Australia.
- This new mechanism was finalised by Australian Education Minister Jason Clare and Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan during the former’s visit to Delhi recently. “India has other agreements with countries like the US. What makes this broader than the agreement with the US is it includes online courses also, apart from courses that Australian universities can run in India or at a standalone campus like the one that University of Wollongong is setting up.
- This agreement is expected to make it easier for Indians to go to Australia for both education and work, and vice-versa.
- However, this move will not apply to professional qualifications just yet. Professional registrations of engineering, medicine and law graduates will remain outside the ambit of this agreement.
- **What did PM Albanese say about Australian universities setting up campuses in India?**
- The Australian premier also confirmed that Geelong’s Deakin University will be the first ever foreign university to have an offshore campus in India, to be set up in Gandhinagar’s GIFT City. Operations in Deakin University’s new offshore campus may start as soon as next year, with students being admitted to some post-graduate courses. The campus is set to offer courses in cyber security and business analytics.
- Two Australian universities, ranked among the world’s top 300, have reached out to the Union government to set up independent offshore campuses in India. The other university reportedly interested in setting up an Indian campus is the University of Wollongong (UoW). Indian students can obtain Australian education without being in Australia. The branch campus aims to provide a world-class post-graduate education to meet the industry’s skilled workforce demands within the country.”
- Multiple governments since the 1990s have unsuccessfully attempted to allow the entry of foreign varsities in India. This is now finally set to change with the entry of Deakin and the prospective entry of UoW. In last year’s budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced that world-class foreign universities and institutions would be allowed in the newly set up GIFT City to offer courses in financial management, FinTech, science, technology, engineering and mathematics “free from domestic regulations”.

- ✓ First conceptualised as far back as 2007, the GIFT City is spread over 887 acres in Gandhinagar and comprises a multi-service Special Economic Zone (SEZ), which houses India's first International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) and an exclusive Domestic Tariff Area (DTA).
- **What is the new 'Maitri' scholarship?**
- A new scholarship was also announced for Indian students studying in Australia. The 'Maitri' scholarships will provide financial assistance to Indian students in Australia for as long as four years. "The scholarships are part of the wider Maitri (friendship) programme that seeks to boost cultural, educational and community ties between Australia and India.
- The 'Maitri' scholarship was first mentioned in a joint media statement by Australian ministers on February 14, 2022. The statement had said "The \$ 11.2 million Maitri Scholarships Program will attract and support high-achieving Indian students to study at Australian universities. It will showcase Australia's globally renowned academic and research institutions, particularly in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and health,".

**PRELIMS**

**1. NISAR satellite**

➤ **CONTEXT: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) recently received the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite from the U.S. space agency in Bengaluru.**

- NASA and ISRO are jointly working on the all-weather, earth-observing mission scheduled for launch in 2024.

➤ **The background**

- NISAR is the first satellite mission that will collect radar data in two microwave bandwidth ranges: L-band (1-2 GHz, commonly used for satellite communication and remote sensing) and S-band (2-4 GHz, commonly used for satellite communication and weather monitoring).

- 'SAR' is a type of remote-sensing technology that uses radars instead of optical sensors to create high-resolution images of the earth's surface. It can penetrate clouds and vegetation to generate accurate data.

- NISAR will image the entire land and ice masses of the earth four to six times a month. The output is expected to be available within a couple of days of the observation and within hours in cases of disasters.

➤ **Why it matters**

➤ NASA and ISRO plan to accomplish the following through NISAR:

- **Disaster mapping:** A collection of pre-disaster images will be used to better understand disasters and inform official policy on the best courses of action in future. Satellite observations will also be uninterrupted by weather, thus providing quick and reliable information for rescue operations and loss estimates.

- **Changes in permafrost:** NISAR will be programmed to observe global changes in permafrost at regular intervals, updating scientists about its degradation, with implications for global water resources, aquatic ecosystems, coastal water levels, etc.

- **Forests:** Forests provide timber, fuel, and a variety of products, act as carbon sinks (sequestering excess carbon in the atmosphere), purify air and water resources, and are habitats for multiple plant and animal species. NISAR will monitor global forest resources, their extent, and quality and provide information for their sustainable development and management.

- **Agriculture and food security:** SAR imaging of crop rotation, growth, and harvest can be used to streamline planned agricultural output and monitor the health of crops.

**2. Multi-Angle Imager for Aerosols missions**

➤ **CONTEXT: NASA announced that it is partnering with the Italian Space Agency ASI to build and launch MAIA, or the Multi-Angle Imager for Aerosols missions.**

➤ **About**

- MAIA mission, is an effort to investigate the health impacts of tiny airborne particles polluting some of the world's most populous cities.

- The satellite mission will aim to understand the effects of different types of particle pollution on human health.

- Set to launch before the end of 2024, the MAIA observatory will consist of a satellite known as PLATiNO-2, provided by ASI, and a science instrument built at Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in southern California.

- The mission will collect and analyze data from the observatory, sensors on the ground, and atmospheric models.

- The science instrument on MAIA will have a pointable spectropolarimetric camera, which captures digital images at multiple angles in the ultraviolet, visible, near-infrared, and shortwave infrared portions of the electromagnetic spectrum.

- MAIA will be able to collect measurements of sunlight reflecting off airborne particles, which will help researchers determine the abundance, size, and optical properties of certain pollutants in the earth's atmosphere.

- According to Nasa, this data will help the MAIA science team explore the geographic distribution of airborne particles and also investigate how they relate to the patterns and prevalence of health problems stemming from poor air quality.

➤ **Importance of the Mission**

- About 99.82% of the global land area is exposed to levels of particulate matter 2.5 (PM2.5) (tiny particles in the air that scientists have linked to lung cancer and heart disease ) above the safety limit recommended by the World


Health Organization. And only 0.001% of the world's population breathes in air that is considered acceptable - according to the peer-reviewed study published in Lancet Planetary Health.

- Breathing airborne pollution particles has been associated with many health problems, but the toxicity of different particle mixtures has been less well understood.
- MAIA will help us understand how airborne particle pollution puts our health at risk and potentially provide insights that will inform the decisions of public health officials and other policymakers.

### 3. Digital India Act, 2023

➤ **CONTEXT:** The Union government recently formally outlined the Digital India Act, 2023, which is a broad overhaul of the Information Technology Act, 2000. Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology Rajeev Chandrasekhar announced the changes in a presentation in Bengaluru.

- The government is reconsidering a key aspect of cyberspace — 'safe harbour'.
- Safe harbour is the principle that so-called 'intermediaries' on the internet are not responsible for what third parties post on their website.
- This is the principle that allows social media platforms to avoid liability for posts made by users.
- Safe harbour has been reined in in recent years by regulations like the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, which require platforms to take down posts when ordered to do so by the government, or when required by law.

 **Fundamental speech rights cannot be violated by any platform, but there is certainly a case that can be made that weaponisation of disinformation is not the same as free speech, and that needs to be addressed**

**RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR**  
MoS for Electronics and Information Technology



#### ➤ **What is the Digital India Act, 2023?**

- The act is a new legislation that aims to overhaul the decades-old Information Technology Act, 2000.
- The Act covers a range of topics such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), cybercrime, data protection, deepfakes, competition issues among internet platforms, and online safety.
- The Act also aims to address "new complex forms of user harms" that have emerged in the years since the IT Act's enactment, such as catfishing, doxxing, trolling, and phishing.

#### ➤ **Why was this act enacted?**

- **Data privacy:** The Digital India Act will be implemented alongside the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022, which focuses solely on processing personal data in India.
- **Lawful use of data:** It seeks to address the processing of digital personal data in a manner that recognizes both the right of the individuals to protect their personal data and the need to process personal data for lawful purposes.
- **Comprehensive regulation:** This Act and the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill will work in tandem with each other.

#### ➤ **Key features of the Digital India Act**

- Creating new regulations around newer technology, including 5G, IoT devices, cloud computing, metaverse, blockchain, and cryptocurrency.
- Reclassifying online intermediaries to separate categories instead of one general intermediary label, each one with its own set of regulations.
- Removing "safe harbour" immunity for online intermediaries for purposeful misinformation or other content violations from third parties.
- Creating digital standards and laws regarding artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) technology.
- Criminalizing cyberbullying, identity theft, and unauthorized sharing of personal information without consent.

### ANSWER WRITING

**Q. Discuss the challenges faced by women in accessing digital technologies. Also, suggest certain measures that can be taken to bridge the gender digital divide.**

Digital technologies hold immense potential to improve people's economic and social outcomes, yet challenges remain regarding women's access to and use of these technologies. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) reports that more than 50% of the world's women are offline. The term "gender digital divide" is frequently used to refer to these types of gender differences in resources and capabilities to access and effectively utilise ICTs (Information and Communication Technology) within and between countries, regions, sectors, and socio-economic groups.

#### **Challenges faced by women in accessing digital technologies:**

- **Access and Affordability:** Affordability is a challenge for all but affects disproportionately more women and girls, and remains one of the key hurdles in accessing ICTs.

- ✓ The digital gender divide is found to increase as technological sophistication and functionality grow and with the cost of ownership.
- ✓ India accounts for half the world's gendered digital divide, given that only a third of all Internet users in the country are women.
- Lack of Education: Illiteracy further hinders women's ability to access online services.
  - ✓ The digital gender divide is also fuelled by digital illiteracy, which often translates to lack of comfort in using technology and accessing the Internet.
- Socio-cultural reasons: In India, around one-fifth of women were found to believe that the Internet was not appropriate for them, for a number of cultural reasons. Further, around 12% of women in India report not to use the Internet because of the negative social perception associated with its use.
- Safety related issues: This is a key reason for families' opposition to the use of the Internet or the ownership of a mobile phone for both women and girls in developing and emerging economies. Using the Internet can expose women to risks such as cyberstalking, online harassment or even sexual trafficking.
- Market-related factors: The ability of women to access and use digital technologies is directly and indirectly affected by market-related factors, including investment dynamics, regulations, and competition.
- In rural areas, the investment and installation of infrastructures, such as broadband and cell phone towers, is less economically profitable. This can affect disproportionately more women as many of them are located in rural areas.

**Measures that can be taken to bridge the gender digital divide are:**

- Building digital literacy: Digital skill training should be included in formal school curricula from primary level, so girls are reached at an early age and can build skills over time.
- Education policies should support girls' study of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects in inclusive and gender-neutral environments.
- Infrastructure development: Promotion of indigenous information and communication technologies under Atmanirbhar Bharat can play an important role. Promoting market competition between internet service providers. Migrating to new technologies such as the Internet of things (IOT), deployment of 5G and Big Data can also help in bridging gender digital divide.
- Building an evidence base: More research and data is needed in order to design programmes and initiatives that effectively work to close the gender digital divide for women.
- Expanding Accessibility: Governments must work with private sector partners to expand broadband coverage in underserved areas.
- Addressing biases and stereotypes: Focus should be on addressing the many conscious and unconscious biases and stereotypes which often constrain women's participation in digital environments.
- Ensuring cyber security: Such policies are needed which guarantee privacy as well as security in the cyberspace. This will in turn contribute to increase women's trust in digital means and make them able to benefit maximally from the opportunities that the digital era offers.

Increasing women's digital adoption will enable them to access more digital opportunities, be it in education, employment or civic participation. Women20, the G20's official platform to promote gender equity, identifies "bridging the gender digital divide" as one of its priorities that needs to be mainstreamed as part of the G20 agenda this year. A favourable policy environment to promote the digital empowerment of women will be a step in the right direction.

**MCQs**

1. In recent context of India Australia trade relation consider the following statements
  1. India and Australia signed a free trade agreement called the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) in 2022 which was the 2<sup>nd</sup> signed by India with a developed country in a decade after USA in 2021.
  2. The above trade agreement has resulted in the immediate reduction of duty to zero on 96% of Indian exports to Australia in value and zero duty on 85% of Australia's exports to India.

Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
  - b) 2 only**
  - c) Both 1 and 2
  - d) Neither 1 nor 2
2. "Maitri scholarship" often mentioned in news in context of India's relation with which of the following country?
    - a) Nepal
    - b) USA
    - c) Australia**
    - d) Japan
  3. Which of the following state recently sets record for most essay on a person that is as 42.9 lakh handwritten notes on Lachit Barphukan is recognised as the world's largest online photo album in the world?
    - a) Odisha
    - b) Assam**

- c) Gujarat  
d) Arunachal Pradesh
4. Which of the following is wrong with reference to NISAR mission?
- a) NISAR will be programmed to observe global changes in permafrost at regular intervals.  
**b) The mission is a partnership between ROSCOSMOS(Russian Space Agency) and the Indian Space Research Organization.**  
c) The data collected from NISAR will reveal information about the evolution and condition of the Earth's crust.  
d) Its aim was to study threats and global environmental change.
5. With reference to Multi-Angle Imager for Aerosols missions (MAIA) consider the following
1. It is a joint mission between NASA and ASI (Agenzia Spaziale Italiana).
  2. The MAIA observatory will consist of the PLATiNO-2 satellite, which will be provided by NASA, and a science instrument that will be built at ASI's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL).
  3. New Delhi is one of the primary target areas focus of MAIA during its ten-year mission.

Which of the above statement/s is/are not correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only  
b) 1 and 3 only  
**c) 2 and 3 only**  
d) 1,2 and 3
6. First Edition of Women Icons Leading Swachhata (WINS) Awards 2023 recently launched by which of the following ministry?
- a) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs**  
b) Ministry of Women and child Development  
c) Ministry of Rural Development  
d) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
7. With reference to Digital India Act 2023 consider the following
1. The Digital India Act will be implemented alongside the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022, which focuses solely on processing personal data in India.
  2. The Act will also encourage the adoption of digital technologies in various sectors such as healthcare, education, and agriculture, leading to increased efficiency and productivity.

Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?

- a) 1 only  
b) 2 only  
**c) Both 1 and 2**  
d) Neither 1 nor 2
8. With reference to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 consider the following statement
1. The law listed down the forms of cruelty which was inflicted upon lower-caste people.
  2. All offences listed in the Act are cognizable.
  3. The minimum in most cases is six months imprisonment while the maximum is five years sentence and with a fine.

Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only  
b) 2 and 3 only  
c) 1 and 3 only  
**d) 1,2 and 3**
9. Kalakkad-Mundanthuri Tiger reserve recently seen in news is spread over which of the following states?
- a) Kerala-Karnataka  
b) Karnataka-Tamil Nadu  
c) Tamil Nadu- Andhra Pradesh  
**d) Kerala-Tamil Nadu**
10. With reference to Golden City Gate Tourism Multi-media Awards consider the following statements
1. The awards are given annually in various categories related to the Tourism and Hospitality sectors
  2. The 'Golden City Gate' is a creative multi-media international competition for cities only

Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?

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