

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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Page 01 & 04: GS II : International Relations / Preliminary Examination

Recently, a bilateral summit was organized between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Melbourne. Amid geostrategic uncertainties and rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific region, both countries have taken their relations to a new height.

- In this meeting, historic decisions were made to enhance cooperation across multidimensional sectors such as defense, security, civil nuclear energy, critical minerals, and the return of cultural heritage. This cooperation reflects shared democratic values and aspirations for a free, open, and rule-based Indo-Pacific region.

Key Points & Analysis

The major developments of the summit and their strategic significance can be understood through the following points:

A. Joint Declaration on Defense and Security Cooperation

- Military Engagement and Interoperability:** Both countries have adopted the 'Joint Declaration on Defense and Security Cooperation'. Under this, information sharing between the two militaries will be accelerated, and the scope of deployment of military aircraft from each other's territories will be expanded.
- Strategic Consultation:** Regular high-level consultations will be conducted on developments affecting shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

B. Energy Security and Civil Nuclear Cooperation

India, Australia move to deepen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Amid geostrategic uncertainties, Prime Minister Modi, his Australian counterpart, Albanese, adopt declaration to expand maritime security ties and defence collaboration; the countries also seal pacts on civil nuclear energy and critical minerals

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

India and Australia on Thursday adopted a Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, committing to significantly deepen military engagement, strengthen defence industrial collaboration, and expand maritime security cooperation amid growing geostrategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries also sealed pacts on civil nuclear energy and critical minerals sectors.

The declaration, adopted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart, Anthony Albanese, outlines an ambitious road map to elevate defence ties through strategic consultations, enhanced interoperability between the armed forces, expanded military exercises, and greater collaboration in defence science, technology, and industrial supply chains.

A statement released by the office of the Australian Prime Minister mentioned that, under the declaration, the two sides agreed to hold regular consultations



Tactical ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by his Australian counterpart, Anthony Albanese, in Melbourne on Thursday. AP

on defence-related developments in the Indo-Pacific affecting their shared interests, increase the complexity of bilateral and multilateral military exercises, accelerate efforts to improve interoperability and information sharing between their armed forces, and expand aircraft deployments from each other's territories.

The deal also envisages deeper personnel exchanges through education, training, and liaison appointments, while exploring opportunities to cooperate in recruiting skilled personnel for their respective defence workforces.

Mr. Modi emphasised

the importance of a free and stable Indo-Pacific and highlighted the growing engagement between the two nations in the defence domain. "The Indo-Pacific is not just the confluence of two oceans. It also symbolises the shared aspirations of like-minded democracies like India and Australia," he said.

The agreement on civil nuclear energy to facilitate the commercial supply of uranium from Australia to India to fuel nuclear power projects came nearly 12 years after the two countries inked a historic civil nuclear cooperation pact.

"Today, we have signed an important agreement in

the field of nuclear energy. This will open the way for uranium supplies from Australia to India and give new impetus to our clean energy objectives," he said.

He also announced the launch of the Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies, and Supply Chains and said both sides will also work together on a critical minerals corridor.

Under the provisions of the energy security framework, India and Australia vowed to strengthen energy security by maintaining a stable, secure and reliable supply of coal, diesel, other liquid fuels and natural gas. The two countries

will implement an India-Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Road Map to strengthen coordination across the Indian Ocean and the wider Indo-Pacific.

Both sides committed to encouraging greater integration between their defence industries, building resilient supply chains and expanding collaboration in defence innovation, science and technology.

The leaders noted that the new declaration builds upon the India-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation signed in 2009 and complements existing institutional mechanisms, including the Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue, 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue, and Defence Ministers' Dialogue. They also reiterated support for regional institutions, including the Indian Ocean Rim Association, ASEAN-led regional architecture and the Pacific Islands Forum, describing them as key platforms for addressing regional challenges. (With inputs from PTT)

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Daily News Analysis

- **Commercial Supply of Uranium:** A significant agreement on civil nuclear energy has been reached between the two countries. This will pave the way for the commercial supply of uranium from Australia to India for nuclear power projects, which is highly essential for India's clean energy goals.
- **Traditional and Fossil Fuels:** Under the energy security framework, both countries have also agreed to maintain a stable and reliable supply of coal, diesel, and natural gas.

C. Critical Minerals and Technological Corridor

- **Critical Minerals Corridor:** India and Australia will together develop a critical minerals corridor. Australia possesses vast reserves of minerals like lithium and cobalt, which are strategically important for India's electric vehicle (EV) industry and electronics manufacturing.
- **Cyber and Emerging Technologies:** Both countries have launched the 'Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies, and Supply Chains' to reduce dependence on China (De-risking) in the global supply chain.

D. Restrictions on Minors on Social Media: Policy Impact

- **Appreciation of Australia's Law:** PM Modi appreciated Australia's 'Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act, 2024', which bans the use of social media for children under 16 years of age.
- **Policy Indicators in India:** The Indian Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) is also considering similar "graded" restrictions in India. This could prove to be a major policy shift in terms of child safety and digital data protection in India.

E. Cultural Diplomacy: Return of Antiquities

- **Restoration of Stolen Idols:** Following the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) and the investigation by the Tamil Nadu Police, three valuable antiquities from the 11th and 12th centuries (a bronze trident of Bhadrakali, a granite Nandi, and an idol of Kartikeya) are being returned to India from the National Gallery of Australia. This step strengthens 'Soft Power Diplomacy' and cultural trust between both nations.

Conclusion

This agreement between India and Australia is not merely a bilateral union of two nations, but a major strategic step toward maintaining the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region. Based on the triangle of defense cooperation, nuclear energy, and critical minerals, this partnership secures the economic and national security interests of both countries. The growing alignment of both nations in forums like Quad, ASEAN, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) will ensure that this region remains free from the dominance of any single country and that a rule-based international order is maintained.

Daily News Analysis

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding India-Australia civil nuclear cooperation—

1. Australia can supply uranium to India for nuclear power plants.
2. Australia is a nuclear-weapon state under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
3. India is not a member of the NPT.

Select the correct answer—

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

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: India-Australia relations have emerged as a crucial pillar of India's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region. Explain. (10 Marks, 150 Words)



Page 08:GS III : Disaster Management / Preliminary Examination

Wayanad district of Kerala has once again witnessed a severe natural disaster when a horrific debris slide occurred at the entrance of the under-construction 'Twin Tunnel' in Kalladi (Meppadi Panchayat) on July 7, 2026. Six workers lost their lives in this accident. This incident took place near the same area that fell victim to a massive landslide two years ago (in 2024). This disaster underlines the growing conflict between ecological sensitivity, the impacts of climate change, and infrastructure development. The state government has currently halted the work and ordered a high-level inquiry.

Key Causes of the Disaster: Shared Failure of Nature and Humans

This disaster is not the result of a single cause, but rather a 'perfect storm' (fatal combination) of natural extreme weather and human/administrative lapses:

- **Extreme Rainfall:** This region of the Western Ghats received extremely heavy rainfall within a very short span of time, destabilizing the soil of the mountains.
- **Improper Debris Management:** According to preliminary reports, the construction company failed to remove the excavated debris from the site on time (by the June 20 deadline). In the heavy rains, this very debris flowed down like an 'avalanche'.
- **Construction in Fragile Ecology:** Meppadi Panchayat is situated at an altitude of over 7,000 feet above sea level. Despite warnings from environmentalists, the ₹2,100 crore, 8.73 km long twin tunnel road project was approved in this highly sensitive zone.
- **Weak Disaster Management:** The weather conditions in this area were similar to those during the 2024 disaster. Despite this, the state's disaster management apparatus failed to gauge the severity of the situation and take precautionary measures.

Development vs Environment Dilemma

From the UPSC perspective, this case raises a major question on the balance between development and environmental conservation:

- **Demand for Connectivity and Healthcare Services:** Wayanad lacks tertiary care facilities. This tunnel project (Kozhikode to Meppadi) was considered of 'national importance' to accelerate emergency medical care and mobility. On this basis, the Supreme Court had dismissed a petition seeking a stay on it in April 2026.
- **Ecological Cost:** The Western Ghats are one of the most sensitive biodiversity hotspots in the world. The Gadgil and Kasturirangan committees had previously cautioned against major construction works in this region. Frequent landslides (the 2018 floods, Puthumala in 2019, and the 2024/2026 disasters) prove that the carrying capacity of these hills cannot withstand large projects.

Way Forward

A perfect storm

A combination of natural calamity and human failure laid Wayanad low

The fragile hills of Kerala's Wayanad district turned into the theatre of yet another weather-induced disaster when a heavy downpour, on July 7, triggered what looked like a debris slide at the entrance to the under-construction twin tunnel at Kalladi in Meppadi panchayat, in the vicinity of Chooralmala, which was wrecked by massive landslides two years ago. Six workers were confirmed dead. The Kerala government has suspended construction work until the completion of a comprehensive probe into the causes and whether the work complied with the conditions set by the Expert Appraisal Committee under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) while granting environmental clearance for the project. Ever since the great floods of 2018, Meppadi panchayat, which is over 7,000 ft above sea level, has witnessed severe climate-induced catastrophes. Landslides hit the Puthumala area in 2019, within hours of an equally lethal landslide across the hills in Kavalappara in Malappuram district. Environmentalists, therefore, made an impassioned plea against the ₹2,100 crore (approximately) 8.73-km-long twin-tube tunnel road, linking Anakkampoyil in Kozhikode to Meppadi, flagging it as a recipe for disaster. It was instead fast-tracked, citing the need for accelerated mobility for the people of Wayanad, which does not have tertiary care facilities. In April this year, the Supreme Court cited the project's 'national importance' and rejected the Wayanad Prarthitha Samrakshana Samithi's plea to halt it. The group is planning to seek a review of the order.

As with all major disasters, this, too, appears to have stemmed from a heady mix of failures. Kerala Public Works Minister hurriedly pointed to the company executing the construction on behalf of the contractor, Konkan Railways, alleging that it ignored the department's June 20 deadline to remove excavation debris from the area. The company fell back on the rainfall data and the region's landslide susceptibility. Security camera visuals suggest an avalanche-like flow of debris down the slope of the hill that was being bored. Whether a mudslip in the upper reaches caused the debris to cascade down will only be known after a geomorphological probe. On the face of it, the State's disaster management machinery was not up to the job. The synoptic conditions in the area on the eve of the present disaster were eerily similar to those on the eve of the 2024 calamity. Wayanad has a fragile ecology, and any infrastructure project must involve meticulous ecological and climate-resilience planning and uncompromising execution. As it investigates the lapses, the State should review the project's social and environmental costs and ensure that climate-induced catastrophe in Wayanad is prevented, not just responded to.

Daily News Analysis

- **Geomorphological Probe:** An intensive geological study should be conducted to find out the root causes of the soil shifting in the upper reaches of the tunnel.
- **Strict Adherence to Environmental Clearance Conditions:** Strict action must be taken against companies that violate the conditions set by the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- **Climate-Resilient Infrastructure:** In the future, any project in the Western Ghats should not be approved merely through the lens of 'engineering', but only after a thorough Climate Risk Assessment.
- **Strict Standards for Debris Disposal:** Scientifically safe sites must be designated for dumping the 'muck/debris' generated from tunneling or road widening in hilly areas.
- **Reactive to Preventive Approach:** Disaster management must not be limited only to 'relief and rescue' but must focus on 'Early Warning Systems' and the timely relocation of people.

Conclusion

This tragic incident in Wayanad is a stark lesson that the pace of development cannot be accelerated at the cost of human lives and nature. Mobility and healthcare services are certainly fundamental rights, but completely ignoring the environment for them is proving to be suicidal. The Government of Kerala and the Central Government should re-evaluate the social and environmental costs of this project. Sustainable Development is the only way forward to save the Western Ghats from turning into a pile of debris in the future.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: What are the Gadgil Committee and the Kasturirangan Committee primarily related to?

- (a) River-linking project
- (b) Conservation of the Western Ghats and identification of ecologically sensitive areas
- (c) National Water Policy
- (d) Wildlife crime control

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Why are the Western Ghats highly susceptible to landslides? Discuss the natural and human factors. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Since the terrorist attacks in Pathankot and Uri in the year 2016, formal bilateral talks between India and Pakistan have been completely stalled. In the subsequent years, major suicide attacks like Pulwama (2019) and Pahalgam (2025), and recent military clashes like 'Operation Sindhoor' have further deepened the tension between the two nuclear-armed neighbors. Recently, following a joint appeal by a group of eminent citizens (led by O.P. Shah) urging the leadership of both countries to initiate talks, a serious debate has once again ignited in India over whether India should resume dialogue with Pakistan or not.

Should India restart dialogue with Pakistan?



Mani Shankar Aiyar
Former Member of Parliament



Tara Kartha
Former Director at the National Security Council Secretariat

PARLEY

India and Pakistan have not engaged in dialogue since 2016 when talks broke down after the terror attacks at Pathankot and subsequently at Uri. The last 12 years have witnessed major attacks at Pahalgam (2025) and Pulwama (2019) and that apart, there were several smaller terror attacks. Earlier this month, a group of eminent citizens led by Gandhian O.P. Shah drafted a joint appeal to the leaders of India and Pakistan urging them to engage in dialogue. This has led to a public debate on whether India should restart dialogue with Pakistan. Mani Shankar Aiyar, who was a signatory to the letter, and Tara Kartha discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Kallol Bhattacharjee. Edited excerpts:

Should India and Pakistan restart dialogue at this moment, especially since they haven't spoken to each other at the government level for a decade now?

Mani Shankar Aiyar: It is precisely for that very reason, because we haven't spoken to each other for the best part of the last 12 years, that it is absolutely necessary that we resume the dialogue as soon as possible. And as regards the time, my own view is that any time is as good as any other time. And all times when we don't talk are bad for both of us. So I would urge the governments to talk to each other. And until they do, I think people of goodwill on either side of our border should be in touch with each other. I speak as somebody with nearly 40 years of experience of Pakistan and Pakistanis. I have been through several different Pakistani regimes, and it does not seem to me that it matters who is in power in Pakistan. When we engage with them, we engage with Pakistan, and not with a particular individual.

Tara Kartha: Ideally both countries should talk to each other because they are nuclear powers. These are dangerous times, especially since there was an active phase of hostility last year. But my problem is that the present leadership is basically Field Marshal Asim Munir. Let us forget about Shehbaz Sharif [the Prime Minister of Pakistan], for as much as I regard him, I'm sure he is a fine and good politician in his own right, Mr. Munir is in power and he's even more powerful than General Pervez Musharraf was before him. He holds absolute power; him and a couple of core commanders, such as his ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) chief. It is very important to understand that the rise of Field Marshal Munir began in a very systematic fashion once they carried out the terror strike in Pahalgam. I won't say after Operation Sindoor,



Tense ties: Army soldiers patrol along the Line of Control between Pakistan and India in the Uri Sector, Jammu and Kashmir in January. IMRAN NISSAR

I'll say after the Pahalgam attack.

I agree with Mr. Aiyar that it doesn't matter who you talk to, provided that person is interested in peace. But the question is, what stake does Field Marshal Munir have in peace? In that case, he'll have to step down for a civilian prime minister. The moment things get peaceful, they'll tell the Pakistani military to go back to the barracks and that the civilians will take over. So why should he [be interested in peace]? It is a systemic issue. I'm not saying the army can never be talked to. This particular man will not. He is very dangerous.

Is it the correct time to go ahead with the dialogue with Pakistan?

MSA: If we don't go ahead, we'll be stuck in the rut in which we are today. There was a mention of one man, Asim Munir, who's been in power for approximately one year. But we haven't talked to Pakistan for 12 years. So I don't see how Asim Munir being there is the biggest obstacle. We could have talked to Nawaz Sharif. We could have talked to Imran Khan. We could have talked to several others.

And if you look at the past, we have had extremely fruitful talks with Pakistani generals but rarely with Pakistani civilians. Let me first



We are currently talking to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu who has been indicted by the ICC for war crimes. If we can talk to every dictator around the world, what's the problem in talking to the people next door who have the misfortune of being led by an army commander?

MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

run through the Pakistani army men with whom we have had successful interlusions. Ayub Khan was the one who broke the deadlock on the Indus Waters Treaty. It was Zia-ul-Haq who broke the deadlock on Siachen. It was Musharraf, who broke the deadlock on what till then was being projected as the single biggest obstacle in India-Pakistan relations, namely the Kashmir question; they arrived at a four-point solution. However, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto signed on the dotted line in Simla and then turned his back on it.

This is a false argument – that just because the Pakistani army is in power we can't talk to them. We are currently talking to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu who has been indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes. If we can talk to every dictator around the world, including army dictators, what's the problem in talking to the people next door who have the misfortune of being led by an army commander?

So, the argument is that if the Government of India is in dialogue with several military dictators, then why should it not consider talking to Pakistan led by a military general?

TK: As someone who has been in the security establishment, my problem is how do I deal with terrorism? If a democratically elected government opens the door for dialogue and then gets hit by a terror attack – then the question is how to deal with terror attacks that disrupt dialogue? As a democratically elected government, can you justify dialogue? This is a point that was asked by even Nawaz Sharif who said that a terror attack takes place each time dialogue is attempted.

However, I will agree that a few military generals have shown remarkable good sense. In the recent past, when a BrahMos missile was accidentally fired at Pakistan, the Pakistan army handled it well. While the civilians protested, the Pakistan army took it in their stride and kept quiet. At the moment I am concerned with the timing of this proposal as Mr. Munir is in power. The other issue is that Pakistan is in chaos as

there are daily incidents that are being reported in various parts of the country. It's in chaos. So right now he wants to talk. He may have every incentive to talk. Why should I talk? If there is even one indication from Pakistan that they are going to close down terrorist camps, I'm sure tomorrow the government will be ready to talk.

But if at all we are to go forward, I would like to see, for example, a talk on climate change. We are both countries that are equally in bad shape when it comes to climate vulnerabilities. I would like a talk on air pollution, as during a particular season of the year, both sides start burning crop residues triggering an environmental crisis. That kind of a functional dialogue, which does not involve any territorial issue, no vested or political interests is purely functional and people-centric.

I find the kind of wishful thinking which one sees in the letter a little idealistic. It's a bit over the top.

Does the current Indian government have the political bandwidth to talk to the Pakistani establishment?

MSA: Talking to them doesn't mean bending our knees before them. If you have the courage to undertake surgical strikes against them, why don't you have the courage to sit across a table and talk to them? That's my simple point. And if you won't do so, as I'm talking to the Government of India, then we will. We've got Zoom. But I am going to talk to my numerous friends in Pakistan. The number of my friends in Pakistan is larger than the number of enemies I have in India. And that's a rather large number.

TK: Before Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we had someone like Atal Bihari Vajpayee who put his career on the line and went to Lahore. Prime Minister Modi tried in 2015 and went to meet Nawaz Sharif and extended an olive branch. But all these have a political cost.

The question is what will we ask of them. If we have a dialogue tomorrow, we will ask them to stop exporting terrorism and they, in turn, will accuse us of doing things in Balochistan etc. whereas the Baloch people have been harassed since 1947. The question is what can India do in terms of the protests happening in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). We should talk to Pakistan if General Munir shows some evidence that he is cutting down on terrorism.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

Arguments in Favor of Resuming Dialogue

- **Loss due to prolonged stalemate:** Proponents believe that due to the absence of talks for the last 12 years, the relations between the two countries have reached a dangerous turning point. In any diplomacy, completely shutting down dialogue is not the solution to a problem.
- **Principle of Individual vs. Country:** In diplomacy, engagement is not with a specific leader or military commander, but with a sovereign nation (Pakistan). Therefore, talks should happen regardless of who is in power there.

Daily News Analysis

- **Historical success with military rulers:** India's history shows that talks with Pakistan's military generals have been more effective compared to its democratic captains. For example—
 - The 'Indus Waters Treaty' took place during the time of Ayub Khan.
 - The stalemate on Siachen was broken during the time of Zia-ul-Haq.
 - The '4-Point Solution' on the Kashmir issue had advanced significantly with Pervez Musharraf.
- **Nuclear stability and crisis management:** Both countries are equipped with nuclear weapons. In recent years, as soon as a major terrorist incident or an unintended missile firing (like the BrahMos incident) occurs, both countries find themselves standing on the brink of a direct war. To avert the risk of an accidental nuclear war, at least a 'hotline' and top-level dialogue are essential.
- **Comparison with global stance:** If India can engage internationally with other military rulers or controversial leaders (such as Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu), keeping the paths of dialogue closed in the neighborhood is not strategically rational.
- **Courage of war vs. diplomacy:** If India possesses the military courage to conduct surgical strikes inside Pakistan, it must also possess the diplomatic courage to sit at the table and talk face-to-face.

Arguments Against or Skepticism (Skeptical Dialogue)

- **No concrete assurance on terrorism:** India's official policy has always been "Terror and talks cannot go together". Until Pakistan shuts down active terrorist camps operating on its soil, dialogue will yield no results.
- **Vested interest of the military leadership:** Currently, the real power in Pakistan is concentrated in the hands of Field Marshal Asim Munir and the ISI. The entire existence of the Pakistan Army relies on anti-India sentiment. If peace is established in the region, the Pakistani military will have to return to the barracks, and their political and economic dominance will come to an end. Therefore, they are the biggest adversaries of peace.
- **Political risk for democratic governments:** Past experience bears witness that whenever any Indian government extended a hand of peace (such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Lahore visit or PM Modi's sudden Lahore visit in 2015), it was immediately followed by major attacks like Kargil, Pathankot, or Uri. In such a scenario, keeping domestic politics and the sacrifices of the security forces in view, initiating dialogue poses a huge political risk.
- **Internal crisis of Pakistan:** Pakistan is currently grappling with internal chaos, economic bankruptcy, rebellion in Balochistan, and TTP attacks. At such a time, haste in talking will help Pakistan gain international legitimacy without making any reforms, which will yield no strategic benefit to India.

Functional Dialogue: A Way Forward

If talking on political or territorial issues is not feasible, then both countries should begin dialogue on 'non-disputed and people-centric' issues:

- **Climate Sensitivity:** South Asia is highly vulnerable to climate change. Both countries are equally affected by disasters like floods and droughts.
- **Air Pollution:** Due to stubble burning and seasonal air pollution, both Punjab (Indian and Pakistani territories) and cities like Delhi-Lahore come under the grip of smog. This requires joint scientific cooperation.

Daily News Analysis

- **Track-II Diplomacy:** Contact between the common citizens of both countries (People-to-People Contact) should be promoted through civil society, think-tanks, sports, and medical tourism so that the chasm of mistrust can be reduced.

Conclusion

From the perspective of UPSC, India-Pakistan relations demand 'Realism' and 'Strategic Patience'. Although fixing Pakistan's accountability on terrorism without compromising national security and sovereignty must be India's priority, a complete lack of communication also increases the risk of misunderstanding or sudden escalation between two nuclear powers.

Therefore, India should adopt a conditional and incremental approach. Initially, keeping core political issues like Kashmir aside, talks can be started at the 'back-channel' or 'Track-II' level on functional issues such as environment, Indus waters, and crisis management. As soon as Pakistan provides 'credible and verifiable' evidence of dismantling the infrastructure of terrorism, India can consider the restoration of full diplomatic relations.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: Striking a balance between dialogue and terrorism in India-Pakistan relations is a major challenge for India's foreign policy. Comment. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**



Page 10 : GS II : Governance/ Preliminary Examination

Recently, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has released a draft amendment bill to the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. The primary objective of this amendment is to change the eligibility criteria for foodgrains provided to the 'poorest of the poor' families under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY). While the Central Government describes this as a step towards bringing more equity and rationality to foodgrain distribution, Southern states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala have raised serious concerns and demanded its withdrawal.

The Proposed Amendment

- **Current System:** Currently, each Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) family is provided 35 kg of foodgrains (wheat/rice) per family per month, regardless of the number of members in the family.
- **Proposed Change:** According to the new draft, each individual in AAY families will now be given 7 kg of foodgrains per month, but the maximum limit per family will remain 35 kg per month.

Why the Centre is Proposing the Change

The Department of Food and Public Distribution under the Central Government has provided the following arguments for this change:

- **Addressing Intra-category Inequity:** In the current system, smaller families receive more foodgrains per capita, whereas larger families receive less foodgrains per capita.
- **Rational Foodgrain Allocation:** The government believes that allocating foodgrains on a per capita basis will make the distribution more equitable and balanced.
- **Alignment with Nutritional Requirements:** This move aims to better align the actual nutritional requirements of families according to the number of their members.

How the Amendment Affects Households

Why is the Centre revising the NFSA?

Why has the Centre proposed changing AAY foodgrain entitlements? How will the proposed amendment affect households? Why are Tamil Nadu and Kerala opposing? Could the amendment widen regional disparities in foodgrain allocation?

EXPLAINER

T. Ramakrishnan

The story so far: On July 6, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay urged the Centre to retain the present provision of 35 kg of foodgrains per household per month under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) meant for the poorest of the poor, and not to make it a per capita system. The next day, the CP(M) Polit Bureau voiced its concern and demanded that the proposed amendment to the entitlement criteria be dropped. About 10 days ago, immediately after the Union government made public its plan to amend the National Food Security Act (NFSA), Kerala's Food Minister Anoop Jacob expressed reservations over the move.

What is the amendment mooted? On June 24, the Union Food and Public Distribution (F&PD) Department, while publishing a draft amendment bill to the NFSA, said every person belonging to AAY households would be entitled to seven kg of foodgrains per month, subject to a maximum of 35 kg per household per month. At present, the entitlement is for the entire household with a ceiling of 35 kg per month. The proposed amendment covers the first proviso to sub-section (1) of Section 3 (Right to receive foodgrains at subsidised prices by persons belonging to eligible households) of the Act. The public can comment on the amendments till July 13 and send their views by email to sameel.sachdev@nic.in and saurabh@nic.in.

Why is the change being proposed? The existing household-based entitlement, though intended as a protective measure for the most vulnerable families, results in significant inequities depending upon the size of the household, according to the F&PD Department. Smaller households receive a higher per-capita entitlement, whereas larger households receive a lower per-capita entitlement, which may fall below the entitlement available to priority households.

The aim and purpose are to remove intra-category inequities, provide for more rational foodgrain allocation, and better align entitlements with nutritional requirements, a note prepared by the department said.

However, the proposed amendment does not seek to address the inclusion of ineligible persons as beneficiaries, a problem that persists at the State level.

What is the story behind the two southern States' opposition? It is not for the first time that the two States are articulating their opposition to matters concerning the food policy, as their contemporary political history has an important ingredient – the politics of food. Kerala, which has a long history of the public distribution system (PDS) dating back to the now-abolished princely State of Travancore, introduced informal food distribution mechanisms to mitigate the food shortage of the poor and vulnerable, and was perhaps the first to launch a formal PDS in 1962, three years before the establishment of the Food Corporation of India (FCI). At least on two occasions – 1952 and 1967 – Tamil Nadu saw political upsets, the incumbent regime getting reduced to a minority in PDS and being shown the door (in 1967). The reason was that the governments of

Grains of debate

The Centre's proposed amendment to the National Food Security Act has triggered concerns that foodgrain allocations under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana could fall for many households in the southern States

THE GIST

- ▼ The Centre has proposed amending the NFSA to change AAY foodgrain entitlements from a household-based system to a per capita allocation of 7 kg per person, subject to a maximum of 35 kg per household, to address inequities in the existing system.
- ▼ Tamil Nadu and Kerala have opposed the proposal, arguing that it will reduce foodgrain allocations for households with fewer than five members and increase the burden on poor families, particularly in States with predominantly nuclear families.
- ▼ While the Centre says the amendment will make foodgrain distribution more equitable, critics warn it could widen regional disparities, and some have suggested a middle path of a fixed 30 kg allocation per household.

Table 1: AAY coverage, beneficiaries and foodgrain allocation

State	Ceiling of AAY households (lakh)	No. of AAY households (in lakh)	No. of persons (in lakh)	Allocation of entitlement for 2016-17 (in tonnes)
Andhra Pradesh	9.79	8.48	22.48	1,81,557
Karnataka	12	20.3	62.72	1,66,740
Kerala	5.96	5.93	18.53	2,50,236
Tamil Nadu	18.65	18.57	62.21	7,82,771
Telangana	6.49	5.64	15.66	2,38,074
Uttaranchal (N.T.)	0.32	0.24	0.72	8*
Share of the South	52.51	49.16	182.37	21,13,378
All India	250	217.01	777.62	99,53,292

Source: Foodgrains Budget for May 2016, Department of Food and Public Distribution, Government of India

* No PDS scheme follows the concept of AAY; benefit transfer; no allocation has been made.

** Foodgrains – rice, wheat and coarse grains

Table 2: Off take and distribution in the Southern States

How the South fared during the current financial year up to the month of May 2016 (in tonnes)

State	Allocation	Off take (actual)	Distribution
Andhra Pradesh	63,093	63,093	57,837
Karnataka	76,790	57,334	35,003
Kerala	41,706	39,812	20,458
Tamil Nadu	1,30,462	1,06,135	1,21,709
Telangana	89,479	98,519	38,893
Share of the South	3,52,236	4,38,375	2,73,900
All India	16,58,505	17,24,165	13,76,821

Table 3: Fine balance The aim and purpose of the amendment are to remove intra-category inequities, provide for more rational foodgrain allocation, and better align entitlements with nutritional requirements. M. Srinivas

The existing household-based entitlement, though intended as a protective measure for the most vulnerable families, results in significant inequities depending upon the size of the household.

be eligible to receive free rice. Eventually, she extracted a major concession from the Union government that the existing allocations, as they stood in 2013, for all the States would be legally safeguarded.

Hence, it was no surprise that the two southern neighbours joined the rest of the country in November 2016 in implementing the law.

Why are Tamil Nadu and Kerala opposing the amendment to NFSA? Explaining how Kerala would be affected by the latest move, Mr. Jacob has pointed out that States such as his, characterised by nuclear families, will be at a disadvantage as there will be a reduction in the quantity of free foodgrains for families with fewer than five members. He has recalled that even in 2013, when the law took effect, his State took the stand that the AAY cardholders deserved "special consideration," a position that it continues. "As a consumption State, any cut in Kerala's allocation is a matter of concern," Mr. Jacob stated.

Mr. Vijay, who referred in his letter to Mr. Modi about how the amendment

would cause a fall in the monthly allocation of foodgrains from 65,261 tonnes to 42,040 tonnes, stated that the number of AAY cardholders below the family size of five members is 15.75 lakh (out of a total of 18.64 lakhs), covering 58.9 lakh beneficiaries (total 69.27 lakhs). "Rice provided to the AAY cardholders is a staple ingredient of all three meals of the day and cannot be substituted with any other commodity from the open market, resulting in substantial out-of-pocket expenses," he said.

Besides, Anuradha Talwar, a functionary of the Right to Food Campaign, said that the amendment would bring a "North-South divide" in foodgrain allocation, as families in northern States would get higher allocations at their average family size was bigger than that of the southern States.

What is the way forward? Ideally, such a change should have been subjected to greater public scrutiny to arrive at a consensus. However, T. Sathyanarayanan, president, Tamil Nadu Progressive Consumer Centre and veteran activist who served on the State government's panel on food, suggests that the Centre chalk out a middle path by making the allocation of 30 kg per family, irrespective of family members. This would help the Union government to cut down its subsidy bill.

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- **Loss to Small Families:** Families with fewer than 5 members (for example, 2 or 3 members) will now receive only 14 or 21 kg of foodgrains respectively, resulting in a heavy reduction in their allotted quota.
- **Cap on Large Families:** Families with more than 5 members will not be able to get benefits at the rate of 7 kg per person because the maximum limit is still kept at 35 kg per family.
- **Additional Out-of-pocket Expenditure:** Poor families will have to buy grains from the open market at higher prices to meet their requirements, increasing the financial burden on their pockets.

Why TN and Kerala are Opposing

The opposition from both states is linked to their socio-demographic structure and history of 'food politics':

- **Prevalence of Nuclear Families:** Due to demographic transition, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have more small and nuclear families. According to Kerala's Food Minister, families with fewer than 5 members will be directly affected by this amendment.
- **Heavy Cut in Allocation:** According to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay, this amendment will lead to a drastic drop in the state's total monthly allocation (from 65,261 tonnes to 42,040 tonnes). Out of 18.64 lakh AAY cardholders in Tamil Nadu, around 15.75 lakh are families with fewer than 5 members.
- **Crisis on Food Security:** Rice is the staple diet in Southern states and is part of all three meals. It cannot be substituted with other market commodities.
- **Historical Context:** Both states have a strong and successful history of the Public Distribution System (PDS) (since 1962 in Kerala and universal PDS in Tamil Nadu). Foodgrain shortages and changes in policies have always been major political issues in these states.

Widening Regional Disparities

- **Difference in Family Size:** The average family size in North Indian states is larger compared to South Indian states.
- **Unequal Transfer of Resources:** Due to this amendment, northern states with larger families might be allocated more foodgrains, while the foodgrain quota of southern states—which have achieved better population control and smaller families—will decrease.
- **Blow to Cooperative Federalism:** Experts view this as a kind of "North-South Divide", where the brunt of policy changes is being borne by states that have performed better on social development indicators.

Way Forward

- **Wide Public Consultation and Consensus:** Before implementing such a major policy change, suggestions from states and the general public (such as the comments invited till July 13) must be seriously considered to build a consensus.

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- **Finding a Middle Path:** As suggested by consumer activists, the Central Government can maintain a fixed minimum allocation per family (like 30 or 35 kg) without the condition of member count, thereby protecting the interests of small families.
- **Identification of Ineligible Beneficiaries (Inclusion/Exclusion Errors):** Instead of just changing eligibility criteria, the Centre should focus on strengthening the system to remove ineligible people and include the actual poor at the state level.

Conclusion

Although the Central Government's move appears to be driven by the intention of making foodgrain allocation more rational and nutrition-centric, on the ground, it could jeopardize the food security of the most vulnerable and poor families (especially in South India). In a welfare state like India, ensuring food security is not just a matter of fiscal prudence or subsidy management, but is linked to the citizens' Right to Life (Article 21). Therefore, the Centre, while addressing the concerns of the states, should adopt a policy that does not weaken the core principle of 'Food Security for All'.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Ques: According to the proposed NFSA amendment, which of the following changes is proposed regarding AAY?

- (a) All families will receive 50 kg of food grains.
- (b) Each member will receive 7 kg of food grains, but the maximum limit per family will remain 35 kg.
- (c) Only women will receive food grains.
- (d) Direct cash transfers will be made instead of food grains.

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Ques: How does the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, strengthen the concept of India as a welfare state? Explain. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Page 13 : GS III : Internal security

Recently, the emergence of cutting-edge frontier AI systems, such as 'Claude Mythos' developed by Anthropic, has raised cybersecurity concerns in the global and Indian financial sectors. AI's capability to autonomously discover vulnerabilities in software and networks and exploit them at an extremely rapid pace has posed a major challenge to traditional security mechanisms. In this scenario, recent advisories being issued to banks by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other global regulators demand fixing accountability at the board level by treating this threat as a strategic issue rather than a technical one.

Key Points & Challenges

- **Drastic Reduction in the Attack Lifecycle:** Compared to traditional attacks, frontier AI systems scan APIs, combine vendor integrations, and exploit minor misconfigurations to chart an intrusion path in a very short span of time. This speed is so fast that existing monitoring protocols fail to even detect it.
- **The Problem of Overabundance:** Banks already possess thousands of known vulnerabilities. Now, AI tools continuously reporting new flaws at a rapid pace has led to a deluge of data. In this excessive noise, identifying and prioritizing the most critical and severe threats has become extremely difficult for banks.
- **The Patching Dilemma:** Although rapid software patching (fixing flaws) is imperative in the era of AI, implementing patches in banking systems without extensive testing is risky. An untested patch might secure one layer but can also destabilize the entire system. (For instance, the recent global CrowdStrike disruption proves that hurried corrective measures can also increase systemic risks).
- **The Access Paradox:** Indian banks face the dilemma that they themselves have not tested the AI models like 'Mythos' whose threats are being discussed. It is impossible to avoid a threat without experiencing it. However, for actual

AI cyberrisk in banking needs national response

OPINION

Pramod C. Mane
Manoj Apte

Why do advanced frontier artificial intelligence (AI) systems like Claude Mythos matter to regulatory and regulated entities in the Indian financial sector? Because of two things: the speed (of exploitation) and the scale (of the vulnerability). These AI systems have shown the ability to address the weaknesses in software, and weak configuration as well as swiftly exploit the pathways. What worries banks is that the entire attack lifecycle is reduced, including the scanning of Application Programming Interface (APIs) and vendor integrations, integration of minor misconfigurations into a viable breach pathway, all occurring within a timeframe too short for existing monitoring protocols to identify.

In this context, we see the recent regulatory advisory issued to the banks makes sense. It elevates cybersecurity responsibility to the board level, ensuring that preparedness for AI-enabled cyber threats is treated as a strategic issue rather than a technical afterthought. It also emphasises the need for time-bound action plans, recognising that delays in remediation may significantly amplify risk. Finally, it calls upon banks to proactively evaluate their systems against AI-driven threats.

Execution challenges
The real difficulty today is execution. Vulnerability assessment, penetration testing, patch management, monitoring and incident response are not new to banks; they are already

part of the routine cybersecurity practice and are carried out at regular intervals. But AI changes the pressures on each of these processes. A bank may be already aware of thousands of vulnerabilities. When AI systems produce findings at high speed, the problem is no longer a lack of insight but overabundance of the same. This might obscure the critical weakness risk in the noise. Therefore, the real challenge is prioritising. Banks must identify what needs immediate attention, what can wait, and what may become risky when combined with other weaknesses. For banks, bad prioritisation can be as damaging as failure to detect threats.

Patching poses a major dilemma. AI-based vulnerability identification technology may increase the demand for quick closure of security gaps; however, the banking patching cannot be rushed. An untested patch has a chance of securing one layer while making another layer unstable. The global disruption due to CrowdStrike flawed patch illustrates how corrective measures themselves can introduce systemic risk.

Banks know, in this new phase of AI-enabled cybersecurity, accelerated patching is key, but they al-

so know it has to be accompanied by thorough testing, phased implementation, rollback mechanisms, virtual patching, and change windows.

Access dilemma
A paradox lies at the heart of the current debate. Many banks haven't even examined the 'Mythos' AI system - the very system that has created a state of confusion and panic, and therefore the recent debate has turned on one question: Should Indian banks get access to Mythos-like systems, or should they work with other advanced AI tools already available in the market? Small Language models can perform many defensive narrow tasks. A bank may use a smaller model to read logs, summarise alerts, search internal playbooks, classify vulnerabilities, review code snippets or connect incidents with standard operating procedures. Since such models can be kept closer to internal systems, banks may also have better control over data movement, audit trails and validation.

But this is only a partial answer. Small models work well when the problem is bounded and the

sufficient context is available. They are weaker when the task involves unknown code, hidden dependencies, fresh threat intelligence or complex exploit chains. Attackers are not constrained by organizational boundaries. They can learn from many targets, reuse patterns across campaigns and use larger models when the reward is high. Small models are useful defensive instruments, but they are not a substitute for frontier awareness, strong telemetry, red teaming and sector level intelligence.

Preparedness, capacity
The evolving cyber risk landscape calls for more than compliance-driven responses. It requires national and sectoral capability.

The Stanford AI Index 2026 notes that private AI investment in the United States reached \$285.9 billion in 2025, against \$12.4 billion in China, while also cautioning that private investment figures underestimate China's state-directed AI spending.

China has also launched a national AI industry investment fund of about 60 billion yuan. The United Kingdom's AI Opportunities Action Plan speaks of expanding its AI Research Resources by at least 20 times by 2030, and its Compute Roadmap refers to investment of up to £2 billion in a national compute ecosystem. India, too, has moved in this direction through the IndiaAI Mission, with a government outlay of ₹10,372 crore and more than 38,000 GPUs reported under its common compute infrastructure. These figures should not be read as a league table. They show that AI compute and model building are becoming strategic

infrastructure. For India's financial sector, the message is clear but should be stated carefully. The answer is not to reject foreign models or global partnerships but to avoid complete dependence on systems that are externally governed, priced and controlled especially when the risk touches national financial stability. Banks will need state supported domain specific capability that understands payment systems, APIs, vendor dependencies, fraud patterns, cyber telemetry and regulatory expectations.

Shared facilities
This cannot be done banks in isolation. The banking sector should explore shared testing facilities, pooled compute infrastructure where feasible, anonymised threat intelligence, academic partnerships and sector level model development initiatives. Federated machine learning approaches may offer mechanisms, allowing banks to train models locally on sensitive data and share aggregated insights.

Collective future
The next phase of cybersecurity in banking will not be defined solely by how effectively individual institutions defend themselves. It will be shaped by how intelligently the sector collaborates, shares knowledge, and builds collective resilience.

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Big dilemma: When AI systems produce findings at high speed, the problem is overabundance. REUTERS

Daily News Analysis

testing, the bank would have to grant access to its sensitive infrastructure data, such as API responses, network routes, and log patterns, which creates new risks of confidentiality and data leaks (Cloud Retention/Prompt leakage).

- **Small vs. Frontier Models:** Many banks are using 'Small Language Models' (SLMs) within their internal controls, which are effective in limited tasks like reading logs and summarizing alerts. However, they are incapable of dealing with unknown codes, complex hacking chains, and external threats, whereas attackers are leveraging large frontier models.

Global Context & Compute Infrastructure

- **Global Investment Race:** According to the Stanford AI Index, billions of dollars are being invested in AI and compute infrastructure by the US and China. The UK is also working to increase its AI research resource by 20 times by 2030.
- **India's Efforts:** India has allocated ₹10,372 crore under the IndiaAI Mission, wherein a shared compute infrastructure of more than 38,000 GPUs is being developed.
- **Strategic Sovereignty:** The banking sector must avoid relying entirely on externally controlled and expensive foreign AI models, as this is a matter of national financial stability.

Way Forward

- **Shared Testing Facilities:** Instead of working in silos, banks should collectively build shared computing infrastructure and sandbox environments (secure testing zones) at the sectoral level.
- **Federated Machine Learning:** Banks should adopt technology that allows them to keep their sensitive data secure within the bank while sharing the insights and patterns derived from it with other banks to build collective intelligence.
- **Development of Domain-Specific Models:** In collaboration with academia, researchers, and financial regulators, local financial-domain AI models should be developed that understand India's digital payment systems (like UPI), Indian banking APIs, and vendor dependencies.

Conclusion

The next phase of cybersecurity in the financial sector will not depend solely on the individual security capabilities of isolated banks. In the AI-driven era, the key to security lies in how intelligently the banking sector cooperates with each other, shares threat intelligence of unknown risks, and develops a shared collective resilience. To maintain national financial sovereignty and stability, a robust, state-backed, and sector-specific national response is the need of the hour.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Ques: Frontier Artificial Intelligence (Frontier AI) presents both opportunities and risks for the banking sector. Discuss. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Building a durable India-Australia partnership

P rime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Australia this week has been big on substance and high on optics. The choreography is familiar now given the warmth in the relationship: a forward-leaning leadership interaction, a massive diaspora event and a joint statement packed with deliverables and road maps. The Australian government sees India as central to its economic diversification strategy. Its new economic road map and packed ministerial calendar for India underwrite this intent. The elite consensus seems bipartisan and the convergence only growing.

Turning convergence into alignment

Yet, the harder part for most strategic relationships is drawing the line between convergence and alignment. The two might sound like synonyms, but they are not. Convergence is two countries arriving at similar conclusions about the world for their own reasons. Alignment is what happens when those separate conclusions are built into matching capabilities, institutions and habits of engagement. India and Australia have achieved a great deal of the first. The real test of this visit, and of the years after it, is whether it endures by delivering the second.

The convergence is not in doubt, and it is easy to see why it has deepened. Both countries are hedging against overdependence in a global order in transition. Australia's dependence on China, and its alliance dependence on an unpredictable Washington, have come under visible strain. This year's Lowy Institute Poll found trust in the United States at a record low of 31%, with a narrow margin of Australians saying that Canberra should distance itself from Washington under U.S. President Donald Trump. India is running its parallel diversification across energy suppliers, defence platforms and critical minerals processing, driven by a similar instinct.

New Delhi wants to limit its exposure; the Iran and Ukraine conflicts have driven home that any single-point dependency, however longstanding, is now a liability. No country can single-handedly balance China or hedge against American unpredictability. Together, and alongside partners such as Japan, they improve their odds. That is genuine convergence.

This visit has produced tangible evidence of that strategic lock-in. A Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation delivers a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Australia's Maritime Border Command and the



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Indian Coast Guard and adopts an India-Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap to address shared threat perceptions. These are practical mechanisms that deepen interoperability without altering the basic character of the relationship: India remains a trusted security partner, not an ally. On energy security, Australian uranium has been legally available to India since the bilateral 2014 civil nuclear agreement, but it never actually moved commercially, largely because India's own nuclear liability law made foreign suppliers nervous about exposure.

That changed with the SHANTI Act last December, which reformed that liability regime. The agreement on uranium has operationalised a deal lying dormant for a decade. The summit also launched the Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains (PACTS), while reaffirming the complementarity to the Australia-Canada-India Technology and Innovation Partnership as focusing on building resilient technology partnerships through flexible multilateral arrangements. These are examples of alignment beginning to take institutional form.

There are focus areas, there are problems

But for alignment to be durable, convergence must translate into operational overlap. This is most consequential in the Indian Ocean, a region where Australian and Indian interests overlap most naturally. Both are Indian Ocean states with real stakes in the region's sea lanes. India's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region has emerged as a key hub for maritime domain awareness, even as Australia pays closer attention to its western seaboard and Indian Ocean approaches. The two navies have converged on similar risk assessments of shadow fleets, threats to undersea cables and coercive activity below the threshold of conflict.

The new Coast Guard MoU and Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap narrow the gap between strategic intent and operational cooperation. Yet, Australia's most consequential force-structure decisions, from AUKUS (trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.) to its broader defence posture, remain oriented towards the Western Pacific, while India's strategic planners continue to divide attention between continental threats and maritime challenges. The shared ground is real; it is simply narrower than the political convergence sometimes suggests.

Economically, the pattern is similar. Trade has

grown sharply since the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement came into force, but industry voices behind closed doors argue that growth sits disproportionately with large firms. Smaller exporters on both sides remain unaware of how to use it. Track 1.5 dialogues have flagged this as an operationalisation gap.

The knowledge deficit is more obvious when one looks at Australian public consciousness on India. This year's Lowy Poll found only 5% of Australians expect India to be the world's most important power a decade from now, against 54% for China, even as trust in India remains comparatively high. Convergence at the top has not yet trickled down into wider awareness of India's strategic heft.

The diaspora opportunity

The diaspora remains the biggest opportunity to change this, but with a caveat. Indian-origin Australians are now the country's largest immigrant-born community, ahead of the U.K.-born population for the first time. Political leadership has celebrated the diaspora's contribution, and a Centre for Australia-India Relations study finds that Australians broadly recognise it as skilled migrants, students and workers. But recognising the diaspora as a cultural asset, or an electoral constituency, is not alignment. Alignment would require translating that diaspora leverage into a public case for why India matters economically to the average Australian. It would require institutionalising the diaspora's comparative advantage in helping Australian Small and Medium-sized Enterprises navigate Indian regulatory and business culture, and vice versa, rather than leaving that work to individual champions. It would also mean untangling the mobility of Indian professionals from Australia's increasingly fraught migration politics.

Mr. Modi's visit has provided fresh ballast for these conversations about the future of the India-Australia partnership. His message on Australian Pension funds investing in India particularly resonated in the room when he said India would not just treat them as capital but as a marker of strategic trust imposed by Australian families in India. These statements matter because they build the broader public consciousness of India as a trusted partner for the future. Convergence got India and Australia to the table; it is these steps that institutionalise engagement incrementally that build alignment that endures.

Beyond warm optics and deepening convergence, India-Australia ties face the challenge of converting trust into alignment

GS Paper II: International Relations

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: The strategic significance of the India-Australia partnership in the Indo-Pacific region is growing. Analyze its key dimensions and challenges. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Context : The recent visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Australia reflects the strengthening bilateral relations and growing strategic closeness between the two countries. Given the shifts in current global geopolitics (especially in the Indo-Pacific region), Australia views India at the center of its economic diversification and security strategy. This article clarifies that India-Australia relations are no longer limited merely to 'consensus or convergence' (Convergence), but are moving towards a practical 'alignment' (Alignment).

Key Point: Difference between 'Convergence' and 'Alignment'

- **Convergence:** This means two countries arriving at similar conclusions about the world and the global order for their own respective reasons. This convergence already exists between India and Australia.
- **Alignment:** This happens when both countries translate those different conclusions into their shared capabilities, robust institutions, and regular practical engagement. The real test before India-Australia is to bring this alignment onto the ground.

Strategic Alignment and the Compulsions of Both Countries

- **Reducing Dependence on China and the US:** Both countries want to avoid excessive dependence on any single power in a changing global order. While Australia wants to reduce its economic dependence on China and its security dependence on the US, India is also diversifying its options for energy, defense platforms, and critical minerals.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:** Both countries understand that no single nation can balance China alone or deal with the uncertainty of US foreign policy. Therefore, they are working together with partners like Japan (such as through the Quad).

Major Outcomes and Agreements of the Visit

- **Defense and Maritime Security:** Under the 'Joint Declaration on Defense and Security Cooperation', both countries have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Indian Coast Guard and Australia's Maritime Border Command. Apart from this, the 'India-Australia Maritime Security Cooperation Roadmap' has been adopted to enhance practical cooperation in the Indian Ocean.
- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation (Uranium Agreement):** Even after the bilateral civil nuclear agreement of 2014, the commercial flow of Australian uranium to India was stalled due to India's strict Nuclear Liability Law. Following

Daily News Analysis

reforms made to this law by India last year in December through the introduction of the SHANTI Act, this agreement has now practically commenced.

- **Technology and Supply Chains:** PACTS (Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains) has been launched for cyber, critical technologies, and building resilient supply chains.

Key Challenges Before the Partnership (Operational Gaps)

- **Difference in Strategic Priorities:** The Indian Ocean is a shared region for both countries, but Australia's major defense decisions (such as the AUKUS agreement) are primarily focused on the Western Pacific Ocean. In contrast, India's focus is divided between its land borders (continental threats) and maritime challenges.
- **Economic and Trade Barriers:** Trade has indeed increased after the 'Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement' (ECTA), but its benefits are mainly reaching large companies. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) of both countries are still unable to utilize it fully.
- **Lack of Awareness:** According to a survey by the Lowy Institute, only 5% of Australian citizens believe that India will become the world's most important power in the coming decade, whereas this figure stands at 54% for China. The consensus that exists at the top level has not yet trickled down into the mindset of the general public.

6. Role and Opportunities of the Indian Diaspora

- **Largest Diaspora Community:** People of Indian origin in Australia have now surpassed the UK to become the largest diaspora community there.
- **Need to Move Beyond Cultural Asset:** Seeing the diaspora merely as a 'cultural asset' or an 'electoral vote bank' is not enough. Real alignment will happen when this diaspora network is utilized to guide and explain India's complex regulatory and business culture to Australian small industries.

Conclusion

The relations between India and Australia are not limited merely to formal meetings and large rallies, but have become a deep strategic necessity. The work of bringing both countries to the same table was done by their shared 'strategic convergence' (Convergence). However, to keep this partnership sustainable and strong, the decisions taken in defense, nuclear energy, trade, and diaspora policy must be implemented at the ground level. If both countries overcome these practical shortcomings, this partnership will prove to be a strong pillar for the stability of the Indo-Pacific region.