



## CURRENT AFFAIRS



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Date –10- March 2025

## INDIA AND UK DEEPENING TIES

### WHY IN THE NEWS?

At the invitation of the UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy, External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr S. Jaishankar paid an official visit to the United Kingdom from March 4-9, 2025 (during this period, he also visited Ireland on March 6-7, 2025). EAM called on the Prime Minister of the UK, Sir Keir Starmer and Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner. He held comprehensive talks with his counterpart Foreign Secretary David Lammy and met with Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds and Home Secretary Yvette Cooper. During the visit, EAM also engaged with key stakeholders across government, businesses, academia, and the Indian diaspora.



## INDIA AND UK TIES

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- 1. Economic and Trade Relations:** Ongoing negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to boost trade and investment. Strong presence of Indian firms in the UK, especially in tech, pharma, and financial services. UK investments in India's digital economy and fintech sector.
- 2. Strategic and Technological Cooperation:** The UK-India Technology Security Initiative (TSI) focuses on AI, semiconductors, quantum computing, and cybersecurity. Collaboration on green energy, climate action, and sustainable finance. Joint efforts in research and innovation to stay competitive in emerging technologies.
- 3. Defense and Security Partnerships:** Maritime security, counterterrorism, and intelligence-sharing form the core of defence cooperation. Joint military exercises and naval collaboration in the Indo-Pacific region. Potential for defence technology partnerships while respecting India's strategic autonomy.
- 4. People-to-People Connections:** 1.6 million Indian-origin people in the UK contribute to business, healthcare, and politics. The Young Professionals Scheme allows easier movement of skilled workers. Indian students form the largest group of international students in the UK.
- 5. Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities:** Issues like Khalistani extremism and historical tensions occasionally create friction. Differences in foreign policy approaches, but shared strategic interests in global security. India's rising global influence and the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt create avenues for deeper collaboration.
- 6. Future of India-UK Relations:** Review of Roadmap 2030 to assess progress and set new goals. Finalization of FTA to unlock economic potential. Strengthening technology, trade, and diplomatic engagement for a more robust partnership.

## EVALUATIONS OF BILATERAL TIES:

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- 1. Strategic Partnership:** Strengthened by Roadmap 2030, outlining key areas of cooperation.
- 2. Economic Engagement:** Trade negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), significant UK investments in India, and India's growing business presence in the UK.
- 3. Technological Collaboration:** Emerging Tech Exchange Programme and the UK-India Technology Security Initiative (TSI) focusing on AI, semiconductors, and quantum computing.
- 4. Defense & Security:** Counterterrorism cooperation, intelligence sharing, cybersecurity initiatives, and maritime security collaboration.
- 5. Climate & Energy:** Joint projects like the India-UK Green Hydrogen Hub and Climate Finance Leadership Initiative to support renewable energy and net-zero goals.
- 6. Diaspora & Cultural Ties:** A strong Indian diaspora of 1.6 million in the UK, contributing significantly to business, politics, and academia.

## AREAS OF COOPERATION

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- 1. Trade & Economy:** Negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), growing UK investments in India, and strong Indian business presence in the UK.
  - 2. Technology & Innovation:** The UK-India Technology Security Initiative (TSI) focuses on AI, semiconductors, and quantum computing.
  - 3. Defense & Security:** Maritime security, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and intelligence-sharing.
  - 4. Climate & Energy:** Collaboration on green energy, India-UK Green Hydrogen Hub, and climate finance initiatives.
  - 5. Education & People-to-People Ties:** Large Indian diaspora, student exchange programs, and migration mobility partnerships.
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## SIGNIFICANCE OF UK FOR INDIA

- 1. Strategic Partner:** A permanent member of the UN Security Council (P5) and G7, helping India in global diplomacy.
- 2. Investment & Trade Hub:** UK is a key destination for Indian exports, businesses, and financial sector expansion.
- 3. Technology & Research:** Strong R&D collaboration, particularly in advanced tech and pharmaceuticals.
- 4. Education & Workforce:** UK universities attract a large number of Indian students, strengthening human capital.
- 5. Gateway to Europe:** Despite Brexit, the UK remains a crucial financial and trade gateway to European markets.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA FOR THE UK

- 1. Economic Growth Partner:** India is the world's fastest-growing major economy, offering business and investment opportunities.
- 2. Strategic Indo-Pacific Partner:** India's role in counterbalancing China's influence aligns with UK's Indo-Pacific strategy.
- 3. Technology & Innovation Hub:** India's booming tech ecosystem and startup culture complement UK's innovation-driven economy.
- 4. Skilled Workforce:** Indian professionals fill crucial gaps in the UK's healthcare, IT, and financial sectors.
- 5. Cultural & Diaspora Influence:** The 1.6 million-strong Indian diaspora contributes significantly to UK politics, business, and society.

## AREAS OF CONCERN

- 1. Trade Negotiations:** Delays in finalizing the FTA due to disagreements on tariffs and market access.
- 2. Diaspora & Political Tensions:** Khalistani extremism and political sensitivities sometimes strain ties.
- 3. Geopolitical Differences:** India's stance on the Russia-Ukraine war contrasts with the UK's position.
- 4. China Policy:** The UK's evolving approach to China could impact India's strategic alignment.
- 5. Immigration Policies:** The UK's stricter visa regulations for Indian students and professionals create challenges.

## WAY TO FURTHER THE BILATERAL RELATIONS

1. Fast-track the FTA to boost trade and investments.
2. Expand cooperation in emerging technologies like AI, space, and digital security.
3. Enhance defence collaboration through joint military projects and security dialogues.
4. Strengthen climate partnerships for green energy, hydrogen tech, and net-zero commitments.
5. Improve mobility and education ties by easing visa regulations and promoting student exchanges.
6. Address diaspora-related concerns through diplomatic engagement to prevent tensions.
7. Align Indo-Pacific strategies to enhance maritime security and regional stability.

## CONCLUSION

The India-UK relationship continues to evolve with strong economic, strategic, and people-to-people ties. While challenges remain, both countries have a shared vision for deeper collaboration in trade, technology, defense, and climate action. By addressing key concerns and leveraging mutual strengths, India and the UK can build a stronger and more comprehensive partnership in the years to come.

### PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

**Q. With reference to India-UK relations, consider the following statements:**

1. India and the UK are negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to enhance bilateral trade.
2. The UK-India Technology Security Initiative (TSI) focuses on emerging technologies like AI, semiconductors, and quantum computing.
3. The Young Professionals Scheme between India and the UK allows the free movement of workers without restrictions.

**How many of the above-given statements are correct?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

**Answer: B**

### MAINS QUESTIONS:

**Q. Examine the significance of India-UK bilateral relations in the context of trade, strategic partnerships, and technological cooperation. What are the key challenges, and how can both countries strengthen their engagement?,(250 words, 15 marks)**

## PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRI) AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

### WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj's upcoming launch of the Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayats (MWFGP) initiative has garnered significant attention, placing it squarely in the news. This initiative represents a pivotal step towards fostering gender-sensitive governance at the grassroots level, aiming to transform rural governance by prioritizing safety, inclusivity, and gender equality. During the International Women's Day 2025 celebrations, underscores the government's commitment to this cause. The event's significance is amplified by the participation of key figures, including Union Ministers of State and high-ranking officials, alongside representatives from every district across the country and international organizations like UNFPA.





### PRI & WOMEN – DATA AND STATISTICS

Women's participation in PRIs has seen remarkable growth over the years. As per the Ministry of Panchayati Raj:

1. Over 1.4 million women representatives currently serve in PRIs, constituting more than 46% of the total elected members.
2. Around 20 states in India have already implemented 50% reservation for women in PRIs.
3. Studies indicate that panchayats led by women are more likely to focus on healthcare, education, and sanitation.
4. However, despite high numerical participation, only 10% of women hold decision-making roles without external influence.
5. The Economic Survey of India reports that women-led PRIs have 30% higher fund utilization in social welfare schemes than male-led ones.
6. According to a UNDP study, PRIs with women leaders have significantly improved maternal and child health indicators.
7. A World Bank study highlighted that women-led panchayats are more likely to invest in drinking water facilities, sanitation, and public health infrastructure.
8. Women sarpanches have been found to increase village-level economic activities by promoting self-help groups and microfinance initiatives.

### PROVISIONS OF PRI RELATED TO WOMEN

Several constitutional and legislative measures have been implemented to promote women's representation in PRIs:

1. **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992:** Mandates **one-third** reservation for women, including SC/ST women, in PRIs.
2. **State Amendments:** Many states have increased the reservation to **50%** for women in PRIs.
3. **PESA Act, 1996:** Recognizes tribal self-governance and ensures the representation of tribal women in local governance.
4. **National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001):** Promotes capacity-building programs for elected women representatives.
5. **Training and Capacity Building Initiatives:** Programs like the **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)** aim to enhance leadership skills among women representatives in PRIs.

- 6. Mandatory Women's Participation in Standing Committees:** Many states require that women must be part of key decision-making committees in PRIs, ensuring active involvement in policy formulation.
- 7. Financial Assistance for Women Representatives:** Several government programs provide financial and logistical support to women leaders in PRIs to improve their governance efficiency.
- 8. Digital Literacy and E-Governance Training:** Initiatives like e-Panchayat and digital literacy programs specifically target women representatives to enhance their governance capabilities.
- 9. Legal Safeguards Against Gender Bias:** Some states have introduced legal provisions to prevent discrimination against women leaders in PRIs, ensuring their authority is not undermined by male counterparts.
- 10. Women's Collectives and Networking Support:** Several NGOs and government bodies promote women's leadership through networking groups, allowing them to share experiences and challenges.

## **ROLE OF PRI IN STRENGTHENING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

- 1. Enhancing Political Participation:** Reservation policies have enabled women to step into leadership roles, ensuring gender inclusivity in decision-making processes. For example, in Bihar, the 50% reservation for women in PRIs has led to an increased number of female sarpanches actively participating in governance.
- 2. Improving Social Indicators:** Women-led panchayats have shown **better implementation** of welfare schemes related to maternal health, child nutrition, and education. In Rajasthan, women-led panchayats have significantly improved maternal healthcare by ensuring the proper distribution of prenatal supplements.
- 3. Financial Independence:** Through self-help groups (SHGs) and government programs, PRIs facilitate economic opportunities for rural women. The Kudumbashree movement in Kerala, working in coordination with PRIs, has empowered over 4.3 million women financially.
- 4. Grassroots Mobilization:** Women leaders in PRIs have successfully mobilized communities to fight against social evils such as **child marriage, domestic violence, and dowry**. In West Bengal, female panchayat members have played a crucial role in reducing instances of child marriage by enforcing stricter monitoring.
- 5. Policy Implementation and Accountability:** Women-headed PRIs have been instrumental in implementing schemes like **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** and **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**, ensuring better accountability and community participation. For instance, a woman-led panchayat in Maharashtra successfully implemented a sanitation campaign, making their village open-defecation free.
- 6. Promoting Gender-Sensitive Governance:** Women leaders advocate for policies that address gender-specific issues, ensuring equitable resource allocation.
- 7. Encouraging Leadership Development:** PRIs provide a platform for women to gain governance experience, many of whom progress to state and national politics.
- 8. Strengthening Community Engagement:** Women-led PRIs actively engage with local communities to identify and address key developmental concerns.
- 9. Incorporating Women-Centric Policies:** PRIs with strong female representation push for policies that prioritize women's health, education, and employment.
- 10. Enhancing Women's Legal Awareness:** Women in PRIs play a crucial role in spreading awareness about legal rights, including domestic violence laws, inheritance rights, and gender discrimination laws.

## **CASE STUDIES**

- 1. Chhavi Rajawat, Rajasthan:** India's first woman MBA sarpanch, Chhavi Rajawat, transformed her village, Soda (Rajasthan), by implementing water conservation projects and enhancing rural infrastructure.
- 2. Panchayati Raj in Bihar:** With 50% reservation, Bihar has witnessed a surge in women panchayat leaders who have been instrumental in improving education and healthcare facilities.

- 3. Kerala's Kudumbashree Movement:** A women-centric self-help group model, integrated with PRIs, has empowered thousands of women through financial independence and skill development.
- 4. West Bengal's Women-led Panchayats:** Women leaders in West Bengal have successfully implemented social welfare schemes, particularly in improving sanitation and child nutrition programs.
- 5. Madhya Pradesh's Women Panchayat Heads:** In various districts of Madhya Pradesh, women sarpanches have led initiatives against domestic violence and promoted legal awareness among rural women.
- 6. Odisha's Mission Shakti Initiative:** Linked with PRIs, this movement has significantly enhanced women's economic empowerment through self-help groups.

#### ISSUES GRAPPLED BY PRI IN EMPOWERING WOMEN

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Despite progressive policies, several challenges persist:

- 1. Proxy Leadership:** Many elected women representatives function as proxies for their male relatives, limiting their autonomy in decision-making.
- 2. Patriarchal Constraints:** Societal norms and gender biases continue to hinder women's effective participation in PRIs.
- 3. Lack of Training and Awareness:** Many women representatives lack the necessary administrative training and education to function effectively.
- 4. Limited Financial and Administrative Autonomy:** Women-led PRIs often face bureaucratic hurdles and financial constraints, restricting their ability to implement development initiatives.
- 5. Safety and Harassment Issues:** Women leaders in PRIs frequently face threats, harassment, and societal backlash for challenging traditional power structures.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

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- 1. Enhancing Capacity Building:** Regular training programs should be conducted to improve the leadership and administrative skills of women representatives.
- 2. Ensuring Financial Autonomy:** PRI funds should be directly accessible to women representatives to ensure independent decision-making.
- 3. Strict Implementation of Reservation Laws:** Measures should be taken to prevent proxy leadership and ensure real empowerment of elected women.
- 4. Encouraging Digital Literacy:** Digital tools and e-governance initiatives should be introduced to enable women to participate effectively in decision-making.
- 5. Legal and Social Safeguards:** Strict laws against harassment of women leaders and community awareness programs to support women's leadership roles should be implemented.

#### CONCLUSION

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Panchayati Raj Institutions have been instrumental in promoting women's empowerment by providing them a platform for political and social participation. While reservation policies have improved numerical representation, addressing issues like proxy leadership, financial constraints, and social stigma is crucial for achieving true gender empowerment. Strengthening PRI through capacity-building initiatives, financial independence, and legal support will pave the way for a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic grassroots governance system in India.

#### PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

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- Q. Consider the following statements regarding Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and women's participation:**
1. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act mandates 50% reservation for women in all PRIs.

2. Women-led PRIs have shown better implementation of social welfare schemes than male-led PRIs.  
3. PRIs with female leadership have contributed significantly to reducing maternal and child mortality rates.

**Which of the above statements is/are correct?**

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

**ANSWER: B**

**MAINS QUESTIONS:**

Q. Discuss the role of PRI in promoting gender-sensitive governance at the grassroots level.  
(250 words, 15 marks)

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