

# India and Australia: 2+2 Meet

September 15, 2021

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held in-person talks on Saturday with their Australian counterparts Marise Payne and Peter Dutton in a '2+2 Dialogue'. In this context, relations between India and Australia become important for the UPSC exam.

**In news:** India, Australia to hold 2+2 meet

**Placing it in syllabus:** Foreign Affairs

**Dimensions:**

- Decisions of the meet
- History of India Australia relations
- Importance of Australia
- Hindrances to relations

## Content:

### Decisions of the meet:

- India and Australia decided to maintain an open, free and prosperous Pacific region that follows rules and stays **in line with UNCLOS or United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea.**
- This needs to be done to support the **Indo Pacific Ocean's Initiative** and is needed for renewed efforts by the **Quad member countries** for cooperation in the region.
- India and Australia have called for a "**broad-based and inclusive**" **government in Afghanistan** to ensure long-term peace and stability in the war-torn country, signalling their clear unwillingness to accord any recognition to the Taliban regime.
- Referring to the **threat of terrorism**, the two sides **strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms** and the

- use of terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism.
- the two sides **agreed to continue cooperation in the sphere of counter-terrorism**, including countering radicalisation and violent extremism, combating the financing of terrorism, and preventing exploitation of the internet for terrorist activities.
  - The two sides also reiterated their commitment to furthering cooperation in **counter-terrorism in multilateral fora such as the UN, G20, FATF**, as well as in **Quad** consultations.
  - The two **sides sought the protection of rights of women and children** and their full participation in public life and expressed concerns over targeted violence against the defenders of their rights.
  - In the talks, the ministers renewed commitment to achieving an “early harvest” announcement by December on an interim agreement to liberalise and deepen bilateral trade in goods and services that would pave the way for an early conclusion of a **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)**.
  - The ministers also underscored the importance of an **early resolution of the issue of taxation of offshore income of Indian firms under the India-Australia Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement**
  - The joint statement said Australia also expressed its strong support for India’s membership of the **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)**.

### **What is 2+2 dialogue?**

- 2+2 Ministerial is the **highest level of institutional mechanism** between India and Australia.
- In this meeting the **defence and the foreign members** of both the countries collaborate and **meet for issue discussions working for mutual benefit**.

India now has “2+2” dialogues with all its Quad partners – **the US, Japan and Australia**. A similar dialogue is expected to be

launched with Russia as well.

## History of India-Australia relations

- The formal relationship began for many Australians in 1950, when Robert Menzies became the first Australian leader to visit independent India.
- India-Australia relations touched a historic low when the Australian Government condemned India's 1998 nuclear tests.
- The relationship between the two nations has expanded dramatically since the establishment of a Strategic Partnership in 2009.
- **1941:** Consulate General of India was first opened as a Trade Office in Sydney
- **1944:** Lieutenant-General **Iven Mackay** was appointed **Australia's first High Commissioner** to India.
- 1950s: As part of the **Colombo Plan**, many Indian students were sponsored to go and study in Australia.
- 1960s: Easing of restrictions saw an increase in non-European Indians migrating to Australia, especially professionals.
- **2008:** **Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT)** and the Extradition Treaty between India and Australia, were signed. (entered into force in 2011)
- **2009:** **Upgradation of bilateral relationship** between the two nations to a **"Strategic Partnership"**, including a joint declaration on Security cooperation.
- 2013: Former Defense Minister A K Antony paid the first ever official visit by an Indian Defence Minister to Australia and held bilateral talks with the then Australian Defence Minister.
- 2014: A **Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement** between the two countries was signed during the visit of then PM Tony Abbott to India.( came into force in 2015)
- 2014: **Social Security Agreement(SSA)** was signed.
- 2016: The Australian Parliament passed the **"Civil**

**Nuclear Transfer to India Bill 2016**” which ensures that contracts to supply Australian uranium to India for civil use are fulfilled.

### **Recent Developments**

- The two countries are currently discussing a **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)** which will provide greater market access to exporters of goods and services and address the border restrictions to trade.
- India is also seeking to address its **adverse balance of trade in Goods and Services** through specialized market access for its products.
- India and Australia have recently emerged as close strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific which is evident in the number of high level visits and the number of joint military exercises between the two countries.
- The **shift in the relationship is primarily led by common maritime security concerns** due to a **rising China and its strategic consequences on the Indo-Pacific strategic order**.
- Both are also part of other multilateral naval exercises such as **Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC)** hosted by the US and the **Exercise MILAN** hosted by India.
- Other areas of cooperation include the establishment of a blue economy, infrastructure and connectivity initiatives, and strategic industry collaboration.
- India and Australia also carry out other bilateral and multilateral military joint exercises such as **AUSINDEX** and **Malabar** among others.
- India will participate in **Talisman Sabre** – Australia’s largest war games – by 2023. India, along with Germany and France, has been taking part in this exercise as an observer.
- Both sides had also signed the **Mutual Logistics Support arrangement and Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for**

**Maritime Cooperation** in the Indo-Pacific in June 2020.

## **Importance of Australia**

- The **Indian Ocean region is economically and strategically significant**
- India–Australia both borders the Indian Ocean and has a shared interest in the maintenance of freedom of navigation and trade.
- Australia is a prominent Indian Ocean state, with the state of Western Australia as its gateway.
- They boast the region’s longest Indian Ocean coastline as well as its largest Search and Rescue Zone.
- The Indian Ocean is also home to some of its largest hydrocarbon deposits, and important offshore territories.
- Australia is committed to playing a leading role in managing the opportunities and challenges in the region over the coming decades.
- India is a rising Indo-Pacific power and an increasingly significant security partner of Australia, particularly in the maritime domain. They both depend on free and open sea lanes
- For both India and Australia the peaceful and open character of the Indian ocean is a vital national interest.
- Australia recognises India’s critical role in supporting security, stability and prosperity of the Indian Ocean region.
- Australia and India are committed to working together to enhance maritime cooperation and have had a formal bilateral naval exercise (AUSINDEX) since 2015.
- Both the nations, being aware of China’s assault on maritime security and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region, can serve together as the net security provider in the region.

**Civil Nuclear Cooperation:**

- A Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement was signed in September 2014 which came into force in November 2015 and provides the framework for substantial new trade in energy between Australia and India.
- The deal ensures that Uranium mining companies of Australia can supply Australian uranium to India for civil use with confidence that exports would not be hindered by domestic legal action challenging the consistency of the safeguards applied by the IAEA in India and Australia's international non-proliferation obligations.
- It also ensures that any future bilateral trade in other nuclear-related material or items for civil use will also be protected.

## **Hindrances to relations**

China has been increasingly challenging the traditional areas of influence of both India and Australia, i.e., the Indian subcontinent **(String of Pearls)** and South Pacific Islands. China's growing deployments in the Indian Ocean has thrown a challenge to India in its immediate neighbourhood.

On the Australian continent, China is trying to win over the Pacific countries (small islands such as Vanuatu, Tonga and the Solomon Islands have become beneficiaries of China's seemingly generous economic outreach) through chequebook diplomacy.

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India is also seeking to address its adverse balance of trade in Goods and Services through specialized market access for its products.

**Mould your thought:** The Indian Ocean is the major reason for

the upswing in defence and military cooperation between India and Australia. Critically Evaluate.

***Approach to the answer:***

- Introduction
- Discuss the importance of Indian Ocean for both nations
- Discuss the common challenges faced by both
- Mention the examples to show the increasing defence and military cooperation to counter these challenges
- Conclusion