

## Taking off from Down Under

India and Australia share a strong bilateral relationship based on historic ties, cultural links and extensive people-to-people connections. As large democracies, the two countries play a central role in strengthening geopolitical cooperation and maintaining peace and security in the region.

During Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's visit to India earlier this year, significant steps were taken towards strengthening this long-standing relationship. They included signing agreements for combating international terrorism and promoting civil aviation security, besides agreements on health and medicine, environment and the climate, among others. While the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) is still uncertain, the proposed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) can be more effective in deepening trade, investment and economic partnership between the two nations. However, a plethora of collaboration opportunities still exist across sectors in both countries, particularly in the areas of Smart Cities, agriculture, education, energy, among others.

For instance, there is a need to look beyond agricultural exports from Australia to India and explore synergies in the larger agricultural value chain. While accelerating India's agricultural productivity growth is of prime importance, the high dependency on the monsoon has been a key challenge. Water scarcity in many arable areas has also been an area of concern for Australia. Stakeholders from both the nations can collaborate for joint research towards innovation in crop cultivation under varied environmental conditions for higher yields. Additionally, India can benefit from Australia's expertise in building a strong cold storage industry to ensure a robust agricultural supply chain. With heightened government focus on the food industry and 100 per cent FDI in setting up of cold storage units, the sector presents an attractive opportunity for Australian investors. Further, partnerships in areas of dairy farming and technology, breeding and genetics, food processing and research can emerge as key pillars of the bilateral relationship.

In the context of renewable and clean energy, the civil nuclear deal between the two nations and the Australia-India Energy Security Dialogue stand as testaments to the mutual interest in achieving energy security and developing clean energy models. Key discussions during the bilateral Energy Security Dialogue last year laid the foundation for increased engagement in the energy sector and the Australian businesses stand to gain significantly from access to the huge energy market in India. On the other hand, India can look at increasing LNG supplies from Australia to diversify its concentrated supply from the Middle East.

Education and skill development are other important areas. For India to become a global talent hub, it is critical to make corresponding changes to its education system by overcoming key challenges of low levels of employability, research and entrepreneurship; and, adopting a structured education system that fosters Design, Innovation and Creativity-led Entrepreneurship (DICE). India can partner Australian universities, several of which are globally ranked, to bring the best practices, encourage faculty development, improve quality assurance protocols and greatly enhance student achievement. Through innovative digital platforms, India and Australia can offer Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to facilitate knowledge and cultural exchange.

Smart Cities infrastructure is another key aspect. India has been witnessing rapid urbanisation with the highest annual growth in urban population among the major economies. With urban population expected to reach 50 per cent by 2051, there is an immediate need for our cities to be 'Future Ready' to accommodate this steep demand. While the Government of India has launched its ambitious Smart Cities Mission to develop 100 Smart Cities over a period of five years, international collaboration can fast-track the actualisation of the same.

Australia, as one of the most urbanised nations in the world, can be an important partner for India in building sustainable urban design, improving construction productivity, enhancing water resource management and designing smart urban transport.

Finally, and crucially, there's healthcare and life sciences. India and Australia have been working closely in the field of healthcare. The Australia-India Strategic Research Fund is being utilised to conduct joint high-level research in this important sector and several bilateral MoUs have been signed including a recent one, on cooperation in the field of communicable diseases and mental health, earlier this year.

Vast opportunities for collaboration exist in the field of telemedicine, digital health and pharmaceuticals among others, which can immensely boost accessibility of healthcare services in our country. Further, India can greatly benefit from Australia's expertise in providing aged-care, while Australian investors can leverage the untapped potential of this sector in India.

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