



The case for deeper technological ties with London

It makes strategic and economic sense for Delhi, as the UK is one of the few nations to have laid out ambitious policy goals with an eye on the unfolding technological revolution.



Technological cooperation with major powers: Refocus on Britain

1. When Delhi thinks of technological cooperation with major powers, the US, Europe and Japan come to mind. Russia lags behind its Western cousins in civilian technologies but remains a major force in defence technologies.
2. The missing link in India's technological mind space, however, is the United Kingdom. This is surprising since Britain was the first nation to industrialise and has a long tradition of scientific research and technological development.
3. With top-ranking universities and the golden triangle of science and innovation — London, Oxford and Cambridge — Britain is one of the world's top technology powers.
4. Britain is ranked third — just after China and ahead of Russia — in the world's cyber power index put out by Harvard University's Belfer Centre in 2020. India brings up the rear at number 21.

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5. This year, the World Intellectual Property Organisation ranked Britain fourth in the global innovation index; India is far behind at the 46th position. India, then, could gain in a technology partnership with Britain.

Complexities of colonial past:

1. Britain's ties with India have never looked as promising as today. But the popular narrative on bilateral relations remains mired in the past.
2. To be sure, London's advocacy of Pakistan has always irritated Delhi. Meanwhile, the Indian political class revels in bashing Britain.
3. By focusing on the positive, Delhi is betting it can reduce the traditional negative elements in the engagement with the UK. Given its diplomatic success in getting the US, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to put "India first" in their South Asia policies, Delhi is confident that the UK can be turned around too.
4. Meanwhile, the steady relative decline of Pakistan — its economy is now about a tenth of India's — and Delhi's deepening strategic partnership with Washington are also encouraging London to rethink its past approach to the Subcontinent.

Technological cooperation:

While a trade agreement between Delhi and London is said to be imminent, it is in the technological domain that the prospects are immense but under-explored.

1. While policymakers around the world have been talking endlessly about the massive implications of the unfolding technological revolution, only a few nations have laid out ambitious policy goals in harnessing it.
2. The UK is one of them, but there is insufficient awareness in India's strategic community of the British moves to put science and technology at the very heart of its political, economic, security and foreign policies.
3. London announced a raft of measures this year starting with a major report on "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: An Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development, and Foreign Policy".
4. It was followed by a series of other reports on defence, S&T policy, outer space strategy, and an artificial intelligence strategy. It is expected to announce a new cyber strategy in 2022.

UK's 8 themes for the future of technology:

1. Eight broad themes stand out from these initiatives. First, leverage technology to "level up" the regional and social inequalities in Britain.

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2. Two, ensure Britain's privileged position as a leading science power. Third, focus on technological innovation to drive Britain's future economic growth.
3. Fourth, build internal security resilience against new technological threats. Fifth, modernise the intelligence apparatus with the help of new technologies.
4. Sixth, integrate technology into the national defence strategy as new capabilities like AI become as consequential as battle tanks, ships and fighter jets. Seventh, project technological power to counter malevolent actors in the international system.
5. Finally, London wants to build a coalition of like-minded countries to reshape the global governance of technology. This includes strengthening technological ties with the traditionally close partners in the Anglosphere — US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand — as well as other partners like Japan and India.

Implication for India:

1. All these elements in British policy mesh with India's own economic, political, and security interests.
2. The British technology initiatives are also aligned with the technological agenda of the Quad — or the Quadrilateral forum that brings together Australia, India, Japan, and the US.
3. For Delhi, the essence of the new alliance with Britain is fourfold — generate domestic prosperity, enhance national security, climb up the global technology hierarchy, and contribute to the construction of a free, open, and democratic global technological order.