

India-Turkey Relations - From Strategic Estrangement to Pragmatic Re-engagement

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India-Turkey Relations Latest News

- India and Turkey are cautiously **rebuilding** bilateral ties after a prolonged period of diplomatic strain, largely driven by Ankara's support for Pakistan on the Kashmir issue and defence cooperation with Islamabad.
- Following the deterioration of relations after the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor in 2025, recent diplomatic engagements indicate **a gradual thaw** based on shared economic and strategic interests.

Evolution of India-Turkey Relations

- Relations witnessed significant growth after the rise of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in **2002**.
- High-level visits, cultural exchanges, and business cooperation expanded steadily, with bilateral trade rising from about \$700 million in 2002 to nearly **\$13.8 billion in 2022**.
- However, ties began deteriorating after **Turkey** repeatedly criticised India's decisions regarding Jammu & Kashmir, particularly the abrogation of **Article 370** in 2019.

- Ankara's consistent endorsement of Pakistan's position on Kashmir deepened India's strategic distrust.

Major Causes of Diplomatic Tensions

- **Kashmir and Pakistan factor:**

- Turkey emerged as one of Pakistan's strongest supporters on Kashmir in international forums.
- The relationship reached a low point when Erdogan reiterated support for Pakistan's stance during his 2025 visit to Islamabad.
- Following the Pahalgam terrorist attack that killed 26 civilians, Turkey criticised India's military response, Operation Sindoor, and described it as "**unprovoked aggression**". This further aggravated bilateral tensions.

- **Defence cooperation with Pakistan:**

- Reports that Pakistan employed **Turkish-origin drones** during Operation Sindoor intensified Indian concerns.
- Ankara's defence exports and military cooperation with Pakistan were viewed in New Delhi as indirectly strengthening a country accused of sponsoring cross-border terrorism.

Diplomatic and Economic Fallout

- **Political signals:**

- India adopted several diplomatic measures to express its displeasure.
- Absence from Turkish National Day celebrations in New Delhi.
- Increased political outreach to Greece and Cyprus (including the Indian PM's visit to Nicosia).

- **Economic consequences:** The diplomatic crisis also produced economic repercussions. For example,

- Air India cancelled a major aircraft maintenance contract with a Turkish company.
- Indian universities suspended academic MoUs with Turkish institutions.
- Indian tourist arrivals to Turkey reportedly fell by nearly 37%.
- Security clearance of Turkish firm Celebi Airport Services India was revoked on national security grounds.
- Bilateral trade experienced a slowdown.

Signs of a Diplomatic Thaw

- **Resumption of official dialogue:**

- In April 2026, India and Turkey resumed Foreign Office Consultations after a four-year gap.
- **Discussions covered:** Trade and investment, tourism, technology and innovation, energy cooperation, education, counter-terrorism and security cooperation.
- Both sides acknowledged the importance of sustained dialogue to prevent misunderstandings and manage disagreements.

- **Cooperation on law enforcement:**

- A significant confidence-building measure (CBM) was Turkey's assistance in **extraditing** fugitive drug trafficker Salim Dola to India.

- Discussions are underway regarding the extradition of additional criminals wanted by Indian authorities.

- **Other CBMs:**

- Both sides invoked **historical goodwill**, including India's support for Turkey's War of Independence.
- **Turkey** clarified that military interactions with Pakistan were part of longstanding defence arrangements rather than new assistance.
- **India** conveyed that its growing engagement with Cyprus and Greece is not an anti-Turkey strategy.

Why Turkey Recalibrated Its Approach

- **Economic imperatives:**

- The backlash in India highlighted the costs of diplomatic estrangement.
- Turkey seeks to preserve access to the large Indian market; opportunities in infrastructure, construction and investment; and revenue from Indian tourism.
- India remains an important destination for Turkish **exports** such as marble, machinery and agricultural products, while Turkey **imports** Indian chemicals, machinery and automobile components.

- **Strategic diversification:**

- As Turkey pursues a more autonomous foreign policy despite being a NATO member, it aims to deepen engagement with emerging Asian powers, including India.
- The Turkish Foreign Minister has publicly emphasised that Ankara seeks positive bilateral ties with India independent of its relationship with Pakistan.

Why India Is Interested in Re-engagement

- **Geopolitical significance:** A functional relationship with Turkey offers India:

- Greater outreach in the Islamic world.
- Access to European and Central Asian markets.
- Enhanced connectivity opportunities.
- Strategic balancing amid evolving regional geopolitics.

- **Trade and connectivity interests:**

- Despite political tensions, commercial ties remained relatively resilient. India recognises the strategic value of maintaining economic engagement with Turkey.
- Maintaining ties with Turkey provides **flexibility** in pursuing alternative trade and transit routes (**IMEC** and **INSTC**) amid ongoing instability in West Asia.

Conclusion

- The India-Turkey relationship is moving from confrontation towards cautious pragmatism, with collaboration in multilateral forums such as the **G20**, and convergence on reforming global governance institutions (like **UNSC**).
- Indian policymakers believe that a more balanced and nuanced Turkish position on Kashmir would significantly strengthen bilateral relations.

Source: **IE**

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