

India-France Relations - Expanding Cooperation in Trade, Technology, Defence and Global Governance

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India-France Relations Latest News

- The Indian Prime Minister (PM) and French President (Emmanuel Macron) held bilateral talks in **Nice**, France.
- This was their first meeting after the elevation of India-France relations to a “Special Global Strategic Partnership”, marking a new phase in bilateral cooperation.
- The discussions covered defence, trade, innovation, artificial intelligence (AI), space, nuclear energy, education, mobility, and global geopolitical issues.
- The Indian PM also discussed India’s participation in the upcoming **G7** Summit, reflecting France’s support for India’s role in global governance discussions.

Strengthening Economic and Trade Ties

- **Target to double bilateral trade:**

- India and France agreed to establish a High-Level Mechanism to double bilateral trade from the current **\$16 billion** (2025-26) to **\$32 billion** within five years.
- Both sides stressed the importance of the proposed India-EU Free Trade Agreement (**FTA**) to unlock greater trade and investment opportunities.
- **Economic security and supply chains:**
 - A new India-France Economic Security Dialogue will be launched.
 - Cooperation will focus on strengthening supply-chain resilience, securing access to critical minerals, and expanding collaboration in SMEs, aviation and railways.
- **Skill development:** Agreement to establish a Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Aeronautics in **Kanpur**, supporting India's aerospace manufacturing ecosystem.

Defence Cooperation - From Buyer-Seller to Co-Development

- **Focus on advanced defence manufacturing:** The leaders agreed to intensify cooperation through **co-design**, co-development, and **co-production** of advanced defence platforms and technologies.
- **Key areas of existing cooperation:**
 - India-France defence partnership already includes:
 - Rafale fighter aircraft for the Indian Air Force and Navy.
 - Scorpene-class submarines.
 - Shakti helicopter engines.
 - Joint helicopter manufacturing initiatives.
 - A major milestone was the inauguration in 2026 of the **H125 Helicopter** Final Assembly Line (FAL) in Karnataka, established by Tata Advanced Systems Limited and Airbus.

Space and Nuclear Collaboration

- **Expanding space partnership:** Building upon six decades of cooperation between Indian Space Research Organisation (**ISRO**) and Centre National d'Études Spatiales (**CNES**), both countries agreed to deepen collaboration in:
 - Human spaceflight.
 - Space Situational Awareness (SSA).
 - Private-sector participation in the space economy.
- **Civil nuclear energy:** The leaders noted that India's **SHANTI Act** creates fresh opportunities for collaboration in:
 - Small Modular Reactors (SMRs).
 - Advanced Modular Reactor technologies.
 - Clean and reliable nuclear energy solutions.

Innovation Roadmap 2030 and AI Governance

- **Adoption of Innovation Roadmap 2030:** Recognising technology as a pillar of the partnership, India and France adopted an Innovation Roadmap 2030 to guide long-term cooperation.

- **Joint AI working group:** Both countries agreed to establish a Joint India-France AI Working Group focusing on:
 - AI governance.
 - Emerging technologies.
 - Responsible and ethical AI development.
- **Emerging technology collaboration:**
 - Partnerships will be expanded in deep-tech, semiconductors, agri-tech, med-tech, renewable energy, defence technologies, and space technologies.
 - The leaders also welcomed the signing of **19 agreements** among institutions within the innovation ecosystems of both countries.

Digital, Education, Mobility and Cultural Connectivity

- **Expansion of India's UPI in France: Airports** in Nice and Paris are expected to facilitate Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions, enhancing convenience for Indian travellers and promoting digital public infrastructure abroad.
- **Facilitating talent mobility:**
 - Both leaders agreed to improve student and professional mobility, expand mutual recognition of educational qualifications, and strengthen academic exchanges.
 - The Indian PM invited French universities to establish campuses in India under the National Education Policy (**NEP**) 2020 framework.
- **Visa-free transit:** France operationalised visa-free airport transit facilities for Indian nationals, improving connectivity and travel convenience.
- **Cultural cooperation:** The two countries agreed to enhance collaboration among museums and cultural institutions, including the **National Maritime Heritage Complex**.

India-France Relations

- **Overview:** Diplomatic relations, established soon after India's independence in 1947, were elevated to Strategic Partnership (first-ever for India with a Western nation, and the first for France with a non-Western nation) with France in **1998**.
- **The core of partnership:** Shared democratic values, belief in multilateralism, respect for international law, and strong economic, cultural, academic, and people-to-people ties (~119,000 Indian diaspora in mainland France).
- **Horizon 2047:** In 2023, the year which marked 25 years of India-France strategic partnership, both sides set the course for the next 25 years until 2047.
- **Bilateral trade:** Within the EU, France is India's **3rd**-largest trading partner, after the Netherlands and Germany. Indian exports to France amounted to \$7.1 billion in 2025-26 (out of total bilateral trade of \$15.81 billion).
- **Defence cooperation:** Bilateral army exercise SHAKTI; both air forces also participate in biennial Ex-GARUDA (bilateral), and TARANG SHAKTI and MILAN (multilateral); and bilateral naval exercise VARUNA.

- **India France Year of Innovation:** India and France are celebrating the India-France Year of Innovation in the year 2026, which was jointly inaugurated by the French President and the Indian PM in 2026 in Mumbai.

Conclusion

- The India-France Special Global Strategic Partnership is evolving beyond traditional defence cooperation into a comprehensive framework.
- The outcomes of the Nice summit underscore the **shared ambition** of both countries to build a resilient, technology-driven and strategically significant partnership capable of addressing 21st-century geopolitical and economic challenges.

Source: PIB | IE

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