



INDIA - FRANCE RELATIONS - GS II MAINS

Q. India - France ties was reinforced by a shared vision to cooperate for further enhancing peace and prosperity for the two countries and the world at large. Discuss (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Delhi-Paris Pact: Macron to be Chief Guest this Republic Day*

What's in the news?

- French President Emmanuel Macron will visit India as Chief Guest for the 75th Republic Day celebrations, the Ministry of External Affairs said, days after it became clear that US President Joe Biden will be unavailable.
- This will be the **sixth time a French leader will be the Chief Guest at the R-Day celebrations.**

Key takeaways:

- In terms of protocol, the highest honour bestowed upon a nation is the invitation to be the chief guest during Republic Day celebrations.
- They are given the ceremonial guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan followed by a reception hosted by the President of India in the evening.

How is the Republic Day chief guest chosen?

- The process starts nearly six months in advance of the event.
- The most central consideration is the nature of the relationship between India and the country concerned.
- Invitation to be the Chief Guest of the Republic Day parade is the **ultimate sign of friendship between India and the country of the invitee.**
- Another factor that has historically played a role in the choice of the Chief Guest is the association with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) which began in the late 1950s and early 1960s.
- The first Chief Guest of the parade in 1950 was President Sukarno of Indonesia, one of the five founding members of the NAM.
- **In New Delhi, the choice of guest has been guided by a set of imperatives: strategic and diplomatic, blending business, global geo-politics and bilateral engagement.**



India - France Relations:

Backdrop:

- As early as the 1980s, France wished to give greater scope to its relations with India.
- France bet on India's strategic, diplomatic and economic emergence and steadfastly supported India's requests in **several strategic matters** such as
 - Permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council.
 - Better participation in the decisions taken at international fora (such as the expanded G8 and G20).
 - Access to civil nuclear cooperation.
- India and France have traditionally had close and friendly relations.
- In **1998**, the two countries entered into **Strategic Partnership** which is emblematic of their convergence of views on a range of International issues apart from a close and growing bilateral relationship.
- The areas of **Defence & Security cooperation, Space cooperation and Civil nuclear cooperation** constitute the principal pillars of our Strategic Partnership with France.
- India and France are increasingly engaged in new areas of cooperation like **security in the Indian Ocean region, climate change including the International Solar Alliance, and sustainable growth and development** among others.
- There exist vibrant bilateral **cultural and educational linkages** as also growing people-to-people contacts.

Key takeaways:

- As Strategic Partners, India and France share a high degree of convergence on a range of regional and global issues.
- This year, we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership. The Prime Minister was the Guest of Honour at the Bastille Day Parade held on 14 July 2023 in Paris. President Macron visited India for the G-20 Summit on 8-9 September 2023," the MEA said, while announcing the confirmation of the visit.

Important areas of India - France Relations:

1. Strategic:

- India and France are close strategic partners.
- France was one of the first countries that accommodated India's position after the **1998 Nuclear Tests**.
- France supported India's political and security compulsions vis-a-vis the nuclear weapons.



- Further, France has backed **India's permanent candidature at the UN Security Council as well as the G8.**
- In addition, France is also part of **India-France-Australia Trilateral Dialogue** that supports free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

2. Security:

- India and France regularly conduct joint military exercises. These include **Varuna (Naval), Garuda (Air Force) and Shakti (Army).**
- Both countries have also undertaken '**joint patrolling**' in the **Indian Ocean Region to back their stance of open Indo-Pacific.**
- Both are striving towards maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean region.
- Further, France has emerged as India's second largest arms supplier after Russia.
- Major military equipment imported from France includes the **Rafale and Mirage 2000 Fighter Aircraft and Scorpene Submarines.**

3. Science and Technology:

- India and France share strategic partnership in the space domain.
- Both concluded a **Joint Vision for Space Cooperation in 2018.**
- They are also cooperating in satellite navigation and related technologies.
- India and France are jointly constructing the **world's largest nuclear park in Jaitapur, Maharashtra.**
- Space agencies of India and France inked an agreement for cooperation for the country's first human space mission **Gaganyaan.**

4. Energy:

- French support played an important role in India getting an **exemption from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 2008** to resume international cooperation in civil nuclear energy. France actively supports India's entry into the NSG.
- Further, India and France played a pivotal role in creating the **International Solar Alliance.**

5. Trade:

- From January to December 2021 (CY2021), the India-France bilateral trade in goods (excluding military equipment) stood at € 12.58 billion.
- India's exports to France were valued at € 6.70 billion while Indian imports from France stood at € 5.88 billion. The bilateral services trade (CY2020) stood at € 4.76 billion.
- **France has emerged as a major source of FDI for India** with more than 1,000 French establishments already present in India with a total turnover of US\$ 20billion and employing around 300,000 persons.
- France is the 11th largest foreign investor in India with a cumulative investment of US\$ 10.6 billion between April 2000 - December 2021.
- **Brexit:** In the past, Indian companies saw the U.K. as the entry point for Europe; now with Brexit approaching, India can also look at France as its entry point for Europe.



6. Diaspora:

- It is estimated that the Indian community, including NRIs in mainland France number around 109,000, largely originating from **French enclaves of Puducherry, Karaikal, Yanam, Mahe and Chandernagore.**
- A Sizable number of Indian-origin population lives in the French Overseas Territories of Reunion Island (280,000), Guadeloupe (60,000), Martinique (6,000) and Saint Martin (300).

7. Education:

- The most significant agreement was the focus on **youth and student exchanges.**
- Currently, about 2,500 Indians go to France annually to pursue higher education, compared to more than 250,000 from China.
- The agreement on mutual recognition of academic degrees and the follow-on Knowledge Summit, where 14MoUs between educational and scientific institutions were signed.
- Recently, the France External Affairs Minister stated that their goal is to enroll about 20,000 Indian students in higher educational institutions by the year 2025.

8. Environment:

- India and France had launched the **Indo-French Year of the Environment in January 2021** to strengthen cooperation on these issues and ensure coordination ahead of these multilateral events.
- **Objective:** To strengthen Indo-French cooperation in sustainable development, increase the effectiveness of actions in favour of global environment protection and give them greater visibility.
- The Indo-French Year of the Environment over the period 2021-2022 would be based on **five main themes** such as
 - Environmental protection
 - Climate change
 - Biodiversity conservation
 - Sustainable urban development
 - Development of renewable energies and energy efficiency.
- It is also a platform for engaging in discussions on critical areas of collaboration relating to the environment and allied areas.

9. Maritime cooperation:

- Like India, France has expressed **concern about China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean Region.**
- French overseas territories in the Indian and the Pacific Oceans provide it with the second largest exclusive economic zone globally.
- It has long maintained **bases in Reunion Islands and Djibouti and established one in Abu Dhabi in 2009.**



- Strengthening cooperation with France, particularly in the western Indian Ocean Region makes eminent strategic sense even as India develops its presence in **Oman (Duqm) and Seychelles (Assumption Island)**.
- More synergy between the two navies in the Gulf area where France has a base (in Abu Dhabi) and better mutual understanding of the implications of a Chinese base in Gwadar is important for India.
- India and France have inked a roadmap to enhance their bilateral exchanges on the blue economy and forge a common vision of ocean governance based on the rule of law and cooperate on sustainable and resilient coastal and waterways infrastructure.

10. Urban Development:

- The recent developments include **urban planning and management of services** like housing, transport, water, sanitation using the public private partnership model which the French have employed successfully.
- The flagship programme of **Smart Cities** in which France is focussing on Chandigarh, Nagpur and Puducherry is taking shape as more than half the business agreements signed related to electric mobility, water supply, waste management and smart grids.

11. Counter-Terrorism:

- Both countries reiterated their strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations including cross-border terrorism and terror-related incidents in France and India.
- It reaffirmed that terrorism cannot be justified on any grounds whatsoever and it should not be associated with any religion, creed, nationality and ethnicity.
- The leaders also reaffirmed their strong determination to eliminate terrorism wherever it is to be found and urged the international community to strengthen the efforts to counter and prevent terrorist financing.

Significance of the India France relationship:

1. Securing the Indo-Pacific:

- India will require the support of France for maintaining the stability and security of the Indo-Pacific region and countering the growing Chinese aggression.
- The Indian Ocean holds importance for France as it controls the Reunion Islands.
- Both countries have concluded a **Joint Strategic Vision for cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region in 2018**.

2. High Degree of Trust:

- France has stood by India through thick and thin, beginning with 1998 when India conducted nuclear tests.
- Both nations share a high degree of mutual trust that allows them to cooperate on bilateral and multilateral issues.



- **Entry to Key Organizations:** France's support will be crucial to India's entry into the UNSC and the NSG.

3. Tackling Climate Change:

- The cooperation between them can be helpful to achieve the goals of the **Paris Agreement** and in implementing the Glasgow Climate Pact.

4. Global Stability:

- Cooperation between the two can help in checking Russia's assertiveness in Europe and China's assertiveness in Asia, thereby ensuring global stability and world order.

Challenges:

1. Stalled Projects:

- Many projects that have been negotiated between the countries have not been operationalized.
- For instance, the **Jaitapur nuclear project** has been stalled and is facing a lot of domestic impediments.

2. Free Trade with EU:

- Despite having good relations, France and India don't have a free trade agreement between them.
- Further, no progress is being made on the India-EU Broad based Trade and Investment agreement (**BTIA**) as well.

3. Different stand on Russia Ukraine conflict:

- France has openly criticized the Russian invasion. India has a more restrained stance on the conflict.
- The difference in the response hasn't impacted their bilateral relationship till now.
- However if the conflict gets prolonged, then it might impact the India France relationship as well.

4. Operating at low potential:

- While the governments share a robust relationship, the business relationships are weak.
- Bilateral trade is less than half of India's trade with Germany. The target of €12 billion set in 2008 remains elusive.

5. China factor:

- France's commitment to the **Belt & Road Initiative** is in stark contrast to India's stand as well, hence the strategic differences between the two nations.



WAY FORWARD:

- Since independence, India has experimented with different institutions including the NAM and BRICS to shape global norms.
- The new partnerships with France, Germany and other like-minded countries like Japan would hopefully be significant for India's influence on the global stage.
- **French social security laws, long-term student visas**, and the facility to work for two-three years to pay off student loans are some of the areas that need to be worked out so that more effective cooperation can take place between the two countries.
- **France**, which had sought **strategic autonomy** within the framework of its alliance with the US, and **India**, which has valued **independent foreign policy**, are natural partners in building the new coalitions for an uncertain era.
- **France also opens the pathway for deeper engagement with European global issues**, especially after uncertainty in the region due to BREXIT.
- Even though above specified areas provided a robust basis for engagement, it remained primarily at a government-to-government level. In recent years, it was clear that for a wider partnership, **strengthening business-to-business and people-to-people relationships was essential**.

India and France have excellent bilateral ties, which are reinforced by a **shared vision to cooperate** for further enhancing peace and prosperity for the two countries and the world at large.



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