

INDIA-FRANCE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

NEWS: India, France agree to intensify defence, space, n-cooperation

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

India and France, celebrating over 25 years of strategic partnership, have expanded their cooperation in defence, space, nuclear energy, and emerging technologies under the 'Horizon 2047' roadmap. This collaboration now includes co-development of advanced defence systems, joint space missions, and enhanced Indo-Pacific engagement.

Context

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar held wide-ranging discussions with his French counterpart to strengthen bilateral cooperation in strategic and emerging domains such as defence, nuclear energy, space and the Indo-Pacific.

India–France Strategic Partnership

- **Established in 1998:** Launched on January 26, 1998, this is India's **first-ever Strategic Partnership** with any country.
- **Core Vision:** To enhance both countries' **strategic autonomy** and deepen multi-sectoral co-operation.

Key Strategic Pillars

- **Defence and Security:** Regular high-level meetings like the Annual Defence Dialogue (ministerial level) and the High Committee on Defence Cooperation (HCDC).
- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation:** Under the 2008 agreement, France remains a key nuclear partner.
- **Space Collaboration:** Over six decades of collaboration between ISRO and CNES (France's space agency).

Expanding Areas of Cooperation

- **Indo-Pacific Engagement:** Enhanced collaboration on **maritime domain awareness**, freedom of navigation, and rules-based order.
- **Digital and Cyber Security:** Joint frameworks to safeguard digital infrastructure and cooperation in AI and quantum technologies.
- **Climate Change and Sustainability:** Support through renewable energy technology and the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**.
- **Counter-Terrorism and Multilateralism:** Shared commitment to combat global terrorism and uphold international law.

Defence Cooperation Highlights

- **Rafale Fighter Jets:** India procured 36 Rafales from Dassault Aviation; now extended with 26 Rafale-M jets for the Indian Navy.
- **Scorpene Submarines (Project-75):** Joint production with France's Naval Group; 6 submarines indigenously constructed, including **INS Vagsheer**.
- **Jet Engine Development:** HAL signed an agreement with **Safran Helicopter Engines** to co-develop engines under the **Indian Multi-Role Helicopter (IMRH)** program.
- **Future Vision:** Co-development of **next-gen fighter jet engines** and defence technology exports to third countries.

Joint Military Exercises

- **Shakti** – Army
 - **Varuna** – Navy
 - **FRINJEX-23** – Joint services
- These reflect growing interoperability and military trust.

Economic Cooperation

- **Trade Volume:** Bilateral trade touched **USD 15.11 billion in 2023–24**, more than doubling over the past decade.
- **EU Ranking:** France is India's **fifth-largest trading partner** within the European Union.
- **Technology Transfer:** Increasing integration of French innovations in **renewable energy, urban infrastructure, and sustainable manufacturing**.
- **UPI Integration:** India's UPI system has been successfully enabled in France — a first for the EU region.

Space Cooperation

- **Legacy Collaboration:** Over 60 years of cooperation, notably with **CNES and ISRO**.
- **Joint Missions:**
 - **TRISHNA** – Climate monitoring satellite.
 - Ground stations and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) systems are jointly developed.
- **Arianespace:** France remains a key launch services partner for Indian satellites.

Energy Cooperation

- **International Solar Alliance (ISA):** Co-founded in 2015 to promote solar deployment globally.
- **Nuclear Cooperation:**

- 2025 saw the first meeting of the **Special Task Force on Nuclear Energy**.
- Work initiated on **Small Modular Reactors (SMR)** and **Advanced Modular Reactors (AMR)**.

Indian Diaspora in France

- Estimated **1.19 lakh Indian-origin population**, mainly descendants of workers from former French colonies (like Puducherry).

Areas of Concern

- **Trade Imbalance:** Despite growing ties, bilateral trade lags behind India's trade with other EU partners.
- **Defence Technology Transfer:** India seeks deeper ToT; some French platforms offer limited openness.
- **Nuclear Liability Law:** India's **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010**, assigns liability to suppliers, hindering French investment in nuclear projects like **Jaitapur**.
- **Geopolitical Divergences:**
 - France's deep ties with **China** can dilute its Indo-Pacific alignment with India.
 - Different positions on Middle Eastern conflicts (e.g., Iran, Palestine) occasionally create diplomatic gaps.

Future Outlook: Horizon 2047 Roadmap

- **Adopted in 2023** to mark the 25th anniversary of their strategic partnership.
- **Vision:**
 - Joint development and export of **advanced defence platforms**.
 - Expand cooperation in **space security** and **maritime presence**.
 - Integration of **emerging technologies** for global competitiveness.
 - Promote **strategic convergence in the Indo-Pacific** and use of multilateral platforms like IORA and G20.

Conclusion

- India–France relations have evolved into a **comprehensive strategic partnership**, with defence at its core.
- Shared commitment to **strategic autonomy, multilateral order, and sustainability** ensures long-term cooperation.
- With **Horizon 2047**, both nations aim to create a model for **collaborative, innovative, and export-oriented partnerships** across sectors.

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