

## **Prime Minister Modi's France Visit 2023**

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**Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited France on 13 and 14 July at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron as the guest of honour for the French National Day, or Bastille Day celebrations in Paris.**

**As India and France celebrate 25 years of their strategic partnership this year, it provides scope for both the countries to look back on their relations which started in 1998 over shared values and aspirations of peace, stability and desire for strategic autonomy. France has been one of India's most steadfast allies in the western world, it has stood by India during difficult times such as in the aftermath of India's nuclear test in 1974 and 1998, tensions with China in 2020 and being the first country to offer India the support of its armed forces.<sup>1</sup>**

**In past decade, France has emerged as a key trading partner of India with annual trade of \$12.42 billion in 2021-22. It is the 11th largest foreign investor in India with a cumulative investment of \$10.31 billion from April 2000 to June 2022, which represents 1.70% of the total foreign direct investment inflows into India. More importantly, it has emerged as a key defence partner for India, becoming the second largest defence supplier in 2017- 2021 (at 29 per cent replacing US at 11 per cent) with crucial defence deals under technology transfer agreement 2005 and increased military to military engagement including the induction of the French Scorpene conventional submarines being built in India, and the Indian Air Force having received 36 Rafale fighter jets, tie up of Tata Group with Airbus to manufacture C-295 tactical transport aircraft in Vadodara, Gujarat (expected to be expanded into other civilian and military aircraft manufacturing in a joint venture with France).<sup>2</sup>**

**The visit was also utilised to discuss wide range of bilateral issues such as major defence deals as well as outline a roadmap for the next 25 years coinciding with the 100th anniversary of India's independence in 2047. As both the countries are wary of the complex and changing nature of the world order, they look forward to strengthening and broadening their ties and seeking joint efforts for a multi polar world.**

**Prime Minister Modi focused on their strategic partnership as a driving force behind their collaboration in key domains including defence, space, civil, nuclear, blue economy, trade, investment, education, culture, people to people ties and cooperation on regional and global issues.**

**Joint exercises such as Shakti, Varuna, Gaurda, Desert Knight, Pegase) and other efforts to improve maritime cooperation are regularly held for enhancing interoperability, integration and trust between the two countries. France led a multilateral exercise 'La Pérouse' with the navies of Quad countries - India, US, Australia , Japan- and the UK in the strategic Indian Ocean region, where China is trying to get foothold after wresting control of the strategic Hambantota port in Sri Lanka. A recent strategic agreement between France and India also allows both countries' warships access to the other's naval stations across the Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy now has access to significant French ports, including one in Djibouti, the location of China's sole overseas military installation.<sup>3</sup>**

Although France has been the second- largest defence supplier for India from 2017- 2021, it has always been a reliable partner in military aircraft domain long before that, from procurement of the 1st generation Dassault Ouragan fighter (Toofani in IAF) to Dassault Mirage and Rafale, this showcases the level of mutual trust, transfer of technology and the synergy the two sides share in the defence sector with increasing French involvement in the Make in India initiative towards advancing India's defence technology, and increasing industrial partnerships.

PM Modi announced a deal for the acquisition of 26 Rafale-Marine fighters for the INS Vikrant aircraft carrier, a repeat order for the construction of three more Scorpene (Kalveri) class submarines at Mazagon Dockyards Limited through the "Make in India" initiative and joint development of an engine for fighter jets with French aircraft equipment manufacturer Safran.<sup>4</sup> The Scorpene Class submarines are designed for hunting down enemy submarines and surface ships, and will be built with an Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP) which will allow them to stay underwater for a relatively longer duration. Since France has already delivered the order of 36 Rafale jets, the Rafale M variant having common spares and support as the Rafale operated by the Indian Air Force had an edge over Boeing's Super Hornet. The IAF also depends on Russia for spares for its Su-30MKI and MiG-29 fighter jets, however, the war in Ukraine has held up Russian spares critical for India to maintain its tank and fighter jet fleets, and delayed the delivery of Russian air defence systems.

India and France understand that their common stand on strategic autonomy and sovereignty can only be achieved when they both have a strong indigenous capacity in key sector hence India is willing to expand its procurement sources beyond Russia. Deals with France have been based on solid guarantees that it will not stop the supply of spare parts and weapons in case of a conflict, which the other suppliers have not guaranteed.

As the Indo-Pacific becomes a prominent theatre for greater power politics, this will provide the Indian Navy a boost to its combat capabilities and in tackling various challenges such as all forms of terrorism including use of terrorist proxies and cross-border terrorism. It is one of the responsibility of our Navy to promote the vision of advancing peace, stability, and prosperity in the region with a commitment to uphold international law, respect for sovereignty and creating a region free from tensions, conflicts and coercions.

To strengthen collaborations and cooperation in the cyber security and to counter cyber threats, both the countries have agreed to join forces in promoting cyber norms and principles and to upgrade their bilateral cyber dialogue with a view to contributing to a peaceful, secure and open cyberspace. The two sides have also agreed to work together for a more secure and sovereign 5G/6G telecom systems.<sup>5</sup>

In light of 60 years of scientific and technical space cooperation to address the dynamic challenges in particular maintaining a secure access to space for all, both have agreed to set up bilateral strategic dialogue where experts from space and defence agencies, administration and specialised ecosystem will come together to discuss security challenges in outer space, new areas of cooperation and norms and principles applicable to space. As mentioned in an Indian Express news article titled 'Series of pacts sealed as

Modi & Macron hold talks in Paris, outline bold, ambitious goals', dialogue on space security issues was held during the visit, "Agreements between ISRO and its French counterpart on the next joint earth observation satellite (Trishna), first phase of maritime surveillance programme, protection of our joint satellites from collision risks in orbit".<sup>6</sup> France's expertise in space technology combined with India's aspirations to grow as a space power will be cataclysmic.

## Conclusion

Bilateral cooperation between India and France will continue to develop new partnerships in various formats in the region and within regional organisations with their vision on multipolarity and multilateralism. Besides a roadmap for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, the defence agreements along with the collaboration in energy, environment, space and other sectors underline India's importance to France and its larger aim of restraining China.<sup>7</sup> India and France are tackling many challenges of the 21st century as we are moving towards a new world order. Be it climate change, supply chains, counter-terrorism, counter-radicalism, etc. the world is looking at India as a reliable partner to steer across a complex and uncertain geopolitical environment.

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## Endnotes

1 Editorial, "PM Modi's visit to France bolsters ties with a crucial Western ally", <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/editorial/pm-modis-visit-to-france-bolsters-ties-with-a-crucial-western-ally/article67091233.ece> (Accessed July 15, 2023)

2 HARSH V. PANT, ANKITA DUTTA, "Exploring the blue in the India-France partnership", <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/exploring-the-blue-in-the-india-france-partnership/article66490647.ece> (Accessed July 15, 2023)

3 Pratik Prasenjit, "French Connection: 6 reasons why France is India's top partner in Europe",

<https://www.wionews.com/india-news/french-connection-6-reasons-why-france-is-indias-top-partner-in-europe-615179> (Accessed July 15, 2023)

4 Aman Gupta, "PM Modi departs for three-day visit to France and UAE, says 'this visit is special'", <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/pm-modi-leaves-for-two-day-visit-to-france-11689209231291.html> (Accessed July 16, 2023)

5 MEA, India-France Joint Statement during the Visit of Prime Minister to France, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35279/IndiaFrance\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_during\\_the\\_Visit\\_of\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_to\\_France](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35279/IndiaFrance_Joint_Statement_during_the_Visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_France) (Accessed July 16, 2023)

6 Shubhajit Roy, "Series of pacts sealed as Modi & Macron hold talks in Paris, outline 'bold, ambitious goals'", <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/pacts-modi-macron-indian-french-troops-march-paris-8> (Accessed July 16, 2023)

**7 Editorial, “PM Modi’s visit to France bolsters ties with a crucial Western ally”, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/editorial/pm-modis-visit-to-france-bolsters-ties-with-a-crucial-western-ally/article67091233.ece> (Accessed July 16, 2023)**

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