

Indo - French Bilateral - Part II

What is the issue?

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- French President Macron's visit saw the signing of multiple bilateral deals and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen cooperation.

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- The comprehensive 'Joint Statements' and stress on strategic cooperation in 'Indian Ocean Region' highlighted the growing importance of the relationship.

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What is the historic evolution of the relationship?

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- There were limits to bilateral cooperation during the cold war period as France was a NATO member.

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- After the end of cold war, India-France Strategic Partnership was launched in 1998 to boost bilateral ties, and two eventful decades have passed since.

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- Cooperation in diverse fields covering - defence, space, counter-terrorism, education, culture, economics, climate change, culture, urban development, science and technology have taken shape over the years.

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- After India went nuclear in 1998, France was the first major power to open dialogue and display greater understanding of India's security compulsions.

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- It was also the first P-5 country to support India's claim for a permanent seat in an expanded and reformed UN Security Council.

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How has cooperation in the security domain evolved?

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- **Arms Trade** - Cooperation began in the 1950s when India started sourcing high-end military hardware (aircrafts, helicopters) from France.

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- An agreement for building six Scorpène submarines in India with French help was signed in 2005 and one has already been commissioned (INS Kalveri).

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- The government-to-government agreement for 36 Rafale aircraft recently moved forward after prolonged negotiations.

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- An ambitious offset target of 50% of the Rafale deal (25,000 crores approx) for reinvestment in India could possibly boost India's budding aerospace industry.

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- Also, technology sharing and acquisitions of short range missiles and radar equipment were concluded recently.

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- **Working Partnership** - "Strategic Dialogue" has been established, to enhance cooperation in defence, intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism.

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- MoUs were signed for reciprocal logistics support to each other's armed forces, and exchange and reciprocal protection of classified information.

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- Terror strikes in recent years have enlarged the scope of counter-terrorism cooperation to include cyber security and discussions on de-radicalisation.

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- Joint exercises between the air forces and the armies were instituted in 2003 and 2011, respectively and joint navel exercise "Varuna" dates back to 1983.

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- **Indian Ocean Region** - There has been a growing convergence of interests in maritime cooperation in this region due to the expansionist Chinese foray.

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- Also, French overseas territories in the Indian and the Pacific Oceans provide it with the second largest exclusive economic zone globally.

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- Notably, France has long maintained bases in Reunion Islands and Djibouti and established one in Abu Dhabi in 2009.

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What are the other aspects of mutual cooperation?

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- **Space** - French assistance for the construction of “Sriharikota Launch Site” in 1960 marked the beginning of ties and both are now big players in the sector.

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- Currently, many Joint missions for space awareness, earth observation with applications in meteorology, oceanography and cartography are undertaken.

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- Inter-planetary exploration and space transportation systems are cutting edge science and technology areas that have also been identified.

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- **Energy** - An agreement was for building six pressurised nuclear reactors with a capacity of 9.6 GW was sealed a decade ago, but little has progressed.

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- The current bilateral has reiterated the commitment for the Jaitapur nuclear power plant in Maharashtra, and it is hoped that there will be progress.

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- Climate change and renewable energy resources (particularly solar), has also emerged as an important sector in the bilateral cooperation.

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- The multilateral initiative “International Solar Alliance” (ISA) was launched on the sidelines of Paris Climate Talks and currently has 61 members.

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- **Urban Development** - Planning, construction and management of services like housing, transport, water, and sanitation is also a domain of convergence.

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- Under the Smart City Mission, France has tied up with the corporations of Chandigarh, Nagpur and Pondicherry for various projects.

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- For a wider partnership, strengthening business-to-business and people-to-people relationships is essential and this needs to be facilitated.

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- **Trade** - While bilateral trade has grown in recent years, it currently stands at merely \$10 billion, which provides ample scope for trade enhancement.

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- Private sector seems to have recognized this as agreements worth \$16 billion were signed at the recently held business summit.

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- Notably, more than 1000 French companies operate in India and 100s of

Indian enterprises have sprouted up in France in recent years.

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- Also, while U.K. has traditionally been the entry point for most Indian companies to E.U. markets, Mr. Macron has now pitched France as a suitable alternative entry destination in the post-Brexit scenario.

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- **Educational** - Currently about 2,500 Indians go to France annually to pursue higher education, compared to more than 250,000 from China.

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- By 2020, France has envisioned to host 10,000 Indian students and agreements for mutual recognition of academic degrees is also in the pipeline.

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- **Tourism** - France has targeted to attract 1 million Indian tourists and India on has aimed for 335,000 French tourists by 2020.

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- These targets are modest considering that France has an intake of 80 million tourists and India takes 9 million annually.

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- These numbers should be viewed in the present cotext where Indo-French direct people to people contact is current very low.

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Source: The Hindu

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