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1. India- France Relations – Bilateral Relations

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held high-level bilateral talks with French President Emmanuel Macron in France — the first meeting between the two leaders since India-France ties were elevated to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership" earlier in 2026. The summit produced substantive outcomes across technology, defence, space, energy, and economic cooperation, reflecting the maturing depth of what is India's oldest and most institutionally dense strategic partnership with any Western nation.

1. Major Highlights of the Summit

The talks yielded three headline outcomes. First, the two leaders formally adopted the "Innovation Roadmap 2030" — a structured framework providing long-term direction to bilateral cooperation in technology and innovation, covering artificial intelligence, quantum computing, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing. Second, they agreed to establish a **Joint India-France AI Working Group** to deepen collaboration on artificial intelligence governance, research, and deployment — a domain of growing geopolitical significance as the global competition for AI leadership intensifies. Third, both leaders jointly inaugurated the maiden edition of **Bharat Innovates 2026**, an initiative of India's Ministry of Education designed as a premier platform connecting India's deep-tech innovators with global stakeholders and investment ecosystems.

2. India-France Strategic Partnership: A Historical Overview

The India-France Strategic Partnership was launched on 26 January 1998 — on India's Republic Day, a symbolically deliberate choice — making it India's first-ever formal Strategic Partnership with any country. The partnership's core vision is the enhancement of strategic autonomy and deepening of bilateral cooperation across multiple domains.

The partnership rests on three foundational pillars: **defence and security, civil nuclear cooperation, and space collaboration**. Over the past decade, it has expanded significantly to encompass Indo-Pacific cooperation, maritime security, digitalisation, cybersecurity, climate change, sustainable development, advanced technologies, and counter-terrorism. Defence cooperation is institutionally reviewed through the Annual Defence Dialogue at the ministerial level and the High Committee on Defence Cooperation (HCDC) at the secretary level.

3. Defence Cooperation: The Strategic Centrepiece

Defence remains the most visible and consequential dimension of India-France bilateral ties.

1. **Rafale Fighter Jets:** India procured 36 Rafale aircraft from Dassault Aviation for the Indian Air Force — a procurement that transformed India's air combat capability and set the template for future government-to-government defence deals.
2. **Scorpene Submarines (Project P-75):** France's Naval Group collaborated on the construction of six Scorpene-class submarines in India. The latest vessel, INS Vagsheer, represents the maturing of this technology transfer.
3. **Combat Aircraft Engine Development:** Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Safran Helicopter Engines of France signed an agreement under the Indian Multi-Role Helicopter (IMRH) programme to co-develop engines — a step toward genuine technology co-development rather than mere procurement.

4. **Rafale–M for the Indian Navy:** Both nations formally concluded an Inter–Governmental Agreement (IGA) for the procurement of 26 Rafale–M fighter jets for the Indian Navy – to be deployed from INS Vikrant, India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier. This deal deepens the Rafale relationship and gives India carrier-based air power parity with regional competitors.
5. **Future co-development** of next-generation fighter jet engines is on the agenda, representing the ambition to move from buyer-seller toward genuine co-developer status.
6. **Joint Military Exercises:** Exercise Shakti (Army), Exercise Varuna (Navy), and FRINJEX-23 (joint amphibious) keep operational interoperability high.

4.Economic Cooperation

France is India's third-largest trading partner within the European Union, after the Netherlands and Germany. Bilateral trade has more than doubled over the past decade, reaching approximately Euros 13.59 billion (USD 15.81 billion) in 2025–26. The trade relationship is expected to gain further momentum following the signing of the India–EU Free Trade Agreement – a landmark agreement that significantly expands market access for goods and services between India and all EU member states. Both countries are also working on jointly developing and integrating technologies across digital and manufacturing domains. India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has been successfully enabled in France – a milestone in the internationalisation of India's digital payment infrastructure.

5.Space Cooperation

The ISRO–CNES (Centre National d'Études Spatiales) partnership spans over 60 years and is among the oldest and most productive bilateral space cooperation arrangements in the world. France has been a key supplier of components and launch services through Arianespace. Joint missions include the TRISHNA satellite mission – focused on thermal infrared imaging for agriculture, water, and urban monitoring – alongside MDA systems and ground station support.

Energy Cooperation

The International Solar Alliance (ISA), co-founded by India and France in 2015 on the sidelines of COP21 in Paris, remains one of the flagship outcomes of the bilateral relationship – now encompassing over 120 member countries. In nuclear energy, the first meeting of a special task force on nuclear energy within the framework of the Indo–French Strategic Dialogue was convened in 2025. Both sides are working toward a partnership on Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and Advanced Modular Reactors (AMRs) – next-generation nuclear technologies that offer lower capital costs, greater flexibility, and enhanced safety compared to large conventional reactors. The long-delayed Jaitapur nuclear power project in Maharashtra – potentially the world's largest nuclear power station – remains on the agenda, though progress has been hampered by India's nuclear liability framework.

6.Areas of Concern

1. **Trade imbalance** persists, with bilateral trade remaining below potential relative to the depth of strategic ties and the scale of both economies.
2. **Technology transfer depth** in major defence items remains a concern – France has been willing in principle, but the actual depth of transfer in complex systems such as aircraft engines has faced limitations.
3. **Nuclear liability concerns** under the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, continue to slow progress on the Jaitapur project despite the civil nuclear agreement of 2008.
4. **Geopolitical divergences** – France's substantial economic ties with China, and occasional differences in Middle East policy positioning – mean that alignment on Indo–Pacific issues is not always complete.

7.Future Outlook: Horizon 2047 Roadmap

To mark the 25th anniversary of the Strategic Partnership in 2023, both countries adopted the Horizon 2047 Roadmap — a visionary document guiding the relationship through to 2047. The roadmap envisions joint development of advanced defence technologies, export of co-developed products to third countries, deeper maritime and space security cooperation, and growing Indo-Pacific convergence through strategic dialogue and joint military presence.

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