



MACRON'S INDIA VISIT SOLIDIFIES A TRUSTED PARTNERSHIP

by

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French President Emmanuel Macron was in India as a chief guest of the 75th Republic Day celebrations. India [celebrates this day](#) to mark the nation's transition to a republic in 1950 when the Constitution of Independent India was adopted. A French leader being invited as the Guest of Honor for the Indian Republic Day marks the [sixth occurrence](#), the highest number for any country. The robustness of the partnership is underscored by President Macron's acceptance of the invitation just a month ago, as the initially invited United States President Joe Biden was [unable to attend](#) the event. The French leader's visit was a few months after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit for Bastille Day celebrations in Paris in July and Macron's attendance at the G20 summit in New Delhi in September last year.

Although the visit was largely ceremonial, it did produce a comprehensive [joint statement](#), [nine agreements](#) and seven announcements. This included 'a roadmap for defense-industrial partnership' as well as agreements in the areas of 'defense-space partnership', setting-up of assembly line for H125 helicopters, urbanization, science and technology and health cooperation. Other initiatives included declaring 2026 as India-France Year of Innovation and setting up of a Solar Academy in Senegal under the jointly launched International Solar Alliance.

Unique and Trusted Partnership

Today New Delhi has established more than 35 strategic partnerships. But the first ever strategic partnership India signed with any country was with France in January 1998. A few months later India conducted the Pokhran II nuclear tests. France not only refrained from imposing sanctions, but the then French President Jacques Chirac also wanted to [resolve India's exclusion](#) from the global nuclear framework. Since then, both have worked closely in almost all multilateral forums, including in the UN

Security Council. Convergence has emerged on issues related to reformed and effective multilateralism, international terrorism, climate change, sustainable development, and the Indo-Pacific. These issues have already been captured under [Horizon 2047](#) Roadmap agreed to by both nations in July 2023.

Both are situated in different geographies and are at different stages of economic development. But somehow their world views seem to have converged. France is an integral part of the European economic and security architecture and trans-Atlantic alliance. Still, the core of French foreign policy has been national identity and strategic independence. Since Charles De Gaulle, French leadership seems to believe that a strong and united Europe could be used as a tool to improve the [French position in world affairs](#). President Macron intends to make the EU a third pole in global affairs along with the U.S. and China through strategic autonomy and European sovereignty. [These French views converge](#) with the Indian preference for a multipolar world and strategic independence. While in Delhi, Macron [asserted](#) that India "is unique to understand all the different balances and equilibriums of the whole region".

The last 25 years have also seen unprecedented economic growth in the Indian economy. There has also been the rise of an assertive China. Economic and geopolitical factors created tremendous opportunities for both to work together. A strong institutional mechanism has been established to strengthen cooperation in the areas of defense, space, civil nuclear, renewables, cyber space, digital technology, counter terrorism, maritime security, military exercises and the blue economy. Both have jointly launched the International Solar Alliance and established [trilaterals](#) like India-France-Australia and India-France-UAE. There is a convergence in security and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific.

As outlined in a joint [Indo-Pacific Roadmap](#), both may align their infrastructure, connectivity and development projects together linking through trilateral cooperation with Australia, the UAE or through triangular development cooperation projects. Besides, France has now emerged as the second largest



exporter of defense equipment to India: 36 Rafale fighter jets have already been [delivered](#). A [number of deals](#) including more Rafale jets, submarines, and joint development of combat aircraft engines are being finalized.

Broader Context

At the moment France and Europe are [worried](#) about a possible second Trump presidency. Amid conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, coupled with a resurgence of the far right and protests [within the country](#), Macron's leadership in both France and Europe has also seen a [diminishing of its earlier shine](#). Domestically, he is weakened by [not having a majority](#) in parliament. He has also [faced criticism](#) for adopting a more lenient stance towards both Russia and China, as well as for his [comments on Taiwan](#). Issues concerning Russia and China will continue to influence India-France ties.

For Europe, the major foreign policy challenge at the moment is the Russia-Ukraine war. This is an area where Indian and French perceptions differ. Many European leaders including Macron have labelled China as a negotiating partner, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival. Since 'de-coupling' from China is not possible, the latest focus is on 'de-risking' economic ties with China. Although Europe's tough policies towards Russia and French 'mixed-up' approach towards China will continue to pose challenges to bilateral ties, it may also throw up new opportunities to work together. The conflict in Gaza has divided the already [polarized French society](#). In the evolving situation, policy makers are struggling to determine a position on the issue. Ahead of the EU elections, Macron has recently [reshuffled](#) his cabinet and [tightened immigration rules](#). Macron also visited India when the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and India's shift away from secularism was keenly [discussed](#) in French media.

Trade and Investment

The economic partnership too needs some focus. Most large French companies have a presence in India and they have [invested about \\$10 billion](#) in

India. Bilateral trade was stuck at about \$10-12 billion in recent years. Last year, it reached about \$14 billion. In comparison, India's trade with countries like Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam is more than France. India definitely can have better trade and investment ties with a \$3 trillion European economy. Negotiations on India-EU trade and investment agreements have re-started. France is keen on an FTA with India. The seventh round of India-EU FTA negotiations will begin [next month](#). Knowing the history of these negotiations, however, any early breakthrough is unlikely.

Migration and Mobility

The [2018 migration and mobility agreement](#), larger student and professional mobility and improved civil society linkages may help bring India and France further closer. During the visit, Macron said he aimed to attract as many as [30,000 Indian students](#) a year to enroll in French higher educational institutions. In 2023, close to [8,000 Indian students chose France](#) for higher education, mainly in the area of business management. During his visit, a new young professional scheme facilitating the exchange of individuals between 18-35 years of age was also operationalized.

Conclusion

On solid foundations laid by earlier leaders, three Indian Prime Ministers and four French Presidents have contributed to special India-France ties in the last 25 years. Prime Minister Modi played a historic role in finalizing the Rafale deal and forcefully articulating the Indo-Pacific narrative, which has made a qualitative difference. Differing perceptions on the Ukraine crisis has not dented ties. Overall, Macron's visit emphasized the strengthening camaraderie between India and France amidst increasing uncertainty in global geopolitics. It will help further strengthen India's ties with Europe.

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