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25 years of the India-France strategic partnership

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Why in News:

Celebrating 25 years of the India-France strategic partnership was at the top of the agenda during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to France and his meetings with French President Emmanuel Macron recently, which ended with a number of agreements and a slew of defence deals

Background

India and France are long-standing strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1947, and the upgrading of the partnership to the strategic level in 1998, our two countries have consistently acted together, building on a high level of mutual trust, shared commitment to the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and common values rooted in international law.

To mark the 25th anniversary of the Indo-French partnership, both countries agree to adopt a roadmap to set the course for the bilateral relationship up to 2047, which will celebrate the centenary of India's independence, the centenary of the diplomatic relations between the two countries and 50 years of the strategic partnership.

India and France intend to work together in the interest of international peace and stability and reaffirm their commitment to a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

They agree to work within the framework of a partnership between equals, in consonance with their respective sovereign and strategic interests, as they have done since 1998.

In order to further deepen this Strategic Partnership, and in keeping with universal values of liberty, equality, democracy and the rule of law, India and France have decided to strengthen cooperation in the sectors of the future, so as to reinforce their sovereignty and decision-making autonomy, and to respond together to the major challenges confronting our planet, including through the cooperation between India and the European Union.

Major outcomes of Recent visit

"Horizon 2047" agreement was signed. It included the strategic road map for the next 25 years. It has three pillars — 1) Partnership for security and sovereignty 2) Partnership for the planet and 3) Partnership for the people.

This agreement includes a variety of fields of cooperation i.e., defence, space, nuclear energy, climate change and green transitions as well as education and people-to-people ties.

Through this roadmap, the India-France Strategic Partnership will further diversify into new areas of cooperation while also deepening existing programmes of shared interest.

A roadmap to cooperate in the Indo-Pacific region was also released. The agreement includes military and naval exchanges and a trilateral development fund to help countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

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Under defence cooperation, Safran, the French company and the DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) will jointly develop jet engines for the advanced medium combat aircraft. Submarines are proposed to be jointly built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders and the Naval Group of France.

Significance of the India and France relations

Strategic autonomy: France-India strategic relationship is built on a respect for each other's strategic autonomy. For example, unlike other European countries, France has avoided any comment on India's internal affairs or its foreign policy choices, like Russia's war in Ukraine.

French support after nuclear tests: In 1974, and in 1998, France did not join the western push to sanction India for its nuclear tests either; it even stepped in with uranium supplies to power the Tarapur reactors

Strategic partnership: Franco-Indian strategic partnership comes at the top in comparison to 30 strategic partnerships with various countries. It has remained strong during difficult or good times. Franco-Indian strategic partnership covers all dimensions of a full spectrum partnerships, like defence, space, climate change, critical technologies and people-to-people ties

Indo-Pacific: France maintains a notable presence as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific region, with overseas territories such as La Reunion, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia, and military bases in the area.

Defence cooperation: Joint exercises between the two countries, use of French military bases by Indian forces and achieving real-time maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean are of paramount importance for India.

Technological assistance: The collaboration between India and France in domains such as supercomputing, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies holds significant importance for India's future and has the potential to shape the course of their relationship for the next 25 years

Challenges in India-France relationship

The Rafale deal did not find mention in the joint communiqué, issued after the Paris summit between Mr Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Reference to the construction of three more Scorpene submarines was dropped from a later version of the bilateral statement "Horizon 2047".

Also, France's stand on China's BRI contrasts with that of India. Therefore, France might not be a reliable partner in case of confrontation China.

Seven years after a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between India and France for setting up the world's largest nuclear power plant at Jaitapur (Maharashtra), the project has not seen much progress

The Way Ahead

The divergence between India and France on the war in Ukraine has not endangered the development of their bilateral ties. This is because of the trust developed between the two countries over the last 25 years and mutual understanding of each other's positions on the subject