

## **The Indo-French Strategic Cooperation**

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### **Abstract**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century Indo-French relations have taken a new turn. This is primarily because of their demand and interest which both the countries face from internal and external challenges. As such, strategic partnership between them is a long term relation based on political, economic, social and historical factors. The partnership encompasses security, space, defence, climate change and civil nuclear cooperation. The author, thus analyses these aspects of national security and readily argues that the growing economic activities will solve employment in both the countries. Similarly, progress in scientific field will immensely benefit France because it is greatly depend on nuclear sector. Thus, today, for both the countries the need is to expand nuclear cooperation so that their strategic partnership gets a further boost in widening other areas of cooperation.

**Key Words:** strategic partnership, civil nuclear cooperation, terrorism, security threat, defence technology, trade and investment, GST, sustainable development, climate change, solar and renewable energy, skill development.

### **Introduction:**

The Indo-French cooperation could be analyzed in the context of strategic partnership. It is a long-term relations between two countries based on political, economic, social and historical factors. Such a partnership is manifested in a variety

of forums. India has signed “strategic partnerships” with more than 30 countries. The Strategic Dialogue in 1998, between India and France encompasses security, space, defence and civil nuclear cooperation sectors.

India-France relationship enjoys ample support from French government and has been accorded a high priority by all the Presidents of France. The significance of strategic partnership has seen great progress in all areas of bilateral cooperation through regular high-level exchanges at the Head of State/Head of Government levels. Indo-French relations received a boost in 2015 with high level engagements and expansion of the already strong cooperation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a landmark visit to France from 09-12 April, 2015. Prime Minister Modi and President of France Mr. Francois Hollande held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2015. They again met in Paris on 30 November 2015 at the Leaders’ Event of CoP-21 (21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in Paris.<sup>1</sup>

There has been a significant progress in bilateral relations through regular Ministerial and official visits. This has been a positive factor in Indo-French relations and important areas are and exchanges in strategic areas of security, defence, nuclear energy, space, science and technology, culture, education etc. France has always supported India’s permanent membership in the UN Security Council and multilateral export control regimes like the NSG, MTCR etc.<sup>2</sup>

The India–France relations is based on three important pillars, i.e. civil nuclear cooperation, defence relations and to terrorism. As a strategic partner, French support to India has been unflinching. In fact, along with Russia, France did not imposed any sanctions against India after the 1998 nuclear tests. Indo-French technological collaboration includes such areas like solar thermal technology,

robotics and control systems, besides defence technology. India was depended on France for many years for the launching of its heavy satellites.<sup>3</sup>

In the last decade, France has consistently condemned terrorist killings. On Post-26/11 attack, it has backed the substantial evidence that India had given to Pakistan on the Mumbai attacks. In his visit in 2010, President Sarkozy strongly condemned Pakistan for providing a safe haven to terror outfits. He states such business was 'unacceptable'. He also stated that terrorism erupting from Afghanistan and Pakistan was the major source of instability in the world and was against the return of the Taliban in the name of reconciliation. Recently, in May 2011, France has also signaled a temporary freeze on arms sales to Pakistan. The major thrust of French interest lies in boasting nuclear trade with India.

France became the first country to sign a 5 civil nuclear agreement with India in September 2008. It included provisions for the transfer of technology. However, France has voiced concerns about nuclear liability laws in India. Meanwhile, France, like the US and Russia, has also supported India's candidature for the four multilateral export control regimes. The recognition of India's importance by France in recent years could be seen in the technological field. Its technological prowess in certain critical areas is of great relevance to India because it indicates a high potential in the growth of the Indo-French strategic partnership. The above analysis of French support to India would suggest that France deserves to be graded at seven on how substantial the support was, six on how sustained it was, and seven as regards its future potential.<sup>4</sup>

### **Defence Cooperation:**

Modernization of Indian defence forces is the prime need of the Narendra Modi government. Prime Minister Modi has promised to speed up the defence procurement and indigenization of defence manufacturing. The 'Make in India'

programme aims at 'promoting self-reliance, indigenisation, technology upgradation and achieving economies of scale and developing capabilities for exports in the defence sector.' India is likely to invest more on defence in the future. According to a report from Information Handling Services (IHS) Jane's Defence Budget, India would become the fourth biggest defence spender by 2020. It will only lag behind the US, China and Russia and will be ahead of France, Japan and the UK. The IHS Jane's Defence Budget also projects that India's defence spending would reach US \$65.4 billion in 2020. <sup>5</sup> India is a major market for international defence industry.

The geostrategic environment points out that the country has invested in new fighter aircrafts, attack helicopters, howitzers, submarines and aircraft carriers and other programmes.<sup>6</sup> Defence cooperation is thus a crucial area of cooperation between India and France. Enhanced political relations between the two countries helped to develop defence cooperation. During Cold War era, France sold weapons to India. It was basically a 'buyerseller' relation.<sup>7</sup> After the Cold War, India-France defence cooperation has gradually expanded. The strategic partnership calls for extensive defence cooperation between the two countries. India and France relations have also enhanced their cooperation in such areas as joint military exercise, arms sales, research & development. For instance, technological cooperation in the areas of light aircraft engines, tank technology, etc have been developed.<sup>8</sup> During the visit of President Hollande, Rafale was given top priority deal Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that he had ordered 36 'ready-to-fly' Rafale fighter jets to modernize Indian warplane fleet.<sup>9</sup>

Cooperation with France will also be helpful to India in enhancing the defence manufacturing base. Defence manufacturing is the key to 'Make in India' programme. For instance, French company, DCNS, is reportedly in negotiations with the Indian companies for collaboration in manufacturing in India.<sup>10</sup> France has shown interest in intensification of cooperation in collaboration in defense

technologies and research and development, apart from defence cooperation. From time to time India and France have gone for military exercises, which are highly appreciated. Their recent military exercise included the component of countering terrorism.<sup>11</sup>

### **Trade and Investment:**

Just a week before his departure to India, in 2015 President Hollande declared that France is under a 'state of economic emergency'.<sup>12</sup> The country is passing through difficult time. The unemployment rate is above 10 per cent, marginally higher than 9.8 per cent EU average. French economy registered economic growth in 2015, which broke the stagnation of three years. Economic growth of one per cent is not sufficient to fulfill the aspiration of the young and the employment opportunities.<sup>13</sup> The European neighbourhood is not stable. The growth of crises in the adjacent areas has put tremendous pressure on the EU, including France. India is likely to remain one of the fastest growing economies.

Economic reforms is one step in improving the economic environment in the country. India's two crucial reform bills - GST and land acquisition-have not been passed so far, but the overall economic climate has improved in the country. Similarly, French President, is bothered about ways to create jobs for some 3.6 million people back home. He has a presidential elections coming up in 2017. In short, he is faced with some real immediate tasks.

Trade and investment remains another top priority for the countries. India's trade in goods with France was 7879 million Euros in 2014. Trade has registered a growth of around 10 per cent from the previous year. Bilateral trade in goods in 2013 was around 7088 million Euros. There are fluctuations in bilateral trade in goods. However, bilateral trade in services has been constantly growing. Trade in services was 1992 million Euros in 2011; it reached around 2922 million Euros in 2013.<sup>14</sup> France is an important partner in terms of investment. It was the ninth largest

investor in India in 2014. The total French FDI inflows in India were around US\$ 4.41 billion in 2014. On the other hand, with cumulative FDI inflows amounting to € 410 million, India ranked 47th largest foreign investor in France in 2013.<sup>15</sup>

The major emphasis is on the 'Make in India' programme. France is ready to assist India's ambitious programme in the manufacturing sector. In the Business meeting with industry leaders, both Modi and Hollande advocated the economic needs and opportunities of 'Make in India' programme. Regular business interactions between the countries will help in creating the business environment and facilitate greater economic linkages. France and India have also launched the CEO forum. In the Joint Statement, both leaders appreciated the first meeting of the CEO forum, which was held in a short timeframe of nine months. As part of 'Make in India' initiative, an agreement was signed between Airbus Group and Mahindra to manufacture helicopters.<sup>16</sup>

### **Sustainable Development, Climate Change, Solar and Renewable Energy:**

During the recent conference on climate change in Paris, India was a leading voice for nonwestern concerns. Prime Minister Modi congratulated the French President for its sustained diplomatic efforts that paved the way for the successful conclusion of COP21 (Conference of the Parties 21st session in France) in Paris in December 2015. Both concluded the Paris agreement. It was based on the principles of climate justice, and fostering climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development. The two leaders welcomed the French commitment to support the solar projects launched by the member countries of ISA. To that effect, the AFD Group will provide funding amounting to 300 million Euros. This pledge is in line with the financing of 2 billion Euros for the development of renewable energies, announced by France during COP21.<sup>17</sup>

Realising the significance of energy storage to promote renewable energies, the two leaders signed two MoUs: CEA (French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission) and Crompton Greaves and Green Ventures. These MoUs will boost practical collaboration in the field of renewable energy, including transfer of technology and know-how. Hollande and Modi also reaffirmed their valuable partnership in India's ambitious plans to develop Smart Cities. As such, the two leaders went one step further in extending technical assistance for the development of the 3 cities of Chandigarh, Nagpur and Puducherry respectively, as Smart Cities in India.

The two Leaders emphasised the importance of clean transport and recalled the Protocol of Cooperation signed between the Indian Ministry of Railways and French National Railways SNCF (Société Nationale des Chemins de fer Français) In April, 2015. The two leaders further initiated the follow-up Agreement signed in December 2015 between the SNCF and Ministry of Railways to support a semi high-speed project for up-gradation of Delhi- Chandigarh line to 200 KMPH. The two leaders also signed the agreement between SNCF and Ministry of Railways on cooperation in the station. Renovation projects for Ambala and Ludhiana railway stations. Furthermore the leaders also welcomed the Joint Venture agreement signed between the Indian Railways and Alstom for the supply of 800 high horse power locomotives manufactured in India and made rapid stride in finalizing the investment in the electric locomotives factory in Madhepura, Bihar.

Research on space has been a shared interest of France and India. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Indo-French space cooperation in 2015, the leaders signed two Implementing Arrangements between their Space Agencies for cooperation in definition studies on a future joint Thermal Infrared Earth Observation mission and hosting of the French instrument for data collection on India's Oceansat-3 satellite. The leaders were optimistic that these missions would

help in monitoring the environment, weather, water resources and coastal zones and would further strengthen the partnership between the two countries. They also agreed on the collaboration through the participation of the Centre National d'études spatiales (CNES) in future space and planetary exploration missions of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).<sup>18</sup>

France and India underlined the importance of the dialogue on trade issues through the India- France Joint Commission, as well as their strong commitment to the European Union-India Broad Based Trade and Investment Agreement.

Both the countries recognized the need to cooperate in preventing off-shore tax evasion and made provisions to strengthen the exchange of information in recent years. The two leaders further explored ways for joint co-operation, especially in capacity building and sharing of best practices, in line with G20 commitments. Recognizing the important role of cooperation between States the two leaders also concluded MoU on Cooperation in urban development between Telangana and the Bordeaux Metropole in September 2015 and the Investment Roadshow held by Government of Karnataka in Paris and Toulouse in December 2015 and encouraged more such initiatives.

### **Skill Development:**

So far India's development strategy is concerned there are certain the weakness such as manufacturing, which, is linked to India's skills-deficit. Hence, the promotion of education, skill development, science & technology become an important for Indo- French bilateral relations. The Leaders welcomed people-to-people and tourism contacts between the two countries, as well emphasizing the need for cultural, educational and scientific exchanges between the two countries. Indo-French issued joint statements in February 2013 and in April 2015 concerning the negotiations of a bilateral partnership agreement on migration and mobility. The

leaders committed to pursue their discussions on this agreement and to reach for some positive solution as soon as possible.

In the field of higher education hundreds of agreements between French and Indian institutions have already been signed. The two leaders welcomed the agreement signed between the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Pune and the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon. Further, the two countries agree the signed the agreement between the Indian Institute of Technology in Mumbai and French CNRS/Telecom Bretagne/Université de Bretagne occidentale/Université de Bretagne. Sud/ENSTA Bretagne/ENI Bretagne. Research Fellowships issues was also taken by the Thales and Indian Institute of Technology Mumbai. Recognizing that skills development was a key priority, both leaders welcomed the important role played by French companies in India in training and skilling the Indian workforce and encouraged them to engage even more actively in the sector. They also welcomed partnership between the French CNCP and the National Skills Development Authority of India focusing on Qualifications Register under the framework of the MOU on cooperation signed between India and France.<sup>19</sup>

### **Heritage, Culture, Sport:**

Culture has been a major aspect of the high politics in France, and India. Prime Minister Modi and President Hollande showed satisfaction on the progress made on a number of initiatives by Indian and French institutes to promote and preserve cultural heritage and enhance cultural cooperation between the two countries when Prime Minister Modi's paid a visit to France in April 2015. Both the countries welcomed the conclusion of the Cultural Exchange Programme between India and France for the period 2016-2018 and welcomed the Administrative Arrangement concluded between the Ministry of Culture and Communication of the French Republic, the Chairman of the National Library of France and the Ministry of Culture of India.

It was really good on the part of Indian and French archaeologists to work for archaeological survey of human existence that could date back to 2.6 million years near Chandigarh in India. They also welcomed the launch of the book "Shadows of Gods" by Institut Français de Pondichéry extensively cataloguing Indian Objets d'Arts and cultural heritage and its important contribution to the preservation and recovery of stolen Indian art.

The leaders supported the "Namaste France" cultural festival to be hosted by India in France from 15 September to 30 November 2016 where various Indian actors will perform various cultural performances, exhibitions, fairs and workshops. All these will highlight Indian cultural heritage and a reciprocal "Bonjour India" cultural festival of France in India in 2017. Realising the importance of Alliance Françaises in India, the Embassy of France/Institut Français in India and the Indian Embassy in France Prime Minister Modi announced the inauguration of a new Indian Cultural Centre in Paris in 2017. On similar line, President Hollande too stressed the need for further deepening Indo-French cultural ties and announced the opening of new centres of Alliance Française in Varanasi and Lucknow in 2016-2017. Both leaders also welcomed the hosting of the Regional Hindi Conference in Paris in 2016. President Hollande welcomed the announcement of 5 scholarships for French citizens to learn Sanskrit language.<sup>20</sup>

In the field of sports, the two countries leaders made rapid stride to the enhanced cooperation between them and welcomed the agreement signed between the Federation Française de Hockey and Hockey India. In the context of the recent agreement between Fédération Française de Football and All India Football Federation, the two leaders showed great desire in developing grassroots football in India by reinforcing the presence of its Academy established in 2014 in Delhi and Bangalore, as well as to consider a possible exhibition match in the future.

### **Science and Technology:**

India-France has made rapid progress in science and technology field. France could play a major role in nuclear technology as it has advanced nuclear technology and produces 75 per cent electricity through it. France is far advanced in developing nuclear technology.<sup>21</sup> Nuclear energy would diversify the energy basket and enhance energy security of the country. Although there are challenges in nuclear cooperation between the two countries, France sees India as a potential market for its nuclear technology. Prime Minister Modi and French President Hollande 'encouraged industrial companies to conclude techno-commercial negotiations by the end of 2016 for the construction of six nuclear reactor units at Jaitapur.'<sup>22</sup> The MoU was signed between Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) and Areva, France in 2009. The NPCIL and Areva signed General Framework Agreement and Early Works Agreement in 2010. Rehabilitation package agreement has been signed between NPCIL and Maharashtra government in 2010. The MoEF has given signal for the environmental clearance and Coastal Zone clearance in 2010. The French role would be crucial for India's membership in export control regimes. France has provided support for India's entry into international export control regimes. India and France has also signed MoUs for cooperating among the institutions engaged in scientific research.

### **Fight against International Terrorism:**

India and France have been seriously affected by international terrorism. Both countries have faced grave terror attacks, which led to the loss of human lives and property. France has witnessed several terror attacks in 2015. The country is in a state of emergency after terror attacks in Paris in November 2015.<sup>23</sup> French President has intensified global war to fight against the IS. India and France too has joined hand in enhancing their cooperation in the fight against international terrorism. India-France cooperation on international terrorism ranges from bilateral defence cooperation, joint working groups, joint military exercises to cooperation at the

multilateral forums. The Joint Statement on cooperation on international terrorism noted that terrorism is not acceptable in any circumstance. Both countries called for early conclusion of negotiations and adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism in the United Nations, which is perceived to be 'an ideal platform for a global alliance of nations against international terrorism'.<sup>24</sup> They welcomed the UNSC resolution 2249, has been highly appreciated which calls for necessary measures against the threats of the Daesh or IS. The Joint Statement on Counter Terrorism calls for comprehensive measures ranging from ending terror financing, dismantling terror infrastructure and preventing the supply of arms.<sup>25</sup> It Stern actor has to be taken against the Lashkar-e-Tayibba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Haqqani Network and other terrorist groups.<sup>26</sup> India and France also recognized that the terrorist activities from across Afghanistan borders pose serious threats to peace, security and stability of Afghanistan.

### **Conclusion:**

Recently honouring the French President shows that it is not simply a matter of symbolic affirmation of the continuity of Indo-French relations. It is also a matter of great strategic significance. The Republic Day parades which showed Indian achievements in many areas and the invitation to the French President as the Chief guest is an honour and these are positive indication of the positive goal of the rple played by Indian and French diplomacy. As such, the visit of President Hollande becomes important in the larger framework of India's foreign policy.

In the age of globalization, and mass consumption of technologies of instant communication, ceremonies like national day parades are more than mere ritual. President Hollande's visit was an important step towards growing cooperation between India and France. Further, political interactions on crucial issues of security may lead to other factors in solving global and regional crises. Threats of terrorism

and extremism are rapidly growing and a multilateral effort is sine quo non for effectively addressing the root causes of the menace.

Today, France is facing grave economic challenges. As unemployment rate is high, economic development with India could be raised to considerable level. France is all set for economic reforms in order to make economic environment more business friendly. India still remains an attractive destination for investment India has taken up large infrastructure development projects. It is good to see France taking keen interest in developing smart cities and making sincere efforts to provide access to energy to people at affordable price.

Thus, the growing economic activities between India and France will generate employment opportunities in France. Science and technology are long-standing areas of cooperation. Both countries are in the process of enhancing cooperation in areas of space and nuclear technologies. Today, India needs all necessary sources of energy to meet the growing demands. On the other hand, France is interested in India's nuclear sector. Both countries have made efforts to expand civil nuclear cooperation. On other issues Indo-French cooperation is important at the multilateral forums and international organizations. France has always supported India's permanent membership in UNSC and membership of multilateral export regimes. They are also committed for expanding cooperation at the EU level. One can say that the French visit to India has provided impetus to their bilateral cooperation as well as it has gained momentum in broadening the understanding on global and regional issues of mutual importance.

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