



## Strengthening Indo-French Ties

*This editorial is based on “ [Shared understanding: On India-France ties](#)” which was published in The Hindu on 14/02/2025. The article brings into picture the deepening Indo-French partnership, highlighting key agreements in defense, nuclear energy, and AI as both nations pursue strategic autonomy while balancing ties with the US and China.*

**For Prelims:** [Indo-French partnership](#), [Small Modular Reactors](#), [Rafale jets](#), [Indian Space Research Organisation](#), [Artificial Intelligence](#), [Unified Payments Interface](#), [Varuna](#), [India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor](#), [International Solar Alliance](#), [National Green Hydrogen Mission](#), [General Data Protection Regulation](#) .

**For Mains:** Key Areas of Cooperation Between India and France, Key Areas of Friction Between India and France.

The deepening [Indo-French partnership](#), marked by their frequent high-level exchanges, reflects a strategic alignment between two powers seeking autonomous paths in an uncertain global landscape. During recent meetings in **Paris and Marseille**, both nations advanced crucial agreements in **defense, nuclear energy, and technological cooperation, particularly in AI**. As shifting geoeconomic policies reshape international dynamics, both nations are strategically positioning themselves as independent powers while maintaining constructive engagement with both the **US and China**.

### What are the Key Areas of Cooperation Between India and France?

- **Civil Nuclear Collaboration:** India and France are strengthening nuclear energy cooperation to enhance energy security and achieve climate goals.
  - The focus has shifted from large nuclear plants like the **9,900 MW Jaitapur project** to [Small Modular Reactors \(SMRs\)](#), which offer cost-effectiveness and faster deployment.
  - France’s expertise in nuclear technology makes it a key partner in India’s plan to generate **100 GW of nuclear power by 2047**.
    - The **₹20,000 crore Nuclear Energy Mission** announced in the 2024-25 Budget supports research in SMRs.
- **Defence and Strategic Partnership:** India-France defence ties have deepened through joint military projects, technology transfer, and maritime cooperation.
  - France is a key arms supplier, supporting India’s military modernisation through [Rafale jets](#), [Scorpene submarines](#), and [naval cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#).
  - **France** and the United States are emerging as key suppliers to India, collectively accounting for **46%** of its arms imports.
  - Also, in December 2024, the two leaders expressed their support for the launch of **FRIND-X (France-India Defence Startup Excellence) in Paris**.
- **Space and Aerospace Cooperation:** France has been a longstanding partner in India’s space

- ambitions, particularly in **satellite technology, launch vehicles, and climate monitoring**.
- Collaboration includes joint satellite missions like **TRISHNA (Thermal Infrared Imaging Satellite for High-resolution Natural Resource Assessment)** and joint research on space security.
  - India's space startups are also benefiting from **France's expertise in AI-based satellite applications**.
  - In 2021, the [Indian Space Research Organisation \(ISRO\)](#) and the French space agency CNES signed a new space cooperation agreement at the **Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC) in Bangalore**.
- **Artificial Intelligence and Technology Innovation:** India and France are leveraging AI for economic and strategic growth while focusing on **ethical AI development**.
    - Recently, the Indian Prime Minister and French President unveiled the **India-France Roadmap on Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, reflecting their shared vision for developing **safe, open, secure, and trustworthy AI**.
      - They welcomed the participation of Indian startups at the **French startup incubator Station F** and acknowledged the expanded opportunities for utilizing India's real-time payment system, [Unified Payments Interface \(UPI\)](#), in **France**.
  - **Indo-Pacific Security and Maritime Cooperation:** France, with its territories in the Indo-Pacific, aligns with India's vision of a **free, open, and rules-based maritime order**.
    - Both nations conduct **joint naval exercises (Varuna)** and are developing joint projects for **climate resilience and connectivity in third countries**.
    - The **India-France Indo-Pacific Triangular Cooperation** aims to finance sustainable projects.
  - **Economic and Trade Relations:** France is one of India's largest European investors, focusing on **manufacturing, clean energy, and financial services**.
    - India-France trade is expanding, especially in **high-tech sectors and electric mobility**.
    - The [India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor \(IMEC\)](#), where France proposes Marseille as a hub, will boost connectivity and trade.
    - Trade relations between India and France have witnessed steady growth, with bilateral trade reaching an impressive **USD 13.38 billion in 2023-24**.
  - **Renewable Energy and Green Technologies:** Both countries are working together on **climate action, renewable energy, and decarbonisation**.
    - France supports India's **solar and hydrogen economy**, particularly under the [International Solar Alliance \(ISA\)](#).
    - Joint research on **energy storage solutions and grid modernisation** ensures efficient renewable integration.
    - France is also aiding India's [National Green Hydrogen Mission](#) with technical expertise.
  - **Education and Cultural Exchange:** France is a top European destination for Indian students, with **7,344 Indian students enrolling in the 2023-24 academic year**.
    - The [Young Professionals Scheme \(YPS\)](#) India-France Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement (MMPA) aims to enhance mobility, while joint cultural programs strengthen people-to-people ties.

## What are the Key Areas of Friction Between India and France?

- **Delays in Defence Procurement and Technology Transfer:** India's defence deals with France have often faced bureaucratic delays, cost escalations, and policy hurdles.
  - Projects like **Rafale jets, Scorpene submarines, and jet engine collaborations** have been slowed due to **contract negotiations, policy changes, and localisation demands**.
    - The **Scorpene submarine project under Project 75(I) has faced delays since 2017**.
- **Civil Nuclear Energy Roadblocks:** Despite strong nuclear cooperation, projects like the **Jaitapur nuclear plant (9,900 MW)** face hurdles related to **high costs, local protests, and legal ambiguities**.
  - The [Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010](#), places financial liability on suppliers, discouraging French nuclear firms from deeper collaboration.
  - In 2023, France stated that **nuclear liability issues** for the Jaitapur project remain

unresolved.

- **Trade Imbalances and Market Access Issues:** While trade between India and France is growing, barriers like **high tariffs, regulatory hurdles, and localisation requirements** create friction.
  - France seeks greater access for its **pharmaceutical, luxury goods, and defence industries**, while India demands easier entry for **IT, agriculture, and generic drugs** in the French market.
    - The slow progress on [India-EU Free Trade Agreement \(FTA\)](#) further complicates the trade dynamic.
- **Disagreements on Global AI and Data Regulation:** While India and France collaborate on **AI development**, differences persist over **data privacy and digital regulation**.
  - France supports the **EU's strict [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#)** model, while India prefers a **flexible, innovation-friendly approach** under its **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**.
  - Disagreements over **open-source AI, cybersecurity norms, and digital sovereignty** could limit deeper AI cooperation.
- **Divergences in Indo-Pacific and Strategic Autonomy:** While both nations support a free and open Indo-Pacific, their approaches differ in **military alignment and strategic independence**.
  - **France, a [NATO member](#)**, often aligns with Western policies, while India follows a **multipolar, non-aligned strategy**.
    - India's growing ties with **Russia (for energy and defence)** sometimes create tensions with France, which has strongly opposed Russia's Ukraine invasion.
  - India refused to **join NATO-led sanctions on Russia** after the Ukraine war, while France has been a **key military backer of Ukraine**.
- **Immigration and Mobility Restrictions:** Despite growing educational and professional ties, **visa restrictions, work permit limits, and recognition of Indian qualifications** remain challenges for Indian students and professionals in France.
  - India seeks **easier residency and work opportunities** for its skilled workforce, but France prioritises **EU-wide immigration policies**, limiting flexibility.
  - The **Young Professionals Scheme (YPS) is launched** to ease mobility, but France looks to **tighten Schengen visa policies**.

## What Measures can India Adopt to Further Strengthen Ties with France?

- **Fast-Track Defence Co-Development and Technology Sharing:** India should shift from a **buyer-seller relationship** to **joint development and production** of advanced defence technologies.
  - Establishing dedicated R&D centres for **jet engines, naval propulsion, and missile systems** under **India's Defence Industrial Roadmap** with France can boost indigenisation.
  - Expediting negotiations on [Project 75\(I\) submarines](#) and **Rafale-M for the Navy** will strengthen maritime security cooperation.
  - To accelerate nuclear collaboration, India must **revise the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010**, ensuring balanced supplier liability without deterring foreign investment.
    - Faster approvals for the **Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant** and clarity on **power purchase agreements (PPAs)** will enhance investor confidence.
- **Strengthening AI and Digital Sovereignty Cooperation:** India should align its AI regulations with **France's AI ethics framework**, ensuring **data sovereignty, cyber resilience, and secure AI governance**.
  - Creating a **bilateral AI Innovation Fund** to support Indian and French startups in **trustworthy AI, cybersecurity, and semiconductors** will accelerate cooperation.
  - Expanding the **India-France AI Roadmap** to include **joint AI research labs and talent exchange programs** can drive leadership in **ethical AI development**.
- **Expanding Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Collaboration:** India and France should transition from **joint exercises like Varuna** to **permanent maritime task forces** for patrolling the Indian Ocean and South Pacific.

- Enhancing **intelligence sharing, interoperability, and naval logistics agreements** will strengthen deterrence against regional threats.
- Setting up a **Maritime Innovation and Security Hub** in the **Reunion Islands** with Indian participation will deepen Indo-Pacific strategic engagement.
- **Accelerating Green Hydrogen and Renewable Energy Investments:** India should facilitate **technology transfer agreements** with France for **electrolyser manufacturing, hydrogen fuel cells, and energy storage systems**.
  - Expanding the scope of **France's investments under India's ₹19,700 crore [National Green Hydrogen Mission](#)** will enhance industrial-scale deployment.
  - Establishing a **bilateral Green Energy Fund** can accelerate investments in **offshore wind, solar PV, and carbon capture technologies**.
- **Deepening Infrastructure and Connectivity Collaboration:** India must ensure **faster implementation of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** by engaging France in **multi-modal logistics, smart port development, and digital trade facilitation**.
  - Encouraging French participation in **high-speed rail, metro, and sustainable urban infrastructure projects** will drive long-term investments.
  - Strengthening financial incentives for **French firms under [India's Production Linked Incentive \(PLI\) scheme](#)** will attract more **foreign direct investment (FDI)**.
- **Enhancing Space Cooperation for Strategic Autonomy:** India and France should co-develop **dual-use space technologies, satellite-based early warning systems, and secure communication networks** for strategic resilience.
  - Expanding collaboration under **the 2047 Space Cooperation Roadmap**
  - Establishing a **Bilateral Space Security Forum** to counter **space weaponization and cyber threats to satellite networks** can ensure long-term cooperation.
  - Strengthening joint R&D in **earth observation, space situational awareness (SSA), and lunar exploration** will also elevate India-France space collaboration.
- **Strengthening Trade and Investment Facilitation:** India should push for **sector-specific market access agreements** in **pharmaceuticals, agribusiness, and high-end manufacturing** to balance trade asymmetries with France.
  - Encouraging **France-based venture capital firms** to invest in **India's deep-tech, semiconductors, and AI startups** will boost economic engagement.
    - Creating **joint innovation clusters in Bengaluru, Pune, and Paris** focusing on **AI, quantum computing, cybersecurity, and semiconductor fabrication** will drive technological synergies.
- **Expanding Educational and Mobility Agreements:** India should **expand dual-degree programs** with France's top universities, ensuring **credit transferability and simplified visa procedures** for Indian students.
  - Increasing funding for **joint research grants in AI, renewable energy, and biotechnology** will enhance academic ties.
  - Extending the **Young Professionals Scheme (YPS)** to mid-career professionals in **STEM, defence, and policy sectors** can deepen people-to-people engagement.

## What Role can France Play In Enhancing India-Europe Ties?

- **Bridging India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Negotiations:** France, as a key EU member, can **mediate regulatory and trade standard alignments** between India and the European Union.
  - By **advocating for reduced tariffs, easing market access, and harmonizing digital and environmental policies**, France can accelerate FTA finalization, unlocking billions in trade potential.
- **Strengthening India-Europe Connectivity via IMEC:** France's strategic port of **Marseille** can serve as a key hub in the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**.
  - By investing in **multi-modal logistics, digital trade facilitation, and supply chain diversification**, France can position itself as a critical transit point between India and the EU.
- **Facilitating India's Deeper Engagement with European Defence Networks:** France can act as India's **entry point into European defence cooperation**, particularly with **OCCAR (Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation)**.
  - Recently, Government of India has officially become the newest Observer State in

the **OCCAR-managed MALE RPAS (Eurodrone) programme**

- **Strengthening Climate and Energy Partnerships in Europe:** France can champion India's **renewable energy initiatives** within Europe, encouraging more EU-based funding for India's **solar, wind, and hydrogen projects**.
  - By supporting **technology transfer and green finance**, France can position India as a preferred partner in **EU's Green Deal** frameworks.
- **Expanding India-Europe Digital and AI Cooperation:** France can help **align India's data governance and AI policies with EU standards**, ensuring smoother tech collaboration.
  - By integrating **India's AI innovation ecosystem** with European AI hubs, **coordinating cybersecurity efforts**, and promoting **India-EU quantum computing research**, France can drive a structured digital partnership.

## Conclusion:

The Indo-French partnership is evolving into a comprehensive **strategic alliance, underpinned by collaboration in defense, nuclear energy, AI, and space**. As both nations navigate an uncertain global order, they are leveraging their shared vision for **multipolarity and technological sovereignty**. Strengthening Indo-Pacific security, green energy investments, and AI governance can further solidify this partnership.

### **Drishti Mains Question:**

Amid shifting global geopolitics, India and France have deepened their strategic engagement across multiple domains. Analyze how historical ties, defense cooperation, and emerging areas of collaboration shape this partnership.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

### **Prelims:**

**Q. Consider the following statements: (2016)**

1. The International Solar Alliance was launched at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2015.
2. The Alliance includes all the member countries of the United Nations.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Ans: (a)**

### **Mains:**

**Q. How will the I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE and USA) grouping transform India's position in global politics? (2022)**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-editorials/14-02-2025/print>

