

# SOMETHING SPECIAL: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON 25 YEARS OF THE INDIA-FRANCE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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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 last week, which ended with a number of agreements and a slew of defence deals. Mr. Modi's visit, just months before Mr. Macron is in Delhi for the G-20 summit, was a special one, as he was invited to be the chief guest at the Bastille Day parade — it saw Indian tri-service participation — and was the second time that an Indian Prime Minister has been extended the invitation (Manmohan Singh was the first in 2009). Chief among the agreements was the strategic road map for the next 25 years — “Horizon 2047” — which includes cooperation in defence, space, nuclear energy, climate change and green transitions as well as education and people-to-people ties. Another road map was released on how to cooperate further in the Indo-Pacific region, which includes military and naval exchanges and a trilateral development fund to help countries in the region. There were also the decisions, in principle, to buy 26 more Rafale fighter jets off-the-shelf (Rafale-M), this time for the Indian Navy; three more Scorpene submarines in continuation to the purchases of 2008, and an agreement between Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Safran for helicopter engines.

In the broader picture, the France-India strategic relationship is built on a respect for each other's strategic autonomy. France has remained steadfast in its refusal to comment on India's internal affairs or its foreign policy choices. While France has taken a leading role in the western pushback to Russia's war in Ukraine, it has not joined other western countries in publicly exhorting India to change its stand. 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. Mr. Modi's visit was also at around the same time that the European Parliament decided to adopt a resolution criticising his government for the violence in Manipur and alleged violations of human rights and freedom of religion issues. Yet, none of these issues was discussed or brought up. India too, made no mention of the violence in France after the killing of a teenager belonging to the Algerian immigrant community. Further, neither country has any desire to pull the other into a coalition, grouping or alliance the other is a part of, and both seem content with the success in forging the relationship bilaterally. In this and many other ways, their relationship has proven itself to be different from the other major partnerships that India has built across the world, explaining both the symbolism and the substance of the Prime Minister's visit.

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