

5TH INDO-FRENCH ANNUAL DEFENCE DIALOGUE

Proposals for collaboration in space, cyber, and submarines

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Defence Minister Rajnath Singh concluded the 5th Annual Defence Dialogue between India and France on Wednesday with late evening talks with his French counterpart, Sébastien Lecornu (Minister of the Armed Forces), in Paris.

Underscoring France's emergence as one of India's closest strategic and defence partners, the two ministers discussed a range of topics, including their assessments of the regional situation, ongoing military-to-military engagements, and enhanced defence industrial cooperation, according to a media release from India's Ministry of Defence (MoD).

Indo-French strategic ties

"The ministers reviewed ongoing defence projects and discussed ways to deepen collaboration between the defence industries of both countries. They also explored potential collaboration in niche domains such as space, cyber, and artificial intelligence (AI)," stated MoD.

Safran engines

An example of a crucial project on the Indo-French cooperation agenda is the agreement signed between France's Safran Helicopter Engines and India's Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) to establish a new joint venture for developing helicopter engines to meet India's future needs.

One such engine, known as the Shakti, is the only power plant with the thrust required to propel HAL's indigenous helicopters, including the light utility helicopter, the Dhruv



PHOTO: PTI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh (left) and his French counterpart Sébastien Lecornu discussed their assessments of regional situation, ongoing military-to-military engagements, and enhanced defence industrial cooperation

advanced light helicopter, the Rudra attack helicopter, and the light combat helicopter, to the challenging heights of Kargil or the Saltoro Ridge, where the Indian Army is deployed at altitudes exceeding 20,000 feet in posts like Sonam and Bana Top.

Earlier on Wednesday, Rajnath visited the Safran research and development centre near Paris in Gennevilliers to witness the latest developments in aero-engine technology.

"Rajnath highlighted the advantages of co-development and co-production in India, including the possibilities for exports to third countries. He underlined the inherent advantages of the Indian market, such as a large, skilled human resource base, world-class infrastructure, and a strong legal architecture," noted the Indian MoD.

Shipbuilding

Indo-French military

cooperation is also venturing into the realm of strategic shipbuilding. While India is constructing almost all of the 40 warships for its Navy domestically, an agreement was signed in Brest, France during Sea Tech Week 2022 to collaborate on joint research aimed at improving the analysis of data collected by underwater sensors using neural systems and AI.

Submarines

In partnership with French shipbuilder Naval Group, the defence electronics giant Thales is competing to supply the Indian Navy with underwater systems, such as sonars and the heavyweight F21 torpedo, which will arm India's six Scorpene-class submarines.

In July, Rajnath approved the construction of three additional Scorpene submarines with air-independent propulsion (AIP) by Mumbai-based Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders under the 'Buy (Indian)

category, with these submarines procured from French shipbuilder Naval Group.

Naval Group could also potentially secure another Indian tender for six AIP-driven submarines to be built in India. France may offer India six nuclear-powered submarines instead of AIP-driven boats, considering Naval Group's experience in building nuclear-powered submarines for the French Navy and conventional-powered boats for the export market.

Rafale-Marine fighters

In the same month of July, the MoD announced the procurement of 26 Rafale-Marine aircraft, including ancillary equipment, weapons, simulators, spares, documentation, crew training, and logistic support for the Indian Navy, from France's Dassault.

This selection represents the Indian Navy's choice for its tender for 26 multi-role carrier-based fighters, which had seen a request for information sent to two vendors: Dassault for the Rafale-Marine and the US firm Boeing for its F/A-18E/F Super Hornet.

Joint exercises and strategic ties

Upon arriving in Paris on Tuesday, Rajnath interacted with the Indian community there.

During the first leg of his two-nation tour in Rome, Rajnath held talks with Italian Defence Minister Guido Crosetto. After discussions on security and defence policy, they signed an Indo-Italian agreement on defence cooperation.