

India, France forge ‘special global strategic partnership’

Airbus H125 assembly line, HAMMER JV & more: 21 outcomes announced after Modi-Macron talks

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India and France on Tuesday elevated their ties to a “special global strategic partnership”, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron concurring that deepening cooperation between Paris and New Delhi represents “a partnership for global stability and global progress in today’s turbulent world”.

Macron, on his fourth visit to India as president, including as the Republic Day chief guest in 2025, was greeted in Mumbai by giant hoardings. On Tuesday morning, hours after landing, he jogged along Marine Drive.

Later in the day, following



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with French President Emmanuel Macron at Lok Bhavan in Mumbai on Tuesday

talks between Modi and Macron, the two sides announced 21 outcomes, highlighted by expanded defence manufacturing cooperation. Earlier

this month, the Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, cleared the acquisition of 114 Rafale fighter jets,

though the deal must still pass through negotiations on price and local production.

Agreements were also signed across innovation, startups, critical minerals, skilling, mobility, renewable energy and health. India and France additionally signed an amending protocol to their double tax avoidance agreement.

In defence, the countries announced a joint venture between Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and France’s Safran Electronics and Defence to produce the Highly Agile Modular Munition Extended Range (HAMMER) precision-guided air-to-ground weapon system in India. The system is deployed on Rafale fighter jets.

The two leaders jointly inaugurated the Airbus H125 helicopter final assembly line at Vemagal, on the outskirts of Bengaluru, Karnataka.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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Age-based social media curbs on table: Vaishnaw

Addressing investment prospects in artificial intelligence, Vaishnaw said India has so far secured commitments worth about \$90 billion from companies and venture capital funds, with total AI investments potentially exceeding \$200 billion over the next two years.

A substantial share of that investment is expected to flow into data centres, an area that already counts capital deployment commitments from technology majors Google, Amazon and Microsoft, alongside domestic players such as Adani Connex and Bharti Nxta. The Adani group has announced investments of \$100 billion over the next decade in renewable-energy-powered, hyperscale, AI-ready data centres.

Vaishnaw said the investment push would extend across all five layers of the AI stack. "We have seen VCs committing funds for deep-tech startups, we have seen VCs and other players committing funds for big solutions and big applications, we have seen VCs committing funds for further research in cutting-edge models."

The projected \$200 billion investments already include the \$70 billion pledged by Google, Amazon and Microsoft late last year. The minister said a further \$17 billion could be directed into deep-tech and application layers as demand accelerates.

He also noted that Nvidia is collaborating with Indian firms on significant investments in AI infrastructure and software, while declining to elaborate. Beyond capital inflows, the second phase of India's AI mission will prioritise research and development, innovation, AI diffusion and strengthening common

compute resources created under the government's AI Mission 1.0.

The ministry is set to place orders next week for an additional 20,000 graphics processing units (GPUs), supplementing the 38,000 already secured. "We will be placing orders for another 20,000 GPUs, and they will be deployed within the next six months, so it's a constant endeavour to provide high-quality gold resources to our startups, researchers and students."

Asked about the message for IT services companies, shares of which have tumbled in recent days, Vaishnaw said technological transitions must be navigated through close collaboration between industry and academia. "Reskilling, upskilling and creating a new talent pipeline should be the priority," he said.

Apology for hiccups on Day 1 of the summit

Vaishnaw apologised for the issues faced by attendees on the opening day of the AI summit, calling the turnout "phenomenal" and promising a smoother experience in the coming days. Addressing criticism over overcrowding, he said more than 70,000 people attended the summit on Monday.

"This is the biggest AI summit in the entire world. The response is phenomenal. The energy is palpable. We can see the organisation is very smooth now. If anybody has faced any problems yesterday, we apologise for that," he said at the press conference in the summit venue, Bharat Mandapam. He said a war room is now operating to address any issues being faced.

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The facility will be operated by Tata Advanced Systems Limited, with Singh and his French counterpart in attendance. The sides also signed an agreement providing for the reciprocal deployment of officers at Indian Army and French Land Forces establishments.

"This is the spirit of cooperation that we have in the field of defence in particular," said Macron. "I must mention the Rafale fighter jets and submarines,

and the new projects we are launching together, such as the final assembly line Tata is setting up for Airbus helicopters in Bengaluru." New Delhi is also exploring the purchase of the maritime version of the Rafale, according to French government sources quoted by agencies. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which tracks global arms transfers, reported that India accounted for the largest share of French arms exports in 2020-24.

Modi and Macron agreed to establish an annual foreign ministers' dialogue to review implementation of the elevated partnership and the "Horizon 2047 Roadmap". "In diplomacy, it means a great deal," Macron said of the new status of the bilateral ties -- a "special global strategic partnership".

India and France first signed a strategic partnership in 1998 -- New Delhi's first such pact with a western nation. Indian officials said the expanded framework would deepen cooperation in space, defence and civil nuclear energy. France has also worked closely with India on counter-terrorism and was described by officials as "extremely helpful" following the Pahalgam terror attack. Macron spoke of joint efforts to promote a "non-hegemonic" world order and to expand connectivity and trade.

In his media statement, Modi recalled Macron hosting him at the AI Action Summit in Paris in 2025, describing France as one of India's oldest strategic partners. "We are combining France's expertise with India's scale," he said. Later, the leaders launched the India-France Year of Innovation at Gateway of India. Modi welcomed France's commitment to host 30,000

Indian students by 2030 and announced that India's leading startups would showcase their innovations in France in June 2026.

On Wednesday, Macron will travel to New Delhi to participate, alongside other world leaders, in the India AI Impact Summit.

Modi said the helicopter assembly line exemplified the breadth of bilateral cooperation, noting that India and France would manufacture "the only helicopter in the world capable of flying to the heights of Mount Everest" and export it globally. "The India-France partnership knows no boundaries. It can reach from the deep oceans to the tallest mountains," he said, calling 2026 a "turning point" for India-Europe relations.

Other agreements included expanded cooperation in science and technology, the creation of a Centre on Advanced Materials, a letter of intent between T-Hub and Nord France on strategic collaboration in startup ecosystems, and plans to establish an Indo-French Centre for Digital Sciences and Technology. The two leaders are also scheduled on Wednesday to launch the Indo-French Centre for AI in Health at All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

Tata Sons board meet next week may steer leadership course

A source said that an age relaxation for executive roles is expected at the time of Chandra's renewal, while pointing out that the same was done when Ratan Tata took the executive role for a while following Cyrus Mistry's removal.

A renewal of Chandra's term may also bring clarity to the issue of listing of Tata Sons, people in the know suggested. Tata Trusts has maintained that Tata Sons should be kept out of the ambit of public list-

ing. Tata Sons was designated an upper layer non banking financial company by RBI in September 2022, mandating a stock market listing of Tata Sons within three years. The RBI has not responded to the Tatas' request seeking a change in classification from an upper layer core investment company. And Tata Sons has remained silent on the way forward.

Besides the relatively new businesses and the listing issue, the Tata group has faced