

# Modi-Macron discussion to focus on bolstering defence and nuclear ties

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Ramping up collaboration in the areas of defence, climate change, trade and mobility of students will be the focus of in-depth talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron in Jaipur on Thursday, according to the French embassy here.

President Macron starts his two-day trip to India from Jaipur on Thursday and will be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations on January 26.

Set to be held on Thursday evening in Jaipur, the discussions between Modi and Macron will consolidate the ambitious renewal of the France-India strategic partnership that both countries had announced through the 'Horizon 2047 Roadmap' in July during Modi's visit to Paris, the embassy said on Wednesday.

The French president will be accompanied by a ministerial delegation comprising Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne,

Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu and Minister for Culture Rachida Dati. A business delegation comprising French majors, and small and medium enterprises will also be part of the delegation. Several eminent French personalities, including European Space Agency astronaut Thomas Pesquet are also expected, the embassy said.

Signed to mark the 25th anniversary of the India-France strategic partnership, the roadmap outlines a closer bilateral partnership for the next 25 years. The embassy said both leaders will review the partnership and finalise new initiatives under the three pillars of the roadmap.

The three pillars broadly focus on defence, climate change and development issues, and people-to-people ties. France is particularly keen to discuss greater mobility of Indian students, and seeks to welcome 30,000 Indian students by 2030. France is also offering a five-year Schengen

visa to Indian students who have a master's degree or above, and have spent at least one semester studying in France. The country processed close to 4,000 Indian student visas in the first semester of 2023.

## Defence industrial road map

Officials recently told *Business Standard* the visit could finally see a formal defence industrial roadmap being adopted by the two countries.

A long-term buyer of defence equipment from Russia, New Delhi has turned towards other players such as France and Israel to modernise its arsenal in recent years. India

ordered a batch of 36 Rafale multi-role fighter jets from France in 2016, which were delivered between July 2020 and April 2022.

Manufactured by Dassault Aviation, the jets have garnered support from the Indian Air Force, despite the controversy over their selection and purchase. In July, the government

gave initial approval for an order of 26 additional Rafale jets for the Indian Navy and six Scorpene submarines.

## Nuclear cooperation

The talks are also set to touch upon the two nation's increasingly strong civil nuclear partnerships. On Wednesday, *Bloomberg* reported that Electricite de France SA (EDF) and the Department of Atomic Energy are likely to complete a preliminary agreement to collaborate on the largely unproven technology. EDF's Chief Executive Officer Luc Remont is part of the delegation traveling with Macron, the embassy said.

In July, both countries agreed to speed up talks on the Jaitapur nuclear plant project. With an installed capacity of 9.6 GigaWatt electrical, the proposed plant in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district would be the most powerful nuclear power plant globally. It would meet the annual consumption needs of 70 million households, and restrict an estimated 80 million tonnes of CO2 emissions annually.

**Talks will consolidate renewal of France-India partnership announced during Modi's Paris visit**