India-France Relationship - Rising Significance

What is the issue?

- PM Modi makes an official state visit to France on French President Emmanuel Macron's invitation for a bilateral summit and to participate in the G7 Summit.
- In this backdrop, here is an overview of India-France ties and its rising significance in the current global scenario.

How has India-France ties been?

- For nearly four decades, successive French presidents have made repeated efforts to elevate the engagement with India to a higher level.
- On the other hand, India was preoccupied with other major powers as the US, Russia and China.
- Delhi could hardly appreciate the pivotal value of France, and more broadly that of Europe, in transforming India's international position.
- However, this trend has begun to change as Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid greater strategic attention to France and Europe in the first term.

How is India-France relationship currently?

- Many pending issues relating to Europe were sorted out during 2014-19.
- The boosting of ties with France was an important feature of Modi's foreign policy in the first term.
- The PM's summit and participation in the G-7 outreach now is a significant mark in bilateral strategic partnership.
- [The bilateral strategic partnership was unveiled more than two decades ago in 1998.]

Why is it more significant now?

- The relative harmony between the major powers witnessed after the Cold War is now becoming a distant memory.
- The growing tensions between the US on the one hand, and China and Russia on the other seems to make wider ramifications.
- Meanwhile, due to Trump administration's disruptive moves, the cracks in

the political West are widening.
- In this wider context of the slow breakdown of the post-War order, India and France could make coalitions that can provide a measure of stability.

What are the emerging challenges for India in this regard?

- **China** - The rapid rise of China has altered the balance of power in India's neighbourhood, causing much concern.
- **Russia** - In the last few years, Russia has been drawing steadily closer to China.
- This is not defined by any problem between Russia and India, but Russia's larger global calculus.
- However, Russia's deeper economic and political relationship with China would only make it harder for India to rely on the former to balance the latter.
- **U.S.** - The 1990s were turbulent years for India and the U.S., with differences over non-proliferation and Kashmir issues.
- However, the two sides settled into a period of stable and expanding partnership under the presidencies of George Bush and Barack Obama lasting from 2001-2017.
- Now, with Trump's Presidency, there are unexpected turns in American domestic politics.
- Clearly, this has begun to produce complications for India on a range of issues from bilateral trade to regional and global affairs.
- These challenges are much the common challenges for many nations other than India.

How could these be dealt with?

- India and France see that strengthening bilateral cooperation and building coalitions with like-minded countries is critical for the protection of their long-term interests.
- The new imperatives driving India and France have manifested themselves in a five-fold agenda for Modi and Macron.
- **Advanced technologies** - France has always been an important partner in the development of advanced technologies.
- This is set to advance further with the consolidation of civil nuclear cooperation and enhancing space cooperation.
- Artificial intelligence and digital revolution are other potential areas.
- Enhancing bilateral cooperation in these strategic sectors is of significance now.
- **Defence** – Next is the new commitment to go beyond the buyer-seller relationship in the field of weapons procurement.

- India comes up with clear policies for making arms in India.
- With this, the synergies between India's large defence market and the French strengths in armament production can offer much.
- **Political cooperation** - Political cooperation between India and France is relatively new.
- It began with French support for India in limiting international sanctions on Delhi after its 1998 nuclear tests.
- Today, France has emerged as India's most reliable partner on issues relating to terrorism and Kashmir; taking this forward would be crucial now.
- **Regional cooperation** - The relationship between India and France has gone beyond the bilateral to focus on the regional.
- It has been agreed to intensify maritime and naval cooperation in the Indian Ocean and more broadly the Indo-Pacific.
- This offers much for maritime governance, oceanographic research, interoperability between their armed forces, capacity building in the littoral, etc.
- **Global agenda-setting** - After their joint efforts to limit climate change and develop the Solar Alliance, India and France have turned to more ambitious ideas.
- The road map on cybersecurity and digital technology issued by Modi and Macron provides the framework for long-term cooperation on a set of issues.

What is the way forward?

- France also opens the pathway for deeper engagement with Europe on global issues.
- Since independence, India has experimented with different institutions including the NAM and BRICS to shape global norms.
- The new partnerships with France, Germany and other like-minded countries like Japan would hopefully be significant for India's influence on the global stage.

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