

**Inde - Entretien de M. Jean-Yves Le
Drian, ministre de l'Europe et des
affaires étrangères, avec le
quotidien "Times of India" -
extraits**

(New Delhi, 14 décembre 2018)

Q - What do you hope to accomplish during this visit?

A - This is my sixteenth trip to India as minister, and it's taking place nine months after the State visit of President Emmanuel Macron. That speaks volumes about the depth of our relations, which is built on a very solid strategic partnership that's celebrating its 20 anniversary this year.

In March, President Macron and Prime Minister Modi had placed our peoples, particularly the youth, at the heart of their joint commitment. That's what I have come to strengthen. Visiting Mumbai to give an impetus to our cooperation on cinema as well as to meet tourism industry professionals, I am conveying the message of a France that's open to the world and keen on doing more with India, a country of great culture.

I also felt that this was an opportune moment to review the joint projects initiated over the past few months that boost our strategic partnership: in the Indian Ocean, to implement the strategy adopted during the State visit in March; and on the Jaitapur project, for which negotiations are progressing at a good pace.

Q - How would you explain the comments regarding the Rafale deal by former French president Francois Hollande?

A - As the then Minister of Defence, I was involved in these discussions. So let me recap the facts. In April 2015, when Prime Minister Modi travelled to France, negotiations between Dassault and HAL had stalled. I had seen that for myself. This was not due to any lack of goodwill; it was just that the proposed plan of action did not help clearly delineate the responsibilities of the various players. Negotiations were leading nowhere. Given the urgent operational need of the Indian Air Force, the only solution - that which we chose - was to enter into a new intergovernmental agreement that offered India a better guarantee for the successful outcome of the project, in compliance with India's acquisition process. As our joint statement then stipulated, this agreement would be concluded "on better terms". And that's what happened. The manufacturers concerned agreed to major offsets obligations of 50%. What does this mean in concrete terms? 50% of the total value of the combat jets will come back to India, in the form of investments, transfers of technology and job creation. To be clear: in implementing the offsets clause, the choice of Indian partners (incidentally, there are about 100) is solely up to the French companies in charge of identifying such projects. This does not

concern the relations between governments. No pressure was exerted on us in this matter. In accordance with the agreement, which I came to sign personally in Delhi on 23 September 2016, the first Rafales will be inducted in the Indian Air Force from 2019 onwards. We are proud of this agreement that contributes to India's security and is consolidating our strategic partnership.

Q - What do you see are the steps forward in the India-France relationship?

A - Indo-French ties are a relationship geared to the future and based on trust. It is on these two pillars that our companies, our students, our researchers, our artists and our diplomats build this relationship every day. For me, the major challenge for the coming years lies in our ability to build a sustainable development model together, to even better connect our companies, our research centres, our universities and our local authorities, to jointly develop technologies for tomorrow, together conceive just, equitable and sustainable models for our societies. It was no coincidence that an Indian project received an award at the Paris Peace Forum a month ago. That's what we do daily for sustainable cities, a sector in which our companies, our expertise, our financing are particularly dynamic. That's also what we're forging in the IT and digital sectors, in which France and India are world champions. The inventiveness of our two countries is equalled only by the importance they attach to a more sustainable and fair world. That's what our fellow citizens ask of us and that, I believe, is what the Indo-French relation brings to them.

(...)

Q - India considers the French relationship to be very important in the maritime domain especially in the Indian Ocean. How are the two countries working together?

A - We have a longstanding bilateral maritime cooperation, which is deepened every day. We concluded important agreements in this area in March, including a reciprocal logistics support agreement, which we are in the process of implementing. Interactions are on the anvil between our two navies in the coming months: in end-January, the anti-aircraft frigate FNS Cassard will call at Mumbai, and in late spring a carrier strike group with aircraft-carrier Charles de Gaulle will be deployed in the Indian Ocean, which will be the occasion for a series of exercises with the Indian Navy.

With regard to maritime surveillance, the White Shipping agreement on exchange of information is operational. We are also pleased at the prospect of India's opening a regional information fusion centre, which will usefully complement the existing network. France will provisionally nominate a liaison officer as soon as possible.

Q - Can India and France collaborate in projects in Africa? How do you think this would work?

A - France and India have a long history with Africa and are both similarly committed to working with African countries to support their economic development and energy transition.

For a country like France, Africa is a priority due to its geographic proximity and the benefits that can be drawn from its economic development. That's why President Macron decided to significantly augment our public development aid. With effect from 2019 we will treble the number of projects financed by France in the form of grants to the tune of 1.6 billion euros. These funds will prioritise healthcare, education and, of course, combatting climate change.

On the last point, the International Solar Alliance (ISA), established by France and India, is a very good platform for implementing common projects between our two countries in partnership with African countries. The majority of ISA member countries are, in fact, in Africa because that's where there's the greatest solar energy potential. A few days ago we held bilateral consultations on Africa for identifying joint projects, particularly in the field of renewable energy. This will be one of the topics of discussion with my counterpart, Smt Sushma Swaraj.

Q - How do you see India-France maritime cooperation?

A - In March, we adopted a Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region including a reciprocal logistics support agreement, which we are in the process of implementing. Our navies are interacting closely: in end-January, the anti-aircraft frigate FNS Cassard will call at Mumbai, and in late spring, the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier will be deployed in the Indian Ocean, which will also see exercises with the Indian Navy. With regard to maritime surveillance, the white shipping agreement is operational.

Q - How does France see India's Indo-Pacific policy?

A - First, I must say that we endorse the concept of the Indo-Pacific. France is present in this entire region, from New Caledonia - which has reiterated its desire to remain French following a referendum - to Djibouti and the United Arab Emirates, where we have permanent military bases. We share the vision expressed by Prime Minister Modi in his Shangri-La speech in June and India's policy of a free, open and inclusive region. It is vital to preserve security and prosperity in this region by fostering dialogue and guaranteeing an order based on compliance with international law. These are the core principles of our bilateral cooperation in this area./.