

India, France to boost defence ties

Strategic partnership: Nirmala Sitharaman with her French counterpart, Florence Parly, in New Delhi. V. Sudershan

India and France on Friday decided to expand military cooperation in the strategically key Indo-Pacific region, besides resolving to ramp up the overall defence and security ties.

Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her French counterpart, Florence Parly, held extensive talks covering a variety of issues, including the regional security situation, joint development of defence platforms and expansion of military-to-military ties.

At their delegation-level talks, the two sides also agreed to expand counter-terror cooperation, and said a lot more could be done in the maritime sphere, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, where China was trying to expand its footprint, official sources said. Ms. Parly described her interaction with Ms. Sitharaman as “excellent”.

The sources said the French side explored the possibility of a follow-on order of additional Rafale fighter jets being placed by India.

India had signed a Rs. 58,000-crore deal with France for the supply of 36 Rafale jets last year and the IAF was pitching for procuring another fleet of 36.

In a statement, the Defence Ministry said the Ministers reviewed ongoing initiatives to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation further as a key pillar of the strategic partnership between the two countries.

Maritime security

“Recognising the growing significance of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific and the need for greater maritime domain awareness, India and France will further expand information sharing arrangements,” it said.

It is Ms. Parly’s first visit to India as Defence Minister and her trip is expected to lay the ground for French President Emmanuel Macron’s upcoming trip.

“A range of measures to expand military to military ties were agreed upon,” the Defence Ministry said.

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