

India–France Cultural Connect: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Visit to France (13–14 June 2026)



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to France on 13–14 June 2026 is significant not only from strategic, political, and economic perspectives but also in the broader context of cultural diplomacy, knowledge partnerships, and people-to-people engagement. India and France have historically nurtured deep cultural and intellectual ties through academic exchanges, scientific cooperation, heritage conservation initiatives, artistic collaborations, and educational partnerships. These interactions have fostered mutual understanding, strengthened societal linkages, and provided an enduring human foundation for the India–France Strategic Partnership.

The visit assumes particular importance as it takes place during the India–France Year of Innovation 2026, a landmark initiative jointly endorsed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Emmanuel Macron. This initiative reflects an evolving conception of culture in contemporary international relations, where culture extends beyond traditional domains of language, literature, art, and heritage to encompass knowledge systems, scientific research, innovation ecosystems, educational networks, and technological creativity. By placing innovation at the centre of bilateral engagement, India and France seek to deepen cooperation not only between governments but also among universities, research institutions, entrepreneurs, investors, start-ups, and young innovators, thereby transforming cultural diplomacy into a dynamic instrument of knowledge exchange, technological advancement, and long-term societal partnership.

- France occupies a distinctive place in India's external engagement owing to its longstanding commitment to intellectual exchange, higher education, cultural diversity, and scientific

inquiry. Cooperation between India and France therefore represents not merely a partnership between two states but also an interaction between two vibrant knowledge traditions and cultural spaces. The choice of France as India's partner for the Year of Innovation carries particular symbolic significance, reflecting the shared recognition that innovation extends beyond technological advancement to encompass knowledge creation, creativity, education, and human development. It underscores the common commitment of both countries to fostering innovation-driven cooperation grounded in intellectual exchange and cultural understanding.

- Another important dimension of the visit is the role of the Indian diaspora in France. The enthusiastic response of the Indian community in Nice ahead of the Prime Minister's visit demonstrates how diaspora communities function as vital cultural bridges, strengthening mutual understanding and deepening societal connectivity between countries. By carrying languages, traditions, values, and social networks across national boundaries, these communities contribute significantly to long-term people-to-people engagement and serve as important stakeholders in advancing bilateral relations beyond the governmental sphere.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the significance of the India–France Year of Innovation and Bharat Innovates 2026, describing them as important platforms for connecting India's startups, innovators, higher education institutions, and research ecosystems with global partners. The significance of the visit therefore extends beyond official diplomacy. It reflects India's evolving approach to global engagement, wherein civilisational heritage, innovation, knowledge creation, entrepreneurship, and diaspora networks increasingly complement one another in shaping international partnerships and enhancing India's global profile.

Major Engagements:

- A key focus of the visit was the joint inauguration of Bharat Innovates 2026 under the India–France Year of Innovation, an initiative aimed at connecting universities, research institutions, startups, venture capital networks, innovators, and young professionals from both countries. The visit also sought to deepen cooperation in artificial intelligence, advanced technologies, civil nuclear energy, space collaboration, defence manufacturing, and Indo-Pacific affairs, while simultaneously strengthening cultural ties and people-to-people linkages.
- On 14 June 2026, Prime Minister Modi's discussions focused on innovation, Artificial Intelligence, emerging technologies, defence cooperation, technology transfer, civil nuclear energy, space collaboration, trade, investment, and Indo-Pacific affairs. The talks reflected a shared commitment to strengthening cooperation in future-oriented sectors and advancing a partnership founded on strategic trust, technological collaboration, and long-term institutional linkages.

- Modi's interaction with the Indian diaspora highlighted the growing societal and cultural foundations of India–France relations. Members of the Indian community expressed pride in India's expanding global profile and viewed the visit as an opportunity to further strengthen cultural and people-to-people ties between the two countries. The engagement also reinforced the role of overseas Indians as key stakeholders in India's global outreach and as vital bridges connecting Indian and French societies.
- Bharat Innovates 2026 emerged as one of the principal outcomes of the Prime Minister's engagements in France, underscoring its significance as an institutional platform for fostering long-term cooperation among universities, researchers, startups, industries, entrepreneurs, investors, and policymakers from both countries.

Cultural Significance and Broader Implications:

- Bharat Innovates 2026 represents a significant expansion in the scope of India–France engagement by transforming innovation into a platform for intellectual and societal cooperation. By bringing together universities, researchers, entrepreneurs, investors, and young innovators, the initiative facilitates the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experiences across societies. Such interactions contribute to deeper mutual understanding, strengthen transnational intellectual communities, and foster enduring human connections that often outlast formal diplomatic agreements. In this regard, innovation emerges not merely as an economic resource but also as a medium for cultural interaction, intellectual exchange, and long-term societal engagement. By facilitating collaboration among researchers, students, entrepreneurs, investors, and innovators, Bharat Innovates creates opportunities for cross-cultural learning and the development of shared knowledge communities. Such interactions contribute to mutual understanding and strengthen the human foundations of bilateral relations.
- The visit also demonstrates the growing importance of knowledge networks in contemporary international relations. Universities, research institutions, innovation hubs, and startup ecosystems are increasingly becoming significant actors in shaping bilateral cooperation. Their participation broadens the foundations of international partnerships and deepens cooperation at the societal level. Equally important is the role of the Indian diaspora in France. The positive response of the Indian community illustrates how diaspora networks contribute to strengthening cultural familiarity, societal trust, and people-to-people relations. These communities serve as living cultural bridges, connecting societies through shared experiences, values, and social interactions. Taken together, innovation partnerships, educational cooperation, research collaboration, and diaspora engagement indicate a broader evolution in India's international outreach. Alongside traditional cultural resources, knowledge, creativity, entrepreneurship, and technological capabilities are increasingly emerging as important sources of international influence and cooperation.

Conclusion:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to France demonstrates that the future of international partnerships will increasingly depend not only on strategic and economic cooperation but also on the strength of societal, intellectual, and cultural connections. The prominence accorded to the India–France Year of Innovation and Bharat Innovates 2026 reflects a growing recognition that innovation, education, research, and entrepreneurship can serve as powerful instruments of international engagement. The visit highlights how universities, innovators, researchers, startups, and diaspora communities are becoming important stakeholders in shaping bilateral relations. Their interactions create enduring linkages that strengthen mutual understanding and deepen cooperation beyond governmental frameworks. The positive response of the Indian diaspora in France further underscores the significance of people-to-people relations in sustaining long-term international partnerships. Ultimately, the visit illustrates a broader transformation in the nature of international engagement. Whereas cultural diplomacy was once largely associated with heritage, language, and artistic exchanges, it now increasingly encompasses innovation, research collaboration, educational partnerships, entrepreneurship, and knowledge networks. Bharat Innovates 2026 embodies this transition and demonstrates how ideas, creativity, and technological cooperation can foster mutual understanding as effectively as traditional forms of cultural exchange. The India–France partnership, therefore, represents more than a strategic relationship between two states; it increasingly reflects a partnership among societies, institutions, innovators, and knowledge communities. By bringing together culture, innovation, education, and people-to-people engagement within a common framework of cooperation, the visit highlights the expanding foundations of India–France relations and offers an important example of how culture and innovation can jointly shape the future of international cooperation.