

Nirmala begins France visit today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will begin a three-day visit to France on Thursday during which both sides are expected to deliberate on further boosting their defence and security ties.

Ms. Sitharaman's visit comes against the backdrop of a huge controversy over the procurement of 36 Rafale jets from French aerospace major Dassault Aviation.

Officials sources said Ms.



Nirmala Sitharaman

Sitharaman would hold wide-ranging talks with her French counterpart, Florence Parly, on ways to deepen strategic cooperation between the two countries and also deliberate on major

regional and global issues of mutual interests. Ms. Sitharaman will also take stock of progress in the supply of 36 Rafale jets by Dassault to the Indian Air Force under a ₹58,000-crore deal. There was indication that she may even visit the facility where the jets are being manufactured, the sources said.

In their talks, Ms. Sitharaman and Ms. Parly are expected to deliberate on joint production of military platforms and weapons by the two countries.

Earlier this year, France

was pitching for starting negotiations for procurement of another batch of 36 Rafale jets by India. However, New Delhi was not keen on pursuing it. In April, the Indian Air Force started the process to acquire a fleet of 114 fighter jets and Dassault Aviation has emerged as one of the key contenders for the contract. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the procurement of 36 Rafale jets after talks with the then French President Francois Hollande on April 10, 2015 in Paris.