

India-Italy Relations Enter a New Phase - From Strategic Partnership to Special Strategic Partnership

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India-Italy Relations Latest News

- During the Indian PM's visit to Italy, India and Italy elevated bilateral ties to a "Special Strategic Partnership", signalling a **qualitative transformation** in relations.
- The Italian PM (Giorgia Meloni) and the Indian PM agreed on a **broad-based cooperation** agenda spanning trade, defence, technology, connectivity, energy security and geopolitics.
- The visit concluded the Indian PM's wider Europe tour, which started with UAE, and included visits to Norway, Sweden and Netherlands.

Elevation to "Special Strategic Partnership"

- The upgradation of ties reflects **growing convergence** between India and Italy on global governance, economic resilience and strategic autonomy.

- The partnership is anchored in the Joint Strategic Plan of Action **2025-29**, which provides an operational roadmap for deeper engagement.
- Italy increasingly views India not merely as a large market but as a major geopolitical and economic power essential for Europe's future engagement with the **Indo-Pacific** and **Global South**.
- Both leaders highlighted **shared commitments** towards international stability, rule-based order, economic security, resilient supply chains, peaceful conflict resolution, and inclusive development.

Expanding Economic and Trade Partnership

- India and Italy set an ambitious target to raise bilateral trade from **€14 billion** to **€20 billion** by **2029**.
- Both sides also underlined the importance of the proposed India-EU Free Trade Agreement (**FTA**) in accelerating trade and investment flows.
- **Key areas of economic cooperation:** Advanced manufacturing, infrastructure, green energy, agribusiness, tourism and culture, maritime logistics, space economy, AI and quantum technology.
- The Indian PM described the partnership as **a blend** of Italy's design and precision with India's scale, talent and affordable innovation, summarised in the principle: "Design and Develop in India and Italy, Deliver for the World."
- Italy's **industrial expertise** and India's **digital infrastructure** were identified as complementary strengths capable of generating high-quality industrial collaboration and employment.

Defence and Strategic Cooperation

- A major outcome was the agreement on a **Defence Industrial Roadmap**, opening avenues for co-development, co-production, technology transfer, and industrial partnerships.
- **Priority defence sectors:**
 - Helicopters (**renewed momentum** after cooperation between India's Adani Defence and Italy's Leonardo S.p.A),
 - Naval platforms,
 - Marine armaments,
 - Electronic warfare systems, and
 - MRO (maintenance, repair and overhaul) facilities.
- The roadmap assumes significance because defence ties had slowed after the AgustaWestland **corruption** controversy.
- Both countries also agreed to strengthen the protection of **critical infrastructure** and supply chains, reflecting emerging concerns over strategic vulnerabilities.

IMEEC and Maritime Connectivity

- Italy reiterated strong support for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC), where it sees itself as Europe's western anchor.
- IMEEC **aims** to enhance trade connectivity, supply chain resilience, energy security, and maritime integration.
- The two countries agreed to hold the first IMEEC ministerial meeting in 2026.

Other Areas of Cooperation

- **Maritime cooperation:** As two important maritime powers located in the Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific, both countries recognised the strategic necessity of strengthening inter-regional connectivity through –
 - Maritime transport,
 - Port modernisation,
 - Logistics, and
 - Blue economy cooperation
- **Critical minerals, technology and innovation:**
 - An India-Italy **Innovation Centre** is proposed to connect industries, research institutions and start-ups.
 - **Emerging technology sectors** (like space cooperation, civil nuclear energy) identified for collaboration to align with India's goals of technological self-reliance and supply-chain diversification.
- **Mobility, education and social cooperation:**
 - Agreements include mobility of Indian nurses to Italy, roadmap on higher education and research, cooperation in agriculture, export of Indian seafood, etc.
 - The two sides also discussed a future **Social Security Agreement**, which would benefit Indian professionals working in Italy.
- **Convergence on global and regional issues:** India and Italy expressed broad alignment on major geopolitical crises (Ukraine conflict, West Asia tensions, Iran crisis, and Indo-Pacific stability).

India-Italy Relations

- Diplomatic relations between India and Italy were established in **1947**. After some years of tensions (due to the 2012 case of the two Italian marines), the two countries revived normal relations.
- The visit of the Italian PM Gentiloni to India in 2017 marked a “**new beginning**” and a great opportunity for both countries.
- At the **50th G7 Summit** (held in Italy in 2024), the Italian PM Giorgia Meloni gave a new height to the relations with the caption of “**Melodi**”.
- Italy is India's **3rd largest** trading partner in export in EU, after Germany and Netherlands and **4th largest** trading partner in import after Germany, Belgium and France.
- The Indian community in Italy (estimated at **2.5 lakh** including PIOs) is the third largest community of Indians in Europe after the UK and the Netherlands.

Conclusion

- The India-Italy Special Strategic Partnership marks a significant expansion of India's engagement with Europe beyond traditional partners such as France and Germany.
- At a broader level, the partnership reflects India's growing role as a **balancing power** in the Indo-Pacific and a trusted partner in shaping an emerging multipolar world order.

Source: **IE** | **DH**

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