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BILATERAL RELATIONS
INDIA - ITALY

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INTRODUCTION

India and Italy are ancient civilisations with rich cultural heritage and longstanding historical links.Italian port cities were important trading posts on the ancient spice route, while people-to-people contacts have continued over centuries. Diplomatic relations were established in 1947, with the two countries celebrating their 75th anniversary in 2023. India and Italy enjoy a strong people-to-people connect, supported by a large Indian diaspora in Italy. Italy remains an important partner for India in Europe and the Mediterranean, while Italy considers India a key partner in the Indo-Pacific.

The relationship was elevated to a Strategic Partnership in March 2023 and further upgraded to a Special Strategic Partnership during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit to Rome in May 2026. To mark this historic expansion, the two countries designated 2027 as the 'Year of Culture and Tourism'. Cooperation spans trade, investment, defence, science and technology, space, energy, artificial intelligence, critical technologies, and education.

The Joint Strategic Plan of Action 2025–2029 provides a comprehensive roadmap for bilateral cooperation through co-production, innovation, mobility, and business collaborations, targeting a €20 billion trade volume by 2029. The nations also work closely on energy transition, integrating the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), and expanding defense industrial co-development. Specialized collaboration in semiconductors, critical minerals, space research, and regional security reflects a shared commitment to peace, stability, and prosperity across the interconnected Indo-Pacific and Mediterranean regions.



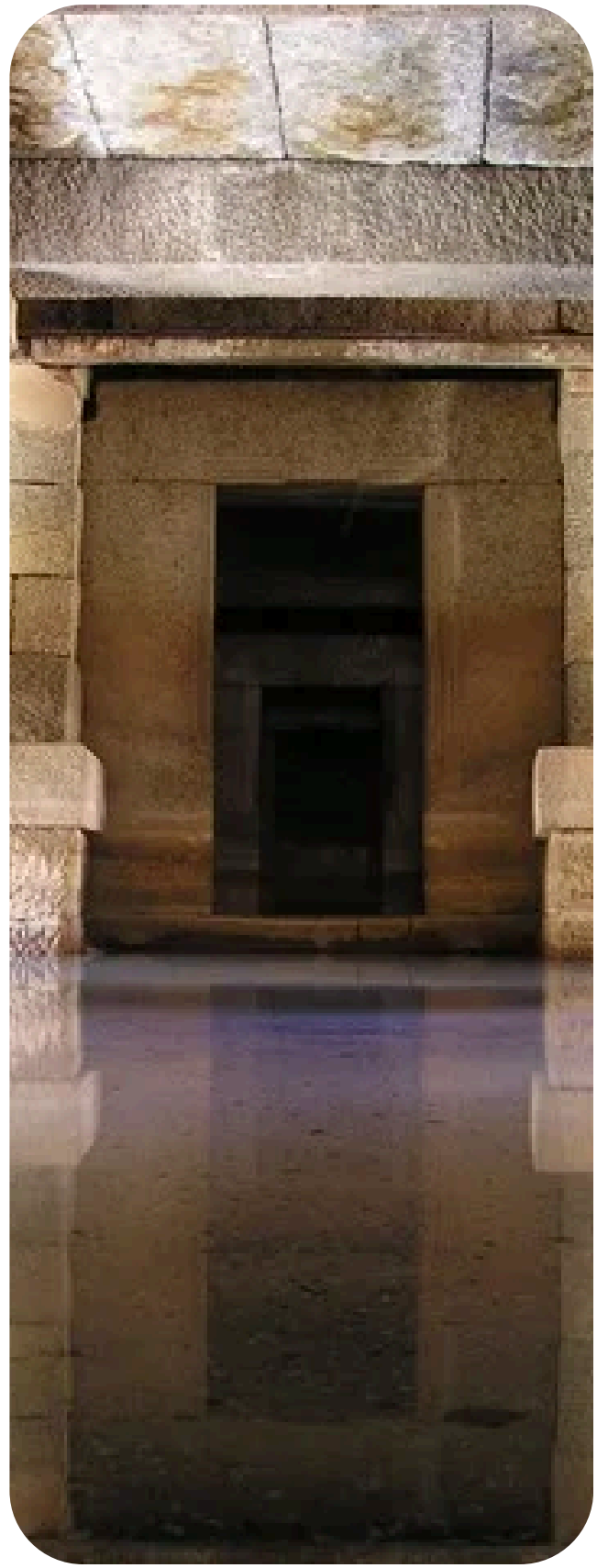
EARLY HISTORY

Indo-Roman relations

Relations between India and Italy date back to ancient times. Works from authors such as Diodorus Siculus' Library of History, Arrian's Indika, and Pliny the Elder's Natural History make references to India. Trade links flourished between India and the Roman Empire, particularly in the first and second century AD. Caches of Roman coins have been discovered across the Indian peninsula, and evidence indicates the existence of permanent settlements of Roman merchants in South India.

The discovery of an Indian ivory statuette in the ruins of Pompeii confirms that goods were traded both ways. The Roman Empire and Indian civilizations also exchanged diplomatic missions. An Indian embassy sailed from Bharuch (referred to as Barygaza by the Romans) in 25 BC and arrived in Rome four years later. Records also exist of Indian embassies being sent to Trajan, Antoninus Pius, Julian the Apostate and Justinian.

During the medieval period, commercial and cultural contacts between the Italian states and India continued through maritime trade routes. Italian merchants and travellers contributed to European knowledge about India through their accounts of the East. Venetian traveller Marco Polo travelled to India in the thirteenth century and recorded observations about Indian society and commerce. In the early modern period, Italian travellers continued to visit the Indian subcontinent and document its cities, customs and political life. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, intellectual and cultural interest in India grew in Italy, particularly through the study of Indian languages, philosophy and religions.



Middle Ages

Relations and trade between the Mediterranean and India ended after the fall of the Roman Empire, but resumed after a few centuries. In the middle Ages, Italian merchants once again began to ply the old routes towards the east used by the Romans. The most notable among these merchants was Marco Polo, who visited south-east India and ports such as Kayak, Comorin (now Kanyakumari), Quilon (now Kollam), Thana, Somnath and Cambay. Marco Polo published his travelogue The Travels of Marco Polo in which he described the life and customs in India at the end of the 13th century.

Many other notable Venetians also visited India.Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, a lawyer from Naples, visited South India during a trip around the world he had begun 1693. Gemelli Careri provides a detailed description of the camp of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb during the Deccan campaign in 1695, in Giro Intorno al Mondo, published in 1699. Many other Italians have also visited India and their names are mentioned on old chronicles. Apart from merchants and travelers, Italians also served in other roles in India such as physicians and artillerymen. Italian Jean-Baptiste Ventura contributed to the organization of the infantry in the army of Ranjit Singh in the 1830s and 40s.

Modern History

In modern times, India–Italy relations developed through political, cultural and people-to-people contacts. Rabindranath Tagore visited Italy in May–June 1926, while Mahatma Gandhi visited Rome in December 1931 on his way back to India from the Round Table Conference in London. During World War II, Indian troops serving with the British Indian Army were deployed in Italy and fought against German and Mussolini's forces. Diplomatic relations between India and Italy were formally established in 1947.

In 2023, India and Italy celebrated the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. The relationship was elevated to a Strategic Partnership in March 2023, with cooperation expanding into cyber security, innovation, defence, outer space, green economy, energy security and transition, defence co-production and co-innovation, and the blue economy. The Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025–2029 subsequently provided a roadmap for strengthening bilateral cooperation. In May 2026, the two countries elevated their relationship to a Special Strategic Partnership, marking the latest major milestone in modern India–Italy relations.

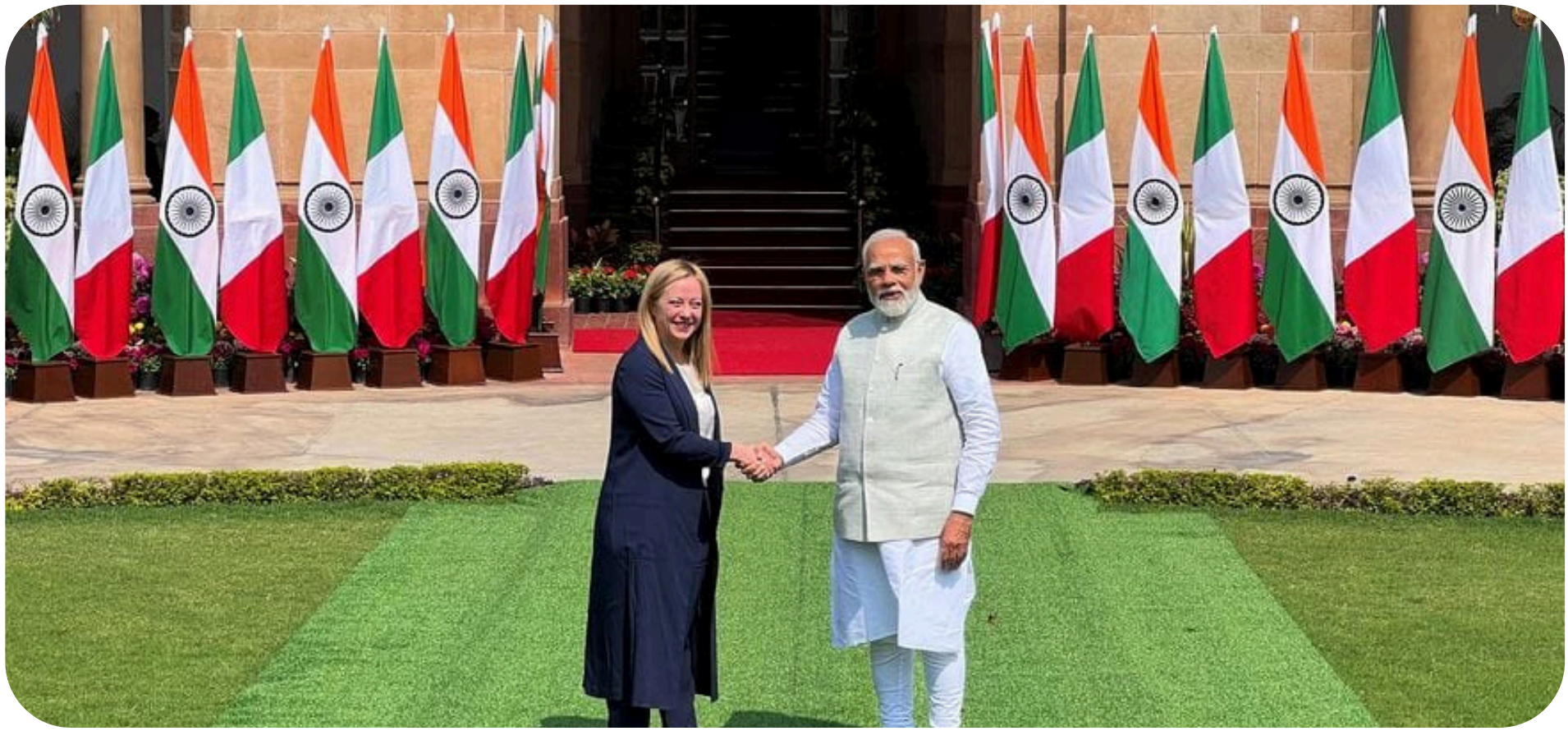


ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Bilateral trade

India and Italy share a growing economic and commercial partnership. Italy is India's fourth-largest trading partner in the European Union. In 2025, bilateral trade reached €14.25 billion. Indian exports to Italy stood at €8.55 billion, while Italian exports to India were €5.70 billion. India therefore recorded a trade surplus of €2.84 billion with Italy. Italy is also an important investment partner for India. Italy ranks 19th in FDI inflows into India, with cumulative FDI of US$3.66 billion during April 2000–September 2025.

Italian investments in India are concentrated in sectors including automobiles, industrial machinery, services and electrical equipment. Indian investments in Italy are mainly in IT, electronics and engineering. More than 700 Italian companies are present in India across several sectors. India and Italy have set a target of increasing bilateral trade to €20 billion by 2029. Economic cooperation is expanding into digitalisation, Industry 4.0, sustainable mobility, space, agritech and energy transition. The India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is also an important area of connectivity cooperation. The elevation of bilateral relations to a Special Strategic Partnership in May 2026 has provided further momentum to economic cooperation.



FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

Italy ranks 19th in FDI inflows into India during April 2000 to September 2025, with cumulative FDI of US$3.66 billion. The leading sectors attracting Italian FDI are automobiles (29.8%), trading (17.1%), industrial machinery (5.6%), services (5.1%) and electrical equipment (4.6%). Italian investments in India exceeded €500 million during the first six months of 2025. Indian direct investment in Italy is approximately €490 million, predominantly in IT, electronics and engineering sectors. The €3.8 billion acquisition of Iveco Group by Tata Motors is the most significant Indian investment in Italy so far. Indian companies operating in Italy include TCS, BKT, Greenlam, Mahindra, Ranbaxy, Zydus Cadila, Varroc Group, Endurance Technologies, Aditya Birla and Sun Pharma. Around 800 Italian companies are present in India, covering sectors such as fashion and garments, textiles and textile machinery, automotive and automotive components, infrastructure, chemicals, energy, confectionery and insurance. The two countries are continuing to promote investment through business forums, economic cooperation mechanisms and sector-specific partnerships.



AGREEMENTS

India and Italy have developed a broad framework of bilateral agreements and institutional mechanisms. The Agreement on Migration and Mobility was signed in November 2023, along with the Executive Programme of Cultural Cooperation for 2023–2027. The Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025–2029 was adopted in November 2024 and provides a roadmap for strengthening concrete bilateral cooperation in political, economic, defence, science and technology and cultural fields. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Italy in May 2026, the two countries adopted a Joint Declaration and elevated their bilateral relationship to a Special Strategic Partnership. India and Italy also adopted an India–Italy Defence Industrial Roadmap, strengthening cooperation in defence and security. The two countries are expanding cooperation in critical and emerging technologies, energy transition, space, trade, investment and connectivity. Education, culture and people-to-people relations are also important areas of cooperation. The two sides are promoting greater cooperation between their defence industries and private-sector enterprises. Cooperation in research, innovation and advanced technologies is being further strengthened through institutional partnerships. The agreements also provide opportunities for increased mobility and exchanges between the two countries. Both sides are committed to implementing the agreed initiatives through regular consultations and institutional mechanisms. These agreements and frameworks provide an institutional foundation for strengthening the Special Strategic Partnership between India and Italy.



FINANCIAL COOPERATION

India and Italy are strengthening financial cooperation as part of their expanding economic partnership. The 22nd India–Italy Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation (JCEC) was held in Brescia on 5 June 2025, focusing on deeper economic and investment cooperation. India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met her Italian counterpart Giancarlo Giorgetti in Milan in May 2025 to discuss ways to boost two-way investment and cooperation in finance and multilateral development. Italy's SIMEST has opened an office in Delhi with a dedicated €500 million funding line, while Italy's export credit agency SACE has provided an additional €200 million to facilitate contracts between Indian buyers and Italian SMEs. In April 2025, Invest India, SIMEST and Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP) signed an MoU aimed at promoting and facilitating bilateral investments between Italy and India. The two countries are also working to strengthen cooperation between financial institutions and development finance agencies. Greater financial connectivity is expected to support Italian companies seeking opportunities in India and Indian companies expanding into Italy. The cooperation also encourages greater participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in bilateral economic activities. Investment facilitation remains an important component of the broader India–Italy economic partnership. These initiatives contribute to strengthening trade, investment and long-term economic ties between the two countries.



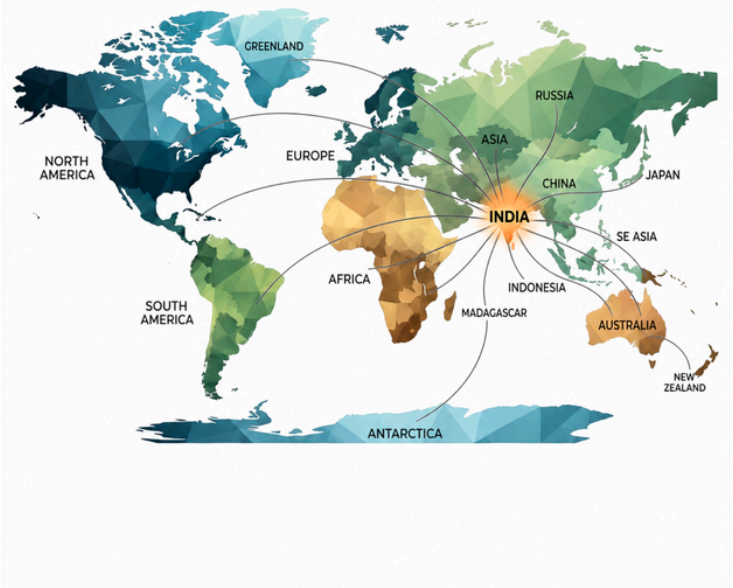
DEFENCE COOPERATION

Defence cooperation is an important pillar of the India–Italy bilateral relationship. The defence relationship has expanded from defence equipment imports to training, defence industry cooperation, export of defence equipment, information sharing, port calls, maritime exercises and maritime security. Italy has a well-established defence industry, and Italian companies including Leonardo, Fincantieri, Elettronica and Simmel Difesa have cooperation with Indian partners. The MoU on Defence Cooperation signed in October 2023 provided further momentum to bilateral defence engagement.

The 11th India–Italy Joint Defence Committee meeting was held in Rome in April 2025, alongside the signing of an MoU between the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM) and the Federation of Italian Companies for Aerospace, Defence and Security (AIAD) for bilateral defence industrial cooperation. The India–Italy Defence Industry Seminar was held in Rome in February 2026. Italian Defence Minister Guido Crosetto visited India on 29–30 April 2026, where discussions covered defence and security cooperation and new areas of industrial partnership, and the 2026–2027 Bilateral Military Cooperation Plan was exchanged. Maritime cooperation has also expanded through regular naval port calls and exercises, including Italian participation in MILAN 2024 and visits by Indian Navy ships to Italy in 2025. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Italy in May 2026, India and Italy adopted the Defence Industrial Roadmap, further strengthening defence industrial cooperation under the Special Strategic Partnership.



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