

# India, Italy upgrade ties | Special strategic partnership announced: Trade to corridor, defence to ports

These decisions were taken after Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in Rome.

Written by: [Shubhajit Roy](#) 7 min read New Delhi Updated: May 21, 2026 02:26 AM IST



Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni welcomes Prime Minister Narendra Modi upon his arrival at Villa Doria Pamphili in Rome for talks. (AP Photo)

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Elevating their bilateral ties to a “special strategic partnership”, India and Italy Wednesday set a trade target of 20 billion euros by 2029, agreed on a defence industrial roadmap, and concluded pacts on critical minerals, countering money laundering and terror financing.

These decisions were taken after [Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni](#) in Rome. Italy was the final stop on Modi’s six-day tour of Europe which took him to Norway for the India-Nordic summit and on bilateral visits to Sweden and the Netherlands. From tech to innovation, defence to green energy, India is deepening ties with Europe amid turbulence in the global order.

The Prime Minister’s visit to Italy reaffirms a strategic partnership in motion, coming as it does after intense leader-level engagement, anchored by the Joint Strategic Plan of Action 2025-29, the operational roadmap for the partnership.

Italy increasingly views India not just as a market, but as a major power and an indispensable partner for Europe. Its championing of IMEEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) as a founding member makes it the western anchor of the corridor. The proposed IMEEC will not just ensure stability of supply chains but will also boost India’s energy security.

Discussing the geopolitical situation, Meloni said Italy and India will continue to play their part at every level, often working in tandem, to contribute to peace and help restore stability.

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“Italy and India naturally share a common vision regarding many of the major challenges of our time: international stability, the upholding of the rule of law, economic security, the resilience of value chains, the promotion of peace, and inclusive development. We also discussed many of the complex scenarios confronting our era – specifically the situation in Ukraine and our shared commitment to achieving a just and lasting peace – as well as the crisis in Iran. We exchanged views with the shared hope that peace negotiations might move forward and reach a positive conclusion, even within a context that we clearly recognise as highly precarious.”

Modi said, “We have been in constant contact regarding Ukraine, West Asia, and other tensions. India’s stance is clear that all problems should be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy.”

Referring to the near closure of the Strait of Hormuz, Meloni said, “Regarding freedom of navigation – the restoration of which we are both actively working toward – we are two nations that need no reminding of just how vital this principle is to our interests. We also addressed the Indo-Pacific region, where we naturally align with the Indian vision of an Indo-Pacific that is free, open and inclusive.”

The bilateral piece in the relationship was marked by personal chemistry – Meloni posted a photograph of the two leaders with a bag of Melody toffees, a pun on the social media hashtag #Melodi.

Modi said, “Over the past nearly three and a half years, I have had the opportunity to meet Prime Minister Meloni several times. This reflects the close cooperation and harmony between India and Italy. Under her leadership, our relations have gained new momentum, new direction, and new self-confidence. I am pleased that we are announcing the Special Strategic Partnership as we upgrade our relations.”

Meloni said, “I truly believe it is a historic day for the relations between our two nations. My friend Narendra Modi has been leading India since 2014 but today this is his first bilateral mission to Italy... Today with this visit, not only are we bridging this gap, but together we have decided to re-vitalise our relations. This visit is the apex of a path that we have built together with determination to strengthen the ties... We are further strengthening our relation all the way up to the special strategic partnership, the highest ever reached in the relations between our two nations... It’s safe to say that now Italy and India are closer than they have ever been.”

“We have also created an honest friendship based on respect and mutual trust. I have personally learned to appreciate the vision, the pragmatism, and the leadership of the Prime Minister, as shown by how popular he is amongst his citizens after many years in government, and I think that this friendship of ours, this relationship of ours has very much helped us to work so swiftly on strengthening our bilateral relations”.

She said they want to increase trade from 14 billion euros to 20 billion euros. “This is a very ambitious target, which can be achieved also by taking advantage of the potential stemming from the free trade agreement signed between the EU and India.”

Modi said Italy is renowned worldwide for design and precision and India’s identity is that of a powerhouse of scale, talent and affordable innovation. “We will move forward on the principle

of Design and Develop in India and Italy and Deliver for the World”, he said.

The two sides agreed on a defence industrial roadmap which had long been an Italian request. In the wake of corruption allegations over the AgustaWestland deal, Italian defence companies had been barred from the Indian defence market. But that is witnessing a change now.

“Our Defence Industrial Roadmap has paved the way for co-development and co-production,” Modi said.

The two countries also signed a pact on maritime transport and ports to strengthen India’s maritime infrastructure. “As maritime powers, close cooperation between India and Italy in the field of connectivity is natural. We will work together on shipping, ports modernisation, logistics and the blue economy,” he said.

Meloni echoed his remarks: “We are two peninsulas, two logistics platforms, which are projected in crucial areas of the world, the Mediterranean and Indo-Pacific area... strengthening the interconnection between these two important areas is of extreme importance. That’s the reason why we wanted to further develop IMEEC which is the infrastructure corridor, economic corridor between Europe, Middle East and India, which was established during the G20 summit. This initiative we strongly believe in, because we think that it can unleash a wonderful potential for our trade, for our businesses, and our relations.”

“Our goal is, naturally, to leverage the complementarities between our respective economic fabrics across many other sectors – sectors we have discussed at length today, as well as during last night’s events. From advanced manufacturing to infrastructure, from energy to the space economy, defence stands out as a key area of cooperation where we are currently investing significant and effective effort. Critical minerals, agribusiness, maritime transport, tourism, and culture – for two great civilisations spanning millennia – also represent opportunities for us to grow together,” she said.

The two sides also signed pacts on mobility of Indian nurses to Italy, a roadmap on higher education and research, pacts on agriculture, export of Indian seafood to Italy, pact on Ayurveda, research in climate change among others.

Capping her statement on the broader ties, Meloni said, “There is an Indian word that captures this sentiment perfectly: Parishram. It signifies ‘hard work’, ‘constant commitment’, and ‘diligent effort’. A word that I am told is widely used in India, and which, let’s give it a try, often appears

in an equally popular proverb: Parishram safalta ki kunji hai. This means: Hard work is the key to success. Well, that is precisely how we are accustomed to building our relationships – through hard work that, ultimately, leads to success.”

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