

Partners in the uncertain times

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Introduction:

The year 2023 has been a bright one as far as the relations between Italy and India are concerned. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi during her visit to India in March marked a breakthrough in the relationship between the two countries.

Other visits of Indian and Italian office bearers in 2023:

1. PM Meloni visited India again in September for the G-20 summit.
2. Deputy PM and Foreign Affairs Minister Antonio Tajani has been to India, and so have several other ministers and deputy ministers in the Italian government.
3. India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal have visited Italy.

The basis of India-Italy relation:

The partnership is rooted in a common view of the strategic challenges in today's world and the approach to face them.

Geo-political:

- Italy and India share the need for a free, safe and open Indo-Pacific.
- Italy looks at the Indo-Pacific from the perspective of an "enlarged Mediterranean", which forms a geostrategic unit with the Indian Ocean.
- Italy sits at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea and acts as a natural bridge towards the Indo-Pacific.

Maritime:

- Maritime security is a priority. In August 2023, during a tour of the Indo-Pacific, the Italian Navy scheduled a visit to Mumbai by the patrol vessel ITS Morosini, the first time in several years that an Italian Navy ship had docked in India.
- A common interest in maritime surveillance and containment of underwater threats, including those against pipelines and the network of digital interconnections, emerged during the event.

Defence:

- Cooperation in the maritime domain will also be central to the relaunched collaboration in the defence sector.
- The renewal of the cooperation agreement signed on October 9 during Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's visit to Italy is a major development.
- It provides the framework for more concrete collaboration. Italian companies have excelled

in devising cutting-edge solutions and are looking forward to increasing their presence in India.

Infrastructure and connectivity:

1. This collaboration will also enhance the stability of the Indo-Pacific region.
2. Italy and India are committed to strengthening infrastructure, both digital and physical.
3. The Blue-Raman project (with an Italian company at its core) will bring the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean — Italy and India — closer in exchange of digital data through a submarine cable system.
4. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), launched during the G20 summit in Delhi also aims to open a new route between Asia and Europe.

Bilateral trade and commerce:

1. The free flow of trade through the Indo-Pacific is vital for Italy, an export-oriented country with 58 ports.
2. Italian companies, whose expertise in the maritime and railway sectors is recognised internationally are ready to play their part in the project, while Italian ports have the required characteristics to act as terminals for the IMEC and access points for Europe.
3. The increase in bilateral trade is evident in the exchange of goods (and services), with Italian machinery, automotive products, and luxury goods finding a growing market in India, while Indian products, like aluminium, steel, and iron, contribute to the supply chain for Italian manufacturing.

People-to-people contact:

1. India and Italy are also looking forward to people-to-people contact.
2. During External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Italy, a Migration and Mobility Agreement was signed.
3. Italy already hosts one of the largest Indian communities in the European Union and has been enriched by a growing number of students and workers.
4. The agreement will provide a framework to improve mobility.

Space and technology:

1. Space is another sector where noteworthy steps have been taken.
2. Italy is looking with increasing interest at India's space initiatives — the success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission has been recognised and celebrated by the Italian scientific community.
3. There is also a growing Indian interest in deepening cooperation in this sector.
4. Collaboration has been underway for some time between the space agencies of the two countries, ASI (Italian Space Agency) and ISRO, government institutions, university research centres and aerospace companies.
5. A joint declaration recently signed between the heads of ASI and ISRO opens up new opportunities, particularly in earth observation, space exploration and helio-physics.

Partnership on global concerns:

1. Italy and India can also converge on multilateral issues because they share the need to frame and support a new global agenda.
2. As EAM Jaishankar emphasised during his visit to Italy, the relationship between the

countries is a “factor of stability” in “a volatile and uncertain world”.

3. Italy and India can play a mutually reinforcing role in addressing the urgent contemporary issues that primarily affect the Global South but also have a major impact on the security, stability and environmental sustainability of the entire world.
4. During its G20 Presidency, India demonstrated its proactive role on several issues such as debt relief for developing countries, reform of international financial institutions, sustainable development and climate change — this includes the Global Biofuels Alliance, which Italy has joined.

Conclusion:

As it prepares to take over the Presidency of G7 in 2024, Italy recognises the worth of addressing the concerns of a large part of the world, following India’s example.



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