

Make in India Complements Made in Italy: Ambassador



India-Italy relations are undergoing a period of rapid transformation, marked by the deepening of economic and strategic ties. In this wide-ranging interview with Manish Chand, CEO & Editor-in-Chief, India and the World & Centre for Global India Insights, Italian Ambassador to India Antonio Bartoli speaks about prospects of enhancing defence and economic collaboration between India and Italy. Looking ahead, the Italian envoy highlights growing complementarities between the economies of India and Italy and underlines shared interests in shaping a free and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

Q) The latest meeting between Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Meloni in Rio de Janeiro culminated in the 2025-2029 Strategic Action Plan. How do you envision the next phase in India-Italy relations?

A) The signing of the Joint Strategic Plan of Action truly marked a turning point. Our governments outlined a path of closer cooperation in 10 priority areas that ranges from space, defence, trade and investment to science, innovation, culture, and people-to-people contacts.

The way ahead will be characterized by shared initiatives and concrete projects. Heirs to millennia-old civilizations, Italy and India are closely linked. We will make the best use of our

structural convergences to enhance synergies in strategic fields such as connectivity, infrastructure, and new technologies.

Q) India and Italy have agreed to negotiate a defence industrial roadmap and increase interoperability of their armed forces. Could you elaborate on the key components of this roadmap and the timeline for its implementation?

A) Both Italy and India look forward to closer defence cooperation. And that means partnering in both defence industry and interoperability. In recent years, military-to-military contacts have intensified and our navies held joint exercises to increase mutual understanding and coordination. We are together in The United



Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and we both operate to ensure the protection of trade routes in the Red Sea and off the Horn of Africa. Freedom of navigation and the fight against piracy remain key priorities for both our countries. Italy intends to further build on this common ground.

Q) How do you see Italian defence companies contributing to India's 'Make in India' initiative, especially in areas of joint ventures, technology transfer, and co-production?

A) India is looking for reliable partners to diversify suppliers and strengthen its defence industry. Delhi is the first arms importer globally and ranks 4th in terms of defence spending. Italy has raised defence budget by 2 billion euro this year, too. And this is a first point. Secondly, many Italian companies are top players in key productions: aircraft and helicopters, shipbuilding, engineering, space and electronics, just to name a few. We see opportunities in the Make in India initiative in the defense sector, too. Here, as in other areas, we will need to be good at exchanging skills and know-how. We aim at win-win collaborations, based on mutual trust.

Q) How are Italy and India planning to deepen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific? What are the next steps?

A) The Indo-Pacific has become an area of greater strategic interest for Italy and Europe. Our relations with India are a pillar of this new approach. Patrolling activities and joint exercises with India and other partners in the area have increased. Between 2023 and 2024 we have had three visits by Italian ships to India. Amongst them, I recall the port call by our first-class Aircraft Carrier Cavour, together with the frigate Alpino. We will continue to make our contribution to keep the Indo-Pacific a low-tension, open and rules-based region. We will remain advocates of dialogue and peaceful settlement of differences.

Q) How does Italy see the future of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)? How does Italy plan to leverage this partnership with India to enhance connectivity and trade flows?

A) Italy and India are peninsulas projected into their surrounding seas, the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, the hubs of a common Indo-Mediterranean region. Economic trade between



Europe and Indo-Pacific accounts for about 70 per cent of global trade in goods and services and 60 per cent of foreign direct investment. As natural terminals of this strategic area, Italy and India are interested in keeping up the flow of goods, commodities, data, and people. The IMEC corridor between India and Europe will be a highway of sea-lanes, air routes, transnational cables and digital infrastructures. For instance, we are discussing with Delhi a MoU on ports cooperation. We are committed to increase mobility between our economies. We are engaged in the Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiatives to enhance innovation, research and scientific collaboration.

Both Italy and India look forward to closer defence cooperation. And that means partnering in both defence industry and interoperability. In recent years, military-to-military contacts have intensified and our navies held joint exercises to increase mutual understanding and coordination.

Q) What is Italy's view of the BRI? In what ways can Italy collaborate with like-minded partners like India to shape an alternative paradigm of connectivity?

A) Italy's exit from the Belt and Road Initiative was based on data and figures. The membership did not deliver the expected economic results.

Italy will, however, maintain important trade and industrial ties with China. But trade relations should be balanced and equally beneficial, resting on clear rules that apply to all parties involved. Our economic partnership with India can rely on a series of advantages. We are

friendly countries who share common values. Our economies are parts of well-established global value chains, whose importance has only grown over the last decade. Our economies are getting more and more complementary, such as in industry, connectivity or infrastructure. For instance, in food processing and agricultural technologies, industry 4.0, digital, new energy and renewables. I just recall Telecom Italia Sparkle's Blue-Raman project, which will digitally connect Genova and Mumbai.

Q) What steps are being taken to reduce trade imbalance with India? Are there plans to diversify trade beyond traditional sectors like automotive and industrial machinery?

A) We see a lot of potential in the merging of the "Make in India" initiative with our "Made in Italy" economic promotion strategy. India is the 4th largest consumer market in the world. There is wide room to bring more Italy here in India. Not only in terms of export and trade, but also as investments and technology. For instance, the Indian business is looking for deeper collaboration with Italy in different fields of action: innovation and startups, space, defence, infrastructure, energy and mobility. By 2027, India will be the world's third-largest economy. Italy, on the other hand, has a solid economic outlook. We are the second manufacturing powerhouse in Europe and we are at the crossroads of important global supply chain. In terms of bilateral investments, Italy and India punch below their weight. We have now the chance to do more and better together.

Q) How can India and Italy intensify their collaboration in the Mediterranean?

A) The Mediterranean presents common opportunities and challenges for Italy and India. We are aware that India has significant interests in this region, which is reflected in its annual 40 billion euro trade exchange. As the latest crises in the Middle East have shown, what happens in the Mediterranean area has a wider and deeper



We see a lot of potential in the merging of the "Make in India" initiative with our "Made in Italy" economic promotion strategy. India is the 4th largest consumer market in the world. There is wide room to bring more Italy here in India. Not only in terms of export and trade, but also as investments and technology.

relevance at the global level. Together Italy and India can work closely to find shared solutions to shared problems: migrations, new technologies, climate change, infrastructure and connectivity. This is also why we invited India to participate in the Mediterranean Dialogues and in the G7 under our presidency.

(Manish Chand, is CEO, Centre for Global India Insights, a think tank focused on global affairs, and Editor, "India's G20 Legacy: Shaping a New World Order," a compendium of essays on India's G20 presidency).