

INDIA–UAE RELATIONS SINCE 2023: FROM BILATERAL COOPERATION TO A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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Introduction:

India and the United Arab Emirates have a long-standing relationship that has significantly diversified in recent years.¹ Since 2023, the two countries have expanded their cooperation from traditional energy trade and human resource exchange to artificial intelligence infrastructure development, technology transfer, defense collaboration, and intelligence sharing. Regional connectivity ambitions have emerged as a new area of shared interest between the two states. Intense diplomacy, resulting in back-to-back official visits, and cooperation agreements in various fields, indicates their bilateral approach to seeing each other as important partners in expanding economic and strategic interests. The reciprocal official visits of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan have intensified the cooperation in all spheres. The consistent exchange between both of the countries makes the relationship reciprocal rather than being one-sided.

¹ *India–UAE Bilateral Relations*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, April 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-UAE_2026.pdf, Accessed September 1, 2026.

Political and Diplomatic Relations:

India and the UAE established formal relations in 1972 following the formation of the UAE. This relationship has since transformed into deep political and diplomatic ties through continuous high-level visits and cooperation. Since 2023, various agreements have been signed, and visits have been arranged including those of the Indian Prime Minister, the UAE President and Crown Prince, foreign ministers, and trade and energy ministers. The UAE has invested in several projects in India and has further strengthened the bilateral relationship through various initiatives, as shown in the given table below.²

Years	Key Development	Area of Cooperation	Evidence of Deepening Relations
2023	Launch of IMEC. Modi visited the UAE Sheikh Mohamed participated in the 2 nd Virtual Global South Summit. Reserve Bank of India and Central Bank of the UAE sign two MoUs to promote the Use of Local Currencies for Cross-border Transactions and to link their payment and messaging systems.	Diplomacy, Connectivity, Finance	Spread from bilateral engagement toward regional and economic cooperation.
2024	Prime Minister Modi's visit to the UAE. Bohasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha Hindu temple was built in the UAE. Sheikh Mohamed attended the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit in India. Abu Dhabi Crown Prince visits India. Bilateral Investment Treaty was signed.	Political, Cultural, Investment	Strengthening of institutional and people-to-people ties

² "India-UAE Political Relations," Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, June 2026, <https://www.indembassyuae.gov.in/page.php?id=political-relations1>, Accessed September 2, 2026.

2025	Dubai Crown Prince visits India. Ministerial-level diplomatic engagement continued. Dubai campus of IIM Ahmedabad was launched.	Diplomacy, Education	Spread into institutional and educational cooperation
2026	Modi and Sheikh Mohamed exchanged official visits. Letter of Intent to enhance Defence, energy, AI, space, investment and digital cooperation was signed. Strategic Defense Partnership Framework was finalized.	Strategic, technological, economic	Appearance of a broader multidimensional partnership

Prepared by the author, Table 1 shows the key areas of cooperation between India and the UAE and provides evidence of the deepening bilateral relationship.

The two states are making efforts to use diplomatic ties for multilateral cooperation through the United Nations in combating international terrorism, collaboration in renewable energy, and in international negotiations on climate change.³ These initiatives strengthened economic and strategic linkages; the Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of the UAE sign two MoUs to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions and to link their payment and messaging systems. Regular high-level visits and partnership in forums such as the G20, BRICS, I2U2, and UN have also increased diplomatic alignment.

Economic and Trade Relations:

India and UAE have multiplied their economic and trade partnership over the years. Bilateral trade has surpassed USD 100 billion in 2024–25, under the umbrella of Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Although this has made an easy way to access the market and lower tariffs, growth in trade cannot be equaled naturally, as India remains dependent on Gulf investment and energy imports while the UAE reaps benefits from India's large market.⁴

³ "India-UAE Joint Statement during the State Visit of Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, February 12, 2016, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/26349/India+UAE+Joint+Statement+d>, Accessed September 3, 2026.

⁴ "UAE-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement," Ministry of Economy and Tourism, United Arab Emirates, May 1, 2022, https://www.moet.gov.ae/en/cepa_india, Accessed September 5, 2026.

Bilateral Goods trade reached approximately USD 100.06 billion. India's export volume to the UAE stands at USD 36.63 billion while it imports goods worth USD 63.42 billion, resulting in a shortfall of about USD 26.79 billion for India. The Bilateral Investment Treaty, signed in 2024, transformed infrastructure, renewable energy, technology, and logistics.⁵ The Emirate's investments provided a large amount of capital to India while increasing its dependence on foreign investment. The financial interlinking supported by UPI-AANI and RuPay-JAYAWAN helped private-sector to expand exponentially. Both countries are committed to doubling their bilateral trade volume by 2032.

Additionally, the two nations cooperate in advanced technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, and are ambitious to join hands for the development of the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). At the same time, the 3.5 million-strong Indian diaspora serves as an important link between the two countries. It contributes in the UAE economy, sends remittances to India, and generates a people-to-people connection that expands bilateral relations beyond government cooperation and is also supported by strong social and economic linkages.

Defence and Security Cooperation:

India and the UAE have notably expanded their defence and security partnership since 2023.⁶ The relationship is not limited to military visits or joint meetings. Rather, the two countries are working to build a long-term strategic security partnership which includes military cooperation, maritime security, counter-terrorism, defence industries, artificial intelligence, cyber security and advanced defence technology to respond to the shared security challenges more effectively, as demonstrated in the following table.

Dimensions	2023	2024	2025	2026
military exercises and training	Going on military training, exercises, and professional exchange	Exercise Desert Cyclone-1 held in Rajasthan	India participated in Desert Flag-10 in the UAE Desert Cyclone-II conducted in the UAE	Cooperation in special operations and counter-terrorism

⁵ "Bilateral Investment Treaty between India and the United Arab Emirates, giving continuity of investment protection to investors of both the countries, comes into effect," Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, October 7, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2062692>, Accessed September 6, 2026.

⁶ "Joint Statement: Visit of President of the UAE, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to India," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, January 19, 2026 <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/40601/>, Accessed September 8, 2026.

Institutional cooperation	Meeting at the defence and security-level during Aero India 2023 ⁷	12th Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) held in Abu Dhabi	13th JDCC held in New Delhi ⁸	Letter of Intent for a Strategic Defence Partnership ⁹
Maritime security		Expansion of maritime-security cooperation	Indian Coast Guard–UAE National Guard cooperation	Greater coordination on Gulf and maritime security
Defence industry		Cooperation between the defence-industry organizations	India-UAE Defence Industry Partnership Forum	Defence industry, advanced technology and R&D cooperation
Emerging technologies			Cooperation in AI, cyber security, unmanned systems and advanced defence technologies	Cyber defence and secure communications

Table-2 explains major areas of defence and security cooperation between India and the UAE

UAE is important for India's strategic stretching and economic ambitions because of its energy reserves, location in the Gulf and Arabian Sea, and regional footprints. The ongoing negotiations between the two countries over the possible deal for BrahMos missiles and the Akashteer air defense system can be seen as the extension of New Delhi's defence diplomacy. The deal could boost India's defence exports, strengthen ties with the UAE, and market BrahMos beyond its traditional foothold.

⁷ "India-UAE Bilateral Defence Cooperation," Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, <https://www.indembassyuae.gov.in/page.php?id=defence-relations>, Accessed September 20, 2026.

⁸ "India & UAE Partnership at 13th Joint Defence Cooperation Committee Meeting," Ministry of Defence, Government of India, July 30, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2150322®=48&lang=2>, Accessed September 10, 2026.

⁹ "Prime Minister's Visit to the UAE: Advancing Energy, Technology, Connectivity and Strategic Cooperation," Press Information Bureau, Government of India, May 15, 2026. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?NotelId=158628&ModuleId=3®=36&lang=1>, Accessed September 12, 2026.

Conclusion:

Over the past three years, the India-UAE relationship has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a primarily energy-driven economic partnership into a broader and more multidimensional strategic partnership. The two countries expanded their cooperation in defence, security, energy, trade, infrastructure, and technology, reflecting the growing convergence of the countries' strategic and economic interests. This expanding relationship has been shaped by a range of bilateral agreements and institutional mechanisms rather than relying on a single initiative. The period from 2023 to 2026 can be regarded as a transformative phase for the development of relations between India-UAE to a towards a more comprehensive and multidimensional partnership. For the UAE, this transformation is part of its quest for security and economic diversification aimed at multi-aligning ties. For India, it is part of New Delhi's efforts to further stretch its footprints in the Gulf region, get energy security, and attract more investments.