



Beyond Ports and Railways: The India-Israel-Italy Technology Triangle and the Future of IMEC

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Mattei Plan and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) should not be treated as separate but overlapping corridors. Rather, they represent complementary layers of an emerging Indo-Mediterranean connectivity architecture. IMEC provides the east-west spine linking India, the Gulf, and Europe while the Mattei Plan extends European connectivity southward into Africa. Italy sits at the intersection of the two, leveraging its Mare Nostrum strategy to link the economic zones of the Indo-Pacific with those of the Euro-Atlantic by placing an EU leg in IMEC. Within this triangle, India provides technological scale and the eastern anchor, Israel brings a critical security and technological hinge in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Italy ensures a European institutional gateway and linkage to Africa through the Mattei Plan. As geopolitical realignments reshape global trade, connectivity, and data flows, IMEC is emerging as more than a network of ports, railways, and logistics infrastructure. The corridor's long-term strategic significance will also depend on the digital architecture that underpins it: secure data networks, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, critical infrastructure protection, and resilient technological supply chains. The potential emergence of an India-Israel-Italy technology triangle is a critical component of IMEC's future development.

IMEC's digital corridor

IMEC's outlook and endurance are determined by its component countries' vested interest in integrating with one another and advancing their priorities through complementary relationships. The Mattei Plan, by complementing IMEC, faces the test of moving beyond a strictly European framework and integrating with broader, non-European initiatives. The Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific should be seen as an integral part of a new East-West connective architecture, with all the strategic significance that that implies. The integration of advanced technological components, such as submarine cables for high-capacity connectivity, regional data centers, and intelligent logistics networks, establishes IMEC as a fundamental architecture for the data economy between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

India, Israel, and Italy bring complementary strategic assets to this evolving digital corridor. India contributes technological scale, software capabilities, digital public infrastructure, and a rapidly expanding AI ecosystem. Israel offers advanced capabilities in cybersecurity, critical infrastructure protection, artificial intelligence, and technological innovation. Italy provides a strategic gateway to Europe and the Mediterranean, strong industrial capabilities, and a human-centric approach to AI governance, alongside the broader connectivity opportunities and human capital created by the Mattei Plan.

The countries' contributions are motivated by the benefits they will accrue. For India, IMEC triggers new global digital networks, expands outbound trade, and improves access to European markets. For Italy and Europe, the main priority is to maintain stability amid global changes and strengthen economic ties with India. For Israel, a functioning corridor would boost economic growth, enhance partnerships with India and the Gulf, and generate over \$330 billion in additional trade. Additionally, Israel would move beyond the role of geographic transit point within IMEC and position itself as a technological and security node within the corridor.

More broadly, an India-Israel-Italy partnership strengthens digital sovereignty, reduces strategic vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure, and offers a trusted technological architecture in an increasingly contested geo-economic environment. Cooperation among New Delhi, Jerusalem, and Rome could

transform IMEC from a primarily physical connectivity initiative into a secure and resilient digital corridor linking the Indo-Pacific, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Europe, and potentially Africa. Such cooperation entails secure data flows, joint research and development, cyber protection for ports and transportation networks, AI-enabled logistics, and greater resilience in critical technological supply chains.

The practical question is how these complementary capabilities can support the implementation of IMEC's digital and technological layer while its physical and political architecture continues to develop. This will be a complex endeavor hindered by infrastructure deficits, financial constraints, and delicate diplomatic negotiations, such as Saudi-Israeli normalization. However, IMEC's digital and technological layer can be implemented immediately by leveraging the complementary capabilities of India, Israel, and Italy, which together possess highly specialized, non-overlapping strengths that can support IMEC's soft infrastructure and digital services while physical tracks and ports are constructed and modernized.

India: Scale, digital capacity and strategic flexibility

India is not simply the eastern endpoint of IMEC. It is one of the corridor's principal political and economic drivers. For New Delhi, IMEC fits into a broader strategy of strengthening economic ties with the Gulf and Europe while expanding the number of trade and connectivity routes available to it.

The corridor is particularly relevant to India's economic ambitions because European markets are central to Indian trade and to its efforts to integrate more deeply into global value chains. The disruptions of recent years have reinforced the strategic importance of creating additional connectivity options. IMEC cannot eliminate India's exposure to maritime chokepoints, but it can provide greater redundancy within a wider network of trade routes.

India's relevance to IMEC extends, however, beyond the movement of goods. Over the past decade, New Delhi has developed large-scale digital platforms in payments, public services, and logistics. Digital public infrastructure, port digitization, cargo tracking, and increasingly integrated logistics systems offer experience that could be applied to the operational layer of a transregional corridor.

This is significant because modern connectivity depends as much on the movement of information as on the movement of containers. Cross-border trade requires compatible customs procedures, digital documentation, cargo tracking, financial transactions, and secure data exchange. Indian policy and research assessments have already identified digital connectivity, telecommunications infrastructure, and integrated digital systems as important elements of IMEC.

India's political approach is equally important. New Delhi is unlikely to treat IMEC as part of an exclusive geopolitical bloc. This would be inconsistent with its broader practice of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. India can simultaneously deepen cooperation with Israel, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Europe, and the United States while maintaining other regional partnerships and connectivity projects.

This flexibility is central to IMEC's appeal from the Indian perspective. The corridor expands India's strategic options without requiring New Delhi to replace one dependency with another. India therefore brings three particularly important assets to the emerging architecture: economic scale, digital capacity, and strategic flexibility.

Italy: The geo-economic bridge of the Indo-Mediterranean

Within the IMEC framework, Rome is uniquely situated to leverage its geography, converting its extensive coastline and more than 100 ports into a geo-economic gateway. Trieste is emerging as the corridor's natural European terminal, linking Mediterranean maritime routes directly to the industrial heartlands of Central and Eastern Europe. Under the "Italia Digitale 2026" program and its National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), Rome has allocated €6.7 billion to expand broadband, secure cloud services, and pioneer digital wallet systems. These public investments are complemented by private capital flows, with data center investments in the peninsula projected to reach €30 billion by 2026. This technological mobilization allows Italy to serve as the critical digital landing point and complement the capabilities of New Delhi and Jerusalem. In addition, bilateral frameworks such as the Italy-India Joint Strategic Action Plan (JSAP) 2025-29 establish joint technological standards across space, artificial intelligence, and supercomputing, consequently

elevating IMEC beyond a traditional transport route and positioning Italy as the premier data junction of a secure, trilateral high-technology ecosystem.

Crucially, this connectivity network converges with Italy's "Mattei Plan" for Africa. Under the plan, Italy is expanding digital access, supporting AI adoption for regional startups, and integrating North and East African nodes with IMEC's broader infrastructural architecture. A key example is the AI Hub for Sustainable Development launched at the UNDP headquarters in Rome during Italy's G7 presidency, which aims to engage African startups within the global tech economy.

Strong safeguards will be essential to ensure digital robustness. According to specialists, shielding information and power from blended dangers requires a collaborative cyber-maritime protection strategy among multiple nations. For Italy, this entails coordinating naval forces, intelligence agencies, and business partners to defend the Raman Blue subsea network, underwater electricity infrastructure, and port control mechanisms. Implementing unified risk notifications, rapid maintenance units, and collaborative security drills for port systems bolsters the security of Italy's sea access points.

Italy possesses world-class expertise in marine engineering, submarine cable installation, and underwater security. Significantly, Italian state-backed and private entities can use national security assets, such as the National Pole for the Underwater Dimension (PNS) and NATO's Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation, to conduct research for the protection of undersea cables, pipelines, and harbors.

This technical defense is paired with soft-infrastructure initiatives that bypass physical delays. The primary mechanism for this is the "Digital Handshake" – an API-level integration connecting India's Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP) with Italy's National Logistics Platform (PLN). By enabling automated, paperless, and green customs clearance, this digital bridge establishes common trade standards and prevents non-tariff barriers, aligning with EU customs-union and digital ID standards. Furthermore, the Italian Space Agency (ASI) and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) can expand their bilateral cooperation beyond basic research to launch "satellite-enabled monitoring and data services," utilizing private-sector satellites to track and secure corridor

assets in real time. Similarly, Italy can strategically align its domestic infrastructure with European regional networks to enhance IMEC's geopolitical reach. The port of Trieste, positioned as the corridor's natural northern terminal, can link Indo-Mediterranean flows directly to the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), creating a geoeconomic corridor from the Indian Ocean to the Baltic Sea. By leveraging these complementary space, maritime, and regional logistics networks, Italy and its partners can build a highly resilient, functional "soft" infrastructure layer that operates independently of physical rail tracks, preparing a robust technological foundation for IMEC's eventual physical completion.

By integrating the Mattei Plan and IMEC, Italy aims to position itself as Europe's prime geo-economic and technological gateway, using its partnership-led model to provide a powerful, non-predatory alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Israel: From transit point to functional node

Israel's initial relevance to IMEC is geographic. In the most commonly discussed route, goods would travel from Gulf ports through Saudi Arabia and Jordan before reaching Israel and continuing by sea toward European markets. Israel and Jordan are not signatories to the original 2023 IMEC Memorandum of Understanding, but both are central to the proposed physical geography of the corridor.

Haifa has consequently emerged in policy discussions as a potentially important Mediterranean node. Yet Israel's long-term value to IMEC should not depend only on whether cargo passes through its territory. A more durable role would combine geography with technological capabilities relevant to the operation and protection of the corridor.

The commercial presence of India's Adani Ports Group in Haifa illustrates one existing connection. Adani's majority ownership stake in the port does not amount to Indian governmental control, nor should it be presented as such. It does, however, create a direct commercial link between a major Indian logistics company and a potentially important Eastern Mediterranean node.

The more significant potential lies in technological complementarity. India possesses scale and experience in operating large digital systems. Israel has developed specialized capabilities in cybersecurity, critical infrastructure protection, AI applications, and technology innovation. Together, these strengths could support areas such as secure cargo management platforms, port and railway cybersecurity, customs data protection, smart border systems, and AI-enabled logistics.

Such cooperation remains a possibility rather than an established component of IMEC. There is currently no official framework designating Israel as the corridor's cybersecurity provider, nor should IMEC be presented as an India-Israel security architecture. The more realistic role for Israel would be as one contributor to a wider, shared resilience framework.

This distinction is important because IMEC's vulnerabilities are no longer only physical. Ports, rail systems, electricity infrastructure, and communications networks increasingly rely on digital systems. Disruption of operational data, communications, or port management systems could interfere with corridor activity without requiring physical destruction of infrastructure.

For Israel, the central opportunity is therefore to move from transit to function: from serving primarily as a geographic passage between the Gulf and the Mediterranean to contributing technological and resilience capabilities to a wider connectivity system.

From physical connectivity to digital resilience

The potential value of an India-Israel-Italy technology triangle becomes clearer when IMEC is treated as an integrated system rather than a single transport route.

A functioning corridor requires ports, railways, and maritime links, but these physical elements must operate across different jurisdictions. Customs authorities need to exchange information; operators must track cargo across multiple transport modes; infrastructure managers require reliable data; and critical systems must remain operational under conditions of physical or cyber disruption.

Building on IMEC's officially envisaged digital dimension, several areas could therefore become practical fields of cooperation:

- secure data connectivity and digital cargo management;
- customs and regulatory interoperability;
- AI-assisted logistics and infrastructure management;
- cybersecurity for ports, railways, energy systems, and communications infrastructure; and
- diversification of suppliers in selected critical technologies.

The technological dimension also creates a broader geopolitical question. IMEC is frequently described as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative. This interpretation captures part of the strategic context but oversimplifies the interests of the corridor's participants. Chinese firms and technologies are already embedded in ports, infrastructure, and commercial networks across the Gulf and Mediterranean, and several IMEC partners maintain extensive economic relations with Beijing.

A more realistic strategic objective is therefore diversification and de-risking rather than comprehensive technological decoupling from China. Resilience would require avoiding excessive dependence on a single supplier or technological ecosystem in especially sensitive areas such as telecommunications, port management systems, critical data infrastructure, and cybersecurity.

Conclusions

An India-Israel-Italy framework could contribute to this diversification without transforming IMEC into an exclusive geopolitical bloc. The objective would instead be to develop trusted technological options, improve interoperability, and create additional layers of resilience within a corridor that will inevitably connect countries with different strategic relationships.

At the same time, technology cannot compensate for missing infrastructure or unresolved political constraints. Significant rail gaps remain across the

proposed route, particularly in the links connecting the Gulf, Jordan, and Israel. Customs procedures and technical standards still require coordination, and IMEC lacks a sufficiently developed corridor-wide governance architecture capable of integrating financing, standards, data management, and implementation across jurisdictions.

Regional politics remain equally consequential. The corridor requires cooperation among states that do not all maintain formal diplomatic relations and whose political relationships remain vulnerable to wider conflict. IMEC's digital layer can therefore advance selectively, but cannot ultimately substitute for progress in physical infrastructure and political coordination.

This is precisely why the next phase of IMEC should not be framed as a choice between a physical and a digital corridor. The two dimensions are mutually reinforcing, but they may proceed at different speeds. The physical corridor remains constrained by infrastructure gaps and regional politics. The digital and technological layer, by contrast, offers opportunities for more modular cooperation that can be developed incrementally.

The strategic significance of an India-Israel-Italy technology triangle lies in this sequencing. India provides scale and digital capacity; Israel can contribute specialized technological and resilience capabilities; and Italy can connect these efforts to the Mediterranean and European industrial and regulatory environment. Together, they could help transform IMEC from a political vision into a gradually integrated connectivity architecture. The key point is therefore not that IMEC must evolve beyond transport. It was designed as more than transport from the beginning. The challenge now is to translate that multidimensional vision into implementable components. Developing the digital, technological and resilience layer while the larger physical corridor continues to take shape may offer one of the most realistic pathways for doing so.

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