

# India, Egypt elevate ties to 'strategic partnership'

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On Sunday, the concluding day of Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Cairo, India and Egypt signed a "landmark" strategic partnership treaty, which the two sides had agreed upon during Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's visit to New Delhi in January this year as chief guest for the Republic Day parade.

Cairo is keen on increased Indian investments. It has suggested New Delhi use Egypt's geographical location as a springboard to three regions: Europe, West Asia, and the whole of Africa, and offered the possibility of an industrial zone for India in Egypt.

Egyptian support would bolster India's claim to the leadership of the Global South and closer relations with an Arab country beyond those in the Persian Gulf.

However, the pomp of Modi's visit to Egypt had a message for his critics back home.

The Egyptian President conferred the Order of the Nile Award, Egypt's highest state honour. Bharatiya Janata Party social media chief Amit Malviya tweeted that Modi "has 13 such international awards from different countries, more than any other Indian PM has ever had".

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that "of the 13 awards he has been given as PM of the country, six have been given by countries where Muslims are in the majority".

Modi also met the Grand Mufti of Egypt, a meeting that comes within days of former US President Barack Obama's interview to CNN, where he said he would look to raise the subject of Indian Muslims with the Indian PM.

At a press conference in the national Capital, Sitharaman slammed Obama. "A former President under whose rule six Muslim-majority countries were bombed with more than 26,000 bombs. How will people trust his allegations?" she asked.

On Sunday, Modi and the Egyptian President held a "private one-on-one conversation", a follow-up of the latter's January visit to New Delhi. Over two days, the two sides discussed increased economic cooperation, including Indian investments in infrastructure, especially in the Suez Canal Authority, and signed agreements in agriculture and health care.

On Saturday, the first day of his two-day visit to Egypt, the first bilateral visit by an Indian PM

since 1997, Modi met the India Unit in the Egyptian Cabinet, set up earlier this year after El-Sisi's Delhi visit.

The unit proposed new areas of cooperation, while Modi "welcomed this 'whole of government approach' to take forward bilateral relations", the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

The Egyptian Prime Minister and seven Egyptian Cabinet ministers attended the meeting, as did the Suez Canal Economic Zone (SCZONE) Chairman Waleid Gamal Eldien who visited India earlier this month. They discussed ways to strengthen trade and investment, cooperation in renewable energy, green hydrogen, information technology, digital payment platforms, and pharmaceutical.

The Indian side promised Egypt its continued support for its request for membership in BRICS (acronym for the regional economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said while there were several requests, India was "looking actively" at BRICS membership for its "friendly and strategic partner" like Egypt.

The PM's other engagements included meeting the Grand Mufti of Egypt Shawki Ibrahim Allam on Saturday. "The Grand Mufti also appreciated the PM's leadership in fostering inclusivity and pluralism," the MEA said. Their discussions focused on issues related to social and religious harmony in society and countering extremism and radicalisation, the MEA said.

Kwatra said the Grand Mufti recently visited India, where he "had first-hand experience of India's diverse and strong social and cultural fabric". Modi said India would set up a Centre of Excellence in Information Technology at the Dar-al-Ifta, which the Grand Mufti heads.

On Sunday, the PM visited Al-Hakim mosque in Cairo, where he also met the leaders of the Bohra community, who are actively involved in the upkeep of the Fatimid-era Shi'a mosque. Modi has had close links with the Bohra community since his days as chief minister of Gujarat.

The PM met Tarek Heggy, a renowned Egyptian author and petroleum strategist, and their discussion covered issues related to global geopolitics, energy security, radicalism and gender equality, the MEA said.

He also met Hassan Allam, chief executive officer of Hassan Allam Holding Company, one of the largest Egyptian companies in West Asia and North Africa.



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**1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Al-Hakim mosque in Cairo, Egypt, on Sunday**

**2. Modi offers tributes to Indian soldiers who fought and laid down their lives in Egypt and Palestine during the First World War, at the Heliopolis Commonwealth War Cemetery**

**3. Modi at the Great Pyramid of Giza**

**4. Modi was conferred with the highest state honour of Egypt — Order of the Nile — by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi (right)**

PHOTOS: PTI