

India's Role In BRICS

Sumit Rauthan¹

Abstract:

This paper explores how India is becoming a new member of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) bloc especially with its recent growth into BRICS+. With the world moving towards a multipolar or fragmented reality, no longer a unipolar or bipolar system, India has become the "bridge power" in the bloc. This paper examines the ways in which India is using BRICS to pursue its vision of the "Voice of the Global South and at the same time retain its strategic autonomy in an environment that is typically characterized by Sino-American competition.

The study emphasizes a two-pronged strategy of India, using the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) to restructure the global financial system, but also making sure that the bloc does not become an all-anti-Western Front. Some of the areas of interest include the leadership of India in Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), its insistence on the introduction of the use of the local currency to settle down the risks associated with the use of the dollar and its persistent insistence to have the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reformed. The article will conclude that India is not only participating in the summits to engage in some economic cooperation, but also to secure a seat at the high table of international governance by evaluating the results of recent summits, such as the 2024 Kazan Summit and the following 2025 ministerial meetings. The results indicate that as long as internal tensions, especially the India-China border conflict, exist, BRICS will continue to be an invaluable avenue through which India can adjust the global balance to capture the 21st-century realities.

Keywords: Strategic Autonomy, Global South, BRICS+, New Development Bank, Multipolarity, Digital Public Infrastructure.

Introduction

Ever since its official establishment in 2009, BRICS has become more than a catchy acronym of investment, created by Goldman Sachs, but an extremely powerful geopolitical force. In the case of India, BRICS is not

¹ Research Scholar Ram Lal Anand College, University of delhi

merely a coalition of rising economies, but it forms part of its multi-aligned foreign policy. With the contemporary definition of the so-called polyresins, with climate change being just one of the elements that can be cited, as well as the disturbances of supply chains and geopolitical confrontations, India sees BRICS as a crucial tool to reestablish the balance on the global levels. The presence of India in the bloc is special. As opposed to China which tends to consider BRICS as a way to confront Western hegemony, or Russia which aims to have a counter-balance to its Western sanctions, India views BRICS as a reformative, not subversive power. The major aim of India is to democratize international institutions whereby the Global South has a decisive voice in the international decision making. The inclusion of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE in the bloc in 2024 has greatly changed the internal dynamics of the group. This is the era of BRICS+ and a challenge and an opportunity to New Delhi. Being the largest democracy in the group and one of the fastest-growing major economies, the challenge facing India is to see the wider bloc stick to the development, connectivity, and economic resilience road, instead of falling into polarized ideological camp.

Methodology

The article is based on a qualitative analytical approach, which uses both primary and secondary sources to assess the trend of India in BRICS. The methodology includes:

1. **Documentary Analysis:** A systematic review of BRICS Summit Declarations (since Yekaterinburg 2009 through Kazan 2024 and beyond) based on language associated with the financial sovereignty, counter-terrorism, and institutional reform.
2. **Comparative Geopolitics Analysis:** The assessment of India in BRICS and its involvement in Western-dominated groups such as the G20 and the Quad to comprehend the details of its Strategic Autonomy.
3. **Economic Data Review:** Reviewing the trade flows between India and other BRICS countries, lending by the New Development Bank (NDB) and the advancements of the BRICS Pay initiatives.
4. **Case Study Method:** The analysis of particular Indian projects, like the popularization of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as an example of digital financial integration on BRICS-level.

The timeframe of the current study focuses on the time frame between 2020 and 2026, which covers the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, and the recent institutional growth of the bloc.



The Financial Pillar: The leadership of India in NDB and CRA.

The most concrete success of the BRICS diplomacy in India is perhaps the establishment of an alternative financial architecture which offers an alternative to Bretton Woods institutions. The first significant institutional innovations in international development financing in a number of decades are the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), created in the 2014 Fortaleza Summit. India was one of the major influencers of the unusual governance system of NDB that requires that all founding members should have equal voting rights irrespective of their contribution to the capital. This was a desperate need in New Delhi, to make sure that the bank would not be overtaken by the greater financial muscle of China as it usually does in other multilateral institutions. The NDB had a capital of authorization of \$100 billion and initial subscribed capital of \$50 billion and each of the five founding members contributed with 10 billion dollars. As of late 2025, the bank has granted about 96 projects worth a total of (estimated) \$32.8 billion in financing, which include clean energy and sustainable infrastructure. This funding has been of great benefit to India as it has received a total amount of \$6.9 billion in 18 projects which focus on the issue of bottlenecks in transport, water management as well as urban development. These projects are usually designed in such a way that they can be in line with the national master plan of multimodal connectivity in India, which is called Gati Shakti.

The Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA) is a liquidity pool of up to \$100 billion to assist member countries to cope with short-term balance-of-payments strains. The contribution by India of \$18 billion towards this arrangement is a show of dedication towards financial stability as a group. This CRA is of specific interest to India because it would offer a safety net to global financial volatility without the high political conditionality that is usually attached to IMF bailouts. Moreover, India has been pragmatic in its advocacy of de-dollarization in BRICS, as opposed to ideological. Where Russia and China have advocated the abandonment of the US dollar altogether, India has looked at the more practical of settling bilateral trade in domestic currencies. The successful testing of Unified Payments interfaces (UPI) of India and the payment systems of the UAE was an example of this approach, as it offers a model to expand financial interoperability on a BRICS-wide basis.

Balancing Act India-China-West and Strategic Autonomy.

The participation of India in BRICS is one of walking the fine line between its own commitments as a part of the bloc and its growing strategic alliance with the United States and other Western nations. Such a balancing act is preconditioned by the peculiarities of Indian geopolitical location: the only major middle



power is this country, which has a long and contentious border with China and, at the same time, is one of the pillars of the US Indo-Pacific strategy. In BRICS, India is a crucial internal balance to the Chinese. Although Beijing tends to pull the group towards an anti-Western, post-dollar, world order, India focuses on how the group is more of a reformist, but not a revolutionary, group.

The conflict between India and China had hit its lowest point with the Galwan Valley confrontations of 2020 resulting in a long-term stalemate in high-level bilateral engagement. Nevertheless, a momentous diplomatic breakthrough happened at the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan (2024). Only a few days prior to the summit, both countries agreed on the arrangement of patrolling along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), making the first official meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping in five years possible. To a large extent, this thaw was a pragmatic acknowledgement that they were collectively crippled in their BRICS and that this was weakening the collective bargain of the block against the Global North. The most apparent Indian strategic action was possibly a tariff war with the United States in 2026. New Delhi did not flinch immediately when Washington first introduced a tariff of 50 percent on Indian goods—a tariff that was aimed at compelling Indians to accept terms of trade. Rather, India leveraged its strategic position in the BRICS and other forums; to pursue parallel negotiations that have seen it speed up trade agreements with the EU and UK and underline its role as being essential to the US own Indo-Pacific ambitions. This was later to be a decisive late night telephone conversation between Prime Minister Modi and the US President that ended up in the tariff being cut to 18%, a much more amenable rate than those being imposed on other key trading partners such as China (37%) or even on the traditional allies such as Switzerland (39%). This achievement highlights the fact that India has been able to use its multi-alignment to gain concrete national interests.

Sectoral Leadership: Space, Digital Public Infrastructure and Counter-Terrorism.

India has since not only shifted the focus on general advocacy but has taken the lead in specific, high impact sectoral initiatives within BRICS, especially in sectors where it has domestic competitive advantages. These programs are created to offer global public goods which are appealing to the developmental interests of the Global South.

Counter-Terrorism and Security

Counter-terrorism has always been the top priority of the BRICS political-security pillar of India. New Delhi has been effective in its promotion of the non-use of the double standards in counter terrorism and

has been urging the adoption of the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Action Plan. It involves practical intelligence sharing, interruption of the financial activity of the terrorists as well as using the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group to combat the misuse of information technology to achieve radicalization. One of the major diplomatic achievements of the Indian government was the 2025 Rio Summit declaration that openly criticized a major terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir region, which signified a developing trend in the bloc towards recognizing India to have certain security issues. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and UPI.

Digital Public Infrastructure is one of the focal points in the technological leadership in India. India has offered its India Stack model, which includes biometric identification (Aadhaar), digital payments (UPI), and data management (Digi Locker) as a low-cost and scalable scheme that can be used to financially include the BRICS+ nations. Such a presentation of the so-called DPI diplomacy is put forward as a neutral, democratic alternative to the Western proprietary platforms as well as the state-centric digital infrastructure in China. As of 2026, the emphasis has moved to the BRICS Bridge, which is a vehicle to interoperable Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs). India has been keen on integrating the digital rupee with other BRICS currencies to enable easy cross-border settlement, and thus, promote financial sovereignty by the entire block.

Space Exploration and Sovereignty of Space.

India has shifted towards multilateral projects in the space sector, instead of bilateral projects. The BRICS countries also signed the 2021 Agreement on Cooperation in Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation, under its chairmanship, establishing a virtual network of satellites to track climate change and environmental disasters. Also, India has been using space as a means of human-centered diplomacy. The world first all-girls international lunar mission is the "Mission Shakthi SAT" which was launched in 2026 at the BRICS CCI Women Empowerment Summit. The program seeks to impart STEM and satellite engineering training to 12,000 girls in 108 countries, with the BRICS+ members among them. India aims to rebrand the paradigm of the global space as a platform of peace and progress, instead of competition, by making space a common platform of collaboration

Global south and challenges of expansion

The BRICS engagement of India as a de facto leader of the Global South is a common theme in its engagement with BRICS. But the recent development of the bloc into BRICS+ has brought some new

intricacies to this leadership position. Although India was initially quite conservative with its expansion, based on criteria that would help it to avoid turning the organization into something unmanageable or overtly pro-China, it eventually welcomed the inclusion of countries that have a strong historical and economic relationship with it, like Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, and Indonesia.

Tension On reforming the UN Security Council.

One of the main objectives of India in BRICS is to undergo total transformation of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to become more permanent by incorporating more Global South members. Although the traditional BRICS members have been supportive of India in terms of an oblique support in terms of permanent seat of Brazil and South Africa, the Rio Summit of 2025 brought out new divides. New entrants Egypt and Ethiopia vetoed a joint communiqué expressly in support of South Africa getting a permanent seat, claiming that it was incompatible with the African Union Azuline Consensus which recommends two permanent seats as a whole by the African Union.

Although Russia and China reiterated their backing of India and Brazil to play a bigger role in the UN, the tension during South Africa candidacy highlighted the challenge of keeping the Global South united as the block gets increasingly diverse. In the case of India, this state of affairs must be carefully diplomatically handled to make sure that its own ambitions will not be thwarted by intra-regional tussles in Africa or the Middle East.

Reducing Economic Imbalances and Disparities.

India is also struggling with how to deal with structural trade deficits with its BRICS partners, especially China. In 2024, the intra-BRICS trade was almost at a point of reaching almost at a point of almost \$400 billion, but India still had a trade deficit of 209 billion with its partners. This imbalance is fuelled by imports of energy and manufactured products, which India is trying to offset by accessing improved market in its competitive industries, including pharmaceuticals, IT services and textiles. The priorities of the 2026 presidency are coordinated plans to strengthen industrial resilience and defend domestic manufacturing, and at the same time agitating towards more intra-BRICS trade.

Conclusion

The success of institutionalizing the "Digital and Financial Bridge" characterizes India as the legacy of the BRICS president as 2026 approaches. India has taken that needle out of rhetoric and delivered results,

demonstrating that even such a diverse group as BRICS + can make real progress when united by similar developmental determinants. New Delhi has given the Global South a roadmap toward sovereign growth by promoting Digital Public Infrastructure and local currency trade.

Internal contradictions, especially the India-China rivalry will remain a constant, but the presence of India as the stabilizing centre will make sure that these contradictions do not bring down the shared mission. India has been able to communicate that BRICS is not an alternative to the Western order, rather an upgrade to it, however, it is more representative, inclusive and robust. Ultimately, India has a role to play in BRICS to make sure that the 21st century is not characterized by the conflict of civilizations, but the collaboration of continents.

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