

## BRICS AT DELHI: VOICE OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

As the members of the BRICS nations meet in Delhi, the unease is visible. The founding members — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — represent over 40 per cent of the world's population, while the newly expanded BRICS+ alliance represents approximately 55.6 per cent of the global population. Most of these nations are emerging economies with fragile and vulnerable financial systems. That is the story of the Global South continuously reeling under pressure and facing headwinds from the North, sometimes in the form of tariffs, environmental concerns, uncertainties in the energy market, or pressure to join one bloc or another.

The Delhi Summit is, therefore, not just a formal grouping but a cumulative effort to send a strong message to the West that it must consider the issues confronting these countries and not impose its agenda. BRICS is no longer merely an economic grouping. It was conceptualised in 2001 as an economic forum, and its first summit took place in 2009, but today it is a potent political force. Under India's chairmanship, it has emerged strongly and has been vocal about the issues it wants addressed by the developed nations.

From wars in West Asia and Ukraine to sanctions, energy insecurity and fractured supply chains, BRICS nations are advocating a just global governance system that gives them strategic autonomy and economic equity. The challenge, however, lies in transforming shared grievances into a coherent and credible global agenda. The Delhi summit of the BRICS grouping comes at a moment of profound churn in international politics. The summit's agenda reflects the anxieties of a rapidly fragmenting world. India's External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, has sharply criticised unilateral sanctions and coercive measures, arguing that "pressure cannot replace diplomacy". His remarks are significant because they underscore India's attempt to maintain strategic autonomy while simultaneously positioning itself as a responsible voice for developing nations.

The BRICS nations are clamouring for reform of the UN Security Council, greater representation for emerging economies in global financial institutions, and protection of sovereign decision-making. Another major concern before the summit is the growing instability in West Asia. Tensions around the Strait of Hormuz have disrupted energy supplies. For developing economies heavily dependent on imported energy, these conflicts are direct economic threats. BRICS leaders are therefore advocating dialogue, ceasefires and diplomatic engagement in conflict zones. However, BRICS is not a cohesive force. The grouping faces several internal challenges. India-China tensions continue to cast a shadow over cooperation, while Russia's direct confrontation with the West makes BRICS's task more difficult. Yet, despite these contradictions, BRICS remains relevant because it reflects a changing global reality. The old unipolar order is weakening, but a stable multipolar system has not yet emerged. BRICS's credibility will depend on whether it can move beyond rhetoric and remain cohesive so that it can voice its concerns collectively. It must first demonstrate that its diversity is its strength, not its weakness.

Ravikumar Chockalingam

As the newly formed government led by actor-turned-politician Vijay begins its tenure, Tamil Nadu faces a test greater than an electoral upset. The real question is whether a politics built on adoration can mature into one grounded in fiscal discipline, social repair, public safety and long-term development.

Tamil Nadu enters this new chapter with enormous strengths, but also with visible fatigue. For decades, the state has been shaped by parties that built enduring welfare legacies yet gradually allowed those achievements to harden into entitlement politics, fiscal strain and a culture of reduced accountability. That accumulated exhaustion created the opening for a new force to disrupt a deeply entrenched establishment.

The rise of a new government led by actor-turned-politician Vijay is therefore not merely a story of celebrity crossing into politics. It is also a reflection of public impatience with an old order that had grown too comfortable with habit, symbolism and transactional politics. When people begin to feel that governments can distribute benefits but not renew trust, disruption stops looking risky and becomes necessary. Yet electoral change by itself is not democratic fulfilment. It is only the beginning of a more serious obligation. A government formed on the strength of public enthusiasm must now show that it can govern with restraint, competence and moral clarity. The whistles of victory are fleeting and cannot overshadow the burden of power and the enormous responsibility that comes with it. That burden is heavier when the margins are narrow. A slim majority is still a valid democratic mandate, but it is also a reminder that nearly half the political community may remain unconvinced, anxious or opposed. In such a moment, triumphalism is dangerous. The new government must treat victory not as a license for excess, but as a call for humility, consultation and steady administration. It must listen more carefully, govern more inclusively and avoid the temptation to confuse electoral arithmetic with moral unanimity.

## From whistles to whispers!



A peaceful transition of power matters so deeply. In every healthy democracy, the transfer of authority must be orderly, dignified and free from vendetta, instability or street-level intimidation. The maturity of a democratic culture is tested not only in the casting of votes, but in the conduct that follows the verdict. The chosen leader leads everyone, more so the ones who did not vote in favor. This is especially important in Tamil Nadu, a state with a strong political memory and an emotionally charged public sphere. Cadres who were trained in loyalty and mobilisation must now learn the harder discipline of democratic responsibility.

The failures of earlier governments must also teach lessons for future. The establishment did not fail because it did nothing. It failed because it increasingly blurred the line between welfare and dependency, governance and patronage, compassion and convenience. For too long, elections risked becoming contests of distribution rather than contests of vision. That approach may produce applause, but it also deepens fiscal pressure and weakens the culture of citizenship. A state cannot indefinitely promise more, borrow more and postpone structural correction without eventually narrowing its future choices.

The contradiction is perhaps sharpest in the social sphere. Governments spoke the language of family welfare while remaining comfortable with revenue models and public

conditions that often contributed to social distress. They announced safety, but too many women still experienced fear in transit and indifference in systems meant to protect them. They celebrated youth, but too often failed to build clear bridges from education to dignity, work and civic belonging.

This is where the new government will be tested. It must prove that change means more than a change of face. It must show that governance can move from spectacle to seriousness, from distribution to capability, from patronage to public purpose. That requires political courage, the courage to speak honestly about debt, to reform without cruelty, to protect the vulnerable without manufacturing dependency and to invest in long-term systems rather than short-term applause. If this means, revisiting promises surrounding freebies and focusing on stronger fiscally responsible welfare schemes, people will understand with reason. Freebies are defensible during floods, droughts and pandemics. They are an ethical response to sudden vulnerability. But when they become the central grammar of governance, they risk turning relief into dependency and citizenship into clientele. A good government does not merely distribute. It enables. It teaches people how to fish rather than ensuring they remain in line for the next packet of food.

As a psychiatrist working in addiction, I have witnessed the far-reaching conse-

quences of drug and alcohol use on individuals and families. It is imperative for governments to recognize the pervasive impact of Drug and alcohol use on the welfare of families and wellbeing of young adults. It is a force multiplier of poverty, domestic violence, school dropout, depression, accidents and lost labor productivity. A state cannot claim to protect families while growing comfortable with revenue streams that help break them. Nor can it address narcotics and synthetic drug use through police action alone. Tamil Nadu needs a public health led addiction policy, systematic de-addiction programs linked to government health systems, school-based prevention programs, stronger anti-trafficking enforcement and abolition of liquor availability around schools, colleges and labor settlements. This need not mean theatrical overnight prohibition. India's own history shows that abrupt prohibition without preparation can fuel bootlegging and illicit harm. But a phased path toward partial, and eventually wider, alcohol restriction linked to rehabilitation, alternative livelihoods and behavioral health would be a far more serious legacy than allowing the state to remain dependent on intoxication for revenue.

Tamil Nadu does not also need endless emotional mobilization. There is a rich legacy of social and economic development, thanks to progressive policies of previous governments going back decades. However, populism expanded faster than reform, political theatre often outran institutional repair and the difficult work of preparing Tamil Nadu for its next stage of development was repeatedly postponed. Today, it needs administrative depth. It needs safer streets, stronger schools, better public transport, genuine women's safety, economic opportunity for youth and a fiscal framework that does not mortgage the future to sustain the present. Tamil Nadu already has a formal women's policy focused on violence-free homes, safe mobility, equal wages and economic access, and the TNWESafe programme seeks to link women's employment, safety and health through a large-scale policy platform, but policy architecture alone is not enough.

## CAN WE AFFORD TO WASTE FOOD ANY LONGER?

Asha Iyer Kumar

Artificial intelligence is no longer confined to the edges of innovation; it is steadily becoming part of the everyday rhythm of education. Its presence in school curricula is not loud or disruptive, but quietly influential, shaping how students engage with learning and how educators respond to their needs.

Not only are we seeing new tools; we are also seeing an entirely different experience created through this evolution. The advent of AI has opened up ways to support not only students' academic growth, but also the confidence and well-being that sit at the heart of meaningful learning.

For years, the classroom has been built on a straightforward approach of one teacher, one lesson, one pace. But all learners are different, some move ahead quickly, while others need more time. AI is starting to close this gap by figuring out when a student is having trouble or is ready to move on, which lets learning adapt to each person's needs. It also changes what teachers do by taking over tasks like grading and keeping track of progress. As classrooms evolve, teachers



act as guides and mentors who assist students in interpreting the material rather than instructing them. At the same time, learning remains deeply tied to confidence, motivation, and self-worth. In this context, AI can contribute positively to this system. If implemented correctly, it can facilitate learning through timely feedback, personalized instructions, and early detection of disinterest, among other ways. It can support both performance and well-being. Nonetheless, the story has another side to it?

The fear is that students will reach for

AI and thoughtlessly use it as a shortcut, skipping the thinking and questioning that leads to learning? Therefore, schools should teach students how to use AI rather than how to access it, with the goal of turning out critical thinkers rather than efficient problem solvers?

Then there are questions of ethics, which are becoming increasingly important?

How else is student data being used?

Are these systems fair for all learners?

Are we teaching children how to use technology?

These are not technical questions alone, they're deeply human ones. And they must be part of the conversation in every school that chooses to embrace AI.

The real impact lies in how thoughtfully schools integrate AI. The priority should be on building AI literacy rather than simply teaching its usage, while ensuring that teachers are equipped and trained alongside students.

Education has never been just about facts. At its heart, education is an experience rooted in relationship-building and mentorship. AI cannot replace that, and it shouldn't try to. What it can do is strengthen it.

When AI is used in the classroom in a thoughtful way, it can make learning spaces more flexible and welcoming to all students, recognising and accepting the different experiences of each one. It gives teachers more time to help students become more curious, confident, and able to express themselves. Maybe this is the real power of AI in the classroom: making it truly inclusive to everyone.

The writer is a Dubai-based author, columnist, independent journalist and children's writing coach; Views presented are personal.

## India asserts its maritime power to ensure energy shipping

Anil Bhat

Following a major escalation in the US-Iran conflict since February-March 2026, along with strict controls imposed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the Strait of Hormuz, the Indian Navy, under Operation Uрга Suraksha (energy protection), began maintaining a high-alert deployment in the Gulf of Oman and the northern Arabian Sea to secure Indian commercial shipping passing through the vicinity of the Strait of Hormuz.

While Iran's theocratic leadership has maintained relations with India based on historic ties and a strategic partnership centred around the development of Chabahar Port, the IRGC has pursued its own agenda, which has included targeting Indian or India-bound merchant ships and tankers — perhaps not every time, but often enough. On December 8, 2025, the IRGC forcefully detained 16 Indian crew members aboard the merchant tanker MT Valiant Roar in the Gulf over alleged fuel smuggling. While ten of these sailors were initially moved to a prison in Bandar

Abbas, the eight who remained on board were subsequently released in February 2026. By early 2026, 348 other Indian citizens from Iran had also returned home.

All this and more has been coordinated by India's Ministries of External Affairs (MEA), Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW), through the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS), Defence (MoD), Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG), Information and Broadcasting (MIB), Indian missions in the region and, on the waters, a powerful flotilla of the Indian Navy.

By March 20, 2026, the IRGC had established a designated "safe corridor" closer to the Iranian coastline and warned against any deviation. Indian officials coordinated with regional authorities to facilitate the passage of Indian ships through this area. Despite a temporary and fragile ceasefire in early April, the area remained a high-risk zone, partly owing to reports of unrecorded mines laid by the IRGC and its offensive actions, including firing at ships, thereby necessitating close-protection escorts for critical fuel imports.

Following an incident on April 18,

2026, when IRGC personnel fired upon two Indian-linked vessels, India summoned the Iranian envoy in New Delhi on the same day to demand safe and uninterrupted passage for Indian ships. Iran maintained that "Indian friends" were in safe hands, even while conducting strict monitoring and allowing only selected vessels to pass.

The Indian Navy significantly enhanced its maritime posture by deploying two aircraft carrier battle groups, led by INS Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya. Operating together in the Persian Gulf, they amounted to a formidable force for sea control, with over 35 aircraft, numerous warships and submarines, thereby highlighting India's commitment to security in the Indian Ocean region, clearly projecting power and strengthening maritime diplomacy.

This move, combined with New Delhi's high-level diplomatic pressure on Iran, proved effective against the IRGC and resulted in Indian-flagged vessels being allowed passage through the highly volatile region where shipping from other nations faced severe restrictions. In early May 2026, the Indian Govern-

ment decisively asserted maritime rights and informed Tehran that no special permission or "protection fees" were required for Indian vessels, which would move under active guidance from the Indian Navy. A significant outcome of these actions was that over 14 (another version places the figure at 22) India-bound ships carrying energy cargo were escorted through the Strait of Hormuz with the assistance of the Indian Navy.

The Indian Navy has reportedly received praise for its effective, independent and proactive security operations, as well as for being a rapid-response security provider in the Indian Ocean Region. By successfully tackling piracy and maritime threats — such as the MV Lila Norfolk, FV Al Naemi, FV Iman (all in January 2024), and the MV Ruen hijacking in March 2024, to name a few — while utilising advanced surveillance and ensuring open, rules-based sea lanes, the Indian Navy has come to be recognised as a force that guarantees stability and safeguards regional interests. Its task forces continue securing Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) and conducting daring res-

cue missions for commercial vessels targeted in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. By hosting the International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026 in February, India showcased its growing indigenous shipbuilding capabilities and strong international partnerships, with participation from 75 nations, making it one of the largest maritime engagements in the region. Also in February, the Indian Navy assumed command of the 47-nation Combined Task Force 154 to focus on training and maritime security — an indicator of growing trust in India's professional expertise.

India has also increasingly come to be viewed as a nation that maintains its security role independently rather than formally joining US-led coalitions, a significant aspect of its foreign policy.

The US Navy, on the other hand, has reportedly faced operational challenges in the Red Sea. One major report indicated that the USS Harry S. Truman carrier strike group encountered significant difficulties during its deployment there. Reports also cited multiple F/A-18 Super Hornets lost in 2025-26, with some incidents involving jets going over-

board due to failed landings and hangar accidents. These losses occurred during a high-tempo campaign against Houthi forces in Yemen. Investigations into these incidents reportedly pointed towards training gaps, equipment failures and intense operational pressure.

On April 9, 2026, the US Navy confirmed that a highly advanced and expensive MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance (HALE) surveillance drone had been lost over the Persian Gulf.

Each unit is estimated to cost between \$200 million and \$240 million. The drone disappeared near the Strait of Hormuz after sending an in-flight emergency signal. The US Naval Safety Command classified the incident as a "Class A mishap", indicating that the drone was destroyed and that the loss exceeded \$2.5 million.

The incident occurred amid rising tensions in the region involving Iran. While some reports speculated about possible interception or electronic warfare interference, official reports at the time stated that the drone had "crashed", with no injuries to personnel.