

DELHI BRICS SUMMIT

The 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi is happening at a time when world is facing major crisis like unending wars and the disruption in supply chains. The old order in which the world was unipolar after the disintegration of the USSR has crumbled while the new order of multi-polarity is in the making. The world is looking increasingly towards the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, the founder members – for political leadership and creation of the new world order. Today the BRICS has expanded to 11 full members including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Indonesia and the UAE. It also has 10 partner countries. The BRICS founding nations are the world’s most developing countries and are therefore in a position to help and collaborate the global south in their journeys of development.

On the level of geo politics, can BRICS summit be of help in resolving the ongoing wars. When the UAE, Iran and Saudi Arabia sit on the table to chalk out a common path of development at the Summit, surely some sparks will fly. The common agenda of growth and the presence of leaders who are friends with all the warring sides would surly lead to some thaw in the hostilities between member nations at loggerheads. India’s chairship of BRICS is the fourth time it is leading the bloc. This summit’s official theme is “Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability” and it does work for all. Most importantly, the two-day summit would see the world’s most powerful leaders including Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian under one roof discussing issues that would shape the world. For India, it’s time to do its bit to make the world a better place for all humans and push for common interests of the developing countries.

Parul Chandra

When Goldman Sachs economist Jim O’Neill coined the acronym BRIC in 2001 to group the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China, he could hardly have envisioned its evolution into a large, influential diplomatic bloc over a quarter of a century later.

Now known as BRICS after South Africa joined it in 2010, the grouping has expanded to include 11 member states and 10 partner countries. Over the years, it has become a vital platform for emerging markets and developing economies seeking a more equitable international order and meaningful reform of global governance institutions.

The bloc’s growth underscores its rising heft on the world stage. Several countries, many from the African continent, are now eager to join BRICS, which expanded considerably in 2024 with the inclusion of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Indonesia joined a year later alongside ten other nations - Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Vietnam — which became partner countries. Today, the 11 member states represent nearly half the world’s population, 40 per cent of global GDP and 26 per cent of international trade.

As a founding member of the informal grouping, India, as the current Chair, will host the BRICS Summit on September 12-13 in New Delhi. It is for the fourth time that India will be hosting the Summit. For India, its BRICS membership is in consonance with its commitment to multilateralism and its policy of strategic autonomy. It also allows India to highlight the need for global governance reform.

Importantly, the Summit will also offer New Delhi the opportunity to demonstrate its diplomatic clout by convening a meeting of world leaders and for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to have bilateral meetings with them on the sidelines.

BRICS at a crossroads



The upcoming Summit, the 18th, is particularly significant as it is taking place against the backdrop of severe geopolitical friction, economic uncertainty, and trade and supply chain disruptions. The long-drawn Russia-Ukraine conflict and the US-Israel war with Iran have contributed in no small measure to the economic headwinds buffeting the world. The West Asia conflict, which has led to the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and enveloped other countries in the region in hostilities, has seriously disrupted global energy supplies.

At the same time, US President Donald Trump has also upended the world order and economic systems. His protectionist trade policies and the unleashing of punitive tariffs on countries, many of which have been important economic partners, have heightened global economic strain.

President Trump’s perception of BRICS as an anti-Western coalition has brought threats of 100 per cent tariffs should the bloc attempt to replace the US dollar with a BRICS currency. President Trump’s fears may be unfounded, though, as the issue of de-dollarisation has left BRICS divided. India maintains that it is not in favour of a shared currency. Russia, on the other hand, wants de-dollarisation, while China would like broader use of the renminbi.

With the theme, ‘Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability’ and the motto ‘Humanity First’, India, as host, aims to steer discussions towards economic, social and institutional resilience “to navigate global uncertainties” and supply chain disruptions.

It also wants multilateral engagement among members to deepen through development finance, trade facilitation and reforms in global institutional governance.

The plethora of issues BRICS members want to work together on, while commendable, also makes cooperation a daunting task. Though bound by three “core pillars” — political and security, economy and finance, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges — it faces structural hurdles. Its consensus-driven model, paired with stark differences in political and economic systems and foreign policy priorities, makes decision-making slow.

Moreover, the rapid expansion of BRICS risks diluting internal cohesion. India, wary of China using expansion to extend its own influence within the bloc, has advocated consolidating existing membership over unchecked growth. It also remains guarded about China’s hegemonic moves, given that Beijing has been seeking to extend its sphere of influence in the region and beyond.

BRICS presents both an opportunity and a challenge. It is an opportunity in that it offers a platform for member states to cooperate and amplify their voices on the global stage on issues of common concern. It is a challenge because of the wide array of issues it seeks to address and the divergence in the views of its members amid a turbulent world order. However, the fact that this bloc has managed to grow in size and address a diversity of issues indicates its relevance.

However, BRICS does need to deliver substantive outcomes and put its money where its mouth is. Indeed, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in May this year about BRICS, “Our relevance will depend on outcomes, not just on intent.” ReadEconomic Reports

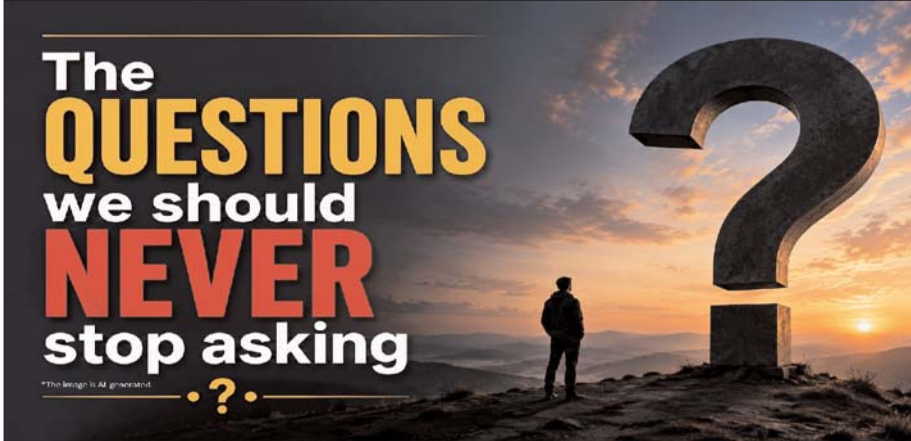
For instance, the New Development Bank, established in 2015 to mobilise resources for infrastructure projects and sustainable development, has modest capital at its disposal. It needs to mobilise more capital if it is to meet the demands of the new members as well as the Global South. BRICS has been seeking a better deal for the Global South, which is in sync with India’s championing of the cause of the Global South.

Ultimately, BRICS’ long-term credibility will not be measured by additional member intake or lofty summit declarations, but by its capacity to deliver tangible outcomes. To avoid becoming an oversized talk shop, the bloc will need to bridge deep internal divides — most notably over de-dollarisation and regional rivalries — while adequately capitalising institutions like the New Development Bank.

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THE QUESTIONS WE SHOULD NEVER STOP ASKING



ber. A persistent child may continue asking questions, but gradually many learn that knowing the expected answer is often more rewarding than asking an unexpected question. Those who carry the habit into college encounter another set of boundaries. And when they enter the workplace, many discover that it can sometimes be easier to nod politely at the profound wisdom being dispensed by seniors than to ask a simple, “Why?”

Perhaps that is where organisations should worry. Every organisation says it wants innovation. Leaders speak about disruption, creativity and thinking differently. Yet all three require something

much more elementary: an environment in which somebody can ask why something is being done in a particular way without being considered difficult. The person asking the question may be wrong. The existing practice may have perfectly sound reasons behind it. But explaining those reasons strengthens understanding. Occasionally, however, there may be no convincing answer beyond, “This is how we have always done it.” And that is precisely when a question becomes valuable.

Human progress has depended upon people who looked at what everyone else accepted and wondered why. Every discovery did not necessarily begin with a bril-

liant answer. Many began with an inconvenient question. And some changed the world simply by asking.

It is easy, of course, to expect children, students and younger colleagues to remain curious. Growing older has made me realise that the same expectation must apply to me. There is no embarrassment in asking my wife or my daughters a question to which I do not know the answer. Someone younger recently reminded me that I may not have all the answers. One of the privileges of growing older should be the freedom to say, “I don’t know. Let me find out.”

That is why I feel happy when a child asks me: Why? What? Who? Where? When? How?

I may not always know the answer. Sometimes there may not even be one. But providing an answer may be less important than ensuring that I do not make the child regret having asked the question.

And occasionally, instead of answering, I may need to ask the question with the child. Growing older may have given me answers to some questions I once asked, but it has also shown me how many more remain. Perhaps wisdom lies not merely in accumulating answers, but in retaining the curiosity — and the humility — to keep looking for them.

Swami Vivekananda's Vision of Oneness

Ashish Tripathi

Bharat is a land of great saints and sages. It is the land where great souls, with the light of their wisdom, illuminated their surroundings and spread their teachings to the far corners of the world. This light of wisdom brought a qualitative change to the lives of billions of people.

A renowned name among these luminaries is Swami Vivekananda. He is the one who, through his deeds and ideas, renewed the ancient idea of ‘Vishwa Bandhutva’ across the globe and granted it a tangible shape.

Swami Ji drew the inspiration to lead this holy task from the profound teachings of his guru, Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa, whose entire life was dedicated to the service of mankind. ‘Nar Seva-Narayan Seva’ was the supreme ideal of his life. This highest ideal was fully embraced and lived by his great disciple Vivekananda, who made it his life’s motto. The disciple invested all his spiritual power in realising his guru’s goal to its fullest potential.

Swami Vivekananda, along with other close disciples of his guru, founded the Ramakrishna Math on

May 1, 1897 with the aim of propagating and materialising the teachings and vision of their master. This became a great centre of religious and spiritual activities, where people from diverse backgrounds could experience a spiritual atmosphere conducive to enlightenment.

Simultaneously, Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission. The Mission is dedicated to fulfilling Samajik Sarokar (social responsibility) and Samajik Seva (social service). It focuses on uplifting the quality of life for ordinary men and women by offering cultural, educational and medical assistance based on the foundational principles and highest ideals of Sanatan Dharma.

Swami Vivekananda possessed an unmatched personality. As a man of action, he led various outstanding initiatives throughout his life, but his rarest achievement was preaching Vedantic teachings to the entire world. He was the one who most judiciously propagated this ancient philosophy in the 19th century. His works were rooted in rationality and logic, and carried a deep touch of humanity. Vivekananda was a sincere and captivating figure; his vision and mission fascinated commoners whenever he visited public spaces. His electrifying



ideas, passionate gestures, and charismatic aura exerted an immense influence on the masses. In 1893, he travelled to Chicago for the Parliament of the World’s Religions. On 11 September, he addressed this international conference, which delegates from various religious sects attended. Swami Ji was the representative of Bharat and Hindutva. He began his speech with the iconic words, “Sisters and Brothers of America...” He was not only deeply appreciated by the audience but also received a massive mark of respect. This not only established an affable relationship with his listeners but also set him apart from the crowd. The core philosophy behind these mesmerising words was inspired and driven by the Advaita Vedanta tradition of Indian philosophy. The Sanskrit

term Advaita refers to the non-dualistic nature of reality. This term is extensively discussed in Hindu scriptures to explain the unity between Jiva (the individual soul) and Brahman (the cosmic soul). This philosophy of Advaita teaches us the idea of oneness and the unity of the self. Popular philosophical texts like the Vivekachudamani and Brahmagyanavali Mala beautifully define this notion:

“Brahma Satyam Jagan-mithya Jivo-Brahmaiva naparah”

This means that Brahman alone is real, the world is illusory, and the individual soul (Jiva) is none other than Brahman. The famous Upanishadic Mahavakya (grand pronouncement), “Aham Brahmasmi”, also refers to the unity of the individual self with Brahman, the Universal Absolute. Through these verses, it is entirely clear that the supreme entity exists commonly and universally in each and every creature of this universe. Therefore, we must think of unity, speak of unity, and act in unity. Swami Vivekananda delivered this great message of Vedantic Darshana to the world. Wherever he travelled as a Parivrajaka (wandering monk), he preached the idea of universal brotherhood, which lies at the core of Hindu Sanskriti (culture). The an-

cient shastras of Sanatan Dharma elaborate on this idea of oneness in every entity of the universe. The ancient Indian text Hitopadesha articulates this beautifully through the verse:

Ayam nijah paroveti ganana laghuchetasam
Udaracharitanam tu vasudhaiva kumbhakam

This literally means that only narrow-minded people perceive things through a discriminatory outlook, whereas broad-minded people view the entire world as one family. Swami Vivekananda was a man of broad vision who always cast aside the notions of duality and saw an instinctive uniformity in everyone. In his speeches and letters, he drew attention to the significance of Advaita Darshana, which highlights the uniqueness of oneness in every man, woman, and creature, beyond the barriers of caste, class, and creed. He emphasised universal brotherhood for the betterment of the world and its people. His memorable speech at the Parliament of the World’s Religions underlined incredible ideas such as brotherhood, tolerance, and acceptance. He received a standing ovation for his vision of religious harmony and the essence of hu-

manity; consequently, his approach made a profound impact on the Western world.

Swami Vivekananda had a great vision for India; he viewed the society and surroundings of his nation with a practical attitude. He journeyed across India, covering different regions and sections of society, where he observed various problems in the lives of ordinary people. He identified poverty, starvation, illiteracy, and poor health conditions as the major challenges facing Indian society. As a true genius, he realised that one cannot accept or pursue a spiritual path under such miserable conditions. Therefore, with the motto “Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha” (For one’s own liberation and for the welfare of the world), he stood up to transform the lives of India’s underprivileged sections. He led this venture under the umbrella of the Ramakrishna Mission, which even today works in education, healthcare, disaster relief, and other humanitarian activities across the country. The work of the Ramakrishna Mission inculcates the values of kindness and compassion within us and celebrates the Upanishadic assertion of “Tena tyaktena bhunjitha” (Find your enjoyment through renunciation).