

BRICS: INDIA TO BALANCE GLOBAL SOUTH AND WEST

When Narendra Modi welcomes Vladimir Putin, Cyril Ramaphosa, and counterparts from an eleven-nation bloc to New Delhi on September 12-13, it will mark India's first BRICS chairmanship — its most consequential hosting since the 2023 G20 presidency. The theme — “Building for Resilience, Innovation, Co-operation and Sustainability” — is compelling; the agenda is not: reformed multilateralism at the UN and IMF, balanced trade and smooth services flows within the bloc, supply chains for semi-conductors and critical minerals, a Startup Innovation Fund, an AI governance framework, and an Agricultural Trade Conduct Protocol aimed at food security.

For India, the summit matters less for any single deliverable than for positioning. Hosting a bloc representing roughly 40 per cent of global GDP and nearly half of humanity lets New Delhi frame itself as the Global South's pragmatic convenor - present at the table with Beijing and Moscow, but unwilling to be cast as anti-Western.

The guest list underlines this: India has invited the sitting chairs of the African Union, ASEAN, CELAC, and the Gulf Cooperation Council as observers, plus UN Secretary-General António Guterres as an expected special guest — a roster built to say New Delhi speaks for the wider developing world, not just for BRICS.

That distinction matters more this year, as Washington's tariff pressure over India's Russian oil purchases pushes New Delhi to hedge harder towards Moscow and Beijing while still resisting a bloc-wide anti-dollar posture.

The talking points to watch: India will push local-currency settlement and payment-system interoperability, while rejecting a common BRICS currency that would invite further American retaliation. Counter-terrorism and terror financing will get prominent language, a long-standing Indian priority. And the India-China thaw — seeded at the 2024 Kazan summit - will be visible.

The complication is that BRICS is not an instrument India fully controls. Iran and Russia want sharper anti-Western language than New Delhi is comfortable issuing as chair; the West Asia conflict had already sunk consensus at May's foreign ministers' meeting; and Saudi Arabia's ambivalent participation, alongside Argentina's withdrawal, shows this is a looser coalition than the G20 India ran in 2023. Critics have called the presidency a “crown of thorns” — diplomatic exposure for uncertain reward. IndiaNews Coverage

The likely outcome is not a triumphant joint declaration but a carefully hedged chair's statement: sharp language on trade facilitation, food security, and institutional reform; softer, vaguer language on Gaza and Ukraine; and modest, concrete wins such as the innovation fund and a digital-payments push.

Rajani Kant Verma

When a building collapses and lives are lost, the first instinct is to find someone to blame. The more difficult — and far more important - task is to determine who was actually responsible.

The tragedy at a PG accommodation in Satya Niketan has rightly triggered public anger and demands for accountability. There can be no argument with the need for answers when human lives are lost. But accountability must follow facts, law and evidence. It cannot become a predetermined search for an individual to carry the burden of a failure that may have developed over years and involved several institutions. This is particularly relevant to the intense media scrutiny of the incumbent Commissioner. The question is not whether a Commissioner should be accountable. Of course, he should. The real question is: accountable for what?

A Commissioner can reasonably be held responsible for decisions taken under his authority, failures to act

where a clear statutory duty existed, matters specifically brought to his notice, and enforcement powers that were lawfully available to him. If evidence establishes that a dangerous condition was known to the competent authority, that there was a legal power to intervene, and that an avoidable failure occurred during his tenure, scrutiny is not only justified but necessary.

But accountability has boundaries. An incumbent Commissioner cannot automatically be held personally responsible for every unauthorised construction that predates his tenure, every historical enforcement failure, every matter falling within another statutory authority, or every violation of which the administration had no knowledge. The fact that a problem continues into a particular tenure does not, by itself, establish personal negligence. Nor does the mere occurrence of a tragedy prove that the officer occupying the chair caused it.

This distinction is particularly important in Delhi. Planning, building control, land use, fire safety, licensing, policing and enforcement can involve different institutions and differ-

ent statutory powers. Responsibilities can overlap, intersect or be divided between agencies. The Commissioner may be the most visible administrative authority, but visibility should never be mistaken for exclusive jurisdiction.

There is a deeper problem in the way administrative failures are often discussed. Every new Commissioner inherits properties, complaints, files, litigation, enforcement backlogs and practices accumulated over years. Some problems may have existed for decades. Some properties may have been inspected previously; others may never have come to official notice. Some matters may have been dealt with - or ought to have been dealt with - by another authority.

To attribute the entire accumulated burden to the person currently occupying the chair is to confuse continuity of office with personal culpability. The proper investigation must therefore proceed backwards through the entire chain of responsibility. When was the property constructed or altered? What was its sanctioned use? When did any violation arise? Were permissions obtained? Were complaints re-

By Deepak Dubey

For decades, Jammu and Kashmir occupied a peculiar place in Indian cinema. It was everywhere on the screen, yet rarely behind the camera.

Its snow-covered meadows, Dal Lake, willow-lined landscapes and mountain valleys provided some of Indian cinema's most recognisable images. Kashmir became synonymous with romance, music and visual spectacle. But the region's own filmmakers, writers and independent storytellers remained largely peripheral to this cinematic imagination.

The inaugural International Film Festival of Jammu and Kashmir (IFFJK) sought to change that equation.

Organised by the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) in collaboration with national film bodies, the four-day festival, themed “Rang-e-Cinema”, brought international features, documentaries, shorts, masterclasses and industry interactions to Jammu and Kashmir.

Its most important innovation, however, was not simply the scale of its programming. It was its geography.

Instead of confining cinema to one venue or one city, IFFJK created a three-point circuit encompassing Srinagar, Jammu and Gulmarg. In doing so, it attempted something larger than a film festival: it connected the Union Territory's distinct cultural landscapes and audiences through a common cinematic platform.

Aglobal response

The response to the festival was substantial. More than 1,100 films from over 80 countries were submitted, from which 135 films representing more than 40 nations were selected.

India led the selection with 64 films, while France contributed 13 and Iran eight. The international slate also featured films from Argentina, Spain, Brazil, Germany, Russia, Sweden, South Korea, the United States and several other countries.

The programming was divided into four principal sections: the International Competition, Bharat Panorama, Cinema of the World, and Jammu and Kashmir Select, the latter providing a dedicated platform for local independent filmmakers.

The festival also attached serious financial value to its competitive sections, with a total prize purse of ₹96 lakh across nine categories. The Best Feature Film award carried ₹25 lakh, while Best Director and Best Debut Director were awarded ₹15 lakh each. The J&K Select winner received ₹10 lakh.

The jury brought considerable international and national filmmaking experience, including Oscar and BAFTA-winning sound designer Resul Pookutty, acclaimed cinematographer-director Santosh Sivan, German film programmer Dorothee Wenner, international media executive Keiko Bang, and National Award-winning filmmaker

Siddharth Roy

A civil engineer learns early that every structure has a limit. A bridge carries its own weight, the traffic moving across it and the forces of wind. Design is therefore not about making a structure capable of carrying everything. It is about understanding loads, calculating capacity and providing an appropriate margin of safety. Human beings could learn something from that principle.

Modern life has become an exercise in accumulating loads. We carry professional ambitions, financial obligations, family expectations, social comparisons and an endless stream of information. We are encour-



Himansu Sekhar Khatua.

Srinagar: Cinema meets the landscape. Srinagar emerged as the artistic and institutional centre of the festival.

The Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC) hosted the opening and closing ceremonies, while theatrical screenings were held at the INOX PVR multiplex complex.

But perhaps the most visually compelling intervention was the open-air floating cinema on Dal Lake. Watching films from shikaras, with the Zabarwan range forming a natural backdrop, turned the landscape that cinema had traditionally used as scenery into part of the cinematic experience itself.

The festival also created an important academic dimension through masterclasses and technical sessions. Cinematographer Anil Mehta, among other practitioners, engaged participants on visual storytelling, framing and the language of cinema. Sessions on editing and sound design further exposed young filmmakers to the technical disciplines that often remain inaccessible outside major production centres.

Jammu gets an equal frame

Perhaps equally significant was the decision to make Jammu an integral part of the festival rather than an appendage to its Valley-centric identity.

The Wave Cinema complex hosted screenings from the Bharat Panorama, world shorts and independent cinema, giving students, cultural practitioners and emerging Dogri filmmakers access to the festival without requiring them to travel to Srinagar.

That decision carried significance beyond logistics.

A genuinely representative J&K film ecosystem cannot be built by privileging one cultural geography over another. Jammu and Kashmir's cinematic identity must accommodate the stories, languages and creative traditions of both regions.

Gulmarg: From backdrop to production destination

The third pillar was Gulmarg.

At an altitude of about 8,690 feet, the alpine resort offered something beyond screenings. It provided visiting producers, studio executives and filmmaking professionals an opportunity to experience the region as a potential production destination.

The Gulmarg component effectively made the case that the mountains of Jammu and Kashmir can offer filmmakers far more than attractive frames. They can provide locations, hospitality infrastructure, distinctive seasonal conditions and a range of natural settings capable of substituting for expensive international alpine locations.

That could eventually translate into a larger economic opportunity—provided the region develops the human resources and institutional mechanisms necessary to support sustained production.

The real breakthrough

The greatest achievement of IFFJK may therefore lie beyond the awards and celebrity appearances.

For years, Kashmir's cinematic representation has oscillated between two familiar images: paradise and conflict.

A global festival offers a third possibility—a Jammu and Kashmir that is an intellectual, cultural and creative participant in world cinema.

The presence of films from different parts of the world allowed local audiences to encounter stories and cinematic languages far removed from mainstream commercial cinema. At the same time, international participants encountered a region capable of hosting sophisticated cultural events and engaging with global creative communities.

The festival also demonstrated something that policymakers should not ignore: there remains a strong appetite for collective cinema-going among young audiences in the region.

From festival to film economy

But the real test begins after the festival ends.

An inaugural edition can generate excitement. A successful film ecosystem requires institutions.

The next phase should therefore focus on

converting IFFJK into a permanent platform for production, investment, training and employment.

First, IFFJK needs a Film Bazaar and Co-production Market. Screenings can inspire, but markets create economic relationships. Local writers and filmmakers should be able to pitch projects to studios, OTT platforms, producers and financiers. A project-development laboratory, supported by script mentoring and development grants, could help regional stories move from paper to production.

Second, Jammu and Kashmir needs a verified Film Talent and Crew Registry. Productions arriving from outside should not have to import every technician from Mumbai or Delhi. A digital database of local cinematographers, editors, sound recordists, technicians, designers, actors, makeup artists, production assistants and line producers could convert film tourism into sustained local employment.

Third, the proposed single-window system needs to become genuinely seamless. A strengthened J&K Film Commission could bring location permissions, heritage approvals, forest clearances, security requirements, drone permissions and standardised charges under one transparent digital mechanism with defined timelines.

Fourth, cinema education must continue throughout the year. Partnerships with institutions such as the Film and Television Institute of India and the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute could bring specialised short courses in screenwriting, cinematography, editing, sound and colour grading to Jammu and Srinagar. University film clubs could nurture a permanent community of young filmmakers and cinephiles.

Finally, IFFJK needs continuity. A fixed annual calendar would allow filmmakers and industry professionals to plan around the festival. In time, the organisers should also explore internationally recognised accreditation and stronger integration with the global festival circuit.

The next frame

The inaugural IFFJK was, in many ways, a cultural statement.

It relit auditoriums, brought world cinema to local audiences, projected films against the waters of Dal Lake and carried the festival into the mountains of Gulmarg. More importantly, it created a conversation about what Jammu and Kashmir can become in the cinematic world.

The region need not remain merely the beautiful landscape in someone else's film.

It can be the place where stories are written, films are made, talent is nurtured, investments are generated and audiences discover the world through cinema.

The first edition has opened the frame.

The challenge now is to ensure that Jammu and Kashmir does not merely host a film festival every year, but builds a film culture that lasts all year.

(The views presented are personal.)

THE WISDOM OF KNOWING WHAT WE CAN CARRY

aged to add another responsibility, another achievement and another commitment, as though human capacity were infinitely expandable. But structures do not work that way. Neither do people.

In engineering, a load is not necessarily dangerous. A properly designed structure is expected to carry loads daily. Problems arise when the load becomes excessive, when it is badly distributed or when deterioration has silently reduced the structure's capacity. Human exhaustion can follow a similar pattern.

The person who appears to be coping may already have cracks invisible to others. A demanding job may not be overwhelming alone. Family responsibilities may not be overwhelming alone. Financial

uncertainty may not be overwhelming alone. But their cumulative effect can exceed the margin of safety.

Engineers therefore think in terms of redundancy and safety factors. They do not design bridges to collapse at the first unforeseen truck. They provide capacity beyond the anticipated load because uncertainty is inevitable. There is wisdom here. Rest is not laziness; it is maintenance. Friendship is not merely companionship; it can provide structural support. Time away from work is a reserve that allows a person to absorb unforeseen shocks before those shocks become permanent structural damage.

Engineering also teaches another uncomfortable truth: damage ignored does

not disappear. Small cracks can become larger defects. Corrosion can weaken reinforcement long before a dramatic failure becomes visible. Preventive inspection is valuable precisely because intervention is easier before collapse. People, too, require inspection. We need moments to ask whether our ambitions remain sustainable, whether our commitments are distributed sensibly and whether the structures supporting our lives are still sound.

There is also a lesson in failure. When a structure collapses, engineers do not simply blame the final load. They investigate design assumptions, materials, workmanship, maintenance and environmental conditions. Human breakdown deserves a similarly nuanced understanding.

Satya Niketan: Accountability, not scapegoating

becomes not to identify and correct danger, but to avoid being associated with it.

That is not accountability. It is scapegoating disguised as accountability.

The Satya Niketan tragedy should instead become the catalyst for systemic action. Vulnerable PGs, hostels and residential premises converted to intensive commercial or quasi-commercial use should be identified and subjected to appropriate safety and regulatory scrutiny. Where a structure or use can lawfully and safely be regularised, it should be. Where it cannot, it should be sealed and, where necessary, demolished.

Most importantly, a sealed or condemned property must not simply reappear under another operator, another name or another purported use without a fresh legal and safety assessment. Otherwise, enforcement becomes temporary theatre rather than prevention.

None of this is an argument for shielding any Commissioner or public official. If evidence establishes negligence, dereliction of duty or failure to exercise lawful powers, responsi-

bility must follow. If responsibility is distributed across several agencies, successive administrations, property owners or other actors, it must be apportioned accordingly.

The governing principle should be simple: the person in the chair is not necessarily the person responsible for everything that has accumulated before him. The victims and their families deserve more than a media trial and a convenient name to blame. They deserve an evidence-based reconstruction of what happened, who had the duty and power to act, what warnings existed, why action was or was not taken, and what must change. There should be no immunity for negligence - but neither should there be guilt by incumbency.

The ultimate test of accountability is not how quickly the system finds someone to blame after a tragedy. It is whether it has the courage to trace responsibility to its source, confront institutional failure wherever it exists, and identify the next dangerous building before it collapses.

That is the accountability Delhi and the victims of Satya Niketan — deserve.