

BRICS TAKEAWAYS

The BRICS summit in New Delhi was a momentous event where world leaders not only met and talked in closed room but where the member countries experienced the shared values and cultural cohesion. More than what transpired in the big hall where all the leaders met and spoke their minds, it was the one to one talks between host Prime Minister Narendra Modi and individual leaders which led to dramatic and sobering moments in the two day mega geostrategic event. Could anyone imagine that the leaders of the UAE and Iran will sit together while their countries have been on a kind of undeclared war? Chinese Premier XI Jinping leaving India with an emotional message is hugely significant. It’s rarely that President Vladimir Putin spends three days in a foreign country, call India his country too and look so relaxed; Malaysian Prime Minister let his hair down and sang a Kishore Kumar number at the Gala Dinner hosted for the delegates on the first day. Yes all that signals to great bonding among the leaders of BRICS which is today an 11-member group and has 40 percent share in global GDP.

While the Delhi declaration which was finalized on the first day was a major achievement in itself, the unity of BRICS reflected the reality of a multipolar world, something that the USA is still in denial mode. However, analysts from that country have started warning President Donald Trump that ignoring the BRICS was not in the country’s interests. BRICS has become the voice of the global south which otherwise would not be able to speak up on issues. The declaration clearly sought an end to the disruption in the global trade route and using diplomacy and negotiations to end the ongoing conflicts be it in West Asia or other regions of the world. India pulled off a great event with finesse and diplomacy and it has set new benchmark for diplomatic hospitality.

HCF or LCM: The limits of global groupings

Manoj Naravane

International groupings often begin with grand ideas and geopolitical optimism, but their trajectories depend far more on political alignment and the willingness of member states to act. India's experience with three major platforms — RIC, BRICS, and the G20 — shows how ambition frequently collides with reality.

The Russia-India-China (RIC) concept was first proposed in 1998 by Russian statesman Yevgeny Primakov. It was meant to be a Eurasian triangle capable of balancing Western influence. Russia and India were long-standing partners; Russia and China were drawing closer. Yet for India, a friend's friend was not necessarily a friend. The India-China relationship, marked by border tensions, strategic mistrust, and competing regional visions, ensured that RIC never evolved beyond occasional meetings. It lacked institutional depth, produced no joint agenda, and never became a meaningful pillar of India's foreign policy. It remained a diplomatic idea rather than a functioning platform.

BRICS, by contrast, began as an economic concept. In 2001, Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill coined BRIC to describe four emerging economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, and China, all amongst the top ten in terms of GDP, that were poised to reshape global growth. South Africa joined in 2010, turning BRIC into BRICS, sandwiching the RIC in betwixt, and giving the grouping global reach. For several years, BRICS served as a forum for coordination, issuing communiqués but achieving little beyond symbolism. That changed with the creation of the New Development Bank in 2014 and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement in 2015, signalling a desire to build alternative financial institutions, both of which were anathema to the USA.

The real transformation came with expansion. At the Johannesburg Summit in 2023, BRICS invited six new members. By 2026, the grouping had grown to eleven full members: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Indonesia. In addition, BRICS created a Partner Country category, now comprising ten states —Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nige-



ria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam — bringing total participation to twenty-one countries.

This expanded BRICS resembles less the clean, original acronym and more a kind of geopolitical bric-a-brac: a shelf crowded with countries of vastly different political systems, regional rivalries, economic capacities, and strategic compulsions. The collection is impressive in size but eclectic in character, united more by the desire for a platform than by a shared vision of what that platform should achieve.

Expansion has magnified internal contradictions. Iran and Saudi Arabia, regional rivals, now sit at the same table. China's economic dominance raises concerns about bloc imbalance. India, wary of BRICS becoming an overtly anti-Western platform, has adopted a cautious approach to further enlargement. The result is a grouping with enormous potential but limited cohesion — a forum where consensus is increasingly difficult to achieve.

The G20, meanwhile, has a different origin and purpose. Formed in September 1999 in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis, it brought together major advanced and emerging economies to stabilise global finance. After its elevation to leaders' level in 2008, it became the premier forum for international economic cooperation. Today, the G20 comprises nineteen countries plus the European Union and the African Union. It accounts for the overwhelming majority of global GDP, trade, and emissions, and more

than half the world's population.

Its membership overlaps heavily with BRICS. Only a handful of countries — Mexico, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States — are in the G20 but not in BRICS. Conversely, BRICS includes states such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Indonesia that are not part of the G20. This overlap raises a natural question: how different are the G20 and the expanded BRICS?

The answer lies in purpose and politics. The G20 is a crisis-management forum with broad global legitimacy, whereas BRICS is a political and economic coordination platform for the Global South, increasingly shaped by China's and India's competing visions. The G20 seeks stability; BRICS seeks structural reform. The G20 is diverse but institutionalised, whereas BRICS is cohesive in rhetoric but fragmented in interests.

What, then, are these groupings actually achieving? Their original objective, to drive global economic growth and reform governance structures, has been overshadowed by political agendas, divergent national interests, and geopolitical rivalries. Both BRICS and the G20 operate by consensus, which means the lowest common denominator often prevails. Amitabh Kant, India's G20 Sherpa, recounts in his book *Scaling Mt G-20* how drafting a simple joint statement required endless negotiation over every word and comma. The New Delhi Declaration of 2023 was hailed as a diplomatic

triumph precisely because consensus had become so difficult. The BRICS Summit, currently underway, faces similar challenges; its foreign ministers have struggled to produce joint statements on issues where member states are sharply divided. TakeEconomics Courses

The current geopolitical environment makes meaningful outcomes even harder. The world is grappling with the ongoing war in Ukraine, the escalating conflict involving Iran, and the never-ending cycle of violence in West Asia. These crises divide member states within both BRICS and the G20. Russia's war in Ukraine splits the G20. Iran's regional role complicates BRICS. China's strategic ambitions unsettle both. Expecting grand outcomes from multilateral forums in such a fractured world is unrealistic.

Instead of a Highest Common Formulation (HCF, to use a mathematical term), namely a visionary, guiding framework for global cooperation, what is more likely is what might be called a Lowest Common Memorandum (LCM), an anodyne statement that offends none, satisfies all, and achieves little, notwithstanding the galaxy of Presidents and Prime Ministers who have descended on New Delhi. This is not a failure of diplomacy but a reflection of geopolitical reality. When major powers are in conflict, multilateralism becomes risk-averse. When consensus is mandatory, ambition becomes optional.

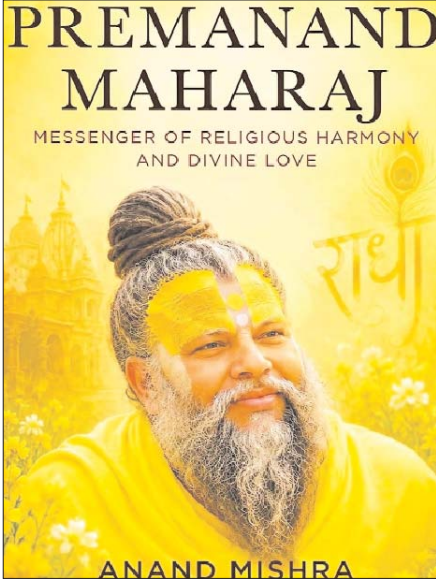
India stands at the intersection of these groupings — a founding member of BRICS, a key player in the G20, and a participant in the dormant RIC. Each platform offers opportunities, but each also imposes constraints. India's success in delivering the 2023 G20 Declaration shows that skilled diplomacy can still produce results. Its cautious approach to BRICS expansion reflects strategic maturity, while its disengagement from RIC indicates realism. But the larger truth remains that global groupings are only as effective as the political will of their members. In a world marked by conflict, rivalry, and fragmentation, India must continue to push for meaningful cooperation — even if the mathematics of multilateralism increasingly favours the lowest common denominator over the highest common ideal.

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DELVING INTO INDIA'S FAITH FAULTLINES

Manish Anand

Premanand Maharaj draws followers from all faiths and beliefs. He trends on the internet. Star powers come to see him in Vrindavan. Yet he's content with Vrindavan and stays there. He's not opening his ashram across the country and abroad. He doesn't polarise people. He just speaks of Bhakti, reciting Radha. That's an absolute and unconditional submission to the divine, argues Premanand Maharaj in his "Ekantik Vartalaps". Journalists Anand Mishra and Resham Mukherjee, in their book *Premanand Maharaj: Messenger of Religious Harmony and Divine Love*, have arguably brought out the first authoritative biography of the saint from Vrindavan. The book traces the life journey of the saint. In the course, India's age-old spiritual heritage shines, as tales of renunciation find new subjects. Along with Premanand Maharaj, through the turns and twists in his life, the book also offers readers a fine



glimpse into the philosophical evolution of a truth seeker.

In an age when instant coffee syndrome cuts through all walks of life, including spiritual teachers who offer immediate re-

lief from the pains of life to their followers, the book reveals Premanand Maharaj holding out against the commercialisation of faith. "Your body pain will not go away with Baba's ashirvad."

To superstitious followers, the Vrindavan saint remains stern, stressing that "even if 100 cats cross my path, I will still stay on my course." The book, published by Om Shakti, states the widely known fact that Premanand Maharaj's kidneys had failed long ago and he undergoes dialysis. The saint hasn't yet accepted any offer from his followers, saying that he lives by the will of Radha. Born Amirudh Kumar Pandey in 1972 in Akhari village in Kanpur, the book states that the saint confronted the moot philosophical question at the age of 13 – what is the meaning of life? A wealthy neighbour had passed away. The young boy saw the grandeur of life reduced to ashes. To find an answer to his question, the young Pandey left home to launch himself on a spiritual path. Staying briefly with gurus, he finally made the ghats of Kashi

his abode.

With singular devotion to Lord Shiva, he meditated. To beat hunger, he ate handfuls of sand. After watching Chaitanya Leela and Ras Leela, the Shiva devotee yearned to go to Vrindavan. Soon he fulfilled his wish, and over the years he has emerged as a key attraction of Vrindavan.

Premanand Maharaj comes out, per the book, as an exemplar of religious harmony as he speaks no ills of other religions. He also comes out as a voice of reason, for he rejects superstition. The saint also raises a spiritual weight against the commercialisation of faith, where the new-age Baba writes immediate remedies for the woes of the followers. Both Mishra and Mukherjee have heavily researched to find sources for the book, as they admit that ready-made materials weren't available. They went through accounts of followers on the internet. They also listened to several videos. In the end, the authors presented a lucid commentary on the life of Premanand Maharaj.

Twenty-five years of seva: Empowering India's young

Anil K Antony

On October 7, 2001, Narendra Modi took oath as Chief Minister of Gujarat at a moment when the state was still carrying the scars of a devastating earthquake, successive droughts and political uncertainty. He entered government not through the conventional apprenticeship of power, but from a life spent in organisation and public work. His mother, as he has often recalled, gave him two simple instructions: always work for the poor and never take a bribe. Twenty-five years later, that moment offers a useful starting point to understand a political journey that has altered the scale and vocabulary of governance in India. Among its most consequential dimensions has been the steady placing of young Indians at the centre of the national project.

India has always been a young country in numbers. What changed during the Modi years was the attempt to convert demography into agency. In Gujarat, the early emphasis on electricity, roads, industrial investment, education and administra-

tive delivery created an environment in which a generation could begin to imagine opportunity beyond traditional boundaries. The lesson that emerged was straightforward: government cannot manufacture ambition, but it can create the conditions in which ambition becomes productive. When Modi moved to Delhi in 2014, that principle was expanded to the national scale.

The vocabulary of that period matters. Skill India, Startup India, Digital India, Make in India, Stand Up India and the Mudra programme were not isolated schemes. Together, they reflected a shift in the relationship between the state and the young citizen. The young Indian was no longer viewed merely as a job seeker waiting at the end of a government pipeline. He or she was increasingly imagined as a creator, entrepreneur, innovator and employer. More than 2.23 lakh startups had been recognised by March 2026, generating over 23 lakh direct jobs. Under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, more than 1.64 crore candidates have been trained or oriented. Mudra has taken informal credit to millions who would

once have remained outside the banking system. These figures are important, but the deeper change is cultural. Risk-taking has become less exceptional. Enterprise has travelled from a few metropolitan enclaves into Tier-2 cities, small towns and districts that once stood outside the national innovation map.

There is an anecdotal truth behind these numbers. A young person in a smaller town today can build a product on cloud infrastructure, receive payments through UPI, market through digital platforms, register an enterprise online and aspire to sell to customers far beyond the geography of birth. This is a profound democratisation of possibility. Digital public infrastructure has reduced the distance between aspiration and execution. It has also changed the psychology of a generation. The young no longer need to migrate to a handful of cities merely to enter the modern economy. Increasingly, the modern economy can reach them. The same transformation is visible much earlier in the life cycle. More than 10,000 Atal Tinkering Labs now engage over 1.1 crore students across hundreds of

districts. Children who might once have encountered science only through textbooks are experimenting with robotics, electronics, artificial intelligence and design. The point is not that every child will become an engineer or founder. The point is that curiosity itself is being treated as a national asset. A country that wants to lead in semiconductors, space, artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing and green technologies cannot wait until university to cultivate scientific confidence.

This is where the Modi years have also been marked by a widening of the horizon. Chandrayaan, the expansion of the space ecosystem, the semiconductor mission, the growth of defence manufacturing, the spread of digital payments and the push into artificial intelligence have given young Indians visible national missions in which to locate their own ambitions. Development is most powerful when it is not experienced as an abstraction. A school student watching India land near the lunar south pole, an engineering graduate working on chip design, a founder building for the next billion users, or a

young technician entering an advanced manufacturing plant is participating in a story larger than individual advancement. National capability and personal aspiration begin to reinforce each other. IndiaNews Coverage

There has also been a conscious effort to connect youth with citizenship. Mera Yuva Bharat, launched in 2023, has grown into a platform with more than 2.46 crore registered young people, linking them with volunteering, experiential learning, internships, skill development and community initiatives. This is significant because the idea of youth empowerment cannot be reduced to employment alone. A confident republic needs citizens who see nation-building as participation rather than spectatorship. Modi has repeatedly spoken of Yuva Shakti not as a constituency to be courted, but as a force to be trusted.

That trust is central to the idea of Viksit Bharat 2047. The generation entering adulthood today will be in its forties when India completes one hundred years of Independence. It will carry the principal responsibility

for whether India becomes merely a larger economy or a genuinely developed nation with technological depth, social mobility, institutional confidence and global influence. The next phase must therefore go beyond access. India has to relentlessly improve the quality of education, deepen research, expand apprenticeships, build world-class universities, connect skilling more closely with industry and ensure that young women participate fully in the economic transformation. The demographic dividend is not automatic. It is an opportunity with an expiry date.

Twenty-five years of Narendra Modi in governance can be interpreted through many lenses: infrastructure, welfare, national security, technology, diplomacy or political communication. Yet the youth lens reveals something especially important. His politics has consistently been accompanied by a politics of possibility. From rebuilding a state in 2001 to articulating the ambition of a developed India by 2047, the connecting idea has been that scale is not something India should fear. It is something India should harness.