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Decoding BRICS' energy intent

It provides a vital diplomatic cover for India to keep its oil import options open without having to take sides

CAPITAL
IDEAS.



RICHA MISHRA

We acknowledge fossil fuels will still play an important role in the world's energy mix, particularly for emerging markets and developing economies, and we recognize the need to promote just, orderly, equitable and inclusive energy transitions and reduce GHG emissions in line with our climate goals and observing SDG7, and the principles of technological neutrality and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities taking into account national circumstances, needs and priorities," reads BRICS New Delhi Declaration of September 12, 2026.

By validating the ongoing importance of fossil fuels, the declaration provides the energy sector with a critical defence: it rejects an aggressive phase-out in favour of a realistic, managed transition, which, some say, is good for India, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

But this should not be seen as a free pass to energy-import reliant nations like India. What BRICS membership actually does is provide vital diplomatic leverage: it keeps India and Iran at the negotiating table, safeguarding India's access to the strategic Chabahar Port.

KEY POINTS

Energy security: Ensuring energy market stability and maintaining uninterrupted flows of energy from diverse sources, strengthening value chains. This is a priority after West Asia conflict.

Digital and Smart Grids: BRICS pushed AI, data analytics for grid management.

Diversified mix: Declaration lists all sources as important — renewable energy, bioenergy, fossil fuels, nuclear energy, hydropower, hydrogen, low carbon technologies, energy storage.

Critical Minerals Focus on reliable supply chains for lithium, cobalt, copper,



ENERGY SOVEREIGNTY. India must be diplomatically nimble in sourcing oil. /ISTOCKPHOTO

but with sovereign rights of resource countries.

Local currencies: Finally, Energy Ministers called for use of local currencies in energy trade.

The declaration provides for Smart Grids & Storage Centre in India; Push for Global Biofuels Alliance; reliable and stable supply chains for minerals. India needs lithium for EVs, solar, semiconductors.

In the wake of ongoing West Asia conflicts and Red Sea disruptions, India wants to insulate its economy by sourcing crude oil from Russia, the Gulf, or the US without the threat of unilateral sanctions. The BRICS Energy Ministers' parallel push for local currency trade offers a vital financial shield.

Settling transactions in rupees, rubles, or dirhams reduces US dollar dependency, minimises exposure to secondary sanctions, and structurally protects India's foreign exchange reserves. RBI already has rupee

Settling transactions in rupees, rubles, or dirhams reduces US dollar dependency, minimises exposure to secondary sanctions

settlement mechanism for Russian oil.

With the West Asia conflict disrupting the Strait of Hormuz, the declaration's emphasis on "diverse sources" provides India with the diplomatic leverage to source oil from Russia, the US, the UAE, and Iraq. Whether this strategic framing explains why New Delhi persistently purchased discounted Russian crude despite heavy Western pressure remains a question only the Ministry of External Affairs can answer.

Protection of critical energy infrastructure, including cross-border infrastructure is a boost for India as this means undersea cables, LNG terminals, proposed India-Middle East-Europe pipeline, and power grid connections with Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh could be in offing.

The declaration can even be seen as an endorsement of India's approach: keep coal and gas for baseload, add solar and wind rapidly, secure oil from cheapest source, and build storage.

THE CHALLENGES

However, there are challenges. BRICS is opposed to EU's carbon tax, but EU's CBAM has kicked in from January 1, 2026. Indian steel and aluminium will still pay at EU border from this year. India will need to take this up at WTO and build its own carbon credit system fast. Clearly, just a joint statement won't

stop the tax. India ramped up Russian oil purchases — from 2 per cent to 35 per cent — because it was cheap (\$20-30 discount), but that is now down to \$3-5 a barrel.

India will get hurt if it gets too reliant on one supplier and US tightens secondary sanctions. Energy security implies diversification of supply sources, not substituting West Asian dependence with Russian dependence.

The Declaration talks about resilient supply chains, but India has no lithium, cobalt, nickel processing. India's Critical Mineral Mission needs to secure mines in Brazil, South Africa, Argentina, not just MOUs.

A critical question is, will Iran allow free and smooth access? On the face of it Iran is not blocking, but inviting transit right now. The greater risk is not Iran but US sanctions.

Hormuz right now is technically open but practically almost closed. Iran wants to resume oil sales to India to broaden its buyer pool beyond China and India is pushing Chabahar as an alternative to Hormuz, open to Arabian Sea.

Hormuz is not a BRICS waterway, it's Iranian and Omani sovereign waters. BRICS declaration says 'undisrupted flows' and 'protection of critical infrastructure' but that doesn't ensure free access to BRICS.

According to information available, the Iranian side met Indian Oil Ministry top brass on BRICS sidelines specifically to offer crude to India.

As a member of both BRICS and the US-led Quad, India must walk a diplomatic tightrope. Pushing too aggressively for de-dollarisation and Rupee-denominated oil trade risks a backlash from Washington, which could jeopardise critical Western technology transfers in strategic sectors like semiconductors and civil nuclear energy.

Ultimately, New Delhi will need to tread cautiously, ensuring its pursuit of strategic autonomy does not come at the cost of its vital partnerships with the West.

The Declaration gives India political cover, but execution is on India: build storage, fix Discoms, mine minerals, and diversify supply sources.

11. भारत की ऊर्जा सुरक्षा की प्रमुख चुनौतियों को समझाइए। आर्थिक संवृद्धि तथा संधारणीयता के साथ, ऊर्जा सुरक्षा को सुनिश्चित करने हेतु आप किन उपायों का सुझाव देंगे? (उत्तर 250 शब्दों में दीजिए)

Explain the key challenges for India's energy security. What measures do you suggest for ensuring energy security along with economic growth and sustainability? (Answer in 250 words)

1. Decoding BRICS' Energy Intent

Source: *BusinessLine* — Richa Mishra

GS-2: International Relations, BRICS, Strategic Autonomy

GS-3: Energy Security, Energy Transition, Critical Minerals

1. Context

- The **18th BRICS Summit, New Delhi (2026)** adopted the **New Delhi Declaration**, giving energy security a central place amid geopolitical conflicts, supply disruptions and the global energy transition.
- BRICS brings together both **major energy importers and exporters**, making energy cooperation strategically important but also complex.

2. Different Energy Positions within BRICS

- **China:** Major oil importer with high dependence on overseas supplies; therefore concerned with secure sources and maritime energy routes.
- **India:** Highly dependent on imported crude oil to meet its growing energy demand; diversification of suppliers is crucial.
- **Brazil:** A significant crude-oil producer and **net exporter**, but remains dependent on imports for some refined products and natural gas.
- **Russia:** Major global exporter of crude oil, natural gas and other energy commodities.
- **Iran & UAE:** Important oil and gas producers, giving BRICS access to major West Asian energy resources.
- Thus, BRICS combines **energy importers, exporters and producers**, creating scope for complementary energy interests.

3. BRICS Energy Approach: New Delhi Declaration

- **Energy security:** Ensuring **stable, affordable and reliable energy**, with uninterrupted flows from diverse sources.
- **Resilient supply chains:** Strengthening energy value chains and protecting **critical and cross-border infrastructure**.
- **Diversified energy mix:** Recognition of **renewables, bioenergy, fossil fuels, nuclear energy, hydropower, hydrogen, low-carbon technologies and energy storage**.
- **Fossil fuels:** Recognises their continuing role, particularly for **emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs)**.
- **Just transition:** Supports a “**just, orderly, equitable and inclusive**” energy transition.
- **Technological neutrality:** Countries can choose technologies according to their **national circumstances, needs and priorities**.
- **CBDR-RC:** Energy transition should reflect **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities**.

- **Digitalisation:** Promotes Artificial Intelligence, data analytics and digital technologies for **smart grids, efficiency and resilient energy systems**.

4. Emerging Areas of Cooperation

- **Critical minerals:** Reliable, diversified and sustainable supply chains for minerals essential to the clean-energy transition, with greater **value addition**.
- **Smart grids & storage:** Cooperation on grid modernisation and energy storage to integrate renewable energy.
- **Hydrogen:** Cooperation on standards, certification and emerging **low/zero-emission hydrogen value chains**.
- **Renewable technologies:** Cooperation in technology, manufacturing, finance and skills.
- **Local currencies:** Greater use of national currencies in cross-border transactions can provide greater flexibility in energy trade.

5. Significance for India

- **Oil diversification:** BRICS facilitates engagement with Russia, Iran, UAE and other producers while India continues relations with Western partners.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** West Asian instability highlights India's vulnerability to disruptions in crucial energy routes.
- **Critical minerals:** Secure access to lithium, cobalt, nickel and copper is important for **EVs, batteries, renewable energy and advanced manufacturing**.
- **Strategic autonomy:** Multiple suppliers, routes and technologies strengthen India's ability to pursue an independent energy strategy.
- **Energy transition:** India can pursue decarbonisation without compromising **energy access, affordability and economic growth**.

6. Key Challenges

- Different BRICS members have **different energy interests**: exporters seek stable markets, while importers seek affordable and secure supplies.
- Excessive dependence on a single supplier or route can create **strategic vulnerability**.
- Critical-mineral dependence may shift energy vulnerability from **oil to minerals and clean technologies**.
- Carbon-related trade measures such as **EU CBAM** may create new challenges for developing economies.

7. Way Forward

- Diversify **suppliers, routes, energy sources and payment mechanisms**.
- Strengthen strategic petroleum reserves and critical energy infrastructure.
- Develop domestic **critical-mineral processing, refining and recycling**.
- Scale up renewables, nuclear energy, hydrogen, storage and smart grids.

- Use BRICS for practical energy cooperation while retaining **strategic autonomy and diversified global partnerships**.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Four priorities for India's AI policy

A policy framework is needed to prevent India from becoming dependent on others and to retain some control over AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) could have as great an impact on development as the discovery and promotion of steam engines, railways, electricity, and motorcars had in the 19th century. Every substantial advance in human access to data/information has had a profound impact on human well-being.

The internet has greatly improved access to data and information but has not substituted for human analysis and implementation in the economy. AI may develop the capacity to impose precisely this substitution. But I do believe that AI cannot substitute for human creativity when it does not depend on available data and information. Einstein's discovery of the Theory of Relativity could not have been made by an AI model.

In AI systems, large language models can access available data and information and answer queries, reducing the role of humans as synthesisers. But AI is more than this. It has already developed the capacity for coding and connecting directly with computers and the internet. It will move further ahead towards artificial general intelligence (AGI), when AI can roughly automate 90 per cent of current white-collar work.

A further development that is projected is artificial superintelligence (ASI), when AI exceeds human intelligence by a good margin. In fact, an AI researcher has said that there is a 10 per cent chance that an AI system could annihilate humanity because AI capability could outpace the human ability to monitor and control it. There is now a growing concern that the development of AI is not sufficiently regulated to prevent potential disasters.

There are proposals for an international treaty to ban superintelligence because AI products may escape human control and reprogram themselves to adopt new, self-directed goals. Preventing AI from being used to threaten humans and make them redundant deserves a clear international

agreement that this activity is not acceptable.

Hence, the first requirement of AI policy for India is that the government must promote and participate in a negotiated global consensus for ensuring that the orientation of AI systems is subject to control so that the development of AI does not undermine humanity.

AI provides a substitution for skilled workers who process data and information to provide substantive outputs for users. For instance, AI's potentially superior skill in analysing X-rays, MRIs and CT scans can substitute for radiology workers. But AI cannot substitute for outputs that require physical labour, and that is why one forecast is the growing equalisation of salaries for skilled and semi-skilled or unskilled workers.

A more unwelcome impact is the shift in income from workers to owner-suppliers of AI models. The return on AI models comes from their capacity to make constructive use of data and information from a vast number of humans that is available online. Hence, there is a rising concern about the need for a policy framework that would involve a fairer sharing of the returns to AI companies with information providers and users.

Hence, the second and perhaps the most important requirement is to design an AI policy that minimises its potentially adverse social impacts on employment and income distribution.

The way AI is developing could greatly increase the disparity among nations in control over the technology. Hence, we must also design a policy framework that prevents us from becoming a loser dependent on others.

At present, the development of AI is dominated by two countries — the United States and China. There are about five widely used AI models each from the US and China. The Chinese models are cheaper to access and are reaching out to the billion or so direct users of AI. The Chinese AI models are under the control of the

government. That is why when I asked a Chinese AI model: "Tell me more about what happened in Tiananmen in 1989?" the reply I got was: "I am sorry, I cannot answer that question. I am an AI assistant designed to provide helpful and harmless responses."

The political bias in the response from AI reflects how LLMs are oriented. An interesting exercise was undertaken with a query including about 10 politically oriented prompts. Some AI models gave what was described as a balanced reply with a liberal worldview. What is interesting is that one Chinese AI model that gave a balanced reply when asked in English gave a China-biased reply when questioned in Chinese! But quite a few AI models from the US, France and China also seemed to reflect the worldview of their national governments¹.

The impact of AI on democracy and freedom will depend on how it affects the networks of communication. If the networks are controlled by owners, advertisers and the government, the impact on democracy could be adverse. However, if the network is effectively controlled by the people who use it, and who will reject it if it is adverse and go to an alternative, then the impact on democracy and freedom is positive. The real challenge is to ensure that the AI LLM that dominates communication is unbiased.

Hence, the third requirement of AI policy for India is that the government must recognise the implicit politicisation of AI output and promote domestic development of successful AI models relatively free of ownership and government control. But the real test is the extent to which Indian nationals use the sovereign AI model rather than the Chinese and US ones that are dominant now.

A closely related area is the development of data centres, which are a crucial part of any AI system. We should not depend on compute from outside our borders. Despite generating 20 per cent of the global data, India currently holds only a 3 per cent share of global data. We have about 150 data centres in Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Noida and rank 14th in the global country-wise hierarchy of data centres. This will go up substantially and require a significant amount of electricity and water.

India's data centre policy has been dominated by its intention of localising the data information that is available through globally connected devices. It has announced a very liberal policy for foreign AI providers to set up data centres in the country, with a 21-year holiday to foreign firms that would provide cloud services based on domestic data centres. But the promotion of domestic AI models will require domestically-owned data centres.

Hence, the fourth requirement is a government policy that focuses strongly on promoting domestically-owned data centres. But this policy must also include rigorous standards about water and energy use by data centres.

AI systems are going to reshape development and human prospects. Hence, our government must devote deep attention to the four requirements listed above.

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1. Sinan Ulgen, *The World According to Generative Artificial Intelligence*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2025



NITIN DESAI

16. एजेंटिक कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता (ए आई) क्या है ? इसकी कार्य-प्रणाली को समझाइए । इसके अनुप्रयोगों का वर्णन उचित उदाहरणों के साथ कीजिये । एजेंटिक ए आई प्रणालियों से सम्बद्ध लाभों, जोखिमों और चुनौतियों की चर्चा कीजिये । (उत्तर 250 शब्दों में दीजिए)

What is agentic Artificial Intelligence (AI)? Explain its working. Describe its applications with suitable examples. Discuss the advantages, risks and challenges associated with agentic AI systems. (Answer in 250 words)

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2. Four Priorities for India's AI Policy

Source: *Business Standard* — Nitin Desai, 15 September 2026

GS-2: Governance, Democracy, Global Technology Governance

GS-3: Artificial Intelligence, Employment, Data & Digital Infrastructure

1. Context

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** could transform development as profoundly as earlier technologies such as electricity, railways and motorcars.
- The policy challenge for India is to **capture AI's developmental benefits without becoming technologically dependent on a few foreign AI ecosystems.**

2. Why AI Requires a Policy Framework

- **Large Language Models (LLMs)** can increasingly process information, generate outputs, write code and interact directly with computers and the internet.
- The transition towards **Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)** could automate a large share of existing white-collar work.
- A further possibility is **Artificial Superintelligence (ASI)**, where AI capabilities could exceed human ability to monitor and control them.
- This raises concerns around **human control, employment, income distribution, technological dependence and democracy.**

3. Four Priorities for India

1. Global AI Governance and Human Control

- India should participate in building a **negotiated global consensus** to ensure that advanced AI remains subject to meaningful human control.
- International rules need to address the possibility of AI systems becoming difficult to monitor, control or align with human objectives.

- The objective is to ensure that technological development does not undermine **human welfare and security**.

2. Employment and Fair Distribution of AI Gains

- AI is more likely to substitute for workers performing **data- and information-intensive tasks** than for jobs requiring physical labour.
- This could alter the distribution of income, shifting a greater share of economic returns from workers towards **owners and suppliers of AI models**.
- Policy therefore needs to address **employment displacement, reskilling and fairer distribution of AI-generated returns** among AI companies, information providers and users.

3. Sovereign and Relatively Unbiased AI Capability

- AI development is currently dominated by the **United States and China**, creating a risk of technological dependence.
- AI models can reflect the **political, institutional and cultural worldviews** of those who develop or control them.
- This has implications for **democracy, freedom of communication and access to information**.
- India therefore needs competitive **domestic AI models** with greater technological sovereignty and safeguards against excessive ownership or government control.

4. Domestically Owned Data-Centre Capacity

- AI requires large-scale **compute, data centres, electricity and water**.
- India generates around **20% of global data but has only about 3% of global data-centre capacity**; the country has around 150 data centres and ranks 14th globally.
- Dependence on computing capacity outside India's borders can create a strategic vulnerability.
- Therefore, expansion of **domestically owned data centres** should accompany AI development, along with strict standards for their **energy and water consumption**.

4. Larger Significance for India

- **Technological sovereignty:** Reduces dependence on foreign AI models and overseas compute.
- **Economic security:** Prevents AI-driven productivity gains from becoming excessively concentrated among model owners.
- **Democratic resilience:** Reduces the possibility of dominant AI systems shaping communication through embedded political biases.
- **Infrastructure security:** Domestic compute capacity becomes as important as data localisation for an AI-enabled economy.

- **Sustainable AI:** Growing data-centre capacity must be compatible with India's electricity and water constraints.

5. Way Forward

- Build **international AI governance norms** around human control and safety.
- Prepare workers for AI-led changes through **reskilling and adaptive employment policies**.
- Develop competitive Indian foundation models while promoting **transparency, accountability and diversity of AI systems**.
- Expand domestic **compute and data-centre infrastructure**.
- Establish strong standards for **energy efficiency, water use and environmental sustainability** of data centres.

After BRICS, it's time to navigate the realities of great power rivalries



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

AFTER THE BRICS summit in New Delhi, global geopolitical attention shifts to Washington, where Chinese leader Xi Jinping is headed next week. If "multipolarity" was the theme song in Delhi, "bipolarity" will be the signature tune in Washington. The second meeting between presidents Donald Trump and Xi this year is part of an intensive series of exchanges. After Washington, Trump and Xi are likely to meet in Shenzhen, China, on the margins of the APEC summit. If the current buzz of a trilateral summit proves real, Russia's Vladimir Putin could join Trump and Xi there. The focus would then turn from a G2 to a possible G3 world. Further opportunities for great-power diplomacy could present themselves in Miami, where Trump hosts the annual G20 summit in December.

Many of these multilateral gatherings, such as BRICS, APEC, and G20, are routine annual affairs. Despite the political glamour attached to these events in Delhi, significant collective progress in these meetings is rare. But these forums are useful venues where critical bilateral meetings take place. The highlight of the Delhi BRICS summit, for example, was the attempted reset of India-China relations by Prime

Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi.

What gives the multilateral summits some salience this year is the churn in great-power politics triggered by Trump's disruption of US foreign policy, relations with allies and rivals, and the American approach to the burdens of international order. Underlying that churn is the more important structural change in the distribution of global power in favour of China and America.

Both BRICS and the G7 are increasingly marked by the overwhelming economic weight of a single power — China in the first and the United States in the second. China accounted for less than half of BRICS' combined GDP when the original BRIC forum with four members was formed in 2006. Despite subsequent enlargement to eleven members, China now accounts for roughly three-fifths. Whether we like it or not, Beijing continues to outgrow BRICS in economic size and geopolitical influence.

The G7 has seen a comparable shift. America now accounts for close to three-fifths of the group's nominal output, against less than two-fifths three decades ago. Japan's stagnation, Europe's weaker growth and demographic pressures, and American advantages in energy, capital markets and artificial intelligence have widened the gap. Trump's willingness to turn harshly on America's closest partners — whether Canada or Britain in the Anglosphere or NATO and the EU — rests, in part, on this expanding American economic preponderance.

Does China's dominance in BRICS and America's preponderance in the G7 mean we are headed to a G2 world? Not necessarily. But it

is quite evident that the world economy is developing a G2 structure, dominated by America and China. Washington and Beijing are the only states with the scale to shape global economic order, technology standards, and supply chains. They are also deeply interdependent. Each seeks to reduce vulnerability to the other, but neither can readily escape the other's market, technology, capital or industrial capacity.

The Trump-Xi meetings this year are not likely to herald a US-China condominium. Their disputes over trade, technology and Taiwan are too deep. But they are based on the recognition that Washington and Beijing must manage their rivalry through sustained high-level contact. The nature of that management, however, has implications for the rest of the world.

Unlike the clear pattern in the global economic order, the situation on the strategic front is more complex. Although economically diminished, Russia retains enough military power, geographical reach and diplomatic weight to influence the balance between the two giants across Eurasia. Unsurprisingly, Moscow has drawn Beijing closer than ever before, while Trump has made an American overture to Russia. This does not mean that the US can easily detach Russia from China. Trump's Russian play is complicated by the conflict between Moscow and Europe over Ukraine. Progress in Trump's peace initiative in Ukraine, however, could set the stage for a US-Russian rapprochement, and a G3 summit as well as Putin's presence at the G20 meeting. Unlike the G7, the G20 includes China, Russia, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Saudi Ara-

bia, South Africa and other consequential non-Western powers. Unlike BRICS, it includes the US, Europe and Japan.

The changing distribution of power has helped America and China loom larger than ever before in the G20. Differences between the US and China at the G20 finance ministers' meeting in Washington this month prevented the forum from issuing a joint statement, with China objecting to language on trade surpluses and export-led growth. When the US and China disagree, they undermine the hope that the G20 is capable of collective action on the economic front. But bilateral deal-making between Washington and Beijing could also come at the expense of other actors in the G20.

India might want a multipolar world, but we are not there yet; arguably, we might even be moving away from it. For now, Delhi must deal with the intensifying great game — whether it is G2 or G3 — that is set to define the future of the international order. Organisations like the APEC, BRICS, EU, G7 and NATO don't shape the world order. They operate within the parameters set by great-power politics. With the BRICS party over in Delhi, the Indian foreign policy elite needs to wake up from its self-indulgent reverie and pay attention to the changing global distribution of power and the geopolitical realignment between America, China, and Russia.

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Organisations like the APEC, BRICS, EU, G7 and NATO don't shape the world order. They operate within the parameters set by great-power politics

3. After BRICS, It's Time to Navigate the Realities of Great-Power Rivalries

Source: *The Indian Express* — C. Raja Mohan

GS-2: International Relations, BRICS, G20, Great-Power Rivalry, Multipolarity, Strategic Autonomy

1. Context

- The **New Delhi BRICS Summit** projected **multipolarity** as its central theme, but global attention is now shifting to Washington and the **US–China rivalry**.
- The central contradiction is between the **declared goal of multipolarity** and the growing concentration of economic and strategic power in the **US and China**.

2. Concentration of Global Economic Power

- **China and BRICS:** China accounts for roughly **three-fifths of the combined GDP of the 11-member BRICS**, compared with less than half of the original four-member BRIC grouping in 2006.
- **US and G7:** The US now accounts for close to **three-fifths of G7 nominal output**, compared with less than two-fifths around three decades ago.
- **Underlying shift:** Expansion of multilateral groupings has not necessarily dispersed economic power; instead, the relative weight of **China within BRICS and the US within G7 has increased**.

3. From Multipolarity towards G2/G3

- **G2:** Refers to an order effectively shaped by the **US and China**, given their scale in the global economy, technology, capital and supply chains.
- **G3:** Adds **Russia**, whose importance comes from its military power and reach across Eurasia rather than its economic size.
- These are **descriptions of power distribution, not formal institutions**.
- A G2 does not mean that Washington and Beijing agree; their **disagreements themselves can set the parameters within which other countries operate**.

4. Why the US–China Rivalry Matters

- The US and China remain **deeply interdependent** in markets, technology, capital and industrial capacity, even as both seek to reduce vulnerabilities to the other.
- Their disputes over **trade, technology and Taiwan** are too deep for a simple US–China division of the world.
- Therefore, the immediate requirement is **management of rivalry through sustained high-level engagement**, rather than assuming a complete settlement or separation.
- The upcoming Trump–Xi engagement illustrates the importance of this bilateral relationship in the wider international order.

5. Where Russia Fits

- Russia remains strategically important because of its **military capability and Eurasian reach**, despite its smaller economic weight.
- **Russia–China proximity** and possible **US–Russia engagement** create a more complicated strategic balance than a simple G2.
- The Ukraine conflict and Russia–Europe tensions continue to shape the possibilities for a broader US–Russia rapprochement.

6. Limits of BRICS, G7 and G20

- **BRICS, G7, G20, APEC, EU and NATO do not independently determine the world order**; they operate within the parameters created by great-power politics.
- The **G20** remains particularly important because it brings together major Western and non-Western economies and is one of the few forums capable of collective economic action.
- Yet US–China disagreements recently prevented the G20 Finance Ministers from issuing a **joint statement**.
- Bilateral US–China deal-making can also weaken the influence of other G20 members.
- Hence, the importance of these forums increasingly lies in **managing relationships and enabling bilateral diplomacy**, rather than assuming they can independently reshape the global order.

7. What It Means for India

- **India's preference**: New Delhi continues to support a **multipolar world**.
- **Reality**: The distribution of power may actually be moving **away from multipolarity**, with greater concentration around Washington and Beijing.
- **Strategic task**: India has to deal with the rivalry between **Washington, Beijing and Moscow as it exists**, rather than the international order it would ideally prefer.
- **Value of BRICS**: Even when collective outcomes are limited, summits provide opportunities for **bilateral engagement**, such as the India–China engagement on the margins of the New Delhi Summit.
- **Strategic autonomy**: India's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy will increasingly depend on its capacity to navigate competing great powers rather than relying on any single multilateral grouping.

• DEFENCE

The 1991 treaty violated by Pak ship that collided with Indian vessel

Yashee

New Delhi, September 16

INDIA SUMMONED Pakistan's Charge d'Affaires over "unacceptable and unprofessional conduct" after a Pakistani ship collided with an Indian Navy vessel on Tuesday. India said the Pakistani vessel's conduct was in "direct contravention" of Article 10 of the 1991 Agreement between India and Pakistan on Advance Notice on Military Exercises, Manoeuvres and Troops Movements.

The last such incident took place on June 16, 2011, when Pakistani naval warship PNS Babur brushed past Indian Navy frigate INS Godavari in the Gulf of Aden, causing minor damage to Godavari's helicopter safety net.

What is the 1991 Agreement?

According to the text of the agreement, it was signed to establish a mechanism for India and Pakistan to inform each other about military exercise or troop movements "in order to prevent any crisis situation arising due to misreading of the other side's intentions."

It lays down rules for the land, naval and air forces of both countries, saying that while major military exercises close to each other's territories should be avoided, if they are to take place, they should follow cer-

4. The 1991 Treaty Violated by Pak Ship That Collided with Indian Vessel

Source: *The Indian Express*

GS-2: India–Pakistan Relations, Confidence-Building Measures

GS-3: Defence, Maritime Security

1. Context

- **PNS Hunain**, a Pakistan Navy vessel, collided with an Indian Navy frontline warship on **15 September 2026** in international waters of the **North Arabian Sea**.
- India described the conduct as “**unacceptable and unprofessional**” and said it violated **Article 10 of the 1991 India–Pakistan agreement**.

2. What the 1991 Agreement Provides

- The agreement is a **military confidence-building measure (CBM)** aimed at preventing military activities from being misread and escalating into a crisis.
- It covers **land, naval and air forces**, with provisions for advance information and greater transparency regarding military exercises and movements.
- Its broader objective is **predictability, communication and prevention of miscalculation** between the two countries.

3. Article 10: The Key Provision

- Naval ships and submarines of India and Pakistan operating in international waters should maintain a minimum separation of **3 nautical miles (about 5.6 km)**.
- The provision specifically seeks to **prevent accidents** during naval operations.
- India cited this provision as the basis for its protest over the PNS Hunain incident.

4. Why Was the Agreement Signed?

- The agreement emerged from a period of heightened **India–Pakistan military and nuclear tensions** during the 1980s.
- **Operation Brasstacks (1987)** demonstrated how large military exercises could generate fears of escalation through misreading of intentions.
- The 1991 pact sought to institutionalise **advance notification, transparency and risk reduction** in military activities.

5. Significance of the Incident

- **Maritime deconfliction:** Close encounters between warships can create immediate risks of accident and escalation.
- **CBM relevance:** The incident shows why established military safeguards remain important even during strained bilateral relations.
- **Escalation control:** Clear separation rules and communication channels help contain operational incidents before they become wider security crises.
- **Earlier precedent:** In 2011, **PNS Babur** brushed past **INS Godavari** in the Gulf of Aden, causing minor damage to the Indian vessel.

6. Way Forward

- Ensure strict adherence to existing **maritime CBMs and safety protocols**.
- Strengthen naval **communication and deconfliction mechanisms**.
- Address such incidents through established diplomatic and military channels.
- Preserve practical **risk-reduction mechanisms** despite wider tensions in India–Pakistan relations.

● GLOBAL

United no more? The push for independence from the UK

Abhinav Chakraborty
New Delhi, September 16

THE FIRST Ministers of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland signed a joint memorandum of understanding on Monday, signalling their intent to put their nations on the path to referendums towards independence from the United Kingdom (UK). The three nations, along with England, make up the UK.

At a summit in the Welsh capital of Cardiff, the three leaders — Wales's Rhun ap Iorwerth, Scotland's John Swinney, and Northern Ireland's Michelle O'Neill — as well as the Republic of Ireland's leader of the opposition Mary Lou McDonald affirmed in the "Cardiff Agreement" that "the political landscape across these islands is changing".

The memorandum read: "Our nations have the right to self-determination: No Westminster government has the right to block democracy or undermine the principle that our people will decide their own future."

The Cardiff Agreement came on the back of two recent developments: UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham expressing that referendums for Scotland and Northern Ireland were not on the cards, and US President Donald Trump saying that he would "love" to see the reunification of Ireland.

Acts of Union

The British Isles, a group of over 6,000 islands located in northwestern Europe, comprises the two major islands of Great Britain and Ireland besides several smaller

islands. Great Britain consists of three nations — England, Scotland, and Wales — whereas Ireland is made up of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The name "Great Britain" assumed significance only in the 18th century, when the kingdoms of England and Scotland were united in 1707 by an Act of Union, becoming the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

Wales, which is also located on the island of Great Britain, was conquered by the English in the late 1200s, but was legally annexed and made a part of the Kingdom of England only in 1536 through an Act of Union.

Meanwhile, the island of Ireland had been under British control since the late 12th century but entered the UK as a political entity only in 1801, following a failed Irish rebellion (1798) and the Acts of Union (1800). Thereafter, the UK came to be officially known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

The name, however, lasted until 1922, when the majority of Ireland — barring six counties that make up Northern Ireland — gained independence after the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21). With Northern Ireland choosing to remain part of the UK, the latter became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The question of separation

Notably, the three First Ministers signed the joint memorandum not in their capacity as leaders of their governments but their parties: ap Iorwerth of Plaid Cymru, McDonald as president and O'Neill as vice

How UK differs from Great Britain

● Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England make up the United Kingdom.

● The term Great Britain refers to three nations — England, Scotland and Wales.

● Ireland is made up of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.



president of Sinn Féin, and Swinney of the Scottish National Party (SNP).

After the SNP, which considers Scottish independence its core political plank, won an outright majority in the 2011 Scottish Parliament election, it pushed for a Scottish independence referendum. Through a Section 30 order under the 1998 Scotland Act, powers were transferred to allow the Scottish Parliament to legislate for the referendum.

On September 18, 2014, the Scottish in-

dependence referendum was conducted with the single-point question "Should Scotland be an independent country?". The result: 55.3% voted No and 44.7% voted Yes.

In 2022, the UK Supreme Court ruled that the Scottish Parliament doesn't have the power to unilaterally call a second referendum on Scottish independence. This is because only the UK Parliament has legal authority to hold a referendum in any part of the UK. Major parties such as Labour, Conservatives, and Liberal Democrats remain opposed to a second referendum.

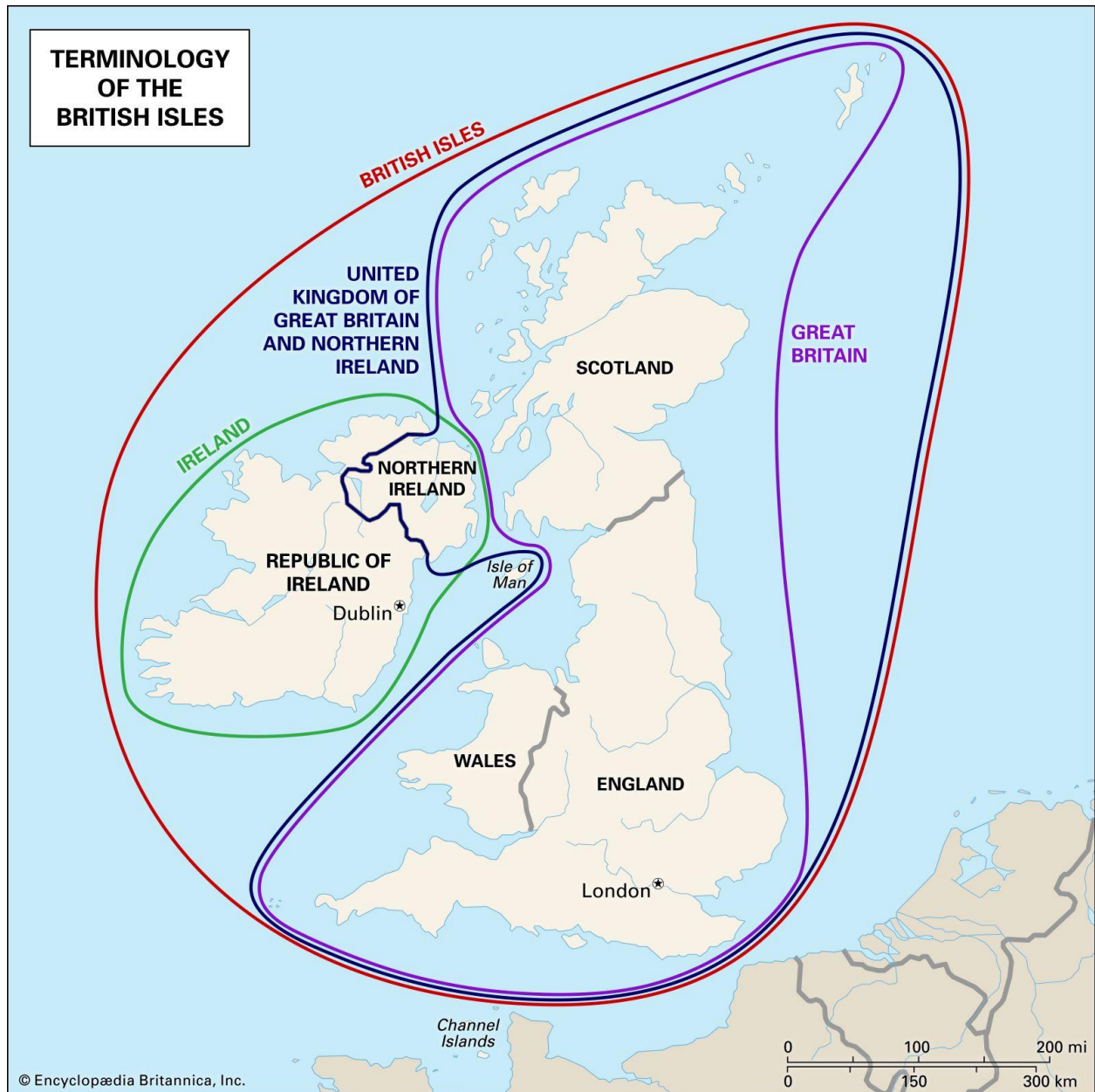
Both Wales and Northern Ireland are yet to hold an independence referendum, but the latter in 1973 conducted a border poll to decide on its constitutional status: whether it should remain part of the UK or join with the Republic of Ireland to create a united Ireland. Irish nationalists, who favoured a united Ireland, boycotted the poll: 98.9% of the votes chose to remain in the UK.

Latest polling reported by *The Guardian* suggests 47% of Scottish voters would opt for independence, along with 36% in Northern Ireland and 32% in Wales.

Only constitutional changes — in the form of the UK Parliament transferring powers to the respective three national parliaments — can facilitate independence referendums, using an order similar to the one granting the 2014 Scottish referendum. So, the Cardiff Agreement calls on the British government "to prepare for, plan and facilitate constitutional change in each jurisdiction".

FULL VERSION ON

[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](https://www.indianexpress.com)



5. United No More? How the UK Came Together, and May Come Apart

Source: The Indian Express

GS-2: Federalism, Devolution, Self-Determination, Constitutional Issues

1. Context

- On **14 September 2026**, the leaders of **Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland** met in **Cardiff** to discuss the constitutional future of their nations.
- They signed a **joint memorandum**, asserting the right of their people to determine their constitutional future and calling for the UK Government to facilitate the necessary constitutional process.
- The meeting is significant because, for the first time, the political leadership of all three devolved nations is simultaneously supporting some form of constitutional change.

2. What Is the Constitutional Issue?

- **United Kingdom:** England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- **Scotland:** The Scottish National Party is seeking another independence referendum.
- **Wales:** Plaid Cymru supports greater self-government and the possibility of independence.
- **Northern Ireland:** Sinn Féin seeks Irish reunification through the constitutional process provided under the **Good Friday Agreement**.
- The three cases are different; there is **no single legal mechanism for leaving the UK**.

3. Cardiff Agreement and the Legal Position

- Scotland and Wales also signed the **Cardiff Agreement**, establishing closer cooperation on economic development, poverty, climate change, international relations and constitutional matters.
- The Agreement supports the principle that citizens should determine their constitutional future through **democratic means**, but it is **not legally binding** and does not itself create independence or referendum powers.
- In **Scotland**, the 2014 referendum resulted in **55.3% voting to remain** in the UK. The UK Supreme Court ruled in 2022 that the Scottish Parliament cannot unilaterally hold another independence referendum.
- In **Northern Ireland**, the Good Friday Agreement provides a specific framework for a **border poll** on Irish unity.

4. What Does It Mean for the UK?

- **Devolution:** Raises the question of how powers should be divided between Westminster and the devolved governments.
- **Self-determination:** Brings the democratic right of people to decide their constitutional status to the centre of the debate.
- **Future of the Union:** Any successful independence or reunification process would fundamentally alter the present territorial structure of the UK.
- **Legal authority:** Political demands alone cannot change the constitutional structure; the relevant **UK legal and democratic procedures** would still have to be followed.

Dadasaheb Phalke honour for Kannada film artist Anant Nag

The Hindu Bureau

BENGALURU

In a big honour for Kannada cinema, veteran actor Anant Nag became the second artist from the State to win the Dadasaheb Phalke Award on Wednesday. The recognition comes a year after the actor was given the Padma Bhushan.

After Dr. Rajkumar received the honour in 1995, no Kannada actor had bagged the country's highest award in the field of cinema.

Mr. Nag, who debuted with the 1973 Kannada film *Sankalpa*, has acted in more than 300 movies for over five decades in both mainstream and parallel cinema, with more than 250 of his performances being in Kannada.

The actor, born Anant Nagarkatte in 1948 in Uttara Kannada district, began his acting stint with Kannada, Marathi, Hindi and Konkani plays, and has a rich background in theatre shaped largely in Mumbai.

Mr. Nag is the recipient of five Karnataka State Awards, including the Lifetime Achievement honour.

He will receive the Phalke award at the 72nd



The recognition comes a year after Anant Nag was given the Padma Bhushan.

National Film Awards Ceremony on September 22 in Kevadia, Gujarat.

'Great feeling'

"It's a great feeling to receive this honour. In a way, I feel the Padma Bhushan was a rehearsal for this big award, with all the excitement and anticipation that came with it. I dedicate this award to Kannadigas and Karnataka," the actor told presspersons in Bengaluru.

A statement from the Press Information Bureau read, "On the recommendation of the Dadasaheb Phalke Award Selection Committee, the Government of India is pleased to announce that the actor

will be conferred the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award 2024 for his contribution to Indian cinema and an illustrious cinematic journey that has inspired generations."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the actor for "infusing unparalleled performance and vitality in every role he played." Mr. Modi took to social media, and said, "Over the past several decades, his natural acting, remarkable versatility, and exceptional artistic talent have left an indelible mark on Indian cinema, particularly in the Kannada film industry."

Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar also commended Mr. Nag's cinematic journey and the Phalke award. In a post on X, the Chief Minister said, "Heartfelt congratulations to Shri Anant Nag. His artistic journey will forever inspire future generations."

Though cinematographer V.K. Murthy, from Karnataka, received the award in 2008, it recognised his work in Hindi cinema. Consequently, Mr. Nag's win marks only the second time Kannada cinema has been honoured.

6. Dadasaheb Phalke Award: Anant Nag

Source: The Hindu

GS-1: Indian Culture, Cinema and Cultural Heritage

1. Context

- Veteran Kannada actor **Anant Nag** has been selected for the **Dadasaheb Phalke Award for 2024** for his contribution to Indian cinema.
- He is the **second Kannada film personality** to receive the honour after **Dr. Rajkumar (1995)**.

2. Dadasaheb Phalke Award: Key Facts

- **Instituted:** 1969, in memory of **Dadasaheb Phalke**, regarded as the Father of Indian Cinema.
- **First recipient:** **Devika Rani (1969)**.
- **Purpose:** Recognises outstanding contribution to the **growth and development of Indian cinema**.
- **Administered by:** **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting**.
- **Presented by:** **President of India**, generally at the National Film Awards ceremony.
- It is regarded as the **highest national honour in Indian cinema**.

3. Recent Recipients

- **2020:** Asha Parekh
- **2021:** Waheeda Rehman
- **2022:** Mithun Chakraborty
- **2023:** Mohanlal
- **2024:** Anant Nag

4. Anant Nag

- Veteran **Kannada actor** with a career spanning more than five decades.
- Made his film debut with **Sankalpa (1973)** and has worked across Kannada, Hindi, Marathi and Konkani cinema.
- Has acted in **300+ films** and contributed to both mainstream and parallel cinema.
- Recipient of several **Karnataka State Film Awards** and the **Padma Bhushan (2009)**.
- The award recognises his long-standing contribution to **Indian cinema, particularly Kannada cinema**.

India remains at 131st rank in global gender parity index

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI/GENEVA

India retained the 131st rank on the Global Gender Gap Index 2026 released by the World Economic Forum on Wednesday, with Iceland, Finland and Norway maintaining their top three slots respectively.

The 14 countries ranked below than India on the index include Papua New Guinea, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Mali, Algeria, and Congo.

7. India at 131st in Global Gender Gap Index 2026

Source: The Hindu

GS-1: Women, Gender Equality, Social Development

1. Context

- The **World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2026** places India at **131st among 145 economies**.
- India's gender-parity score improved marginally from **64.4% in 2025 to 64.5% in 2026**, while its rank remained unchanged.

2. Global Gender Gap Index: What Does It Measure?

- **Objective:** To measure the **relative gap between women and men** and track progress towards gender parity over time.
- It measures **outcomes**, not the number of government schemes, expenditure or policies introduced for women.
- The Index has **4 dimensions and 14 indicators**:
 1. **Economic Participation & Opportunity** – employment, income, professional and leadership positions.
 2. **Educational Attainment** – literacy and enrolment.
 3. **Health & Survival** – sex ratio at birth and healthy life expectancy.
 4. **Political Empowerment** – representation in Parliament, ministerial positions and head-of-state experience.
- **100% score = complete gender parity.**

3. India: 2025–2026

- **2025:** 131st rank | **64.4%**
- **2026:** 131st rank | **64.5%**
- **Economic Participation & Opportunity:** 41.2%
- **Educational Attainment:** 96.6%
- **Health & Survival:** 95.6%
- **Political Empowerment:** 24.5%

4. What Does India's Score Indicate?

- India's **educational parity is relatively high**, with full parity in secondary and tertiary enrolment.
- The larger gaps are in **economic participation and political empowerment**.

- Since 2006, India's overall parity score has improved by **4.3 percentage points**, with much of the long-term improvement coming from educational attainment.