BRICS ‘POWER’ Framework Signals a Broader Global South Agenda amid India-China Coordination and the 18th Summit

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Recent Developments:

- Ahead of the **18th BRICS Summit**, scheduled in **New Delhi on 12–13 September 2026**, Chinese Ambassador to India **XFeihong** proposed a **‘POWER’ framework** for strengthening cooperation within an expanded BRICS and giving greater institutional weight to the **Global South**.
- The proposal is particularly significant because **India holds the BRICS Chairship in 2026**, while **China is scheduled to assume the rotating presidency in 2027**, creating an opportunity for policy continuity but also placing India-China relations at the centre of the grouping’s future trajectory.
- India’s 2026 BRICS Chairship is guided by the overarching theme **“Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability”**, with the agenda increasingly focusing on development, energy security, technology, trade, digital cooperation and institutional reform.
- The proposed framework should be understood as a **Chinese diplomatic vision rather than an officially adopted BRICS doctrine**. Its importance lies in the debate it generates over whether BRICS should primarily function as a development-oriented Global South platform or as a counterweight to Western influence.

Understanding the BRICS ‘POWER’ Framework:

BRICS as a Global South Platform:

- **BRICS** has evolved from a grouping of Brazil, Russia, India and China into a broader coordination mechanism representing major emerging economies and developing countries.
- The grouping currently has **11 full members — Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia** — while a separate **partner-country** category has also been developed.
- BRICS is an **informal political and diplomatic coordination mechanism**, rather than a treaty-based international organisation; it has no constitutive treaty, permanent secretariat or independent budget.
- Its principal significance lies in strengthening **South-South cooperation**, increasing the representation of emerging economies in global governance and advocating reforms of institutions such as the **United Nations, IMF, World Bank and WTO**.

Five Pillars of the POWER Framework:

- The proposed **POWER** architecture uses five pillars — **Principle, Openness, Win-Win, Engine and Responsibility** — to outline a broad agenda covering political, economic, technological and developmental cooperation.

P — Principle: Sovereign Equality and International Law:

- The **Principle** pillar emphasises **sovereign equality, non-interference and peaceful settlement of disputes**, drawing upon the principles of the **UN Charter**.
- It seeks to strengthen a multipolar international order in which developing countries exercise greater agency rather than remaining dependent on established centres of global power.
- For India, this principle is relevant because its foreign policy emphasises **strategic autonomy, sovereignty, territorial integrity and a rules-based international order**.

O — Openness: Multilateral Trade and Connectivity:

- The **Openness** pillar calls for preservation of a **rules-based multilateral trading system** centred on the **WTO**, including the principle of non-discriminatory **Most-Favoured-Nation treatment**.
- It advocates resistance to excessive **geopolitical decoupling, protectionism and punitive tariff barriers**, while promoting cooperation in infrastructure, energy and critical-mineral supply chains.
- India can use this approach to advocate **open but fair trade**, greater market access and resilient global value chains while protecting sensitive domestic sectors.

W — Win-Win: Development-Centred Cooperation:

- The **Win-Win** pillar places **socioeconomic development** at the centre of multilateral cooperation and links BRICS priorities with the **Sustainable Development Goals** and the post-2030 development agenda.
- It proposes greater use of **local-currency settlements, interoperable cross-border payment systems and reciprocal credit arrangements** to reduce exposure to exchange-rate volatility and external financial pressures.
- Such cooperation could complement existing BRICS financial mechanisms without requiring the immediate creation of a common currency.

E — Engine: Growth, Industrialisation and Technology:

- The **Engine** pillar seeks to position BRICS as a driver of global growth through cooperation in **digital public infrastructure, green technologies, advanced manufacturing and Artificial Intelligence**.
- The technology agenda is particularly relevant for India because its experience with **UPI, Digital Public Infrastructure and digital governance** provides potential areas for South-South technology cooperation.
- India's BRICS Chairship has already promoted technology-oriented cooperation, including discussions on **resilient digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, digital skills, innovation and startups**.
- Cooperation in Artificial Intelligence can help developing countries address the **digital divide**, develop locally relevant technologies and establish common principles for trustworthy and human-centric AI governance.

R — Responsibility: Continuity and Global South Leadership:

- The **Responsibility** pillar seeks to use the consecutive presidencies of **India in 2026 and China in 2027** to maintain policy continuity and strengthen the institutional effectiveness of the expanded BRICS.
- It also supports greater representation of developing countries through reforms of the **Bretton Woods institutions** and the **UN Security Council**.
- However, continuity will depend upon whether India and China can separate areas of multilateral cooperation from unresolved bilateral disagreements.

Strategic Significance for India:

India-China Coordination within BRICS:

- The POWER proposal arrives during a period in which India-China engagement has shown signs of stabilisation, creating space for cooperation in areas of common interest while bilateral differences remain

unresolved.
- India can use BRICS to pursue **functional cooperation without compromising strategic autonomy**, particularly in development finance, climate action, technology, trade and Global South representation.
- India should nevertheless avoid allowing BRICS to become an explicitly **anti-Western coalition**, because India maintains extensive strategic, economic and technological partnerships with the United States, Europe, Japan, Australia and other partners.

Economic and Financial Opportunities:

- BRICS provides a platform for strengthening **local-currency financing, development finance and payment interoperability**.
- The **New Development Bank** is particularly important because it finances infrastructure and sustainable-development projects and has expanded its use of local-currency financing. Its current strategy includes a substantial role for local currencies, while its recent operations demonstrate continued diversification of funding sources.
- The NDB has also demonstrated practical relevance to India through infrastructure financing, including projects in transport and urban development.

Technology, Energy and Supply Chains:

- BRICS cooperation can help diversify supply chains for **critical minerals, renewable-energy equipment, semiconductors, fertilisers and strategic technologies**.
- India's 2026 BRICS Energy agenda has already promoted cooperation in **renewable energy, hydrogen, energy storage, critical minerals, carbon capture, digitalisation and energy efficiency**.
- Such cooperation can strengthen **strategic resilience** while reducing excessive dependence on geographically concentrated production networks.

Key Challenges:

Divergent Strategic Visions:

- India generally views BRICS as a platform for **strategic autonomy, development cooperation and reform of global governance**, whereas some members may seek to position it more explicitly as a counterweight to Western influence.
- This divergence can make consensus difficult on contentious geopolitical issues.

India-China Economic Asymmetry:

- Despite calls for greater trade openness, India faces a persistent and substantial **trade deficit with China**, alongside concerns regarding market access, non-tariff barriers and dependence on Chinese inputs.
- Therefore, deeper BRICS trade integration must be accompanied by **supply-chain diversification and domestic manufacturing capacity**.

Geopolitical and Security Frictions:

- BRICS includes countries with competing geopolitical interests, bilateral disputes and different positions on major international conflicts.
- India-China border tensions demonstrate that economic and multilateral cooperation cannot automatically eliminate strategic competition.

Financial and Monetary Constraints:

- Greater use of local currencies faces challenges arising from **currency convertibility, exchange-rate volatility, capital-account restrictions, liquidity constraints and unequal financial-market depth**.

- A common BRICS currency is therefore considerably more difficult than improving bilateral or multilateral settlement mechanisms.

Institutional Cohesion:

- The rapid expansion of BRICS has increased its demographic and economic weight but has also increased the diversity of its political systems, foreign-policy priorities and economic structures.
- Maintaining **consensus-based decision-making** while pursuing ambitious institutional reforms will remain a major challenge.

Way Ahead:

- India should promote a **development-oriented and inclusive BRICS** that cooperates with both Western and non-Western institutions instead of defining itself primarily through opposition to the West.
- India and China should use their successive presidencies to build practical cooperation in **trade, development finance, climate action, digital public infrastructure, Artificial Intelligence, energy and critical supply chains**, while maintaining bilateral disputes on a separate diplomatic track.
- BRICS should strengthen the **New Development Bank**, expand local-currency financing and improve interoperability among national payment systems rather than prematurely pursuing a common currency.
- The grouping should develop **transparent and human-centric AI governance frameworks** that promote innovation while addressing algorithmic concentration, data governance, cybersecurity and the digital divide.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on **implementation-oriented cooperation**, including measurable projects in infrastructure, health, education, food security, renewable energy and digital connectivity.
- BRICS should continue advocating **reform of the UN Security Council, IMF and World Bank**, while ensuring that institutional reform remains consistent with wider multilateral cooperation.

Conclusion:

- The proposed **POWER framework** reflects the growing ambition of BRICS to shape the global economic and political order rather than merely participate in existing institutions.
- Its success, however, will depend less on rhetorical declarations and more on the ability of members to convert their considerable demographic and economic weight into **practical cooperation, institutional capacity and development outcomes**.
- For India, the optimal approach is to make BRICS a platform for **strategic autonomy, Global South leadership, economic resilience and multilateral reform**, while avoiding its transformation into an exclusive anti-Western bloc.
- If India and China can combine **sovereign equality, economic pragmatism and issue-based cooperation**, BRICS can contribute to a more representative, multipolar and development-oriented international order.

Value Addition for UPSC:

- **Essay:** *"The rise of the Global South is reshaping the architecture of global governance."*
- **Key analytical theme:** BRICS should be viewed not simply as an **anti-Western coalition**, but as a contested platform where development cooperation, strategic autonomy, economic diversification and competing geopolitical visions intersect.
- **Important factual correction:** BRICS currently consists of **11 full members**, while the **POWER framework remains a proposed diplomatic framework and is not an officially adopted BRICS institutional framework**.

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