

Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh, speaks at 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the IBSA and 2nd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the BRIC in Brazil's capital, Brasilia.

Convergence across continents: the Brazil-India relationship

B. S. Prakash

Even by the hectic standards of today's fast-paced diplomacy, the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Brazil this April was unusually intensive and eventful. It had at least three components: a substantive meeting with President Lula to discuss the challenges of growing the relationship and progress so far; a summit meeting of IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa), a politically symbolic South-South project that has now matured with the completion of one round of summits and the start of the second round in Brasilia; and a summit of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China), a new entrant with an economic focus in the changing international alphabet soup. There were other world leaders in Brasilia April 14–17 and talk of other international groupings, say the G-20 or BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China), but one thing was clear: Brazil and India are constant in all the constellations.

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Why is this? "A natural and a necessary partnership" is the way Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim characterized the growing linkages between Brazil and India a few years back. A moment's reflection illuminates the aptness of this description. Numerous commonalities between the two countries make it a natural partnership. First are the obvious and objective factors: geographical extent — India is itself a large country but we marvel at the fact that Brazil is two and a half times bigger; substantial demographics — in population India is the second largest and Brazil the fifth in the world; fast-growing trillion-dollar-plus economies, Brazil's expanding at more than 5% annually and India's at 8% annually, earning us the epithet of 'emerging economies' in the global order; and, despite the impressive size of the economy, the fact of economic disparities and deficiencies for large numbers of people in both countries. In short, we are fundamentally comparable in many ways.

More important, however, are our shared values and vision. This can be captured in terms of the three big Ds: democratic values, developmental priorities, and diversity as a reality. The three together make a policy of 'inclusive growth' an imperative. As they have grown, both Brazil and India have no doubt become emerging economic powers (this is what brings them together in BRIC), but both see themselves essentially as still developing, coas untries of the South, which need to grow but must always keep 'equity' a priority. This is what makes us partners in IBSA with South Africa, a nation on the continent of Africa that shares the same values and approaches.

All these factors make for a 'natural' partnership. But what makes us believe that the partnership is also 'necessary'? To answer this, we have to look at the vision of a restructured global order that Brazil and India share. There is a widespread realization today that there are many issues — security, economy, environment, health, terrorism — that require global solutions because they are truly global in nature.

This realization has brought about an awareness, even a grudging acceptance, that the current structures of global governance, the UN Security Council or the IMF or the World Bank or the OECD, do not represent the realities of the 21st century. Many of these structures reflect the politico-strategic realities of 1945, not 2010. Recognizing the imperative to restructure these institutions to make them more democratic, representative, and legitimate, Brazil and India share a vision of what needs to be done. Our joint efforts in this direction, in partnership with like-minded countries, can be a necessary and beneficial activity not only for our own good, but for the global good as well. Some of this is illustrated by such salient new formations as the G-20 or the BASIC at the Copenhagen Conference. In a world that is increasingly seen as multipolar, Brazil and India

work together toward a new style of multilateralism anchored in a coalition of the like-minded.

While all this is positive, for people like me who are working to tighten the links between Brazil and India, the real challenge is in adding greater content to the bilateral engagement, as distinct from the multilateral or the plurilateral, as it is intensifying. Only now are we as individuals and as corporations discovering each other, really only in this decade. The different colonial histories, which took Indians to Canada and the Caribbean but not Brazil, and the distance and lack of connectivity account at least partially for the time this has taken. But someone like me at the cross-section of our bilateral contacts cannot help but notice that among businessmen, bankers, academics, and civil society activists there is now a growing interest in each other. Trade and investments are increasing, though they are still far below potential.

A significant and pertinent trend is the interest of academics and analysts in studying each other's developmental models and social programs, such as 'Bolsa Família.'[1] Since the problems we have related to poverty reduction, public health, and education are so similar, we can learn from each other about best practices and delivery models. It is useful to encourage networking of academic think tanks or research institutions so that we can pool the intellectual capital we are endowed with. The recent meetings in Brasilia saw meaningful initiatives in this direction.



Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh, President of Brazil, Lula, and President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, pose for photo at the 4th Summit of Heads of State Government of the IBSA.



President of Russia, Dmitri Medvedev, President of Brazil, Lula, President of China, Hu Jintao, and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, pose for the official photo during the 2nd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the BRIC.

History, geography, and language used to separate Brazil and India. In the era of global connectivity, we are finding ways to transcend such constraints and discovering areas of convergence.

[1] Government program that grants poor families a monthly allowance to buy food.