

India-Russia ties, BRICS and the geopolitical turmoil in West Asia

By Tridivesh Singh Maini / 1 April 2026



The relationship between Russia and India is multi-dimensional and time-tested. Both countries have an important role to play in the current geopolitical situation. Under the umbrella of BRICS, Moscow and New Delhi can push important economic initiatives between BRICS countries and try to build a consensus on important geopolitical issues.

A conference titled '[India and Russia: Towards a new bilateral agenda](#)' was held in Moscow on March 23, 2026. The conference, which was the second of its kind, was organized by the Russian International Affairs Council (Moscow) and the Indian Embassy in Moscow.

Both the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, and the External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, who addressed the conference virtually, [referred](#) to the important strides made in Russia-India ties in recent years. Jaishankar also emphasised the multi-layered nature of the India-Russia relationship.

Russia's praise for India's strategic autonomy

The Modi government's stand on the West Asia crisis has drawn criticism from opposition parties. The Indian National Congress (INC) has also [accused](#) the government of kowtowing to the US on the issue of the purchase of Russian oil.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, however, praised India for following the path of strategic autonomy. Lavrov [said](#) India '*deserves the deepest respect*' for pursuing an independent foreign policy and '*prioritising national interest*'.

Interestingly, the US Under Secretary for Defence, Elbridge Colby, while speaking at a New Delhi-based think tank on March 24, had also highlighted that India possesses a '*long tradition of strategic autonomy.*'

India's purchase of Russian oil

Here, it would be important to point out that India has been purchasing Russian oil ever since the Russia-Ukraine conflict began in 2022. India had reduced the purchase of Russian oil after the Trump administration had imposed additional tariffs of 25% on India in August 2025 for purchasing oil from Russia. The additional sanctions were then removed by the US in February 2026 via an executive order signed by Donald Trump, days after an interim trade deal had been finalised between both countries.

In the aftermath of the West Asia conflict, the US had given a waiver for the purchase of Russian oil. While commenting on this decision, US Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent had said, '*to ease the temporary gap of oil around the world, we have permitted them to accept the Russian oil. We may unsanction other Russian oil.*'

India's purchase of Russian oil has risen by 70% between February and March 2026. Indian refiners have bought 60 million barrels of Russian oil for delivery in April 2026.

The other important point highlighted during the conference was the importance of India's Chairmanship of BRICS amidst the current West Asia conflict. Jaishankar said in his speech, '*India, during its BRICS chairmanship with a humanity-first and a people-centric approach, looks forward to closely working with Russia to address shared challenges in a balanced and inclusive manner... Let me reiterate our steadfast commitment to strengthening our long-standing partnership and cherished friendship.*'

Amidst the West Asia crisis, Iran has repeatedly stated that India, as the current Chair of BRICS, should play a proactive role along with other members by condemning US-Israel strikes on Iran and by 'halting the aggression' against Tehran. Domestically, the Indian National Congress (INC) has been especially critical of the Modi government for not using India's position as Chair of BRICS to put forth its views along with other BRICS members in the context of the West Asia conflict. New Delhi, however, has stated that building consensus within the BRICS has been tough because the group itself is internally divided: both the UAE and Iran, which joined BRICS in 2024, are directly linked to the broader regional tensions, making consensus-building very complicated.

On March 25, Iranian Ambassador to India Mohammad Fathali said that India, with its balanced foreign policy and important role in the Global South, can play an important role in putting an end to the conflict. He said, '*India maintains historical and strategic relations with all parties, which enables it to act as a trusted player in reducing misunderstandings and strengthening diplomatic pathways.*'

India and Russia in BRICS

India and Russia are founder members of BRICS. Trade between the two countries via local currencies is estimated at over 90%. This point was made by Lavrov during the conference on March 23, and has been made by other senior Russian officials in the past. Increasing trade in local currencies is important because Russia and India have been pushing for trade in local currencies, though they have categorically distanced themselves from the idea of a common BRICS currency.

Both countries have an important role to play given their interests in the Middle East. While not having identical approaches, both have unequivocally pitched for peace.

It would be pertinent to point out that China has also, on more than one occasion, reiterated its support for India's BRICS Chairmanship, and also said that it is willing to work with India for promoting 'common interests' in the Global South.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between Russia and India is multi-dimensional and time-tested. Both countries have an important role to play in the current geopolitical situation. Under the umbrella of BRICS, Moscow and New Delhi can push important economic initiatives – especially trade in local currencies between BRICS countries and try to build a consensus on important geopolitical issues.

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