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THE BULLETIN

Volume: 7 Issue – 04 | Date: 15th Sept. 2026

Beyond the Hydrogen Train
Science, Technology and India's Journey Towards Energy Sovereignty – Part II

By Uday Kumar Varma

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From Science to Motion

The scientific elegance of hydrogen becomes truly visible when it is converted into movement.

Unlike a diesel locomotive, a hydrogen-powered train does not burn fuel in an engine. Instead, it carries compressed hydrogen in specially designed high-pressure tanks. This hydrogen is supplied to a Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) fuel cell, one of the most significant advances in modern electrochemical engineering.

Inside the fuel cell, hydrogen combines with oxygen drawn from the surrounding air. Rather than producing heat through combustion, this electrochemical reaction generates electricity directly. The electricity powers the traction motors that drive the train, while the only direct emissions are water vapour and heat.

The process is remarkably efficient, quiet and environmentally benign. Since there is no combustion, the familiar smoke, soot and exhaust gases associated with diesel locomotives disappear altogether. Noise levels are substantially lower, mechanical wear is reduced and energy conversion is significantly more efficient than in conventional internal-combustion engines.

The science is sophisticated. The experience, however, is deceptively simple—a train that runs almost silently, leaving behind little more than a trail of water vapour.

More Than Another Train

It would nevertheless be a mistake to imagine that hydrogen represents the future of all railway transportation.

Indeed, one of the more interesting paradoxes is that India's hydrogen programme is not primarily about railways.

Over the past decade, Indian Railways has undertaken one of the world's largest railway electrification programmes. Almost the entire broad-gauge network now operates under electric traction. From both economic and environmental perspectives, electrification remains the most efficient solution wherever overhead infrastructure is practical.

Hydrogen therefore occupies a different niche.

Its greatest value lies on routes where electrification is technically difficult, environmentally undesirable or economically prohibitive—mountain railways, heritage lines, remote regions and sections with relatively low traffic density.

Seen in this perspective, the hydrogen train is not intended to replace electric railways. It is intended to complement them. Its larger importance lies elsewhere.

The technologies demonstrated in a hydrogen train—fuel cells, hydrogen storage, high-pressure engineering, power electronics, intelligent control systems and safety protocols—are precisely the technologies that can eventually transform sectors far beyond transportation.

Heavy trucks, mining equipment, ports, shipping, steel plants, fertiliser factories, chemical industries and perhaps even aviation all require dense, transportable sources of clean energy that batteries alone may struggle to provide.

The railway has become the laboratory. The wider economy will become the beneficiary.

Engineering Confidence

Hydrogen's greatest challenge has never been its chemistry. It has been public perception.

For many people, hydrogen immediately recalls the Hindenburg airship disaster of 1937. Images of the burning airship continue to influence popular imagination, often creating the impression that hydrogen is uniquely dangerous.

Modern engineering tells a very different story.

Hydrogen, like petrol, diesel, natural gas or electricity, demands careful handling. But it is neither mysterious nor unmanageable.

Today's hydrogen systems employ multiple layers of safety. High-strength composite storage cylinders undergo rigorous testing under extreme pressure and temperature conditions. Continuous leak detection systems monitor even minute concentrations of escaping hydrogen. Automatic shut-off valves isolate any abnormal flow. Flame detectors, pressure sensors, sophisticated ventilation systems and remote monitoring provide additional safeguards throughout storage, refuelling and operation.

The hydrogen infrastructure established for India's first train reflects this philosophy. The dedicated production, storage and refuelling facility, supported by specialised safety protocols and continuous monitoring, demonstrates that safe hydrogen operations depend not upon extraordinary measures but upon sound engineering, disciplined maintenance and well-trained personnel.

Engineering, after all, is the science of making powerful ideas safely usable.

Why India Chose to Build Rather Than Buy

Perhaps the most significant aspect of India's hydrogen train is not the train itself. It is the decision to develop it indigenously.

India could have chosen a simpler path. Hydrogen train technology already existed elsewhere. Purchasing proven systems or licensing foreign designs would almost certainly have reduced development time.

Instead, India adopted the more demanding route.

Indian scientists, engineers and railway institutions undertook the challenge of designing propulsion systems, integrating fuel-cell technologies, developing control systems, establishing hydrogen storage infrastructure and adapting the entire platform to India's broad-gauge railway network and operating conditions.

That decision deserves attention because it reflects a larger shift in India's technological philosophy.

For much of the twentieth century, developing nations understandably focused on acquiring advanced technologies from abroad.

Such an approach accelerated industrial development but often left domestic industry dependent upon imported components, foreign intellectual property and external technological support.

Today's world demands something more.

Technological leadership belongs not merely to those who use advanced technologies but to those who understand them deeply enough to improve, manufacture and eventually export them.

The distinction is subtle but profound.

A nation that imports technology acquires products. A nation that develops technology acquires capability. Capability, unlike products, grows with use.

It creates skilled engineers, specialised suppliers, research laboratories, manufacturing ecosystems, testing facilities, patents and future innovations.

One successful project therefore becomes the foundation for many others.

This is why indigenous technological development possesses a significance extending far beyond economics. It builds confidence.

From "Make in India" to "Invent in India"

Manufacturing has long been recognised as an essential driver of economic development. Programmes encouraging domestic production have already strengthened India's industrial base in several sectors.

The next stage of national development, however, will depend increasingly upon innovation rather than production alone.

There is an important difference between manufacturing a technology conceived elsewhere and creating one through one's own scientific and engineering capabilities.

The former generates employment. The latter generates knowledge. Knowledge, once acquired, becomes cumulative.

Each generation of engineers builds upon the work of those who came before. Every successful innovation expands the nation's capacity to undertake even more ambitious projects.

History repeatedly demonstrates this principle.

Britain's industrial strength rested not merely on factories but on its mastery of steam engineering. The United States built global leadership through successive waves of innovation in electricity, aviation, computing and biotechnology. Japan and South Korea transformed themselves by steadily moving from manufacturing under licence to designing technologies of their own.

India now stands at a similar point of inflection.

Its aspiration should not be confined to becoming one of the world's largest manufacturing economies.

It should aspire to become one of the world's great centres of scientific discovery, technological innovation and advanced engineering.

Viewed in that larger context, the hydrogen train acquires a significance that extends well beyond clean transportation.

It becomes one visible expression of a nation seeking not merely to participate in the technologies of the future but to help create them.

To be continued in next issue ....

Have Large Aircraft Carriers Become Obsolescent?

By - Vappala Balachandran

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The debate on the role of aging US aircraft carriers in prolonged warfare like the 2026 US-Iran war had started even before the present "USS Abraham Lincoln" controversy. However, it captured global attention when US Congress members flagged serious health and environment issues over "thousands of US military members who have lived aboard an aircraft carrier for more than 250 days" after the war started on 28 February over the Strait of Hormuz.

"National Interest" said on 14 August 2026 that America has 11 carriers in active service, "more than the navies of China, the UK, India, France, Italy, and Spain—combined". Russia has only one.

After al-Qaeda's 12 October 2000 suicide attack on US Navy's destroyer "USS Cole" at Aden, US strategists started elevating the role of large aircraft carriers for counter terror warfare. US defence think tank "Rand" played an important role in formulating this policy after 9/11 attack through its 2004 strategy paper "The New Face of Naval Strike Warfare", followed by "American Carrier Airpower at the dawn of a new Century" on October 28, 2005.

Rand defined the basic premise for this new policy on the need to possess "a credible, deep-strike capability in the remotest part of Southwest Asia where the United States had virtually no access" caused by Osma bin Laden's global terror cells hiding in Afghanistan with Taliban support. It said that this compensated for the weakness of "land-based theatre air forces because of an absence of suitable forward operating locations for the latter".

The paper ends: "Today, deep-strike carrier aviation is not only a natural concomitant of the nation's status as the world's sole surviving superpower; it also is the one outstanding feature that distinguishes the U.S. Navy unequivocally from all other naval forces around the world."

However different views were expressed after Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. In 2023 Jeff Vandenengel, commanding officer of USS Illinois and winner of the Navy League's 2024 Alfred Thayer Mahan Award for Literary Achievement bluntly wrote in his book "Questioning the Carrier": "The large nuclear-powered aircraft carrier is the most powerful surface warship in that fleet and in all naval history. The U.S Navy should stop building them immediately."

Similarly, Philip Pilkington, a Guardian (UK) columnist published a piece in "The National Interest" on 17 January 2025 "Why Aircraft Carriers Are Becoming Obsolete". He wrote this paper after a Russian Oreshnik intermediate-range ballistic missile hit Ukraine's PA Pivdenmash aerospace manufacturing plant in Dnipro on November 21, 2024.

According to "Eurasian Times" the existence of the missile "was not known to the West and the rest of the world till its operational test against Ukraine". Pilkington wondered how a Nimitz class aircraft carrier with a speed of 30 knots (34.5 mph) could escape an Oreshnik missile with a known speed of Mach10-11 (7,610–8,450 mph). On the cost basis "for every aircraft carrier the United States builds, the Russians can build between 154 and 278 Oreshnik missiles".

Harrison Kass, Senior Defence Editor of "19FortyFive", a US based military publication, did not agree with Pilkington on the obsolescence of aircraft carriers. Through his piece "The Navy's Biggest Fear: Aircraft Carriers Become Old and Obsolete Like Battleships" (31 January 2026) he joined a debate initiated by US Naval Institute in January 2025 when Sub-Lieutenant Joseph Reilly of the Royal Navy contested Jeff Vandenengel's 2023 suggestion.

Reilly asserted through his piece “Long Live the Aircraft Carrier” that US carriers were successful in assuming multifront strategic roles like power projection and peace besides wars, thereby retaining “a profound and enduring utility below the threshold of great power war”.

However, Harrison Kass felt that “the carrier faces legitimate concerns in the modern context from the rise of long-range anti- ship missiles, swarming drones and hypersonic glide vehicles”.

None of these arguments have influenced China, which, according to a December 2025 Pentagon report, wants to build nine aircraft carriers by 2035.

Article first published in Lokmat Times Nagpur Main on August 23, 2026

9/11@25: The Day That Divided World History

By Dr. Santhosh Mathew

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Twenty-five years have passed since the world watched, almost unable to believe its own eyes, as two passenger aircraft crashed into New York’s World Trade Centre. The images of smoke rising from the Twin Towers, people running through the streets of Manhattan and the towers collapsing into a mountain of dust remain among the most unforgettable pictures of the modern age. September 11,2001,was not merely an attack on the United States. It became a watershed in international politics. The world that existed before 9/11 and the world that emerged after it were markedly different. If the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 symbolised the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Twin Towers symbolised the beginning of a new and deeply uncertain era.

It was an ordinary Tuesday morning in New York. At 8.46 a.m., American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Centre. At 9.03, United Airlines Flight 175 struck the South Tower. At 9.37, American Airlines Flight 77 hit the Pentagon near Washington. At 10.03, United Airlines Flight 93 crashed into a field in Pennsylvania after passengers fought back against the hijackers. The 9/11 Commission recorded that more than 2,600 people died at the World Trade Centre, 125 at the Pentagon and 256 on the four aircraft. The death toll surpassed that of Pearl Harbour. ([9/11 Commission][1]) Nineteen al-Qaeda terrorists had turned four commercial aircraft into weapons. The attack demonstrated a frightening new reality: modern technology, global mobility and open societies could be turned against the very system that created them.

The psychological shock was enormous. The United States had suffered attacks before, including the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, but 9/11 was different. This time the American mainland itself had been attacked. New York, the country's financial capital, and Washington, the political and military centre, had been struck on the same morning. Geography no longer appeared to provide security. President George W. Bush captured this new strategic thinking when he declared that after September 11, “geography doesn't keep us safe.” The old assumptions about borders, distance and national security suddenly looked inadequate. Washington responded with what became known as the Bush Doctrine. The principle of pre-emptive action, the targeting of terrorist organisations and states accused of supporting terrorism, and the determination to prevent threats before they reached American soil became central to US foreign policy. Afghanistan was invaded in 2001 after the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda leaders. The campaign soon widened into a much larger Global War on Terror. In 2003, Iraq became the next major battlefield. The vocabulary of international politics changed rapidly: “terrorist states”, “rogue regimes”, “weapons of mass destruction”, “regime change”, “pre-emptive war” and the “Axis of Evil” entered everyday political language.

In his 2002 State of the Union address, Bush famously described Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an “axis of evil” because of what his administration portrayed as their support for terrorism and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. The White House subsequently linked the Iraqi threat to alleged chemical, biological and nuclear capabilities. The phrase became one of the defining expressions of the post-9/11 age. Iraq was invaded in 2003, Saddam Hussein was removed and eventually executed, and the Middle East entered another prolonged period of instability. The weapons of mass destruction that had been central to the case for war were never found, leaving a lasting debate over intelligence, political judgement and the use of force.

The war also transformed journalism. “Embedded journalism” became a defining feature of the Iraq War. Reporters were attached to military units and travelled with American and allied forces. The arrangement gave television audiences unprecedented access to soldiers on the battlefield, but it also raised questions about whether journalists travelling alongside the military could remain sufficiently independent. During the 2003 invasion, hundreds of reporters and photographers were embedded with military units. War was no longer simply reported after the event; it entered living rooms in real time through television, satellite networks and the rapidly expanding internet.9/11 also gave new life to old arguments about the nature of the post-Cold War world. Francis Fukuyama had famously suggested after the collapse of Soviet communism that history had reached an ideological endpoint. In his formulation, the “end point of mankind's ideological evolution” was associated with the universalisation of Western liberal democracy. The attacks of 9/11 appeared to challenge that optimism. Ideological conflict had not disappeared. Religious extremism, terrorism, nationalism and civilisational identity had become powerful forces in international politics.

Samuel Huntington's earlier “Clash of Civilizations” thesis suddenly acquired new political relevance. Huntington had argued in 1993 that “the great divisions among humankind” would increasingly be cultural rather than primarily ideological or economic and warned that “the fault lines of civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.” After 9/11, many interpreted the attacks through precisely this civilisational lens. The danger was that terrorism committed by Islamist extremists could be wrongly transformed into a conflict between entire religions and peoples. Islamophobia expanded in many Western societies, while Muslims across the world faced suspicion, discrimination and political stereotyping. The distinction between violent extremism and ordinary Muslim communities became critically important, and often tragically blurred.

The post-9/11 era also exposed the darker side of the war on terror. Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, extraordinary rendition, secret detention and allegations of torture became symbols of the tension between national security and civil liberties. The argument that extraordinary threats required extraordinary measures changed the meaning of human rights and due process in many countries. President Bush's stark formulation-“Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists”—left little political space for neutrality. The international system increasingly came to be viewed through the prism of security. The consequences extended far beyond Afghanistan and Iraq. Terrorist attacks spread across cities in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East. Pakistan became deeply entangled in the war on terror. Afghanistan experienced two decades of conflict before the Taliban returned to power in 2021. Iraq's invasion destabilised the region and created conditions that contributed to the rise of new extremist organisations. The conflict spread into Yemen, Somalia and other theatres. The financial cost was enormous, while the human cost was borne disproportionately by ordinary people living far from the streets of New York and Washington.

There is also a complicated history behind the rise of al-Qaeda. During the Cold War, the United States, Pakistan and other actors supported Afghan resistance forces fighting the Soviet occupation. Osama bin Laden emerged from that wider milieu, though the simplistic claim that the United States simply “created” al-Qaeda does not capture the complicated network of actors,

organisations and ideological currents involved. After the Soviet withdrawal and the collapse of the Soviet Union, bin Laden turned his hostility towards the United States and its allies. The former Cold War environment had produced forces that eventually became threats to their earlier geopolitical partners. The story was a powerful reminder that strategic alliances built for one conflict can produce unintended consequences in another.

Ground Zero has since been transformed. The Twin Towers are gone, but the National September 11 Memorial and Museum now occupies their footprint, while the new World Trade Centre has risen around it. One World Trade Centre stands as a symbol of reconstruction. The memorial pools preserve the names of those who died. New York has rebuilt its skyline, but the memory of that morning remains embedded in the city's identity. Twenty-five years later, 9/11 is no longer simply an American tragedy. It is a landmark in world history. It changed the meaning of security, strengthened the politics of counter-terrorism, reshaped the Middle East, transformed journalism, intensified debates over Islam and the West, and expanded the reach of the security state. The post-9/11 world also demonstrated the limits of military power: terrorism cannot be defeated by military force alone, and political instability cannot be permanently resolved through regime change.

The deepest lesson of 9/11 may be that history did not end with the Cold War. It changed direction. Fukuyama's optimistic “end of history” met Huntington's “clash of civilizations”, while the Bush Doctrine attempted to reshape the international system through American power. A quarter century later, the world is once again moving towards great-power rivalry, geopolitical fragmentation and competing centres of power. The Twin Towers have been replaced by a new skyline, but the political earthquake of September 11 continues to send aftershocks across the world. Twenty-five years on, 9/11 remains not only a day of mourning, but the date by which the modern world measures its transformation: before September 11 and after September 11.

India & China: - Trapped in History

By Col (Dr) Anil Athale (Retd)

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The biggest untruth is the repeated statement that China has occupied 38000 sq. kms of Indian territory in Ladakh area. To arrive to this figure which ‘Indian’ border do we take into account, the maximalist ‘Johonson line’ or the ‘Macartney line’ that places Aksai Chin area in China/ Tibet? The unvarnished truth is that both these ‘lines’ were product of Imperial Britain’s fear of Russian expansion of the 19th century were never occupied or marked on ground. The same fear created a curious ‘Wakhan’ corridor, a strip of Afghanistan that separates India from (then) Russian territory.

In 1960s, the Indian opposition, created this myth of lost territory to attack Nehru and is now stuck with the absurdity of that claim. Did some Indians conspire to make ‘Johnson line’ as the border in order to provoke a conflict between India and China so that India goes into US embrace on rebound?

Nehru, instead of telling Indians that the status of border area in Ladakh was ‘ambiguous’ dismissed it as ‘useless land, where not a blade of grass grows’. The area occupied by the Chinese in the north was neither Indian nor Chinese but a piece of unoccupied and undermarketed land. Neither the British/Indians nor the Chinese/Tibetans exercised any control over it. In 1960 China was smart and encroached on this area.

Once we take out the 'loss of national territory' out of the equation, solution to the border dispute becomes easy and ranges from a 50-year freeze to open border et al. It is invoking of 'Nationalism' and Chinese betrayal that has converted a territorial dispute into an ideological one.

While China treats it as a territorial and tactical ploy, India regards it as a strategic threat.

The present govt jettisoned the old Indian policy (born out of fear) of not developing border road infrastructure. India ought to pursue a policy of engagement with China and offer it an access to open sea via Indian territory in the East as well as North. This India China Economic Corridor will be more attractive than current CPEC (China Pak Economic Corridor). The road/rail infra can be linked to serve economic purpose in interest of both. India China Economic corridor besides giving sea access to China will also create interdependence between the two countries and promote long term peace.

As a first step we have to acknowledge that China/Tibet indeed has a claim in the northern sector. The claim on Arunachal is Chinese tit for tat. China is in no military condition to enforce its claims as geography is in favour of India. Border should then be demarcated keeping the interests of both the countries in terms of defence of vital interests.

Such has been the influence of history that in India for 25 years (1987) we taught our soldiers that air power is ineffective in Himalayas. Despite the bloody nose in 1967 Sikkim, Somradongchu 1987 and Doklam, the Chinese continue to think that it is still 1962!

India China relations must become a non- zero-sum game and a 'realist' conflict instead of an ideological one.

Once we take out the 'nationalism' out of dispute and China dumps baggage of history of 1962, give and take is possible. Do we have the courage to escape the trap of history?

BRICS Gets Bigger. What Does India Want?

By Savio Rodrigues

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The US-Iran war has put to test BRICS' ability to function as a geopolitical grouping rather than merely an economic forum. India lies in a tricky position, with strategic interests in maintaining relations with both Washington and Tehran. Despite Iran and Russia being broadly hostile towards the Western order, India cannot outrightly endorse an anti-US position within the BRICS framework. At the same time, the presence of several anti-Western countries creates pressure on the grouping to take a stronger collective position against the US and Israel. The failure of the May 2026 BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting also highlighted the difficulty of translating the grouping's broad political positions into a unified response to complex geopolitical conflict.

This raises a larger question about what BRICS actually seeks to become. The grouping is often projected as a potential alternative to the Western-led international order. However, the growing differences among its members make such an outcome difficult. BRICS is better understood as a platform through which non-Western powers negotiate their interests, rather than as an alternative bloc capable of replacing the Western order. Its growing membership gives it greater economic and political weight, but also makes consensus more difficult.

The joining of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates gives BRICS additional geographic and strategic depth and makes it more representative of the Global South. However, a fundamental contradiction also arises. The more representative BRICS becomes, potentially the less cohesive it becomes.

Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE have their own regional rivalries, while China and India remain strategic competitors. The expanded grouping therefore brings together greater resources and capabilities, but also more divergent interests. This makes BRICS useful for promoting Global South cooperation, but less likely to develop into a cohesive political or economic bloc capable of directly challenging the Western order.

One of the biggest ambitions associated with BRICS is reducing dependence on the US dollar. The present approach focuses on trade in local currencies, alternative payment mechanisms and common institutions such as the New Development Bank. However, replacing the dollar remains a distant prospect. BRICS does not have a common monetary policy, central bank or financial market. Its members also have significantly different economic and financial systems and do not share common economic interests. Therefore, reducing dependence on the dollar may be realistic, but the formation of a BRICS currency and its replacement of the dollar as the dominant global currency remains largely hypothetical.

BRICS is also no longer limited to geopolitics and security. Its agenda increasingly covers trade, investment, development finance, energy, food security, healthcare, climate change and technology. The New Development Bank provides financing for infrastructure and sustainable development projects, while members are also discussing greater use of local currencies, payment mechanisms and financial cooperation. Technology and innovation are becoming important areas of cooperation, including artificial intelligence, digital public infrastructure, connectivity, critical minerals and energy transition. These areas give BRICS relevance even when its members cannot agree on major foreign policy issues.

For India, this wider agenda makes BRICS particularly important. It provides New Delhi with a platform to engage major emerging economies while maintaining strategic autonomy. India can engage Russia, China, Iran and other non-Western powers through the same platform without becoming part of a formal anti-Western bloc. At the same time, India can continue to deepen its partnerships with the United States, Europe, Japan and the QUAD. This flexibility becomes increasingly important as competition between major power centres intensifies.

BRICS also supports India's ambition to play a larger role in the Global South. India can use the grouping to push for reform of global financial institutions, greater representation for developing countries, technology access, climate finance and development. The expanded grouping also opens opportunities in energy, trade, critical minerals, manufacturing and supply-chain diversification. For India, BRICS is therefore not simply about countering the West or balancing China. It is about giving India another platform to shape the emerging global order on its own terms.

China and India, representing nearly half of the world's population and a significant share of the global economy, give BRICS enormous weight, particularly if the two largest Asian powers can agree on common issues such as greater representation for the Global South. BRICS also provides India a platform to engage China without making the relationship entirely bilateral. Despite differences over the border, regional influence and the Indo-Pacific, continued engagement through platforms such as BRICS and the SCO keeps channels open. However, if India and China disagree on something fundamental, BRICS cannot magically overcome that rivalry. The US-Iran conflict demonstrates this problem, with the grouping struggling to produce a unified position despite its growing geopolitical weight.

BRICS remains relatively more strategically relevant to India than the SCO because of its wider representation of the Global South and its economic, political and global reach. The SCO remains more focused on Eurasian security, terrorism and regional stability, where India faces difficult equations with both China and Pakistan.

BRICS gives India greater space to engage countries such as Brazil, South Africa, Egypt, the UAE, Iran and Indonesia while balancing its ties with Russia and China on a non- Western platform. The SCO remains important as a regional security mechanism, but BRICS offers India a broader platform for strategic autonomy and global influence.

The relevance of BRICS, therefore, may not lie in its ability to replace the Western order. Its greater value lies in providing countries with different strategic interests a platform to negotiate, cooperate and pursue common interests. For India, this flexibility is particularly important. BRICS allows New Delhi to engage competing powers, represent Global South interests and pursue economic and technological opportunities without giving up its strategic partnerships elsewhere. In an increasingly divided world, BRICS may be most useful not as another rigid geopolitical bloc, but as a platform that allows India to shape the emerging global order on its own terms.

GenZ and Wakeup Call to Dynasties—

By - Dr. Shivshankar Mishra

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Emergent technologies are always seen as triggers of major changes, sometimes leading to critical societal upheavals. Events of 2024-26 prove the same. Actor-turned- politician Chandrasekaran Joseph Vijay formed a regional political party in Tamil Nadu in February 2024, the 'Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam' (TVK). Two years later in 2026, he decided to enter the election fray scheduled for April 23, 2026. A month before that he launched a high-stake digital campaign on March 30, 2026 and employed high-impact tech-drivers and without much mingling with the electorate, within a space of under one month, won the election and formed his government. It happened to be the first-ever AI-driven digital campaign on social media that helped win an election in India's electoral history. It has become a landmark. All political parties were stunned. On side-lines was a studious group that was intently watching the Tamil story board, how the public mood was shaped almost entirely with the help of social media. This cohort is highly talented drawn from specialized fields of media, technology, law and public policy advocacy, consisted of Abhijeet Dipke, holding Master's degree in Public Relations from Boston University; Saurav Das an investigative journalist; Ashutosh Ranka a Kanpur IITian with added degree from London School of Economics and Politics; and Ankit Bharadwaj a practicing CA.

They all have been keen students of political events and the triggers that work to create an impact. They had already studied such events precursing the Tamil episode, in historical perspective, beginning from the time range of the turn of 20th century; how the turbulent happenings heralded the impactful changes to alter the course of human history and geography; the most innocuous looking small triggers creating big impact – assassination of an obscure Austrian prince triggered the World War I; the personal prejudice of a corporal culminated in the holocaust killing more than a million innocent people during WWII; the floral and the aromatic revolutions in Arab world during 2003-2011. The most peculiar commonality in Arab Springs was that they had their symbolic identity like color or flower as mascots to unify the crowds; they were youth-student-led, peaceful, non-violent agitations of civil resistance with sit-ins, protests against some core grievances of joblessness, rising prices, corruption and political alienation.

The same issues had ignited the popular resent in the South Asian countries of Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangla Desh also. The common thread that runs through is the exhausting frustration against corruption, neglect of youth and women.

Fifteen years ago in 2011, a similar non-violent anti-corruption movement was organized at Jantar Mantar in Delhi under the leadership of Anna Hazare. He was demanding creation of an ombudsman law to check corruption in public places. Fifteen years since has returned a similar anti-corruption agitation at the same place with similar non-violent methods under the leadership of Abhijeet Dipke. The difference is the leader then was semi-literate whereas the present leader is highly qualified fully immersed in the new digi-culture of the time and social media; then it was only internet; both being the fast ways of communication of their time. The former agitation was joined by all general public. The present movement was triggered by the exposure of structural failures surrounding the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET-UG). Leftist outfits like the Students' Federation of India (SFI), the All-India Students Association (AISA), the All-India Students Federation (AISF), and the youth-wing Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) took up the issue to agitate against the government machinery controlling these tests and examinations. They organized dharna, protests and march on Parliament from Jantar Mantar. This subtly helped in altering mainstream opposition dynamics to support the youth. NEET exam scandal officially emerged on May 5, 2024 and cacophony began. Political parties and parents became vocal on media channels. It provided the organizational backbone and visual language for the historic demonstrations by CJP later; most notably the prolonged sit-in at Jantar Mantar.

Emergence of CJP has had an interesting trigger in a remark by the CJI on May 15, 2026 that ignited an instinct in Abhijeet Dipke, a political communications strategist to tweet back to say "What if...?", and the exhausted and burnt out GenZ, hugely responded on line. Overwhelmed, Dipke didn't waste time and on the very next day on 16 May 2026, he founded the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP). It is said to be by-and-for GenZ whose language and tone is peculiar; contorted phrases looking like parody but with sincerity. Their jokes land because of common frustration about jobs, sense of inequality, rampant corruption all around and political alienation. On the threshold of their adulthood, they find that education no longer guarantees stability in their life. CJP should not be seen as a sudden offspring of a momentous event but a well-planned strategic move of the group-of-4. CJI's outburst gave it its symbol and the NEET Exam a trigger but the opportunity was watched.

It is immaterial for this movement whether Sonam Wangchuk endorses it or Tushar Gandhi; important is the reforms agenda that is emerging from it. Education and exams reforms are one issue, vital are others. Within education is the critical most issue CJP has picked up; the schools reforms. The scope is sure to expand beyond this. Not only GenZ but other groups are on alert. Things after this are not going to be the same. Issues of dynastic rules and corruption are going to be the high points. The quartet of Education-Employment-Public Health-Corruption is going to present a challenging agenda for all political parties to address. One who does best shall represent the republic.

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India is Proud of:

Umakant Kadia

First martyr of Quit India Movement: this young RSS member refused to bow down in front of British tyranny and laid down his life



Umakant Kadia and his memorial in Khadia, Ahmedabad

This year on 15th August, India celebrated its 79th Independence Day. It is because of a sustained freedom movement and the sacrifices of lakhs of freedom fighters that we are able to see this day. While the names of many such freedom fighters found a place in history, several others remained anonymous.

One of the major freedom movements launched was the 'Quit India Movement' in 1942. The movement started in 1942 after Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi called it and was a major turning point in India's freedom struggle. The British made every possible effort to suppress this movement, in which thousands of innocent Indians sacrificed their lives. The first martyr of this Quit India Movement was Umakant Kadia of Ahmedabad. He was a volunteer of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

In 1942, on one hand, the Second World War was going on, and on the other hand, Mohandas Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement against the British in the Congress session held in Bombay on August 8, 1942. As soon as the movement was launched, Indians started countrywide demonstrations against the British government. The British government, as usual, put all the top Indian leaders in jail and used unprecedented force to suppress the movement.

After Gandhi announced 'Quit India' in Bombay on 8th August, its impact was felt across the country, including Ahmedabad in Gujarat. On the morning of 9th August, the British government started arresting Indian leaders in Ahmedabad. However, the protests still took place with marches taking place at various places. To suppress this protest, the police started using force on the orders of the British government and even opened fire.

21-year-old Umakant Kadia, who lived in Dariyapur, was the Mukhya Shikshak of a Shakha of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Remembering him, volunteers who had worked at his Shakha say that Umakant was fully committed to the ideology of the RSS and was devoted to the work of the Shakha.

When the protest started on 9th August, Umakant was at the forefront of the crowd of protestors. The police opened fire to disperse the crowd. Someone from the crowd warned Umakant that why are you moving forward, but Umakant kept moving forward. A bullet fired by the police then hit him directly on the forehead as Umakant made the supreme sacrifice.

Years later, a memorial was built in the Khadia area, in Ahmedabad, where the incident took place. The memorial says that Umakant Motiram Kadia attained martyrdom here. He was the first martyr of the Quit India Movement.

The British government's repression continued even after the incident. The next day, the students of Law College held a rally in the area. When the rally reached Gujarat College, other students also joined in. The police started a lathi-charge to disperse the rally. As the students hoisted the Indian flag, a British officer shot a young man named Vinod Kinariwala.

Umakant Kadia who sacrificed his life on 9th August, and Vinod Kinariwala who did it on 10th August, became heroes of the movement in two days. This is the reason Umakant is known as the 'First Balidani'.

The sacrifice of Umakant Kadia shatters the propaganda of the Congress and the Left against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Contrary to the baseless claim that the RSS did not contribute to India's independence, the truth is that many such volunteers played a vital role in the Indian freedom struggle, and many RSS members like Umakant made the supreme sacrifices, but they were forgotten by history, which was written years later.

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