

INDIA-AFRICA-UAE TRILATERAL TIES: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

Countdown to BRICS 2026: The India-Africa-UAE Trilateral

An emerging India-Africa-UAE trilateral framework aims to leverage strong bilateral ties to enhance South-South cooperation in trade, investment, and technology. This partnership seeks to build resilient, diversified supply chains, offering an alternative to Western- or China-centric economic models.

Context and Background

Current Impetus

The upcoming BRICS 2026 Summit in India and the recent expansion of the BRICS group to include new members like the UAE, Egypt, and Ethiopia are providing fresh momentum for a stronger India-Africa-UAE (IAU) trilateral framework.

Core Concept

The IAU trilateral partnership is an evolving idea centered on boosting economic cooperation and connectivity. The primary focus is on trade, investment, and infrastructure development across the three regions.

Foundational Steps

The groundwork was laid in 2019 when India and the UAE signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on development cooperation in Africa. A significant recent initiative is the Bharat Africa Setu, conceptualized in 2025. This trade ecosystem, launched by India and the UAE's DP World, aims to double India-Africa trade by leveraging integrated logistics, export financing, and certification services.

Analysis of Existing Bilateral Ties

India and the UAE

The two nations signed a landmark Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2022.

1. Aim: To increase annual non-oil trade to US\$ 100 billion by 2027.
2. Progress: Bilateral trade has already reached US\$ 57.8 billion in non-oil trade (US\$ 85 billion including oil).
3. Key Sectors: The CEPA has unlocked cooperation in numerous fields, including renewable energy, civil nuclear energy, fintech, logistics, food security, critical minerals, and space technology.

The UAE and Africa

Gulf countries invested over US\$ 100 billion in Africa between 2012 and 2022, with the UAE being the leading investor. The UAE's investments in Africa now surpass those of major global players like China, France, and the UK. Investment has diversified beyond traditional sectors into high-growth areas like food parks, agritech, fintech, and renewable energy. The UAE is also actively supporting new economic zones, such as the digital incubator ecosystem in Ghana.

India and Africa

India shares deep-rooted cultural and historical ties with many African nations. However, current trade levels are modest, with Africa accounting for only 6% of India's exports and 5.6% of its imports.

Demographic Synergy

The two regions have complementary demographic futures. India's demographic dividend is set to peak around 2041, just as Africa's is rising. By 2050, over 60% of Africa's population will be of working age, positioning it as the next major global growth hub.

Pillars of the IAU Trilateral Cooperation

Industrial and Technological Cooperation

Investment and Financing Collaboration

Research, Vocational, and Academic Partnerships

Strategic and Geopolitical Significance

The IAU trilateral presents a fresh model of South-South cooperation, showcasing how emerging economies can collaborate to shape global governance and development narratives.

By creating new, diversified trade and connectivity routes, the partnership helps reduce excessive reliance on Western-dominated or China-centric supply chains, making the regions less vulnerable to global disruptions.

The framework allows the three regions to work together on shared security challenges, including maritime safety in the Indian Ocean, as well as in emerging domains like cyber defense and counter-terrorism.

Economic Asymmetries

Bridging the significant development and economic gaps between a high-income country like the UAE and some less-developed African nations.

Aligning the diverse governance models, bureaucratic systems, and policy priorities of the partner countries.

Ensuring the IAU framework remains impactful and visible amidst a crowded landscape of international forums like the G20, IPEF, and ASEAN.

Overcoming the immense financing and coordination hurdles required for large-scale infrastructure and connectivity projects that span three continents.

Source: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/countdown-to-brics-2026-the-india-africa-uae-trilateral#:~:text=At%20a%20time%20when%20the,are%20grounded%20in%20mutual%>