

CSIR Diplomatic Insights

2nd BRICS Culture Working Group Meeting, Varanasi

(4–5 June 2026)

The 2nd BRICS Culture Working Group (CWG) Meeting, held in Varanasi on 4–5 June 2026 under India's presidency, concluded with a strengthened multilateral consensus on advancing cultural cooperation within the BRICS framework. Discussions were structured around three strategic pillars consistent with India's BRICS 2026 theme, “Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability.” At a time when international cooperation is increasingly shaped not only by political and economic interests but also by cultural exchanges and people-to-people engagement, the meeting highlighted India's efforts to position culture as a vital pillar of Global South cooperation. The choice of Varanasi—one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities and a living symbol of India's civilisational heritage—carried profound diplomatic significance. By hosting delegates in a city that reflects India's spiritual traditions, cultural diversity, and historical continuity, India not only showcased its rich civilisational identity but also reinforced its role as a cultural bridge connecting emerging powers through dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared heritage. India has consistently played a proactive role in strengthening cultural cooperation within BRICS, recognizing culture as an important instrument of diplomacy, people-to-people engagement, and sustainable development. During its previous BRICS presidencies, India hosted the Meetings of BRICS Ministers of Culture in Goa (2016) and New Delhi (2021), where member states emphasized cultural exchanges, heritage conservation, and cooperation among cultural institutions.

The June 2026 meeting reflected an evolving understanding of cultural diplomacy that extends beyond traditional cultural exchanges. Discussions on the creative economy, people-to-people cooperation, ethical Artificial Intelligence, copyright protection, and heritage preservation demonstrated how culture is increasingly interconnected with innovation, sustainable development, digital governance, and international partnerships. In this context, the meeting illustrated India's efforts to position culture as a strategic instrument for strengthening international cooperation and fostering a more inclusive and multipolar global order. It also served as an important platform for advancing India's cultural diplomacy and soft power objectives, while simultaneously promoting its broader vision of Global South solidarity, mutual understanding, and inclusive international cooperation.

Major Outcomes:

- **Strengthening Cultural Diplomacy within BRICS:** The meeting reaffirmed culture as a key pillar of BRICS cooperation and contributed to the strengthening of intercultural dialogue among member states.
- **Enhanced People-to-People Connectivity:** Delegates emphasized the importance of cultural exchanges, academic collaboration, and societal engagement as essential foundations for building long-term international partnerships.
- **Recognition of the Creative Economy:** The meeting acknowledged the growing significance of cultural and creative industries in fostering innovation, generating employment, and promoting sustainable economic development.
- **Advancing Cooperation on Ethical AI and Copyright Governance:** A broad consensus emerged on the need for enhanced cooperation in the

areas of intellectual property protection, cultural attribution, and the ethical governance of Artificial Intelligence within the creative sector.

- **Strengthened Heritage Cooperation:** Member states expressed support for deeper collaboration in the preservation of cultural heritage and in efforts to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural property.
- **Enhanced India's Soft Power Projection:** Through the strategic use of Varanasi's civilisational heritage and cultural initiatives such as Colours of India, India effectively reinforced its cultural influence and demonstrated leadership within BRICS and the broader Global South.

Conclusion:

The outcomes of the BRICS Culture Working Group Meeting reaffirmed that culture can serve as a powerful bridge for dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding among diverse societies. By promoting people-to-people connectivity, heritage preservation, creative economy partnerships, and collaborative approaches to emerging challenges such as ethical Artificial Intelligence, the meeting reflected the ancient Indian ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—the belief that the world is one family. In this sense, the Varanasi meeting demonstrated how cultural diplomacy can strengthen international partnerships through shared values, mutual respect, and enduring human connections, while contributing to a more inclusive and cooperative global order. Overall, the discussions highlighted the growing recognition of culture not merely as a repository of heritage, but as a strategic resource for sustainable development, social cohesion, and international cooperation, reinforcing the imperative to integrate cultural dimensions into the evolving global development framework beyond 2030.