

Last week, while much of Brazil's attention was fixed on the usual churn of domestic issues, our Communications Minister, Frederico de Siqueira Filho, signed a document in Pune, India, that deserves far more attention at home than it has received. Alongside his Indian counterpart, Jyotiraditya Scindia, on the sidelines of the 12th BRICS Communications Ministers' Meeting, Brazil and India signed a Memorandum of Understanding on telecommunications and information technology. On paper, it is a modest bureaucratic instrument — a framework for dialogue, not a check with a number on it. In substance, it is the clearest evidence yet that Brazil has found, in India, a partner that understands something essential about our own development story: that connectivity is not a luxury for the privileged, but the precondition for everything else a modern state wants to deliver to its people.

I have long argued that Brazil should spend most of its time looking toward the other giants of the Global South who share our particular burden: enormous size, staggering internal diversity, and vast stretches of territory that the market, left to its own devices, will never bother to connect. India is exactly such a giant. So is Brazil. That shared condition, more than any romantic notion of BRICS solidarity, is what makes this agreement worth taking seriously.

Two Countries, One Geography Problem

Strip away the diplomatic language and the MoU is really about a single, stubborn problem: how do you bring reliable digital infrastructure to a population spread across an area too vast and too physically demanding for any one operator, or even any one government, to solve alone? Brazil knows this problem intimately. We are, after all, the country attempting to lay something on the order of 40,000 kilometers of fiber through the Amazon, backed by roughly half a billion dollars, in a basin where rivers substitute for roads and the rainy season substitutes for logistics planning. India knows this problem too, at a scale that dwarfs ours — through BharatNet, its own sprawling rural fiber initiative, and through a digital public

infrastructure program that has become the envy of finance ministries around the world.

What the new MoU does is create a formal channel for these two efforts to talk to each other. The agreement's language is broad by design: it touches telecom policy and spectrum management, fifth- and sixth-generation networks, Open RAN, the Internet of Things, low-earth-orbit satellites and non-terrestrial networks, submarine cables, cybersecurity, and — crucially — digital public infrastructure. Read as a checklist, it can look like the kind of everything-and-the-kitchen-sink document that governments sign to generate a headline. Read as a strategy, it looks like something else: an attempt by two continental democracies to stop treating digital infrastructure as something purchased off the shelf from a handful of foreign vendors, and to start treating it as something they can help build, adapt, and govern together.

Sovereignty Without Isolation

There is a word Indian officials use in this context that Brazilian policymakers would do well to borrow: sovereignty. Not sovereignty as autarky, not the fantasy of building everything ourselves behind a wall, but sovereignty as the retained capacity to choose — which vendors to trust, which standards to adopt, how to regulate networks that increasingly carry the nervous system of the state itself. India's enthusiasm for Open RAN and domestically-influenced 5G and 6G standards is not born of hostility to foreign technology; it is born of a hard lesson learned by countries that outsourced too much of their digital backbone and later found themselves with little leverage over it.

Brazil has learned versions of this lesson too, in telecommunications and in other sectors. A structured partnership with India — a country simultaneously friendly with Washington, Moscow, and Beijing, and beholden to none of them in its technology choices — gives Brasília a genuine alternative source of expertise, equipment standards, and diplomatic company. This is not about choosing India over anyone else. It is about Brazil no longer having to

choose between only two or three options in the first place.

Digital Infrastructure as Public Infrastructure

The part of this agreement that ought to interest ordinary Brazilians the most, rather than telecom engineers, is its explicit linkage between connectivity and digital public infrastructure. This is not a new idea for the bilateral relationship — it builds on a 2025 MoU for sharing population-scale digital solutions, and on the Joint Declaration on a “Digital Partnership for the Future” that Presidents Lula and Modi announced in February, when Modi paid his state visit to India... or rather, when Lula received him in New Delhi. What the telecom MoU adds is the missing plumbing: you cannot run a Pix-style payment system, a digital identity program, or a telehealth platform for the interior over a network that does not reach the interior.

India's experience here is not academic. Its Aadhaar digital identity system and its UPI payments rail have been studied, imitated, and in some cases directly exported to other developing nations as templates for leapfrogging decades of financial-infrastructure development. Brazil's own Pix has, in its own right, become one of the most admired instant-payment systems in the world, adopted by tens of millions of Brazilians in a remarkably short span. Neither country needs to be taught these lessons from scratch by the other — what they need, and what this MoU is meant to provide, is a structured forum in which two countries that have each built something genuinely world-class can compare notes on the parts that did not work as well, and on how to extend the parts that did into the corners of their territory that remain unconnected.

A South-South Innovation Corridor

There is also a subtler, longer-term argument for why this matters beyond the specifics of

fiber and spectrum. India and Brazil are two of the loudest voices arguing, in BRICS, in the G20, and in the corridors of the United Nations, that global technology governance cannot simply be dictated by Washington and Brussels, however important those centers remain. But voices need substance behind them to carry weight. A country that can point to a functioning, growing bilateral technology partnership — with pilot projects, shared research, and measurable outcomes rather than only joint declarations — speaks with more authority in those forums than one relying on rhetoric alone.

This is where I would urge some caution, both to readers and to the ministers who signed this document. An MoU is an opening, not an achievement. It commits both governments to talk, to share experience, and to explore opportunities — it does not, in itself, commit a single real to being spent, a single kilometer of cable to being laid, or a single village in Roraima or Amazonas to receiving a signal it did not have before. Brazil has no shortage of experience with international agreements that generated fine communiqués and modest follow-through. The MoU's own language about "exploring mutually beneficial opportunities" is diplomatic shorthand for "we have not yet decided what we are actually going to build."

What Should Come Next

If this agreement is to mean something more than a photograph of two ministers shaking hands in Pune, both governments need to move quickly from framework to work plan. That means naming the specific agencies on each side responsible for follow-through — Anatel and its Indian counterpart, the Department of Telecommunications, would be an obvious starting point. It means identifying two or three concrete pilot projects, ideally ones that touch the Amazon on our side and India's remote northeast or its island territories on the other, where satellite and non-terrestrial network cooperation could be tested at meaningful scale within eighteen months, not five years. And it means building in the kind of cybersecurity cooperation the two countries began exploring in their first bilateral Cyber

Dialogue late last year, since every kilometer of new fiber and every new satellite link is also, inescapably, a new point of vulnerability.

Brazil and India are not natural allies by geography or by colonial history. What binds them is something more useful for a project like this: a shared scale of ambition, a shared burden of internal inequality, and a shared conviction — one this newspaper's readers should recognize from our own domestic debates over Pix, BharatNet's cousin BharatNet, and rural connectivity funds — that digital infrastructure is not a private good to be left to the market, but a public good that determines who gets to participate fully in national life. The MoU signed in Pune is a small, technical document. The relationship it formalizes, if both governments follow through, could end up mattering a great deal more than its modest text suggests.