



Institute of Social Sciences



People's Forum for Multi-Polar World

Conference on
**Promoting BRICS
Multi-dimensional Agenda**

16 July 2024

India International Centre, New Delhi

Report



From Left: Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences; Roman Babushkin, Charge d'Affaires at the Russian Embassy; Kenneth H Da Nobrega, Ambassador of Brazil; Abhishek Singh, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs; Cedric C Crowley, Acting High Commissioner of South Africa, and Wang Lei, Minister, Chinese Embassy in Delhi.

The Institute of Social Sciences and the People's Forum for a Multipolar World organised a conference on “**Promoting BRICS Multilateral Agenda**” on 16 July at the India International Centre, New Delhi. The conference was a follow up of the earlier seminar held on 19 January on the “*Emergence of BRICS Plus and its New Trajectory.*”

Government officials, senior diplomats from Russian, Brazilian, South African and Chinese embassies, strategic thinkers, academics, think tank and civil society representatives, youth organisations and researchers participated in the day-long conference. Shri Abhishek Singh, Joint Secretary (ED and MER), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, was the chief guest.

Ash Narain Roy

Director, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi

Dr Ash Narain Roy, in his welcome address, emphasised the role of think tanks and civil society representatives as they provide an infrastructure of ideas and incentives. Building an inter-governmental organisation “is not a spectator’s sport,” he said. It is “not what governments do; it is what people do.” He further said that joining BRICS is not choosing sides. It is also not a way to counterbalance any other bloc. BRICS has its own vision and a roadmap.

Dr Roy described BRICS as a “*café com leite* (coffee with milk) alliance which is a metaphor for a harmonious blend of two different elements coming together to create something delightful. He further said that BRICS’ tasks are onerous. It must embrace the philosophy of co-becoming and convivialism. He stressed the need for BRICS to innovate as innovation is the calling card of the future.

Abhishek Singh

Joint Secretary (ED, MER), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

The inaugural session was addressed by the chief guest, Shri Abhishek Singh, joint secretary, Ministry of External affairs, Government of India. He said, BRICS primarily has three pillars of cooperation—politics and security, economy, finance, culture and people to people exchanges. Its role cuts across these pillars. BRICS is playing a critical role in areas like economic growth, social and cultural cooperation, sustainable development and environmental initiatives.

Shri Singh said that consensus is an important feature of how BRICS works. “The positions that we have in the BRICS also helps us to navigate these complex times by working together to advance our collective multidimensional agenda.”

India, a staunch advocate of multilateralism, actively participates in global forums including G20, BRICS, United Nations, WTO, and others. Shri Singh underscored India’s efforts to create a more representative and inclusive global governance architecture through its engagements in these multilateral platforms.

Focusing on the socio-cultural dimensions, Shri Singh stressed the importance of enhancing cultural exchange programs, academic collaborations, and people-to-people interactions within BRICS.

These efforts, he noted, go a long way in strengthening intra-BRICS bonds and elevate the global visibility of BRICS.

BRICS countries are home to some of the brightest minds and cutting -edge research institutions. By leveraging our collective expertise, we can drive advancements in science and technology, addressing critical issues such as climate change. healthcare and digital transformation.

India has pioneered some of the global initiatives to address climate change like the International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and Mission Life (Lifestyle for Environment).

“We are a symbol of change, and we should act like it”, Shri Singh concluded.

Roman Babushkin

Charge D' Affaires, Embassy of the Russian Federation

Mr Roman Babushkin began by saying that BRICS is an evolving institution whose geopolitical and political relevance is growing.

We meet today which is exactly half way of the Russian Presidency with the motto, “strengthening multilateralism for just global development and security”. Russia is very proud to be the chair at this particular juncture.

During the last 15 years, we have developed a work culture and an ecosystem to carry our tasks on a bigger scale. One of the biggest challenges is to find solutions and a common ground on complex issues. In the current period of global turbulence, BRICS naturally becomes a centre of gravitation for the Global South.

Although there are some 30 aspirants to join the group, the number of partners should be reasonable and must be endorsed by consensus. That’s why one of the priorities of the Russian presidency this year is to produce relevant recommendations for the next summit in October 2024 in Kazan.

Dozens of important meetings have already taken place under the Russian presidency. Ministerial meetings of foreign affairs, education, environment, agriculture, sports, tourism, transport, space have been held.

Mr Babushkin referred to the newly created nuclear medicine working group. He also mentioned academic ocean and polar science forum. The calendar also includes other important groups like on counter-terrorism, intellectual property rights, climate change, nano technologies, youth summit and cultural festival.

There is also a focus on the promotion of the NDP -sponsored infrastructure projects and reliable payment mechanisms through the use of national currencies as well as the dialogue on digital currency.

Mr Babushkin concluded his address by quoting President Putin who has said that the main task of the Russian presidency is to create the most favourable conditions for all participants to efficiently use BRICS’ economic, investment, technological and human resources collaboration potential, as



A Section of the Audience

well as to strengthen its constructive contribution towards making the world a more secure and harmonious place.

Kenneth H. da Nobrega

Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil

Ambassador Kenneth H da Nobrega began by commending Russia for its efficient and consensus-driven presidency. He said that BRICS' core principles of mutual respect, sovereign equality and collaboration are not empty words, these go a long way in guiding the group's interactions. These principles have helped maintain cohesion during the complex and challenging multilateral negotiations.

The Brazilian ambassador also spoke on the ongoing expansion of BRICS and its potential to diversify economic ties, particularly focusing on energy trade, international finance, environmental issues and supply chain resilience. He expressed a sense of happiness that the expansion has been managed within the framework of consensus, ensuring that new members benefit fully from BRICS participation.

The central theme of BRICS' commitment is reform in multilateral institutions to make them inclusive structures. The ambassador criticized the notion of "efficient multilateralism" proposed by some Western countries, arguing that it should not undermine the principle of inclusive decision-making and the unique needs of developing nations.

He also outlined Brazil's priorities for its upcoming presidency. These include comprehensive reform in multilateral institutions, leveraging the New Development Bank for economic recovery, promoting local currency trade mechanisms, and focusing on combating hunger, poverty, and climate change with principles of climate justice and historical responsibility.

Cedrick C Crowley

Acting High Commissioner of the Republic of South Africa

Mr Cedrick C Crowley began his address by referring to the three pillars of South Africa's foreign policy—South-South co-operation, North-South dialogue and the centrality of multilateralism.

The current rules based international order and its structures favour the Global North, its political and economic interests as well as its values. BRICS can play a significant role in restructuring that order in favour of a more equitable and representative world. This includes reforms across political, economic, security, and people-to-people cooperation.

Referring to the Russian/Ukrainian situation and the Middle East, Mr Crowley said that institutions that were created by these powerful countries are seemingly forgetting the mandate of these important structures. Even the Security Council resolutions are not binding. The ICJ and ICC decisions are openly violated. Quoting the UN Secretary General, he said that multilateralism is “not working for anyone”.

The reforms that we want should not only benefit all five countries or BRICS members, these have to be inclusive as well.

BRICS is important in terms of dispersing power so that we have a more equitable distribution thereof, but it is not there to replace any global institution. It is there to strengthen the institutions of global governance.

Mr. Crowley clarified that BRICS aims to strengthen global institutions rather than replace them, advocating for a more inclusive approach to global governance. He hoped that the Summit for the Future, convened by the UN Secretary General gives effect to the vision of the Secretary General of a multipolar, reformed world, with the UN at its centre.

Wang Lei

Minister, Embassy of the People's Republic of China

Mr Wang Lei strongly argued that a couple of Western countries cannot monopolize the world order, rule-making and global narrative. The voice of the Global South must count. The emerging markets and developing countries are on the rise. Many countries in the Global South have embarked on the fast track of development. BRICS countries choose their own development paths and pursue an independent foreign policy. They are a positive, stable, and constructive force in international affairs.

In June this year, President Xi Jinping addressed a conference marking the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. He expounded on the essence of the Panchsheel and its relevance for our times to the direction of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

China is ready to join hands with BRICS partners with a more open, inclusive mindset to implement the global security initiative, the global development initiative, and the global civilization initiative. We should be the staunch force for peace, the driving force for open development, a constructive force of global governance, and the advocates for exchanges among civilizations. It is important that we strengthen coordination on international agenda, including the UN Summit of the Future and the UN's 80th anniversary. On the Ukraine crisis, China is committed to peace and dialogue. We support an international peace conference to be held at the proper time that is recognized by both Russia and Ukraine. On the Palestinian question, we must push for an immediate, comprehensive, and lasting ceasefire. Only a two- state solution at an early date will lead to a lasting peace in the Middle East.

BRICS countries consist of major importers and exporters of commodities such as oil, wheat and soybean. Mr Wang Lei concluded his address by asserting that BRICS countries must work to ensure secure and smooth functioning of global supply and industrial chains, and firmly oppose decoupling, disruptions, and unilateral sanctions.

Working Session 1

Perspectives on BRICS' multi-dimensional agenda

Chair: Deepak Bhojwani

Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Ananta Centre, New Delhi

Ambassador Bhojwani, chair of the session, said that BRICS countries like Russia, Brazil, China, India and South Africa are no small powers. They may be middle powers but they are global powers in their own right. New members like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, and UAE make a tremendous mix of very resource rich and also cash- rich nations which are politically stable and will add weight to the voice of the emerging world.

Ambassador Bhojwani further added that the main aspect of BRICS' appeal is its inclusivity. It doesn't ask questions of its participants which may be unfair. It also doesn't expect what they cannot give. It pools all the resources and the strengths of all these partners and forms one cohesive whole. Apart from political aspect, it also enables cooperation on various aspects, whether it is on global challenges like climate change, terrorism and so on, or in terms of economic development in terms of energy, trade currency balancing and so forth.

There is a tremendous amount of inner working that goes into its utility as well as the fact that BRICS as a group presents a massive political force in global affairs.



From Left: Dr. Anuradha Chenoy, Adjunct Professor, Jindal Global University; Dr. Manpreet Sethi, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies; Ambassador Deepak Bhojwani, Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Ananta Centre, New Delhi; Prof. V. Upadhyay, S K Dey Chair-professor, ISS and Dr. Niranjana Sahoo, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation

Anuradha Chenoy

Adjunct Professor, Jindal Global University

In the current geopolitics, BRICS is an institution of great importance. The significance of the BRICS Summit in Kazan should be seen in the context of the 75th anniversary of NATO and its declaration. The global NATO is no longer the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It has proclaimed itself as global and its focus is on the Indo-Pacific and on rearmament.

BRICS vision stands out as a contrast. It is based on protecting national sovereignty, inclusiveness and it opposes hegemony.

Professor Chenoy explained that multipolarity is a dispersal and redistribution of global power centres, which is actually being resisted by those who are arguing for a continuation of the status quo or unipolarity. BRICS' vision prioritises reform in multilateral institutions, which should be made inclusive. It also stands for setting up its own kind of multilateral institutions. In contrast with a liberal order, BRICS stands for respecting and strengthening international law. BRICS is not alliance-based. It is not against any other. It does not have a list of threats, as was in the joint declaration of NATO. BRICS is not only expanding fast, it is undertaking fastest institutionalisation. It has also taken many common geopolitical positions.

She further said that BRICS' attractiveness lies in its alternative to the Cold War dynamics, offering space for Global South countries to have a voice in global governance.

Many countries are drawn to BRICS due to their historical exclusion from dominant multilateral institutions and the perception of BRICS as a more inclusive and development-oriented platform. BRICS is a significant force in shaping global governance, offering an alternative vision to Western-led institutions and advocating for a more balanced and inclusive international order.

Manpreet Sethi

Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies

Dr. Manpreet Sethi focused more on the energy dynamics within BRICS and its expanded version. BRICS countries, hosting 40% of the world's population, are major players in global energy production and consumption. They face challenges due to their reliance on fossil fuels, which contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, exacerbating climate change.

Dr. Sethi highlighted the potential for cooperation among BRICS nations in energy research and technology. The BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform, established in 2018, facilitates collaborative efforts in developing sustainable energy solutions and technologies.

Highlighting substantial growth in renewable energy adoption among BRICS countries, particularly in solar and wind power, she stated that China leads in renewable energy production, followed by significant efforts in India. Recognising contributions of all BRICS members, she shared how each member brings unique strengths to the table.

Russia and China excel in nuclear technology, while India focuses on renewable energy expansion. South Africa is pioneering clean coal technologies, offering diverse capabilities to reduce fossil fuel dependency collectively.

The conference indeed served as a pivotal platform for advancing dialogue and cooperation among BRICS nations, reaffirming their collective commitment to promoting a multipolar world order based on mutual respect and shared prosperity. It is a living testament to the fact that stakeholders remain dedicated to leveraging the strengths of the BRICS partnership to address global challenges and contribute meaningfully to international peace and security.

V Upadhyay

S K Dey Chair-professor, ISS

There are some recent geo-economic and geopolitical developments which open up favourable opportunities for India and other countries of the Global south to exploit their potential. These include: new trade possibilities in the Eurasian region, increasing use of local currencies in trade and other international settlements, and the possibility of BRICS countries developing a new global financial infrastructure as an alternative to the US dollar-based system.

India, Russia and China are the major countries in BRICS and a sound and cooperative relationship between them is vital for BRICS' strength and growth. The trade volumes between India and China as well as between India and Russia are quite high. In the recent years, connectivity issues between the

countries in the Eurasian region have become the main focus areas of the SCO's activities. At the 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit held recently, the leaders of the two countries issued a cooperation statement on connectivity projects in Russia's far east.

In the past few years, many countries are making attempts towards de-dollarization of their economies. Central banks around the world are reducing the share of US dollar assets of their total reserves. These banks are making substantial increase in their gold stocks.

Niranjan Sahoo

Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation

BRICS is nearing two decades of its institutional foundation. It has made impressive strides in many areas. It has created a New Development Bank with \$ 50 billion funds along with a crucial Contingency Reserve Fund to assist countries facing fiscal crises. There are efforts to create a common currency and give a further push to de-dollarisation.

As BRICS enters a crucial stage of its journey with the addition of five more members including some of the oil-rich nations from Middle East to Africa, this fledgling plurilateral grouping has acquired greater geopolitical salience.

Given the many challenges, BRICS needs to create new sets of institutions and arrangements to address pressing issues of governance/weak state capacity, security issues including cross-border infiltration, terror financing issues such as narco-terrorism, drug trafficking counterfeit currency among others.

To strengthen security cooperation, BRICS can create a convergence point with SCO (given that prominent members are present in both the groupings) which has developed a robust framework on this.

Finally, BRICS can reinvigorate global multilateralism on crucial issues of critical minerals, emerging technology, climate finance, renewables/energy security among others.

Working Session 2

Culture, Youth and People to People Cooperation

Elena Remizova

Director, Russian House, Delhi

Speaking about cultural interaction within the BRICS members, Dr. Remizova said that the format of the association is unique in its essence. It is a platform for a respectful dialogue among various cultures and civilizations, without the desire for thoughtless unification.

What the West is seeking to impose is vulgar globalization and uni-directional process, with the flow of goods and ideas moving in one direction. The world has rejected Western powers' efforts to pass off obscene consumerism as universal value.



From Left: Dr. Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences; Dr. Usha K B, Professor, Centre for Russian and Central Asian studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University; Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty, Former Professor, Delhi University; Dr. Elena Remizova, Director, Russian House, New Delhi; Dr. Rakesh Rafiq, Gandhian Thinker and Mr. Tarun Kumar, National Coordinator, PFMW.

Today we are focused on strengthening our cultural identity and preserving historical memory. It is the cultural diversity that is the key to a successful and stable future.

Usha K B

Professor, Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, JNU

The global majority remains marginalised in the existing global governance system. The Global North produces winners and losers. It pursues strategies of regime change, colour revolution, NATO enlargement and invasion, and uni-lateral sanctions without UN approval.

Culture and people-to-people interactions are essential pillars in BRICS' projection of multipolarity. BRICS already has many platforms for promoting culture and understanding, such as the BRICS Parliamentary Forum, BRICS Film Festival, BRICS Youth Summit, BRICS Academic Forum, BRICS Games, etc.

BRICS countries have taken several initiatives. But there is a long way to go to achieve the desired goals. There are many challenges to address. Nevertheless, BRICS provides hope to create an alternative platform for a multipolar world.

It is imperative to promote soft power and cultural diplomacy. India, "fulcrum of the 21st century" in the words of Henry Kissinger, can play a very positive and balancing role in BRICS's efforts to build a multipolar world thanks to its civilisational values, cultural resources, rising economic power, geopolitical significance and strategic autonomy.

Rakesh Rafiq

Gandhian Thinker

Dr Rakesh Rafiq, Gandhian thinker, said that the liberal international order created by the US-led West is crumbling. It was flawed from the beginning and was destined to fail.

Reasons are not hard to find. The West-led liberal order has privileged international institutions over domestic considerations. Such imposition clashes with nationalism over key issues such as sovereignty and nationalism.

The rise and growing clout of the Global South has created spaces for decolonising not just Western knowledge systems but also culture.

Tarun Kumar

National coordinator, People's forum for multipolar world

BRICS countries have the youngest demography. The youth is worst affected by the local and global crises whether it is unemployment, climate crisis and energy sustainability. The challenges facing the Global South are even more acute. The young generation is the victim of widening generational wealth gap and suffer from debt burden. He also spoke on undemocratic WTO processes.

But there is hope. They are the ones who are the change makers and who raise voice for multipolarity.

Prof Manoranjan Mohanty, Distinguished Professor, Council for Social Development, chaired the session.





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- Founding Statement, 28 August 1985