



BRICS Facing Identity Crisis; Chinese Aggression, Pandemic Add To Woes

Bilateral And Multilateral Ties Also Affected By Rising Threat To Concept Of A Multipolar World

By Dr. Raj Kumar Sharma

India will be hosting the 13th BRICS summit in 2021 as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. The BRICS is mainly projected as a grouping of fast-emerging economies with huge market potential.

The 12th BRICS Summit was held virtually amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, hosted by Russia on November 17, 2020 on the theme 'Global Stability, Shared Security and Innovative Growth'. Economy and counter-terrorism were the two key themes at the summit and two declarations were adopted – BRICS Economic Partnership Strategy 2025 and BRICS Counter-terrorism Strategy. The economic partnership focuses on areas like trade, investment, finance, digital economy and sustainable development while the counter-terrorism strategy condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It calls upon the BRICS nations to strengthen cooperation to fight terrorism through groupings like the UN, G20 and FATF. Two areas would continue to be high on India's priority – UNSC reform and terrorism in multilateral forums including BRICS.

It is important to mention that in 2012, India, as the chair of BRICS, introduced security in BRICS agenda as the theme of New Delhi Summit was 'BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Security and Prosperity'.

The BRICS countries have been able to take certain strides in terms of economic cooperation as evidenced by creation of the New Development Bank in 2014. Amidst differences over their policies on terrorism, it has to be seen how BRICS nations cooperate to counter this critical problem that affects humanity across the world.

The latest BRICS summit was held at a time when the world is



Buenos Aires: Leaders of the BRICS nations - Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Brazilian President Michel Temer, Chinese president Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin and South African President Cyril Maraphosa poses for a group photo on the sidelines of the 13th G20 Summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina on Nov 30, 2018. (Photo: IANS/PIB)

moving towards a new bipolarity between the US and China. BRICS countries have been supporting multi-polarity at the global level and intensification of US-China rivalry could make it difficult for them to maintain good relations with both the rivals. Not to forget, China has violated the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India and dismantled all the bilateral border agreements signed in the last thirty years.

These developments along with the internal contradictions in the BRICS grouping raise questions over the future of BRICS and the 12th summit did not help to tide over the mounting identity crisis for the grouping. Over the years, the economic rationale behind the BRICS grouping has been constantly questioned by experts. The COVID-19 pandemic might change that perception as a slowdown is the likely scenario in BRICS countries barring China. Brazil, Russia and India

are among the top COVID-19 infected nations. In fact, BRICS economies were sluggish even before the pandemic and the trend is likely to continue. The economic basis to keep BRICS intact is likely to face severe strains.

President Putin highlighted potential cooperation between Russia, India and China over vaccine development and distribution while President Xi also expressed willingness to cooperate in this area with other BRICS members. However, a coordinated effort from all the members still remains elusive and bilateral route remains the preferred choice.

Brazil has recently accused China of not being transparent on COVID-19 vaccine emergency use. As the NDB set a new example of South-South cooperation and economic governance, a vaccine coming out of BRICS would have added to its credibility and soft power as wealthy countries have secured the lion's share in vaccines that have shown prom-

ise to fight COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have deepened the fissures in the BRICS grouping instead of bringing them together and China's cartographic adventurism has alienated fellow BRICS members like India. India and Brazil have been cultivating deep ties with the US while China's image has taken a hit this year due to its initial mishandling of the Coronavirus in Wuhan last year. India does not have big trade ties with BRICS nations except China and as the trend suggests, India would be making efforts to decouple its economy from China in coming years.

Chinese investments would be subjected to increased scrutiny as well. This does not bode well for BRICS, a grouping that is now struggling to find a common identity.

So far, there was an understanding among the BRICS members that bilateral issues would not impact their thinking on global and

regional issues but this is likely to change as China's aggressive posturing along Indian borders has fundamentally altered the nature of India-China engagement not only at the bilateral but multilateral level also. However, the BRICS members would continue to search for areas of mutual cooperation and India's new thinking on BRICS would be reflected this year as it takes up the chair for 2021.



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Diminishing Stature For Pakistan In The Middle East

NEW DELHI: India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar recently returned to the country last week after a successful visit to Qatar, the seventh such high-level visit from India to West Asia amid the Covid-19 pandemic in the last four months.

Before this, the visit of Indian Army chief General MM Naravane to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia in early December had garnered considerable attention, and was seen as 'historic' and 'a new leaf' in the India-Gulf countries' relations.

Some would also surmise that recent frostiness in Pakistan's relations with the Gulf countries, and the former's pathological obsession with India further cementing Pakistan's 'failed state' situation, may have something to do with these new developments.

Combined with India's emergence as one of the key players in the geopolitical landscape in the Indian Ocean Region completes the picture.

India was invited as a guest of honour by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and a strong speech by then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to the grouping at Abu Dhabi.

The irony should not escape us that Pakistan, with over seven decades of close ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, had moved heaven and earth to stall India's participation. The present government in

Pakistan has been in power for over two years under the shaky leadership of Imran Khan Niazi. During his victory speech in August 2018, Niazi boasted that Pakistan would play the 'role of a healer' in the Middle East - a statement that would be later proved hollow with his electoral slogan of 'Naya Pakistan'.

Today, Pakistan features only perfunctorily in the requirements of the Gulf nations. "Its GDP is still smaller than the Indian state of Maharashtra," said a senior officer.

This year, while the entire world was grappling with the coronavirus, and Indian teams were closely working with Kuwait and the UAE to battle the pandemic, Pakistan was busy spreading malicious anti-India propaganda in the Middle East by using bots and fake Twitter accounts that spewed venom against India.

This was unequivocally and collectively rejected by many GCC countries, including Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman.

In yet another embarrassing instance, Pakistani workers were banned from entering the UAE in November 2020. The UAE government has cited matters of national security, law and order.

A closer look at the falling Pakistani expat population in GCC countries, indicates that Pakistani nationals are not preferred in any country.