

Is 15th BRICS Summit Laying Stone for the Alternative for G7?

- *Prathap*

More than 40 countries from the Global South have shown interest in joining the BRICS bloc. Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been invited to join as full members from January 2024.

15th BRICS summit was held at Johannesburg, South Africa on 22–24 Aug 2023. For this Brazil, India, China, and South Africa national presidents had attended personally. Russian President Putin attended virtually in the context of arrest warrant issued by the international criminal court (ICC) for Ukraine war. One of the key agenda on this summit is expanding BRICS. All presidents in this bloc agreed on this and invited 6 more countries to join as full members from January 2024. By doubling its number of members from five to 11 in one quick sweep, the BRICS grouping has strengthened its position as a global grouping to be reckoned with. In addition, the choice of countries, bringing in four major players from the West Asian region – Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE – apart from Ethiopia and Argentina from Africa and South America is significant, as it denotes a shift in the non-western economic grouping's underpinnings, to make it a more politically relevant bloc. Apart from this as per the South Africa officials say more than 40 countries from the global south have shown interest in joining the BRICS block. One of the main issues that is forming the backdrop of the expansion-related dialogue at BRICS is Russia's quest to create an alternative to the G-7-driven global political-economic model. This has acquired urgency since the western nations unleashed economic sanctions against Moscow after Mr. Putin launched the war against Ukraine in February 2022. Having Iran in the BRICS sends a massive powerful message to the G7, to the Global North, to Washington.

This process has also drawn from India's demand for changes in global multilateral systems to make them more responsive to the needs of the Global South. However, unlike their counterparts in Russia and China, Indian officials have not spoken aggressively for de-dollarisation, though New Delhi has entered into local currency agreements with a few trading partners like the UAE. This indicates a difference among the founding members.

"We welcome moving forward with consensus on this," Modi said in his opening remarks at the meeting in Johannesburg on 23–8–2023. Continuing with India's priorities in its G-20 Presidency year, Mr. Modi kept the focus of his speech on the prospects of the Global South and the African Union, which is being represented at the BRICS Summit by the east African nation of Comoros. The comments were the clearest indication, yet that India would back plans to expand the grouping beyond the five core members. Russia and China are

championing expansion, with South Africa also in support, as President Cyril Ramaphosa confirmed.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said the grouping should not seek to rival the United States and G7 economies. "We want BRICS to be a multilateral institution, not an exclusive club," Lula said. Any new members would need to meet certain conditions, so the group does not become a "Tower of Babel", he said. And he criticised the IMF's loans as "suffocating" and hinted at the possibility of the BRICS bank increasing lending to other countries with "different criteria" to stimulate their economies.

"Development is not a privilege of a few"

We are concerned that global financial and payment systems are increasingly being used as instruments of geopolitical contestation. Global economic recovery relies on predictable global payment systems and the smooth operating of banking, supply chains, trade, tourism, as well as financial flows," South Africa President Ramaphosa said.

Speaking via video stream, Putin criticised "ongoing neo-colonialism" and countries that promote their own hegemony. He also said Russia is open to dialogue to find a solution to the war in Ukraine, which Russian forces invaded in February 2022.

Brazil President Lula said that BRICS countries are ready to join efforts to seek an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine. He also highlighted other conflicts that he said do not receive the attention that they should. "All deserve to live in peace," he said. He also highlighted "decolonising our economies" and paying more attention to the climate crisis.

Besides endorsing expansion, Modi focused on the successes of the grouping over the last 15 years, specifically the New Development Bank, a multilateral development bank working with emerging markets, and the "financial safety net" of contingent reserve arrangement, which works as a liquidity mechanism to support BRICS countries struggling with payments.

China's Xi said he was glad that so many countries are enthusiastic about possibly joining BRICS. He also highlighted the importance of stability and certainty and said there was a need to deepen cooperation to build growth. He criticised a new "Cold War mentality" across the globe and said that countries should "respect all modernisation paths" that individual nations choose for themselves.

"Development is not a privilege of the few," Ramaphosa reiterated, saying the BRICS group should remain united and also play a key role in working to stabilise the world.

The five countries of BRICS have announced a goal of establishing a multilateral development bank for mutual economic cooperation; to create markets; establish a financial safety net and protect the currency value of respective countries.

However, they are trying to maintain good relations with America, which is a dominant power in the unipolar world. These (BRICS) countries have to come forward against the neo-colonialism and hegemony.

India should not subservient to US imperialist hegemony if it is to oppose Cold War Mentality. Russia criticized the Cold War and hegemonism, but its very own policies sought hegemony. It would be good if BRICS-11 could challenge America's hegemony and its NATO's expansion for markets. But can we really think so?