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India's multilateral approach and Goa summit of BRICS: a promise or potential of cooperation?

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Abstract

India in a post-British colonial era vigorously pursued her dream to shine on the global sky in different spheres. She relied upon the time tested principle of regionalism and multilateralism to boost up her aspirations to become a global power. During the process, India heavily invested her appropriate time, luminescent energy and ample resources to establish BRICS a milestone in the history of global multilateralism in post-world war era. The current article encompasses the entire journey of BRICS especially through the en-route of summit declarations to assess the promise and potential of cooperation on this emerging multilateral forum.

Keywords: India's multilateral approach, post-British colonial, multilateral forum

Introduction

India experienced a brutal phase of political, economic and cultural subjugation under two hundred years of British colonial rule which has been rightly termed as the 'era of darkness' (Tharoor 2016) [5]. This regime of colonial loot and plunder has virtually crippled not only the psyche of the Indian people but also put a heavy toll on the socio-political, economic and cultural health of this country which was once famously referred as the 'golden bird' (Sone Ki Chidiya) by the group of foreign inhabitants and the fleet of adventurous sailors. This period of unholy British rule squeezed entire corpus of Indian wealth through 'Drain of Wealth' for successive years in 19th and early 20th centuries (Naoroji 1962) [4]. And it left India, as one of the poorest countries of the world. Unfortunately, the decades of colonial subjugation reduced the country as culturally bankrupt too where arbitrary British colonial policies drastically altered the socio-political, economic and cultural milieu through its notorious 'divide and rule' policy (Chandra, Mukherjee, Mukherjee, Panikkar & Mahajan 2000) [1].

At the outset, this article will explore the basic ideas behind India's approach towards multilateralism in global affairs. It would also offer a brief explanation of the reasons for which India adopted multilateralism in global affairs. The second section will be devoted towards an overview of BRICS since its inception. The third section would deal in length with the potential of cooperation and promises made by India through BRICS platform with special reference to the eighth BRICS summit in Goa held in October 2017. Finally, the article will draw some valid conclusion and provide some suggestions to realise the full potential of cooperation at BRICS.

India and multilateralism

India got independence on 15 August 1947. Since then, it has been the biggest votary of multilateral diplomacy in global affairs. This was perhaps the reason that India has been a founding member of United Nations (UN) and played an instrumental role in the establishment of the UN on 24th October 1945. Though in pre-independence era, Indian foreign policy was entirely a British affair, but it was to an extent, at least in the mid-1940s, influenced by the progressive ideas of Indian National Congress (INC). Thus, Indian leadership, under Nehru, emphasised on internationalism, global humanism, anti-racialism, anti-imperialism, decolonisation and non-alignment in the post-independence era. And to promote the universal and progressive ideas further, they strongly put their weight behind the multilateralism and global institutionalism.

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In other words, independent India realised that their global interests and the interest of the world as well are in convergence with each other and to realise its potential, multilateralism is the best possible methodology. Hence, to deliberate and discuss the issues of global importance and matters of common concern, India has been actively participating in different global and regional forums.

The relative success of UN system and its associated agencies like WHO (World Health Organisation), UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) etc. are some of the glaring example under this category. Besides, the achievements of India at some of the regional forums like SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Corporation), BIMSTEC (The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) etc. bears the testimony of the fact that India has always prioritised the multilateral negotiations in advancing her ties with both the neighbours and regional powers as well. The limited success of leading multilateral organisation like World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO) also owe a lot to India because of her instrumental role in functioning and accomplishments of negotiations under these multilateral organisations.

BRICS

The word BRIC was coined by an economist Jim O' Neill in 2001 referring to a group of four emerging economies comprising with Brazil, Russia, India and China. BRIC, as an informal grouping, was announced at the first summit of BRIC in 2009 at Yekaterinburg, Russia. Second BRIC summit was held in the Brasilia, Brazil in 2010. BRIC was transformed into BRICS with the inclusion of South Africa in third BRICS summit in 2011 held in Sanya, China. New Delhi hosted the fourth BRICS summit in 2012. South African city of Durban invited all BRICS leaders to discuss the issues of common and global concern in 2013. In 2014, BRICS countries gathered at Fortaleza, Brazil to dwell upon the issues of global concern. Russian city, Ufa hosted the BRICS summit in 2015 to pursue their mutual and global agenda. Goa in India hosted the eighth BRICS summit in 2016 to pursue her vision of global peace, security and development through multilateral efforts. The next BRICS summit is proposed in Xiamen, China in 2017. BRICS is now advancing further towards a greater degree of Formalisation with the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) and signing a Contingency Reserve agreement (CRA) along with others.

Eighth Goa Summit of BRICS: promise or potential of cooperation

The representative of BRICS member states gathered at Goa, the smallest state of India, near the Arabian Sea shores in October 2016 for the eighth summit of BRICS countries. All the heads of the states of BRICS states called unanimously for 'strengthening BRICS solidarity and cooperation based on their mutual interests' (Ministry of External Affairs-Government of India 2016) [3]. They also resolved to further strengthen their strategic partnership in the spirit of basic principles of "openness, solidarity,

equality, mutual understanding, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation". BRICS nations agree that emerging challenges to global peace, security and sustainable development require further enhancing of their collective efforts. BRICS wants to create a more "just, democratic and multipolar international order" based on the leadership of the United Nations (UN), and respect for international law.

BRICS recognised the global character of current security challenges and threats confronting the international community. Hence, they called on to agree upon a comprehensive approach to combat terrorism and efficiently address the threat of chemical and biological terrorism. Therefore, it commits to intensify international efforts to address these challenges through common efforts. Besides, India believes that climate change is one of the greatest dangers. Therefore, they argue that the issue of climate change should be dealt seriously. To this end, India will be ready to join the international community in the efforts to address climate change (Ministry of External Affairs-Government of India 2008) [2]. In this context, BRICS states expressed their gladness with the adoption "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals" during the UN Summit on Sustainable Development.

BRICS states expressed their happiness with the operationalisation of the New Development Bank (NDB), and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) has contributed greatly to the global economy and the strengthening of the international financial architecture. BRICS members believe that these two institutions have potential to transform the international scenario of development financing and cooperation. The CRA is also believed to stable the global financial net. The BRICS countries are in favour of resolving international problems collectively through 'peaceful settlement of disputes', political and diplomatic means based on fundamental principles like 'good-faith, sovereign equality of States, non-intervention in the internal affairs of states and non-imposition of unilateral coercive measures against international law' (Ministry of External Affairs-Government of India, 2016) [3]. It is perhaps the reason that to accomplish the tasks mentioned above, BRICS countries demand a comprehensive reform of the UN, including its Security Council.

As far as economic sphere is a concern, the grouping put an overarching focus not only on poverty eradication but also put an equal and balanced emphasis on the 'economic, social and environmental dimensions' of sustainable development. They also vehemently support the multilateral trading system and the centrality of the WTO as the cornerstone of a "rule-based, open, transparent, non-discriminatory and inclusive multilateral trading system" with development at the core of its agenda (Ministry of External Affairs- Government of India, 2016) [3]. BRICS member countries firmly commit towards a globally 'fair and modern tax system' and also welcome the progress made on 'effective and widespread' implementation of the internationally agreed standards. Thus, Indis has a lot of potentials to ensure a high level of cooperation among BRICS member states and the whole world as well on the issues of mutual interests and global concerns.

Conclusion

Since independence, India has been an avid supporter of multilateral diplomacy. The limited success of multilateral

efforts like Non-Alignment (NAM) and the United Nations (UN) suffices to prove India's splendid record towards the encouragement of multilateralism in global affairs. With the demise of Soviet power and the end of the cold war, the global power system structure changed too. Realising this power shift, India along with other emerging nations endeavoured to forged their identities, shared interests, common values etc. to obtain a fair share in the management of the global architecture of the political and economic governance. This aspiration played an instrumental role in the formation of BRICS as an alternative voice in the international system. Since its materialisation, BRICS has chiefly voiced her vision through summit declarations. The recent Goa summit in 2016 has meticulously spelt a huge cache of promises for cooperation at Inter and intra-BRICS level. The increasing political weight and the growing economic clout of BRICS states certainly give a tremendous amount of hope that they will realise not only the huge potential of cooperation possessed by them but also they will deliver on the promises made by them regarding their cooperation through successive meetings, summits etc. However, the outcome of this entire exercise significantly depends upon the seriousness of their intention to cooperate among themselves and vis-a-vis other stakeholders. It also rests upon how successfully they overcome with the irritants lying bare in the bumpy and shaky path of the cooperation at both inter and intra-BRICS levels.

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