

BRICS Think Tank Council (BTTTC) meeting, New Delhi

- 1. The Observer Research Foundation, in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs, India, convened a meeting of the BRICS Think Tank Council in New Delhi on September 23, 2016. The official members of the Think Tank Council include Institute of Applied Economic Research, Brazil; National Committee for BRICS Research, Russian Observer Research Foundation, India; China Centre for Contemporary World Studies, and South African BRICS Think Tank.
- 2. The objective of the BTTTC meeting was to take stock of the achievements under the Indian Presidency, conduct a review of the Russian Presidency, and look forward to the plans in place for the forthcoming Chinese Presidency.
- 3. The Welcome Remarks for the meeting were delivered by Mr. H. S. Venuwathan, Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation. He informed those present that the BTTTC was formally established in March 2013 at the Durban Academic Forum. The objective behind creating such a Council was to establish a permanent entity that would enhance cooperation in research, knowledge sharing, capacity building, and policy advice between think tanks in BRICS countries.
- 4. On Shree Tharoor, Member of Parliament, and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, India, delivered the Opening Remarks. In his address, Dr. Tharoor stated that India accords high priority to its engagement with this grouping, and the concept of BRICS is slowly emerging as an alternative forum that can stand up to the dominant world view of established economies — the principal ones are which merely happen to still dominate the global system because they were the founders of the post World War II Bretton Woods global order. “The BRICS nations might not have numbered in 1945 but this is 2016 and to ignore BRICS is to ignore the fate of history.” Dr. Tharoor concluded.
- 5. On behalf of the Ministry of External Affairs, India, Joint Secretary (MER), Sri Ashok Dinesh, stated that one has to be extremely cautious when talking about the creation of BRICS, and when it comes about. He highlighted that we have merely discussed BRICS as it was already present amongst us, and that it was open to us to take forward its legacy. “BRICS is a gratitude to all of us,” Sri Dinesh expressed, and instead of thinking where we are taking the BRICS, he stressed how it was important to take a step back and take stock of where BRICS has taken us up until this point, and where it is taking us in the future.
- 6. The discussion then moved towards the activities undertaken by ORF and by RES during the course of the Indian Presidency. Anubandhan Varmanathan highlighted how ORF had successfully hosted the Digital BRICS Council in New Delhi in April 2016, and the BRICS Smart Cities Conference in Jaipur, Rajasthan, in August 2016. Dr. Sachin Chaturvedi, Director-General, RES, mentioned how RES had hosted a BRICS Wellness Forum in Bangalore, Karnataka in September, and was gearing towards the BRICS Civil Forum in New Delhi, and the BRICS Economic Forum in Goa, both in the month of October.
- 7. Speaking about the achievements of the Russian Presidency, Prof. Tolstyga highlighted how Russia introduced several new forums and several areas such as youth policy, migration, telecommunication, industrial cooperation, international development assistance, and labour and employment. Prof. Kataraya also presented the final report from the 9th Academic Forum, which was hosted in Russia. On the future direction of BRICS, he expressed the need for creating a BRICS Strategy which will encompass several prospective goals for BRICS over the next five or 10 years. Such a strategy will enable us to answer questions such where is BRICS going, and where it has taken us thus far.
- 8. Mr. Wang from China highlighted the growing popularity of BRICS related research in institutions across China and deemed it important to further increase such academic output. He also stated that the next Academic Forum would be hosted by CCCWS in China along with a couple of BTTTC meetings however the date and venue were yet to be finalized.
- 9. Prof. An Sita from South Africa expressed his appreciation for the BRICS Academic Forum Outcome Document and remarked how the 9th Forum has taken the idea of BRICS from being an economic alliance, to a grouping that views inter-State relations differently. Prof. Sita also expressed that moving forward, greater emphasis is needed on BRICS cooperation in areas of education, and scientific and cultural research. Similarly, the next speaker, Mr. Luis Fernando from Brazil, stressed the need to focus not just on economic issues but also human rights aspects and the south-south technical cooperation.
- 10. The discussion then moved towards furthering research cooperation between the BTTTC Members. The BTTTC members had previously agreed to write a paper on one of the subjects of the BTTTC Vision Document. At this meeting it was decided these papers would be finalized by October 13 and shared with all. Final comments were expected by October 30, and the completed publications would be released at the next Rannim Dialogue, scheduled to take place from January 17 to 19, in New Delhi.
- 11. The meeting was concluded by an address by Mr. Amar Saha, Secretary (ER), Ministry of External Affairs, India. In his address the Secretary highlighted the theme of India's BRICS Presidency, i.e. Building Resilience, Inclusive and Collective Solutions. He stated that the Indian Presidency focused on a few key elements over the course of the year. First was that BRICS needs to get out of the capitals and foreign offices. Second, it was felt that BRICS needed to become more people-centric. To ensure more people-to-people contact between the members nations, India hosted events such as a BRICS Film Festival, a BRICS U-17 football tournament, and a BRICS Youth Summit. And lastly, the Secretary stated the key to BRICS cooperation lay in sustained thinking. He stated there was an urgent need to create a BRICS Agriculture Research Network, a BRICS credit rating agency, a BRICS think tank preparation mechanism, a think tank centre in the World Bank Institute to provide knowledge solutions to the New Development, to further the cooperation amongst BRICS nations.

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