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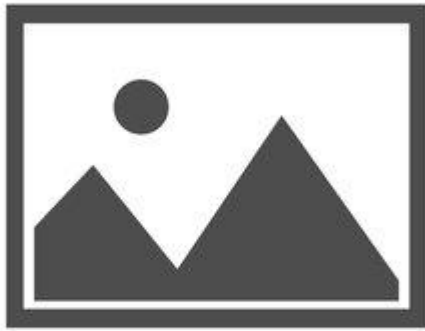
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Need to strengthen parliamentary dimension of BRICS structure: Russian Speaker

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Noting that BRICS have a significant future, Duma Chairman Sergey Naryshkin has highlighted the need to democratise BRICS as much as possible and to promote the parliamentary dimension of the structure.



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Russia, which takes over the chairmanship of BRICS in July this year, is working to strengthen the grouping which it thinks has a significant future, said Mr. Sergey Naryshkin, Chairman of the State Duma, Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, during an interaction in Delhi.

The interaction, held on February 27, was organised by Observer Research Foundation. Mr. Naryshkin was heading a powerful delegation to India to participate in the parliamentary delegation meeting with its Indian counterparts. The delegation included Mr. Vyacheslav Nikonov, Head of the Duma's Education committee, Mr. Alexey Pushkov, Head of the Duma's International Affairs Committee and Deputy Finance Minister, Mr. Sergey Storchak.

Initiating the interaction, Mr. Naryshkin highlighted the need to democratise BRICS as much as possible and to promote the parliamentary dimension of the structure. He said he would be organising a meeting of parliamentary delegations from all BRICS nations in Beijing. He said the formation of the New Development Bank is an extremely positive step.

Mr. Naryshkin said India and Russia have tremendous potential for economic, security, social, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation. He reiterated the importance of India-Russia relations, and added that upon his return, a roundtable discussion in the Lower House of the Russian Parliament will be dedicated to the delegates' experiences in India.

However, Mr. Naryshkin added that to be functional and useful, "cooperation requires promotion". He also cautioned against the dangers of accepting the will of one powerful state despite living in a multi-polar world.

Welcoming the delegation, Mr. Sunjoy Joshi, Director, Observer Research Foundation said that from a geopolitical standpoint, the meeting was taking place at a crucial moment. While large parts of the world are facing serious political turmoil, optimism can be experienced in other parts of the world. Global GDP numbers, growth and consumption patterns demonstrate

that pivot is moving towards Asia. A new global order may be emerging, and India-Russia cooperation will continue to play a significant role- not just at the bilateral level but also at the multilateral level.

Mr. Arvind Gupta, India's Deputy National Security Advisor, spoke primarily about India-Russia relations. He said that after President Putin's 2014 visit and the signing of the "Druzhba-Dosti" joint vision statement for the next decade, the India-Russia partnership has been heading towards unmatched mutual confidence and trust. Mr. Gupta said that the vision document is a road-map for the partnership and if the plan can be realised, it'll be a new chapter for India and Russia.

He added that in addition to nuclear energy cooperation, there is scope for cooperation in technology, bio-technology, energy, health care, etc. He emphasised that academic exchanges should also be encouraged between the two countries. Lastly, it was established that there is an urgent need to reinvigorate economic bilateral trade.

Speaking about nuclear power cooperation, he noted that both sides agreed to complete the construction and commissioning of "not less than 12 units" in the next two decades.

Mr. Sergey Storchak, Deputy Finance Minister of the Russian Federation, spoke about cooperation in finance in context of BRICS. He explained that the issue of monetary cooperation is a complex one and in order to cement good relations in this regard, it is vital to make the first project of the New Development Bank a landmark success. Further on the topic of the New Development Bank, Mr. Storchak said that since the inception of the idea, to the actual formation of the bank, the BRICS partners have shown immense compatibility. Now it is important to formalise the staff of the bank and to tackle issues such as a proportionate distribution of capital and fair representation. The first President of the Bank will be Indian, and the Indian government should nominate someone as soon as possible, he added Mr. Charanjeet Singh, Joint Secretary (MER) in the Ministry of External Affairs, said that the comfort level between the BRICS countries could be gauged by the fact that an institution like the Development Bank could be put together in such a short of time.

Carlos Duarte, Ambassador of Brazil, echoed these feelings and added that more cooperation is needed in areas such as health, education, science and technology. He also emphasized on the importance of improving the parliamentary dimensions of BRICS.

Mr. H.H.S Viswanathan, Distinguished Fellow, ORF, highlighted that BRICS is unique in the way that it covers all continents. It is not a regional institution. BRICS doesn't aim to replace existing institutions ? it aims at strengthening them, by productively setting the agenda". He noted that BRICS think tank will play an increasingly important role in the future.

Speaking about the significance of BRICS, Alexey Pushkov, MP, Chairman Committee on International Affairs, State Duma, Federal Assembly of Russian Federation, said that it is an institution of new global approaches-the members don't just dictate or accept policies, there is active participation.

He said the problems of the world couldn't be solved by means of force, pressure or illegal economic sanctions. Highlighting the significance of the Asian region, he said that the key events and key players of the world today are situated in the West-Asian, Central-Asian and South-Asian regions.

Mr. Kanwal Sibal, former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to Russia, said that BRICS is an institution that was formed to develop alternatives. He mentioned that the issues between India and China should be addressed by BRICS.

Mr. Vyacheslav Nikonov, MP, Chairman, Committee on Education, State Duma, Federal Assembly, of the Russian Federation, spoke highly of the potential of the potential of economics and academic forum of BRICS. He said that power is now moving from developed countries towards developing countries. Mr. Nikonov stated that Russia has always supported India in the Security Council and it is time to collaborate on defence, energy, space and ICTs. He also spoke about cooperation in cyber security saying that BRICS is basically, the "institutionalisation of cooperation". He also informed the participants that the BRICS Academic Forum would be held before the Summit.

Cautioning against focussing on ideas instead of the reality, Mr. Prabhat Shukla, Former Ambassador to Russia, said that international foreign policy issues such as falling oil prices and the deterioration of Russia's relations with Europe could influence BRICS as well.

Mr. Sergey Sobko, MP, Chairman, Committee on Industry, State Duma, Federal Assembly of Russian Federation, drew on the historical significance of India-Russia relations by saying that 40 years ago, Aryabhata was launched by a Soviet carrier and in 2015, aero-space and aviation cooperation is just as important to Russia. Mr. Rakesh Sood, former Special Envoy of the Prime Minister, said the strength of BRICS lies in economics and finance. It has not yet evolved to the extent that it can influence the international agenda. Importantly, he pointed out that if we analyse the set of bilateral equations among the members of BRICS - areas of convergence as well as areas of divergence can be observed.

He concluded by saying that if BRICS is to become a rule-making grouping, it has to build on relationships that constitute the strongest planks in that group. However at the same time, bilateral relations should not have adverse effects on multilateral relations.

Summing up the discussion, Mr. Sunjoy Joshi reiterated the importance of BRICS. He also appreciated the way the forum has evolved over time from being just an economic acronym coined in 2001 to a functioning body in less than a decade. He said that the grouping that earlier represented emerging economies is now seen as a body with great political weight.

(This report is prepared by Vidisha Mishra, Research Assistant, Observer Research Foundation, Delhi)

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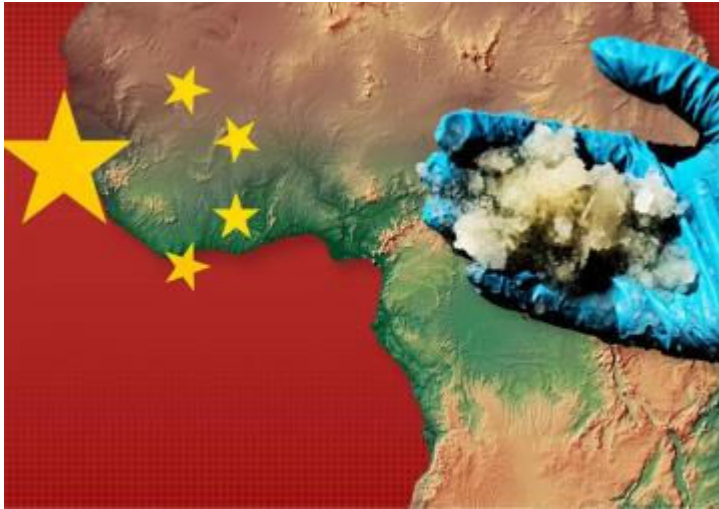
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