

AIR Spotlight - BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting

AIR Spotlight is an insightful programme featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panelists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the topic of discussion is the outcome of the 43rd GST Council Meeting.

Participants:

1. Ambassador Ashok Sajjanhar, Former diplomat
2. Simran Sodhi, Journalist

Context:

At the BRICS foreign ministers' meeting, various decisions were made regarding the COVID pandemic, reforms of multilateral institutions, resolving bilateral disputes, and counterterrorism.

BRICS:

BRICS is an acronym for the powerful grouping of the world's leading emerging market economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The [BRICS](#) mechanism aims to promote peace, security, development, and cooperation. Since 2009, the governments of the BRICS states have met annually at formal summits.

Key areas discussed in the BRICS meetings:

Response to COVID pandemic:

- In all international meetings, the COVID pandemic is a major agenda for discussion. In the BRICS meet also, it was discussed comprehensively. The Ministers expressed grave concern over the continuing public health, societal and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic globally. The affordability and accessibility of vaccines were in focus. The Chinese foreign minister assured India all support in fighting the pandemic.
- Members also appreciated the proposal floated by India and South Africa last year at the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#) for a temporary waiver of patents on COVID-related vaccines, medicines, and other medical equipment to ensure timely, affordable, and equitable access to diagnostics, vaccines and essential health products and technologies and their components to combat the pandemic.
- The proposal has gained weight with the support of US president Joe Biden. However, the European Union is still not convinced. The decision on the proposal will take considerable time and effort.

Indo-China disputes:

- The meeting was held against the backdrop of tense relations between India and China.
- The ministers reiterated the resolve to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, and the need to resolve any problem through peaceful means.
- The [Galwan valley clash](#) between Indian and Chinese armed forces didn't reflect in the statement of either the Chinese or the Indian foreign minister.

- India's foreign minister S Jaishankar advocated for a fair, just, equitable, inclusive, and representative multipolar international system based on international law and the UN charter, which respects the sovereignty of all nations.

Multilateral Institutions:

- The ministers agreed to work together for strengthening the functioning of multilateral institutions including the United Nations (UN) and its organs, IMF, and others, and making them more representative.
- Multilateral institutions have become outdated in their structure and are not functioning effectively. The credibility of the United Nations has been significantly diluted. This was observed during the pandemic. The [UN Security Council](#) didn't meet in March last year on the issue of COVID. When it met in April, no concrete outcome came due to a tussle between the USA and China.
- The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi had earlier reiterated that the UN didn't reflect the reality. It was working on principles that were devised 75 years ago.
- A joint statement by BRICS leaders will give a push to the demands for reforms.
- However, it may not be of much significance as China is the one that has blocked any reform especially with respect to the UN Security Council.

Cross border terrorism:

- The members discussed measures to check cross-border terrorism, financing of terrorists, and safe havens.
- In 2020, BRICS countries had adopted the BRICS counter-terrorism plan. Counter-terrorism working group is working to finalize a result-oriented action plan.
- It vindicates India's stand on terrorism and in veiled reference points towards Pakistan. However, although China has supported this, it is the biggest ally of Pakistan and keeps on defending Pakistan on terrorism issues by stating that Pakistan is a victim of terrorism.
- India is also vocal about curbing cross-border terrorism at various platforms such as [FATEF](#) and in meetings with US and European members.

Conclusion:

The BRICS Foreign Ministers' Summit is very significant given the range of issues that were discussed. This will also help in normalizing relations between India and China.