

EXPERT INTERVIEW

Suvam Pal (www.suvampal.com) is a Taipei-based journalist with over 20 years of cross-platform experience across China, India, South Africa, the UAE, and Taiwan. He is currently a Senior Producer with TaiwanPlus (www.TaiwanPlus.com) news channel's International Media Development Team. As the first Indian journalist to work in Taiwan, he is also the only one to have worked with state media in both China and Taiwan. Additionally, he is a globe-trotter, published author with HarperCollins India and a documentary filmmaker.



Suvam Pal (SP) speaks with Dr Mansi (KM) about the Kazan BRICS summit and the future of this group based on his extensive work experience in four of the BRICS countries.

KM: What in your view is the main take away from recently held BRICS Kazan summit?

SP: It was a quite a breakthrough summit for the non-western world. It underlined the fact that an important geopolitical event could be hosted without any western representation. It's important for a multipolar world and the consolidation of a non-western grouping is important. The biggest take away for me is definitely India and China coming to talking terms at the highest level after nearly five years. This may pave the way for a positive turn around after the bilateral relationship between the two neighbours and the world's most populous countries hit the rock bottom since the June 2020 Galwan clashes. At a time when one of the key members of the BRICS, Russia, is continuing to fight its war in Ukraine and shunned by the western countries through sanctions and embargoes, its engagement with the other BRICS countries was much needed for future deterrence, dialogues, and ceasefire resolution talks. Therefore, the BRICS summit has acted as an important bridge. Besides, the emergence of the Global South has also been magnified at the summit. From India's perspective it's important to keep its strategic alliances going with both the western and the non-western world, and, its strong presence at the BRICS summit in Kazan just validated that.

KM: Do you think BRICS expansion is diluting the mandate of founding members?

SP: It's debatable whether the BRICS should be a motley group of countries or spread its wings to other parts of the world. More participation means more engagements and cooperations. But still there remains a chance of having too many cooks spoiling the broth, especially when some of the initial agendas of the founding members of the BRICS, including the introduction of a rating agency, are far from being achieved.

KM: Do you think BRICS has the intention and capability of replacing the US led World Order?

SP: I am sure the genesis of the BRICS has got its intention to create an alternative world order, if not replace the U.S.-led one. It has certainly got the capability with two of the world's top five economies, roughly 45% of the world's population and nearly 35% of global GDP (by purchasing power parity) bolstering its presence. If the U.S. continues to use its hegemonic tactics towards creating a unipolar world under its leadership and its own terms and conditions, the BRICS countries will certainly get the impetus or, may be compelled, to challenge that U.S.-led world order and emerge as a stronger alternative.

KM: How do you see India's role in the BRICS plus?

SP: India has been playing a pivotal role since the formation of the BRICS and in the coming days, it's going to play a more important role with Russia and China jointly trying to tilt the balance of power against the U.S. Moreover, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership and Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's stewardship, India's proactive, multipolar, and often assertive, foreign policy manoeuvres make it a force to reckon with at any global groupings. Therefore, India's inward role within the BRICS Plus as a founding member and outward role as a bridge between the BRICS countries and the U.S.-led western powers are crucial. With China and Russia consolidating its strategic alliance and the axis against the west, India's power play in the BRICS and at the same time, in the Quad, can maintain the right balance of power between the east and the west and prevent it from being dragged either towards the U.S. or in favour of Russia and China. Therefore, we may see India making a number of important geopolitical moves in the coming days both within the BRICS Plus and outside of it.

KM: Since you have worked in four BRICS countries, what does your experience tell you about the relevance of BRICS to these countries? Has it become more relevant now? Do you think the US sanctions on Russia have revived BRICS?

SP: I have worked in India, China, and South Africa. India and China are actually part of three important non-western groupings — BRICS, RIC, and SCO. But BRICS has certainly got a magnified and much exalted profile and presence compared to the other two where Russia is also a member. Meanwhile, four of the BRICS founding members — India, China, Russia, and South Africa — are also part of the G20 and even though all these groupings have different agendas and separate modus operandi, but there is always a bit of overlapping in terms of posturing and positioning. However, I feel that the BRICS lost a bit of steam with two of its founding members — India and China — keeping a fraught relationship for more than four years. However, the Kazan summit this year has certainly invigorated the BRICS a bit with the two big Asian neighbours coming to talking terms at the highest level. It has somewhat regained a bit of its past relevance in these uncertain times of rapidly changing geopolitics and international relations. The U.S. sanctions on Russia has certainly given some impetus to Vladimir Putin's pro-active role in the BRICS but one has to consider the U.S.-China trade tensions, and also, the bittersweet bilateral relationships between India and the

U.S. under Joe Biden-Kamala Harris. All these factors have contributed to this year's BRICS summit in Kazan with renewed vigour and zeal.