

An Acronym Still

What all they enjoy is self-claimed 'big power Status'—Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC). They miss no chance to congratulate themselves to highlight their 'unprecedented' role on the international stage. What role they play in the American theatre of war, now threatening to engulf the entire South Asian region is anybody's guess. No doubt this acronym—BRIC—has acquired special significance in global market because of their near magic growth rate of 10.7 percent on an average from 2006 to 2008. They are being pampered by international financial institutions, including IMF, not always for their 'outstanding performance'. Maybe Washington has a strategic ploy to isolate these emerging market economies to consolidate its leadership position in world affairs. Whether or not BRIC miracle is sustainable is a different matter but BRIC experts think the high-growth phenomenon is due to the "big country effect".

True, all of them are big in terms of geography and population. The geographic areas of Russia, China, Brazil and India rank first, fourth, fifth and seventh worldwide while in terms of population China and India rank first and second. Brazil stands at number five and Russia number seven. But this huge population doesn't mean huge market. The hungry cannot propel the economic miracle. India is at No 134 on UN Human Development Index—a measly 134 among 182 countries. China, Sri Lanka and even Bhutan rank higher than India at 92, 102 and 103 respectively. Among India's neighbours only Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh rank lower. With millions living below poverty line, having very little purchasing power and that too due to government's poverty-alleviation schemes, this Asian 'bubble' is more like a joke.

And yet they are big for more than one reason. As for natural resources India ranks number eight, Brazil number nine, China number three and Russia number two. Here lies the crux, of the so-called 'big country effect'. Multinationals are coming in dozens into these countries with the sole aim of exhausting abundant natural resources at throwaway prices and exploiting cheap labour as quickly as possible while making millions development refugees and destitutes in the process. This is precisely the reason why global players are so eloquent about BRIC. The way the global mining giants have unleashed a rein of terror, particularly in India, with the active connivance of the government, forcing thousands to flee their homes and livelihood, has no parallel in history. It surpasses even the atrocities of early British marauders.

The gross reserves of mineral resources of India, China and Brazil are said to be around \$3.57 trillion, \$3.18 trillion and \$1.1 trillion respectively—far more than the \$290 billion of Britain and Japan and the \$340 billion of Germany. In all these countries—India, China and Brazil—millions face eviction and destitution

because of this huge mineral wealth. In India the poorest of the poor—the tribals—are the worst affected in the hills and forests where large-scale mining operations are in full swing. These people are expendable because they are voiceless and they will have to die to keep the pace of growth and miracle. Also, these areas of contention witness the ever growing resistance movement developing in depth and breadth with every passing day under the sway of the Maoists. Yesterday's Britain-oriented corporations plundered India's mineral wealth on a smaller scale while affecting not many people. But today's corporations with transnational character, plunder mineral resources anywhere in the world with utmost ruthlessness bringing in social unrest, breaking up nation states and innumerable deaths.

One reason China has been so consistent about propagating the idea of 'big country effect' is its relentless efforts to describe the world as multi-polar. But the reality is otherwise. It is unipolar still. And they form no more than an acronym—BRIC. Uncle Sam continues to be the final arbiter in matters related to international economic and foreign affairs. What happened at the Copenhagen climate summit last December is an eye-opener. Obama had his way with his non-binding accord, otherwise heavily biased in favour of the North, with the help of BRIC. And international media lost no time to shower praises on maturity and pragmatism of BRIC. Accepting BRIC as major players by America doesn't mean they matter in the global decision-making process. How do they confront American aggression in the Middle East and Afghanistan speaks volumes about their importance in shaping the so-called multi-polar world. □□□