

Indian Express News Analysis (IENA)

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Govt calls special session of Parliament later this month, gives no reason

#ParliamentSpecialSession #Parliament #Polity #GS2

The government said a **special session of Parliament** was being convened from **September 18 to September 22**. It gave no reason for calling the session which would have five sittings.

Previously held such special sessions of Parliament

- On the occasion of the **golden jubilee of Independence Day, held in 1997** from August 26 to September 1.
- The Modi government last convened a special session of Parliament on **June 30, 2017 to mark the rollout of the Goods and Services Tax (GST)**.
- A special sitting was convened on **November 26, 2015 to pay tribute to the Constitution and Dr B R Ambedkar**.
- **In 2002, the then BJP-led NDA government got the Prevention of Terrorism Bill passed at a joint sitting of the two Houses on March 26** since the ruling alliance did not have the majority to get it cleared in Rajya Sabha.
- A **midnight sitting was called on August 9, 1992, for the 50th anniversary of the 'Quit India Movement'**.

Chandrayaan 3: Another payload detects sulphur presence

#RAMBHA #ILSA #SHAPE #SulphurOnMoon #Chandrayaan3 #ScienceandTechnology #GS3

ISRO released preliminary data from instruments called **RAMBHA and ILSA, both installed on the lander module**, and another called **APXS which is on the rover**. It had earlier released data from instruments called ChaSTE and LIBS.

Chandrayaan-3 is carrying seven scientific payloads, four installed on the lander, two on rover, and one on the propulsion module that is going around the Moon in an orbit. ISRO has till now released data from five of these. It has also mentioned that the **instrument onboard the propulsion module — SHAPE or Solar-polarimetry of Habitable Planet Earth — has been functioning normally**.

The seventh instrument, called **LASER Retroreflector Array is a set of mirrors that will remain on the Moon for much longer duration. It does not collect any data on its own but is meant to reflect laser beams fired from Earth. Scientists use these kinds of experiments to accurately measure the distance of Moon from the Earth, for example.**

RAMBHA or Radio Anatomy of Moon Bound Hypersensitive Ionosphere and Atmosphere is meant to measure the plasma density (concentration of ions and electrons) near the lunar surface. ISRO said initial assessment from the data collected by RAMBHA, an instrument developed by

Space Physics Laboratory of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, **indicated that the plasma near the lunar surface was “relatively sparse”.**

The Alpha Particle X-ray Spectroscope, or APXS, installed on the rover, detected signals of the presence of Sulphur and other minor elements. Earlier, LIBS had also collected data on the elemental composition of lunar surface, and found “unambiguous” confirmation of presence of Sulphur, through first-of-its-kind experiments.

BRICS is bigger now. Is it better too?

#BRICS #BRICSmembers #BRICScountries #ImportanceOfBRICS #InternationalOrganisations #InternationalRelations #GS3

Leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa took a call last week to expand the BRICS grouping from five countries to 11.

The **Johannesburg declaration**, issued after the summit, said Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) had been invited to become full members from January 1, 2024.

To understand the expansion and its implications, one must first understand the origins and evolution of BRICS.

Origin of BRICS

BRICS brings together five of the largest developing countries of the world, **representing around 41 per cent of the global population, around 24 per cent of the global GDP, and around 16 per cent of global trade.**

The acronym **BRIC was first used in 2001 by Goldman Sachs** in their Global Economics Paper, ‘The World Needs Better Economic BRICs’. On the basis of econometric analyses, the paper projected that the **four economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China would be among the world’s largest economies in the next 50 years or so.**

As a formal grouping, BRIC started after the meeting of the leaders of Russia, India and China in St. Petersburg on the margins of the G8 Outreach Summit in 2006. The grouping was formalised during the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers on the margins of the UNGA in New York in 2006.

The first BRIC Summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009. It was decided to include South Africa at the BRIC Foreign Ministers’ meeting in New York in 2010, and accordingly, South Africa attended the 3rd BRICS Summit in Sanya, China, in 2011.

Expansion

The Johannesburg declaration said that BRICS countries had reached a consensus on the guiding principles, standards, criteria and procedures of the expansion process, but these have not been made public.

Indian officials said New Delhi took the lead in forging consensus on membership criteria and selection of new members. **New Delhi’s efforts were guided by its objective to incorporate Strategic Partners as new members.**

India has strategic partnerships with four of the new six members — Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran and Egypt.

By growing to a size of 11 members, BRICS has become larger than ASEAN (10 members) and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (9).

But while many portrayed the new expanded grouping as an alternative to western blocs like the G7, **Delhi doesn't view this as an "anti-West" grouping.**

In fact, France, one of the P-5 (permanent members of the UN Security Council) countries which is also a member of G7, is learnt to have expressed interest in engaging with the BRICS more actively. Whether Paris becomes a member is a question to be agreed through consensus.

The new entrants are emerging economies with the potential to scale up. Many belong to the Global South or the developing countries, and want to hedge their bets in the increasingly polarised geopolitical landscape.

Africa and Latin America

From Latin America, despite Brazil's reluctance, regional rival Argentina was selected as a new member. **With a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of approximately US\$610 billion, Argentina is one of the largest economies in Latin America.**

From Africa, Ethiopia and Egypt made the cut, over Nigeria, Algeria and Senegal.

According to the World Bank, Ethiopia is the second most populous nation in Africa after Nigeria, and one of the fastest-growing economies in the region, with an estimated 6.4% growth in FY 2021/22.

Egypt occupies a crucial geo-strategic location — 12 per cent of global trade passes through the Suez Canal — and is a key player in the region. An important economic powerhouse, it is an emerging economy with reforms brought in by the government led by President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

But both **Argentina and Egypt have strong economic dependency ties with China.**

Early this month, Beijing lent a helping hand to Argentina so that it could avert a default with the International Monetary Fund for the second time in 30 days. The cash-strapped country tapped almost \$3 billion of a Beijing currency swap line to pay the multilateral lender.

China's bilateral trade with Egypt is currently at \$15 billion, double that of India's \$7.26 billion in 2021-22. Sisi has been wooing Chinese investments, and has travelled to China seven times in the past eight years.

Ethiopia, a Christian-dominated country, is seen as a careful balancer of both the US and China.

Countries from Asia

Of the three Asian countries, **Saudi Arabia and UAE are strong partners of the US**, and along with Egypt, have close ties with Washington.

Iran, which has had a complicated relationship with the US, has been wooed by China in recent years.

The inclusion of Saudi Arabia and the UAE is expected to lead to more mobilisation of financial resources for the New Development Bank, the BRICS alternative for developing countries.

By including these four, BRICS has also addressed the question that no Muslim-majority country is in the grouping.

One important point is that **Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia share a common regional space**. This might give **salience to the West Asian and North African region**, and the **rivalries and geopolitical tensions here might play out in the grouping as well**.

These contradictions within the member countries could limit the potential of BRICS.

Russia, China's stakes

With the expansion of the grouping, **China is seen as trying to build its own bloc against the Western powers**. But India has maintained that decisions have to be made "through consensus" — the guiding principle in the grouping — so that it is not completely led by Beijing.

In fact, this inclusion of six members has been projected as the first phase of the expansion, which leaves room for a second phase.

Russia, the other major player in the grouping, will host the next BRICS summit in Kazan in 2024. An expanded grouping of 11 members attending will work for Moscow, which has been facing diplomatic isolation. It will use the opportunity to portray Russia's relevance despite Western pressures.

For India, the Chinese challenge remains the most pertinent. Delhi has the unenviable task of guarding against the grouping being swayed by Beijing, which wants to pack it with countries indebted to China.

Name

For now, the name of BRICS will remain the same, since officials feel it is a brand in itself.

Kokborok, Tripura's language without a script

#Kokborok #LanguageOfTripura #Languages #Polity #GS2

Last year, Union Home Minister Amit Shah pitched for Devanagari script for oral languages in the Northeast, the Roman Script for Kokborok Choba (RSKC), a conglomerate of 56 tribal organisations of Tripura, protested – Hindi has its place, it said, but tribal youth prefer the Roman script.

A decades-old tussle

Kokborok is the lingua franca of the bulk of Tripura's 19 tribal communities. It has a long history, and was **recognised as an official state language of Tripura in 1979**. It is now taught in 22 degree colleges of the state, and in Tripura Central University as well.

However, **Kokborok does not have its own script**, and there has long been an argument over whether it should be written in the Bengali or Roman script.

The erstwhile Left government had set up two commissions to examine the question. According to the RSKC, both commissions, led by the former MLA and tribal leader Shyama Charan Tripura, and the linguist Pabitra Sarkar, found that the **Roman script was favoured by the majority of the state's tribal peoples**.

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