

# COVID-19 Hits Hard, but Challenges BRICS

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Region: [Asia](#), [Latin America & Caribbean](#),  
[Russia and FSU](#), [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

*By and large, the coronavirus pandemic has taken a huge toll on Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) since it was declared late January by the World Health Organization (WHO). It allegedly originated (yet to be proved) from Wuhan city in China. However, the World Health Assembly has agreed to launch an investigation into the origin of the disease, whose unyielding march across the globe since last year and has already left more than 320,000 dead. It has shattered nearly all economies.*

In the world including BRICS countries, the outlook remains bleak. Statistics made available as at May 20, showed that Brazil (113,000) in South America, Russia (317,554) in Eastern Europe or compared to, say all the former Soviet republics, India (106,000) and China (82,965) both in Asian region, and South Africa (17,200) in Africa. It means South Africa, with a population 57 million, has one-fifth of the total confirmed COVID-19 cases in Africa.

Further, assessing BRICS countries population in relation to the number of infections, Russia seems to be the worse spot, the second highest in the world and that was followed in the third position by Brazil. Under a “pessimistic scenario”, the number of active cases could peak again when the expected “second wave of coronavirus” sets in if strict precautions are ignored.

Russia’s Health Ministry held, on May 7, a meeting of BRICS countries via videoconference focusing, particularly, on the issue of the novel coronavirus pandemic discussed joint efforts needed by BRICS countries. It was held within the framework of Russia’s BRICS chair-ship.

Participants from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa discussed at the meeting all aspects, including measures on liquidation of the novel coronavirus infection, and submitted report to BRICS Health Ministries.

“It is planned that the online platform will provide partners with an opportunity to share BRICS countries’ experience and develop joint steps towards reaching a better understanding of the ways to liquidate the COVID-19 outbreak,” according to the report.

Under an “optimistic scenario”, the BRICS meeting held May by Health Ministers of BRICS countries would adopt collaborative steps contributing toward the eradication of the global pandemic.

BRICS has to accelerate the implementation of some of its earlier initiatives. Over the years, the BRICS has wanted to expand cooperation in the fight against infections and the joint

production and use of vaccines. Cooperation on countering infectious diseases has long been a priority for BRICS. For instance, the final declaration of the 2015 BRICS summit in Ufa, Russia, contains instructions by the leaders to work on managing the risk of disease outbreaks.

That declaration stated: “we commend the efforts made by the BRICS countries to contribute to enhanced international cooperation to support the efforts of countries to achieve their health goals, including the implementation of universal and equitable access to health services, and ensure affordable, good-quality service delivery while taking into account different national circumstances, policies, priorities and capabilities.”

Last month for instance, BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs /International Relations held a video conference chaired by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Brazilian Foreign Affairs Minister Ernesto Araújo, Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and South African Minister of International Relations Grace Naledi Pandor took part in the meeting.

China and Russia have strong working relationship and both are members of BRICS. Russia objects to attempts by the United States to turn the World Health Organization (WHO) into a forum for settling political scores, Minister Lavrov said with colleagues during the video conference of BRICS Foreign Ministers held late April. Russia has been working closely together with China, and Russia has no reason to oppose China, according to Minister Lavrov.

Key Highlights from that meeting included:

- The BRICS nations agreed to allocate \$15 billion to the New Development Bank (NDB) so that it could set up a special loan instrument to support the revival of economies and help meet the emergency expenses incurred for responding to the coronavirus pandemic.

The BRICS nations further held discussions on ways to step up cooperation within the bloc to contain coronavirus pandemic, as well as to revive the economies that have received a major blow due to the travel restrictions and lockdown imposed in most countries to curb the spread of coronavirus.

- The meeting underlined the need for reforms in the multilateral systems and stated that this was the way forward. The bloc reiterated its support towards the World Health Organization, stating that it is a very important and unique platform, which employs the best professionals from around the world, including from the United States.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called on all the BRICS members to firmly stand by multilateralism, by the international system centered around the United Nations and by the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

Throughout 2020, – under the theme “BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Shared Security and Innovative Growth” – Russia holds the BRICS *pro tempore* presidency. The emphasis of the Russian presidency is on promoting science, technology and innovation and digital economy and health, and strengthening cooperation in the fight against transnational crimes. In addition to those, dozens of academic, sporting, cultural and artistic events

planned for the year.

BRICS is the group composed by the five major emerging countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, – which together represent about 42% of the population, 23% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 30% of the territory and 18% of the global trade.

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