

BRIC INSTITUTIONALIZED

Friday, May 16, 2008

YEKATERINBURG (Russia)

Russia, India, China and Brazil on Friday, May 16, 2008 vowed to turn their four-way group into a powerful instrument for changing the world.

At their first stand-alone meeting here, the Foreign Ministers institutionalized BRIC, agreeing to hold regular meetings at the level of Foreign Ministers.

The Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee hailed BRIC as a "unique combination of mutually complementary economies" and platform to promote energy and food security, fight terrorism and reform global political and financial bodies.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said BRIC would work to "support global stability and ensure uninterrupted and manageable global development."

Speaking at a joint press conference later, Mr. Lavrov said it was only natural that the BRIC grouping had taken shape. "We are the world's fastest growing economies, we have many common interests in the globalised world and share many views on how to build a more democratic, fair and stable world."

"We are changing the way the world order is organized," echoed Brazil's Foreign Minister Celso Amorim.

The BRIC group met a day after a meeting of Russia, India and China in the troika format, which had a very similar agenda.

Underscoring the closeness of the two groups, the Foreign Ministers decided to hold the next stand-alone meetings of the RIC troika and BRIC concurrently in 2009. This prompted a question from the leading Indian daily *The Hindu* about a possible eventual merger of the two groups and BRIC's likely expansion to include the other G8-dialogue outreach countries — South Africa and Mexico.

Mr. Lavrov refused to speculate on the future of RIC and BRIC, but suggested that the two groupings might evolve into something bigger.

"Our BRIC meeting today [Friday, May 16, 2008] and RIC meeting yesterday [Thursday, May 15, 2008] allow me to assert with confidence that the groups' evolution in the natural course of things will be reflected in the forms of their organization."

At variance with U.S.

A joint communiqué on the BRIC meeting set forth coordinated positions on a wide range of pressing international issues that put the group at cross purposes with the United States.

It stressed the need for "building a more democratic international system founded on the rule of law and multilateral diplomacy" with the United Nations "playing the central role."

The BRIC Foreign Ministers said the acute problems of poverty, hunger and diseases could be solved only "if due account is taken of the interests of all nations and within a just global economic system." They called for resolving disputes through "political and diplomatic efforts" and for adopting "a cooperative approach to international security" that would factor in "the concerns of all and address them in a spirit of dialogue and understanding."

In an open challenge to the U.S., the BRIC "agreed on the need for multilateral efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space." Mr. Lavrov proposed that India and Brazil co-sponsor a draft treaty banning weapons in outer space which Russia and China tabled at the U.N. last year.