

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

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Houthis take control of Red Sea coast in Yemen

Agence France-Presse
SANAA/DUBAI

Yemen's Houthis seized a strategic Red Sea island on Friday after capturing territory along the coast, sealing their takeover of a vital shipping corridor linking Europe and Asia.

After a week-long offensive that has left hundreds dead, the Houthis appeared to be in control of territory along the Yemeni side of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the southern gateway to the Red Sea and, in turn, the Suez Canal.

A military official of Yemen's Saudi-backed government said the Houthis have seized control of the country's entire Red Sea coast. "Everything that was under our control on the western coast has fallen," the official said.

The capture of Mayyun island, in the middle of the narrow waterway, heightens the fighters' ability to attack Saudi tankers, which they have been targeting since July.

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter,



Mangled remains: Wreckage of a Saudi Karayel unmanned combat aerial vehicle shot down over Hajjah governorate in Yemen, according to Houthi authorities. REUTERS

The Houthi offensive has cost more than 500 lives, and has displaced about 46,000 people

ter, has relied on the Red Sea ever since Iran's Hor-

muz blockade choked off its shipments via the Gulf.

Praise from Tehran

Mohammad Mokhber, an adviser to Iranian supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei, congratulated the Houthis on their "resounding victory" on Friday.

A member of the Houthi's politburo had sought to allay fears for global shipping in an interview released on Friday, insisting "there is no cause for international concern".

"Freedom of navigation and international trade in the Red Sea and Bab al-

Mandab are safe and orderly," Hazem al-Assad told the Al-Araby al-Jadeed news outlet on Friday.

The Houthi offensive has cost more than 500 lives, and has displaced about 46,000 people, the UN migration agency said on Friday.

The Houthis carried out their heaviest missile and drone attack in years this week against Saudi Arabia -- Yemen's northern neighbour -- setting oil sites ablaze and wounding 73.

Before the Red Sea offensive, the Houthis already controlled a large part of Yemen's north.

Saudi hits back

While Saudi Arabia has hit back with air strikes and ordered troop reinforcements from Aden, where the Saudi-backed government is based, it has failed to stop the Houthis' lightning advance. Houthi media said two Saudi strikes hit Mokha's airport on Friday, while a local official there said the city's seaport was also hit by six missiles of unknown origin.

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India building economic bridges amid rise in global trade barriers, says Modi

At the BRICS Business Forum, PM calls for freedom of navigation; Putin says leading powers of the late 20th century being replaced by emerging economies; Pezeshkian highlights link between economic security and national security, urges BRICS nations to expand trade in local currencies

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday highlighted the issue of rising trade barriers and constrained sea trade routes, saying India was building bridges among these constraints and using its presidency of BRICS this year to establish new cooperation networks among the BRICS nations. He was speaking at the BRICS Business Forum in New Delhi.

Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke about how the leading powers of the late 20th century were being replaced by new emerging economies and that this competition was now taking "ugly forms" such as military attacks and threats of secondary sanctions.

During his speech, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian highlighted the dangers of the global financial system being dependent on only a few countries and called for increased BRICS trade in local currencies. He also said that the attacks by the U.S. and Israel on his country showed how economic security could not be separated from national and regional security.

Mr. Modi took note of the fact that BRICS coun-



At the forum: Prime Minister Narendra Modi holds the hand of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian as they walk alongside Russian President Vladimir Putin and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. ANI

tries represented 50% of the world's population, 40% of global GDP, and more than 25% of global trade.

Cooperation networks

"Not only that, over these years, while global GDP has increased by around two-and-a-half times, the combined GDP of BRICS countries has increased by around four-and-a-half times," he said.

Mr. Modi said that while trade barriers were increasing around the world, India was building economic bridges. "Since 2014, we have entered into free trade agreements with around 40 countries," he

said. "Here too, our approach is the same: reduce barriers and increase opportunities for businesses. Therefore, under our presidency [of BRICS in 2026], we have established new cooperation networks in areas such as agriculture, health, skills and smart grids," he said.

He added that India has taken additional initiatives such as the BRICS Incubator Network, BRICS MSME Portal, and Start-Up Innovation Fund to connect start-ups and MSMEs with markets and finance.

Profound global shifts

"Global trade can move forward only when sea

technological and scientific advantages, Mr. Putin said it was in the nature of humanity and the economy to change.

He added that this change was accompanied by Russia's "Western competitors doing everything to get back their erstwhile competitive edge".

"Sometimes this competition is taking ugly forms," Mr. Putin noted. "Sometimes there are measures resorted to of a physical nature, when pipelines are being destroyed, when attempts are undertaken to block international transport corridors, to seize maritime vessels, other illegal restrictions are being applied."

"And there's also the threat of so-called secondary sanctions against those who do not want to follow someone else's interest and rather look after their own," he added, without mentioning India or the U.S. threat to impose 100% tariffs on India as a penalty for its Russian oil imports.

Mr. Pezeshkian also noted the "increasing use of economic instruments to exert political pressure", and asked the assembled leaders what the BRICS response would be to the ongoing global challenges.

"We believe that the true strength of BRICS is

not confined merely to the size of its members' economies," he said. "Rather, it becomes more apparent when these capacities are transformed into a network of trade, investment, and joint financing that is a transition from potential cooperation to operational."

Mr. Pezeshkian talked about how the decades of sanctions Iran has faced has now entered a new phase as a result of the "active military act of aggression of the United States and the Israeli regime" against Iran.

"This act of aggression, in addition to its human and material losses, once again revealed an important reality: economic security cannot be separated from national and regional security," he emphasised.

"Therefore, by creating resilient capacities for the economies of its members and the global south, BRICS must create an environment in which no country can disrupt the legitimate trade of another country through monopolising a financial instrument or technology," Mr. Pezeshkian said.

He said that one of the most important steps the BRICS countries could take was to expand the use of national currencies in trade.

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India can change what BRICS stands for — more choices, not more blocs

IT'S AN extraordinary conclave of global leaders. As the BRICS Summit opens today at Bharat Mandapam, the leaders will represent almost half the world's population, 40 per cent of global GDP and over a quarter of global trade. The geopolitics makes the lineup even more exceptional, almost audacious. Narendra Modi will host, amongst others, Russia's Vladimir Putin, South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa, Iran's Masoud Pezeshkian, Indonesia's Prabowo Subianto, China's Xi Jinping and the UN Secretary-General. Almost miraculous, in these Manichean times.

It will be tempting to judge it, though, as one judges all summits: Can a communiqué survive the night? Can two wars be papered over in a paragraph? And if Xi shows up smiling, is that a thaw? None of these is the real test. Anyone who has attended the drafting of a summit line in this town knows how it goes. It starts with the communiqué and ends with the communiqué, and whatever grand vision India has for the international system two decades from now is considered — politely — by India's diplomats to be somebody else's bailiwick: The professors. The real test is whether India brings an idea to the meeting or is simply a venue for others' ideas.

Surjit Bhalla wrote one for India in this paper yesterday ('Forget BRICS, look West', IE, September 10). His maths is not wrong, and neither is his analysis. China will never rebalance. But BRICS was never meant to

be either a growth miracle or a security blanket. To fail it for not being something it never set out to be is to flunk it in the wrong exam. The real mistake comes at the conclusion. Looking West because America has shown itself willing to punish partners who drift is not grand strategy. It is a mere change of address.

BRICS is imbalanced. China pushed hardest for new members. Its bank is in Shanghai. Russia and Iran, the members under Western sanctions, are the ones most interested in de-dollarising their trade. And it is Washington, not Beijing, that now threatens tariffs against any bloc that flirts with a rival to the dollar. Equidistance between America and China is not a policy; it's an assertion of powerlessness. Alignment with either is surrender. What India should do instead is work, quietly, to change what BRICS is for. The world doesn't need more blocs. It needs more choices. A grouping that seats Iran beside the UAE will never agree on ideology, and need not.

The international system, and Asia at its centre, is too large and too plural to be organised around a single axis. India's place in the world gives it both the latitude and the responsibility to say this with conviction. Brazil and South Africa, which gain nothing from either Chinese or American primacy, can say it with the same conviction, and should join Delhi at the table. The rule applies in the other di-



AMITABH MATTOO

The international system, and Asia at its centre, is too large and too plural to be organised around a single axis. India's place in the world gives it both latitude and responsibility to say this with conviction

rection, too. Reforming a Western-designed system is a legitimate wish, but a world where Washington is replaced by Beijing as the trusted guarantor of Asian choices simply replaces one centre with another. The harder ambition is an Asia in which China is powerful but not hegemonic, India influential but not domineering, ASEAN does not have to choose, the Gulf defines itself, and the small don't have to be anyone's client states. None of that is "anti-China". All of it is opposed to hegemony. That distinction is the whole argument.

Three things are within India's reach this weekend. First, an interoperability protocol that links domestic fast-payment systems, building on UPI's existing presence in the Gulf and Southeast Asia and allowing any member to join (or leave) at will. Not a BRICS currency, but a set of alternatives so that no country ever has to rely on a single financial plumbing system. Second, reform of NDB governance that gives newer members more power over its capital. Third, if the sher-

pas insist on a statement about Ukraine and Gaza, let's make it one about principles, not positions: Not an endorsement of anyone's war aims but a defence of sovereignty which applies to Ukrainians and Gazans alike, and an offer of Indian good offices that this government has, for whatever reason, been extremely reluctant to extend.

When I teach Indian foreign policy at Jawaharlal Nehru University, I teach Kautilya, too. The mandala confuses my students for reasons opposite to those I expect. They think an old book will give them hierarchies. They find networks. I call their attention to the inner ring, where the vijigishu sits: The king who wishes to conquer. Then you realise that every king in a mandala considers himself the vijigishu. The map has as many centres as it has points. Hegemony, in Kautilya, isn't how the world is. It's what one powerful ruler wants to make of it, despite all the other vijigishus. Asia should settle, instead, for a Kautilyan compromise: A circle of states that can disagree and still cooperate, whose sovereignty is absolute and none of which has the power or the excuse to impose its will on the others.

History is being made whilst we wait. But it isn't made by onlookers. It's hammered out on anvils. For two days this weekend, India is in possession of the anvil. Washington and Beijing wield the hammers. If India can lay ideas on that anvil this weekend, there's a chance Asia will have more than one centre when the dust settles. And if there's one enduring product of this summit that survives the photo-op, let it not be a declaration. Let it be a different question we ask about Asia. Not "Who will dominate?" but "How do we ensure that nobody does?"

The writer is dean and professor, SIS, JNU and former vice-chancellor, University of Jammu