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1. Trump threat to BRICS over ditching the dollar: what he can do, what it will mean for US, India**Overview**

Ever since the US chose to weaponise the global financial infrastructure by throwing Iran (in 2012) and Russia (in 2022) out of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), key to international financial transactions, countries across the globe have been looking to reduce dependence on the US dollar as well as the US-led global financial system.

Perceiving these growing attempts as a threat to the US dollar's domination, US President-elect Donald Trump has threatened Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS nations) with

100 per cent tariffs if they create a new BRICS currency or back any other currency to replace the US dollar as the world's reserve currency.

This comes after Russian President Vladimir Putin at the BRICS summit in October said: "The dollar is being used as a weapon. We really see that this is so. I think that this is a big mistake by those who do this."

However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the summit said that BRICS should not acquire the image of one that is trying to replace global institutions.

India's efforts towards rupee internationalisation

Trump's threat comes at a time when US sanctions on Russia resulted in Russian oil being redirected from Europe to Asia. In an effort to reduce reliance on the US dollar and to internationalise the Indian rupee, the Reserve Bank of India allowed invoicing and payments for international trade in Indian rupees in 2022, after sanctions were imposed on Russia amid the Ukraine war.

Notably, foreign exchange market turnover (daily averages), as per the BIS Triennial Central Bank Survey 2022, shows the US dollar is the dominant vehicle currency, accounting for 88 per cent of the global forex turnover. The rupee accounted for 1.6 per cent. The survey stated that if rupee turnover rises to equal the share of non-US, non-Euro currencies in global forex turnover of 4 per cent, it will be regarded as an international currency.

However, India's trade with Russia in domestic currency remains low due to Indian banks' fear of US sanctions and an unbalanced trade relationship between the two countries. While there has been a multifold rise in India-Russia trade after the Ukraine war, it has been firmly in favour of Russia.

India's exports to Russia stood at \$4.2 billion in FY24, but increasing oil imports from Moscow have widened the import bill to \$61 billion. As a result, Russia has a huge pile of rupee reserves that it has not been able to use to settle bilateral trade using domestic currency, and is instead using it to invest in Indian stocks and bonds.

On the contrary, bilateral trade between Russia and China in domestic currency has jumped. A more balanced Russia-China trade has helped transactions using the yuan and rouble. China-Russia trade in 2023 crossed a record \$240-billion mark. The Russian government said that over 90 per cent of the bilateral trade settlement is now in Russian roubles.

'Not trying to target the US dollar'

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in October said that while India is pursuing its trade interests, avoiding the use of the US dollar is not part of India's economic policy.

Jaishankar said US policies often complicate trade with certain countries, and India is seeking "workarounds" without intending to move away from the dollar, unlike some other nations. However, the minister added that a multipolar world will eventually be reflected in "currencies and economic dealings".

'Threats impractical and counterproductive'

International trade experts said that while the US dollar dominates global trade—accounting for over 90 per cent of transactions—it is not the only currency used internationally. Other convertible currencies like the Japanese yen, the euro, and the British pound are also integral to global commerce, and the United States has not objected to their use. The proposed BRICS currency is simply an extension of these existing alternatives.

"It is the actions of the United States that have pushed many countries to seek alternatives to the US dollar. The US has a history of leveraging its influence over global financial systems, such as the SWIFT network, to impose unilateral sanctions. SWIFT is essential for secure and standardised international financial transactions. By blocking countries like Russia and Iran from accessing SWIFT, the US has effectively weaponised the global financial infrastructure, forcing other nations to find alternative payment mechanisms to continue legitimate trade," former trade officer and head of think tank Global Trade Research Initiative, Ajay Srivastava, said.

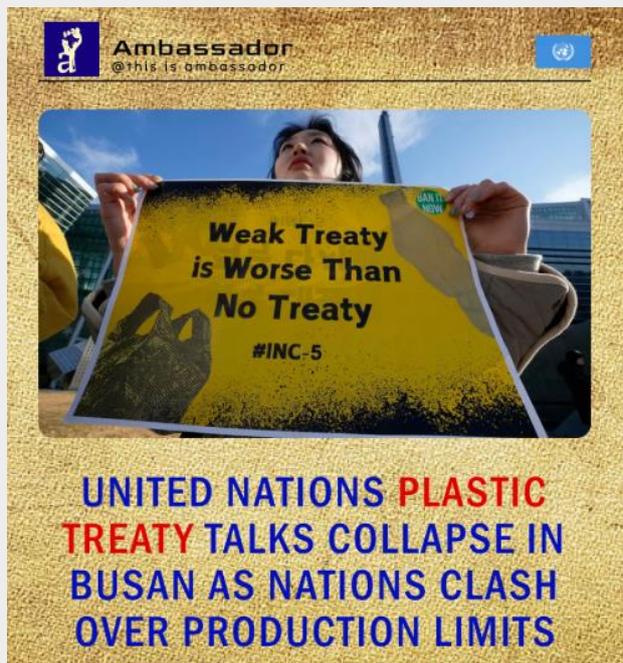
Srivastava said that a 100 per cent tariff on BRICS countries could backfire. "Imports into the US would simply shift to third countries, potentially increasing costs for American consumers without bringing manufacturing jobs back home. The US has become less competitive in manufacturing labour-intensive goods due to higher production costs, and tariffs are unlikely to reverse this trend," he said.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

2. Why global plastic treaty talks collapsed

Introduction



The week-long global talks in Busan, South Korea, on curbing plastic pollution ended recently in failure to adopt a final legally binding treaty as countries could not reach an agreement on how to regulate plastic production.

This was the fifth and final round of negotiations since March 2022, when the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) agreed to develop a legally binding treaty on plastics pollution by the end of 2024. Although the treaty was not finalised, discussions on the draft text of the treaty will continue next year.

Why did the talks fail?

The main dispute was regarding the demand for production cap goals in the final treaty along with clear language on the elimination of certain plastic chemicals and products. This demand was mainly pushed by a coalition of more than 100 countries which includes African nations, Latin American nations and most of the European Union.

However, a coalition of "like-minded countries" including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Russia, and Iran opposed the inclusion of provisions on plastic production cuts, arguing they were beyond the mandate of the 2022 resolution to end plastic pollution. For instance, Kuwait said in a bid to include such provisions in the final treaty, the mandate was being stretched for advancing trade restrictions, economic agendas, and commercial competition, under the guise of environmental action. India and China also supported the stand of this coalition.

What does the treaty's draft text say?

The draft text reflected both points of consensus and contention.

Points of consensus included proposing a ban on open dumping and open burning for sustainable waste management. The draft text also provided clear definitions of plastic and

plastic products, but it did not reflect definitions of contentious issues such as microplastics, nanoplastics, primary plastic polymers, and recycling.

Despite a pushback from the Arab group of countries led by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the draft text included options to include a goal to reduce plastic after the treaty is finalised. References to single-use plastics and short-lived plastics were also included.

This draft text, with all its issues and progress, will serve as the basis for the next session in 2025.

What was India's stance?

India's stance and interventions centred on issues such as the varying responsibilities of countries in addressing plastic pollution, keeping in focus the right to development of countries and the need for the provision of technical and financial assistance to manage plastic waste. It also stressed that the scope of the treaty should be well-defined to not overlap with existing multilateral environmental agreements.

India outlined its stance in the opening plenary. Its delegation said any legally binding treaty must recognise the need for support to developing countries through finance and technology transfer. At the outset it made clear it did not support any articles on "supply", referring to the discussions surrounding curbing production. India said the sustainable level of production at a global or national level was not well-defined and may become a method for imposing a cap on the production of products, chemicals, or primary polymers.

It also said production of primary polymers was not directly linked to plastic pollution and there should be no targets concerning polymer or plastic production. Instead, it asked to focus on reducing plastic pollution. Further, it did not support a levy of a plastic pollution fee on the production of primary polymers.

At the end of the talks, India added that a balance has to be struck between preventing plastic pollution and protecting the sustainable development of developing countries.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

3. Why South Korea President has declared 'emergency martial law', what this means

Overview

South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol declared "emergency martial law" in an unannounced television address late on December 3 night, accusing the opposition of sympathising with North Korea and paralysing the government with anti-state activities.

"Through this martial law, I will rebuild and protect the free Republic of Korea, which is falling into the depths of national ruin... I will eliminate anti-state forces as quickly as possible and normalise the country," he said, while requesting the public to tolerate "some inconveniences".

What does martial law entail?

Put simply, martial law is the replacement of civilian government by military rule, and the suspension of civilian legal processes for military ones. Standard civil liberties may be suspended for as long as martial law continues.

Article 77 of the Republic of Korea's constitution contains provisions pertaining to the declaration of martial law in the country. It says: "When it is required to cope with a military necessity or to maintain the public safety and order by mobilization of the military forces in time of war, armed conflict or similar national emergency, the President may proclaim martial law as prescribed by law."

"Under extraordinary martial law, special measures may be taken with respect to the necessity for warrants, freedom of speech, the press, assembly and association, or the powers of the Executive and the Judiciary under the conditions as prescribed by law," Article 77 further says. South Korea's Yonhap News Agency cited the military as saying activities by parliament and political parties would be banned, and that media and publishers would be under the control of the martial law command. The news agency also reported that MPs are not being allowed to access the premises of the National Assembly in Seoul.

In his announcement, Yoon did not mention specific measures that will be in force during martial law.

Since the establishment of the Republic of Korea, martial law has been declared 16 times. It was last declared in 1980.



Why did President Yoon declare martial law?

Since the latest National Assembly elections held earlier this year delivered a landslide verdict for the opposition, Yoon has effectively been a lame duck president. He has not been able to pass the laws he wants, and has instead been reduced to vetoing bills passed by the opposition. This is what he was referring to when he spoke about the opposition having "paralysed state affairs".

Moreover, since his election in 2022, he has seen a steady decline in approval ratings in part due to the number of scandals involving him and his wife, who has been accused of "influence peddling", according to the BBC. Allegations against Yoon's wife

include stock manipulation and accepting a luxury Dior handbag. The opposition has been trying to launch a special investigation against her.

In recent weeks, Yoon's conservative People Power Party had been locked in an impasse with the liberal opposition Democratic Party over next year's budget bill. Simultaneously, the opposition has also moved to impeach three top prosecutors in what Yoon has described as a vendetta against their criminal investigation on Lee Jae-myung, who narrowly lost the presidential election in 2022 but is favourite to win the next time around in 2027.

It is in face of these crises that Yoon has chosen what analysts are calling "the nuclear option".

What has the response been to Yoon's declaration?

The declaration of martial law has come completely out of the blue. So far, according to the BBC, "the streets look normal". The public's reaction is characterised more by "bewilderment" than anything else, the BBC reported.

The move, however, has invited unanimous criticism from South Korea's political establishment, including Yoon's own party.

The People's Power Party leader Han Dong-hoon has called the declaration of martial law a "wrong" move, and has vowed to block it. Notably, according to South Korean law, the government must lift martial law if the majority of the National Assembly demands votes for its repeal.

However, it is unclear how this vote will take place, given reports that lawmakers are not being allowed access into the Parliament.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

4. Marburg virus outbreak in Rwanda: Why 'bleeding eye disease' is a global concern

Bleeding eye disease



An outbreak of Marburg virus disease (MVD) has killed at least 15 people, and infected at least 66 in Rwanda as of November 29, the country's Ministry of Health announced.

Often referred to as the "bleeding eye virus", MVD is one of the deadliest pathogens known to infect humans. Case fatality rates ranging from 24% to 88% in past outbreaks, depending on virus strain and case management. The first case in Rwanda this year was reported in September.

Ebola's lesser-known twin

Marburg belongs to the filovirus family, like the much better known Ebola. Both pathogens are clinically similar, and although rare, can cause outbreaks with high fatality rates.

The first recognised MVD outbreak occurred in the town of Marburg in Germany in 1967. Since then, subsequent outbreaks have been mostly reported across Africa, most recently in Tanzania, Ghana, and now Rwanda.

The World Health Organisation has put MVD in a list of pathogens that pose the greatest threat to public health, and do not have adequate drugs and vaccines against them.

Spread from bats, human contact

Initially, human MVD infections were caused by prolonged exposure to mines or caves inhabited by colonies of Rousettus bats, most notably the Egyptian fruit bat (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*).

However, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), the virus also spreads through human-to-human contact: both directly (through contact with blood and other bodily fluids of infected people), and indirectly (through surfaces and materials like bedding, clothing, etc. contaminated with these fluids).

Can cause haemorrhagic symptoms

The interval between infection and onset of symptoms varies from 2 to 21 days. Initial symptoms, according to the WHO, include high fever, severe headache, muscle ache, severe watery diarrhoea, abdominal pain and cramping, and vomiting.

Many patients develop haemorrhagic symptoms (bleeding), often in many places including the digestive system (faeces and vomit often come with fresh blood), the nose, gums, the eyes (hence "bleeding eye disease"), and vagina. Haemorrhage leads to most MVD fatalities, with death in fatal cases occurring 8 to 9 days after the onset of symptoms, usually of severe blood loss and shock.

Treatments still in the works

Currently, there are no approved vaccines or specific treatments for MVD. According to WHO, supportive care — rehydration with oral or intravenous fluids — and treatment of specific symptoms, improves survival.

Some treatments are also being further devised. Rwanda Health Minister Sabin Nsanzimana had said in October that the country is seeking experimental vaccines and treatments. The US-based Sabin Vaccine Institute had provided Rwanda with 700 doses of its experimental Marburg vaccine, which were administered to healthcare professionals at the frontlines. Its efficacy is still unclear.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express