

# The Kazan BRICS Games 2024: Strengthening Inter-Cultural Friendship and Solidarity

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*BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), an informal association of sovereign countries, has been experiencing a wide range of steady and progressive developments.*

*It is also experiencing a comprehensive strengthening of multifaceted friendship in the association and among its new members: Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. But the most important and common to all is that BRICS has been envisioned on a few key policy principles, particularly a shift towards bolstering a new economic architecture, respect for equal rights, protection of sovereignty, and sustaining a fairer world. In typical practice, as the geopolitical contest widens, the BRICS approach also focuses on ways to counterbalance the United States and Europe's overarching strategic interests around the world.*

In the middle of June, the BRICS Games were held for the first time, a new promising initiative that sportsmen and women converged in **Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan**. A historical city on the Volga.



For two weeks, **over 3,000 athletes from the BRICS member states demonstrated the triumph of universal values of sport, equal opportunities, and uncompromising talents in different kinds of distinctive sports.** The activeness displayed during the two weeks pointed to the fact that BRICS is consolidating its international friendship, and its future preparedness in global affairs continues to increase rapidly.



## **GAMES 2024**

BRICS is an effort to form a geopolitical bloc capable of counterbalancing the influence of western dominated global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. BRICS association collectively works against the century-old 'rules-based order' and instead advocates for multipolarity and the establishment of a more just, balanced, polycentric world architecture.

In his short but modest message delivered to participants on June 12, **President Vladimir Putin** underscored the above-mentioned fact and its implications of the BRICS Games, among others, stand "as a competition free from political interference and pressure that truly unites athletes from around the world." Organized in an open large-scale format for the first time this 2024, moreover under Russia's chairmanship, Putin emphasized unreservedly that "the BRICS Games will become yet another symbol of expanding inter-cultural dialogue, making a weighty contribution to strengthening friendship among its members and facilitating interstate interaction in the interests of people and universal development." (See *Putin's Message, Kremlin, 12 April 2024*)

As certainly shown, the BRICS Games has now become one of the most innovative achievements, an assessment of incredible prospects for broadening its image. The participants share their caring attitude towards each other despite peculiar cultural

diversities. In practical reality, it highlighted a comprehension of new realities and a new geopolitical culture as reflected in the entire Games. In a context, it has lately dominated the discussions in many media outlets.

Moreover, a few days before the commencement of the Games, BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs/International Relations issued a joint statement on 10th June 2024, in which they noted clearly within the framework that “the active participation of the new members of BRICS, and assured continued support to their seamless and full integration into BRICS cooperation mechanisms.” It is worth reiterating here that one of the latest mechanisms is the BRICS Games. (*See the Joint Statement of BRICS Foreign Ministers, Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation, 10 June 2024.*)

The Foreign Ministers of BRICS member states – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Iran, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia. Reports stated that Foreign Ministers as Guest States – Algeria, Bangladesh, Bahrain, Belarus, Venezuela, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cuba, Laos, Mauritania, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkey and Sri Lanka – participated in the meeting.

## **Results of BRICS Games**

In a further analysis from Russian local media including *Interfax Information Agency and Itar-Tass*, the unique feature was that the Russian national team won the largest medal count of the BRICS Games. The main reason was that Russian sports enthusiasts are located in the Russian Federation, while foreign participants faced some hurdles in traveling from and to their destinations. Ethiopia, for instance, despite its direct daily flights to Russia, still needed sponsorship.

According to fascinating insights into local and foreign media reports monitored by this article author, the 2024 BRICS games were several times larger than all previous BRICS games – 387 sets of medals were awarded in 27 sports, while the next-largest BRICS games were the 2023 edition in South Africa where only five sports were contested.

The brisk ceremony was held on 12 June 2024 in the concert hall of the international exhibition complex Kazan Expo and in the presence of athletes and official guests without ordinary spectators. Instead of a grand ceremony on 23 June 2024, only athletes and guests participated in the Sabantuy festival at the closing of the Games.

(1) Russian athletes have won 262 gold medals. It had a total of 502 medals including gold, silver, and bronze.

(2) The Belarusian national team ranks second, its athletes have received a total of 247 medals.

(3) China got a total of 62 medals.

(4) Brazil got 50 medals.

(5) India had 29 medals.

(6) South Africa had 7 medals.

A total of 382 gold medals sets of medals were played for or competed at the BRICS Games.

There were 27 sports contested at the 2024 BRICS Games. With an exceptionally huge budget, cash prizes were also awarded to winners of the gold, silver and bronze medals, demonstrated Russia's rising desire to support BRICS. (*The medal tally is maintained by the BRICS Games website*)

Largely predictable as it happened, there were doubts that Russian sportsmen and women, who participated in the Games, were in their thousands while foreign athletes were, most probably, only in their few hundreds. The largest delegations were from Russia, Brazil, and China. It was noted that most countries sent weaker teams, with the exception of Russia, Belarus, and Brazil. The results were that Russians got nearly all the medals including the gold, diamonds, and silvers. For Russia which adores symbolism, it was again an occasion to explore and project its image. It is also interested in building and uplifting its post-Soviet image to international levels. For individual Russian athletes, or more appropriately the collective capitalized on socio-cultural opportunities for their benefits and for professional careers and future prosperity.

At the closing ceremony, several remarks published on official websites and on social media and related responses impact on Russia's foreign policy significantly. It highlighted, once more, Soviet slogans of "international friendship and solidarity" which could play some crucial role in balancing its strategic alliances in BRICS and with other partnering developing countries in the Global South.

Considering the collective lined-up activities culminating in the final BRICS summit in October 2024, it has broader implications for the global geopolitics. In the first place, it provides the cornerstone for much-talked-about the association's expansion or enlargement. More than thirty (30) countries, which constitute a notable force, have expressed the desire to join the association, according to several reports. Despite the potential for achieving the primary aspirations of the association offering significant opportunities to some actors, it presents simultaneously complex interplay of historical ties, disparity of economic uncertainties, social and cultural diversities, and therefore, also faces substantial challenges that necessitate adopting strategies to surmount and overcome in BRICS future development process.

**History of BRICS Games:** Paving the way for the BRICS Games was an Under-17 (U17) football tournament organized by the Indian state of GOA in October 2016. Brazil eventually won the tournament beating South Africa 5-1 in the final, while Russia took third by defeating China 2-1.

Then the inaugural BRICS Games were held in June 2017 in Guangzhou, China. The Russian side won the basketball and volleyball competitions. Athletes from China dominated in Wushu competitions.

The next edition of the BRICS Games was held in South Africa's Johannesburg in July 2018 and its program included competitions in men's volleyball (won by Russia), women's volleyball (won by China), and women's football (won by Brazil).

The BRICS Games were not held in 2019 when Brazil held the rotating chair in the organization. In 2020, Russia chaired the association and planned to hold the BRICS Games in the city of Chelyabinsk putting six sports competitions on the list of the tournament's schedule (3×3 Basketball, Boxing, Women's Volleyball, Table Tennis, Sambo wrestling, and Wushu). However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the BRICS Games were at first

postponed from June to September and later canceled altogether.

India presided over BRICS in 2021, but the BRICS Games were not organized for safety reasons due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2022 BRICS Games were organized in an online format by China, which presided over the association that year. The program of the tournament included online chess matches, break dancing and Wushu (participants in both competitions were judged by video clips they sent). A total of 42 sets of medals were handed out and Russia finished 1st in the overall medals standings followed by China and India.

The 2023 BRICS Games were held in Durban, South Africa, between October 18 and 21. The program of the tournament included competitions in swimming, tennis, badminton, beach volleyball, table tennis as well as various competitions for disabled athletes (wheelchair tennis and wheelchair table tennis).

Up to 450 athletes from Russia, Brazil, India, China, and South Africa participated in the tournament, where Russia was represented by 34 athletes. The Russian team again finished first in the overall medal standings having won 59 medals (35 gold, 12 silver, and 12 bronze medals), followed by the Chinese national team with 55 medals (19-22-14) in 2nd place, and the South African team in 3rd place with 51 medals (9-22-20).

In mid-May 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed the government to submit proposals for organizing and holding the BRICS Games (2024) in Russia. The program of the tournament featured Rhythmic Gymnastics, Fencing, Synchronized Swimming, Judo, Diving, Badminton, Karate, Wrestling, Sambo, Wushu, Koresh Belt Wrestling, and other competitions.

Perhaps, the most critical aspect in defusing criticisms was when Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov paid an official visit in April to China, where he stated that the 2024 BRICS Games and the following World Friendship Games in Russia would be organized based on the principles enshrined by International Olympic Committee (IOC) Charter. Lavrov's main concern is to shift in dynamics and switch Western allegiances, pushing these steps for realignments is undoubtedly fraught with challenges and exposes far-reaching implications for global geopolitics.

## **BRICS Games and Future Perspectives**

Kazan is the sports capital of Russia. There were volunteers from 17 regions of Russia including the Arkhangelsk region, the Krasnodar region, Siberia, Tyumen, Omsk, Tomsk, and the Urals - represented by the Chelyabinsk Region. The most extreme and farthest point is Vladivostok - volunteers from the Primorsky region. "Our objective is to ensure that all countries have the opportunity to compete without discrimination and politicization as well as to create equal conditions for everyone and follow the traditions of sports," Russian Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyarev said, speaking at the 'BRICS - New Opportunities for Multipolar Sports Development' session, held at Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF).

The local authority boasts of this great honor bestowed on the city, a venue for exchanging useful experiences and collaborating trends, in one way or the other, for the unprecedented benefit of citizens and association members in the field of sports. Kazan is now described as "a city of modern public (people-to-people) diplomacy, consolidating contemporary

diplomacy at the provincial city level and developing innovative approaches to existing challenges, outlining emerging diverse tasks and creating new models of sustainable social interactions.” Kazan Mayor Ilsur Metshin termed it “the power of city diplomacy” and expressed conscientious hope that it would forever be remembered for its contributory fame in the history of new movement as it garnered its own colossal sport and cultural heritage. Moreover, this sports diplomacy promotes invaluable cooperation that could lead to hospitality and tourism business among BRICS.

The Sports Ministers in Kazan, on the sidelines of the BRICS Games, have agreed to take additional indisputable measures in confrontation of the United States and Europe. “We deem the elaboration of a framework program for sports cooperation between BRICS members to be an important initiative,” Russian Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyaryov said. “Together, we should oppose attempts to use sport as an instrument of pressure or discrimination for ethnic or political reasons.” Towards that, Russia has volunteered to draft the framework document that will lay the foundation for sports cooperation between BRICS members, consolidate integral values, and set the rules for BRICS games.

As far back in May 2022, the BRICS member countries, recognizing the value of interpersonal and cultural exchanges, signed the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Agreement between the Governments of the BRICS members and its new partners on Cooperation in the Field of Culture for 2022-2026. This plan was designed to strengthen cultural cooperation. The signatories intend to collaborate in the domains of culture, tourism, education, the arts, sports, and other areas. Within the contours of shifting geopolitical dynamics, BRICS continues navigating the challenges and opportunities. In a distinctive reality, the sports diplomacy offers an opportunity for building trust and understanding, necessary ingredients for uncompromising vision and pathways into the future.

The Russian Federation chairs BRICS in 2024. The BRICS Games has become an annual multi-sports tournament organized by the country that holds the rotating chair in the association. The BRICS Games, featured more than 20 different sports, on the orders of President Vladimir Putin was held in the Volga area city of Kazan on June 12-23, according to the BRICS Games Organizing Committee. The renovation of Kazan’s sports facilities, upgraded the entire infrastructure, hosting the BRICS Games cost four billion rubles (\$45.1 mln). The final BRICS summit in October is expected to give a weighty package of approved solutions to set the vector of cooperation on politics, security, the economy, finance, science, culture, sport, and humanitarian relations.

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