



'BRICS' CABLE AND CYBER SECURITY

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The USA's PRISM program, which is a mass electronic surveillance program conducted by the National Security Agency (NSA) on almost all the countries of the world has created a huge storm in the world politics in the recent months. Along with the ongoing Syrian Crisis, the issue of USA's surveillance program is the most discussed issue in the stage of world politics. While all the countries of the world have condemned the act of USA in breaching their country's sovereignty, the BRICS countries which is a group of the fast developing economies comprising of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa have gone a step further in expressing their dissatisfaction.

The heads of the states of BRICS nations met after six months on the sidelines of 68th – United Nations General Assembly meeting which started on 17th September in New York. While the whole speech of Brazilian President, Dilma Rousseff was on condemning the surveillance program, other countries also expressed their dissatisfaction. It is to be noted here that the Brazilian President has postponed her state visit to USA which was supposed to be in the month of October due to the allegation of USA's surveillance on Brazil and on the President herself.

It is at this same gathering, the foreign ministers of all these five BRICS countries met and discussed on various issues including cyber security. In their joint media statement the foreign ministers including the foreign minister of India, Salman Kurshid expressed their concern about the reported practices of unauthorised interception of communications and data from citizens, businesses and members of governments, compromising national sovereignty and individual rights. They reiterated that "it is

important to contribute to and participate in a peaceful, secure, and open cyberspace and emphasised that security in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) through universally accepted norms, standards and practices is of paramount importance”.

Although the BRICS countries have come together in expressing their concern towards the surveillance program their individual initial responses for the program were too different. While Brazil, Russia and China totally condemned the program from the start, India started off by defending the program at first, but later condemned due to pressure from internal media and there was not much reaction from the South African side. Nevertheless Brazil, China and Russia responded strictly against USA through their actions. While Brazilian President called off her state visit to USA thereby stopping all the business deals which were supposed to happen including the F-16 deal, China allowed Edward Snowden, the whistleblower of PRISM program, to fly to Russia rejecting USA's extradition plea and Russia went on a step further by giving asylum to Snowden in its country.

While it is known and understood widely that governments of countries do carry out surveillance programs on one another, the depth to which USA has gone in the name of surveillance has triggered the outrage in the world stage. The PRISM program has gone to the extent of collecting and processing of e-mails in the pretext of surveillance against terrorism. The program has also gone to the extent of tapping and recording calls not only of leaders but also of civilians and also bugging the countries missions at various places. For example, under the surveillance program, billions of pieces of information have been plucked from the telephone and internet networks of India in just 30 days. India is the most affected among the BRICS countries under the PRISM program and it falls in the fifth rank in terms of amount of information obtained in the overall surveillance program around the world. Yet, a concrete response and plan for the future is not clear from the Indian government.

On the other hand Brazil which was the most affected Latin American nation by the PRISM program has expressed its grief and has started to work on enhancing its security in all aspects. Brazil has entered into a cyber security pact with Argentina and the

government is also moving a bill in the congress which would force the service providing companies like Google and Facebook to maintain their servers inside the country. Also, in order to protect the interest of BRICS countries in the networks Brazil is focusing on the construction of BRICS Cable, an underwater fibre optic cable which would connect between Fortaleza, Brazil and Vladivostok, Russia.

The fibre optic cable comprising of 2-fibre pair with a capacity of 12.8 Terabit per second would be the third longest undersea telecommunications cable in the world, covering a distance of 34,000km. This hi-Tech connectivity would be the BRICS countries' greatest strategic investment and is expected to help these fast growing economies by enhancing technology sharing, boosting trade and by facilitating easy financial transactions.

On India's part, the country is in an absolute dilemma regarding its cyber security. Although India is getting offers from various countries like Japan, Israel, Canada and United Kingdom for partnership in the field of Cyber security, India is unable to process any request or even to enhance its indigenous cyber security due to two main reasons. Firstly, India is yet to functionalise its Cyber Security Policy, which would clearly determine the need of the state and secondly India lacks in the number of cyber security experts to secure its networks. India has around 30000 cyber security experts whereas the state's requirement is 500000 including both private and public sector. In this situation, it can only be hoped that the Cyber Security Policy of India will come into force soon and the country will work in enhancing its number of cyber soldiers in the years to come.

End Notes:

- Brazil, Argentina team up for joint Cyber defence mechanism, "The Hindu", September 16, 2013.
- Brazil: BRICS cable aids cyber security, "The BRICS Post", September 20, 2013. [URL]: <http://thebricspost.com/brazil-brics-cable-aids-cyber-security/#.UkwAwd7Vt3v>
- <http://gadebate.un.org/68/brazil>
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- <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/Americas/NSA-cyber-snooping-worries-BRICS/Article1-1127825.aspx>
- <http://www.un.org/en/ga/info/meetings/67schedule.shtml>
- India among top targets of spying by NSA, "The Hindu", September 23, 2013.
- NSA cyber snooping worries BRICS, "Hindustan times", September 27, 2013.

- www.bricscable.com

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