

Invest in
**SOUTH
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Tackling the challenges of ICT and the internet

The rapid development of the internet and a sharp increase in user numbers are causing cybersecurity to gain prominence globally, and the Durban Summit may see the BRICS countries discuss the harmonisation of cyber legislation

The BRICS activities in the field of information and communications technology (ICT) are based on the role of the forum and its potential as a market. With 700 million internet users, the BRICS economies account for 29 per cent of the global user audience, a share that will rise due to the massive growth of their internet penetration rate. This is a colossal asset in terms of economic and social development, but making this asset work in the BRICS countries requires investing in it heavily.

A major thrust is intercontinental (or inter-regional) infrastructure projects aimed at developing bandwidth in remote regions, such as South Africa. One such project, aimed at developing broadband not only in South Africa but also among its neighbours, was presented at the 2011 Sanya Summit in China. The South Atlantic Express submarine cable was designed to link South Africa and Angola to the GlobeNet cable through the United States and Brazil. A year later, an even larger BRICS cable project was announced, envisaging a 34,000 km fibre-optic cable that would link all the BRICS economies to the United States, from Vladivostok to Miami through China,

India and Brazil. With more than \$1.5 billion required, the project is still waiting for the investors' green light, but the prospects are promising. Africa is the most rapidly growing internet market in the world, but it is also one with a great lack of infrastructure for broadband access. The BRICS cable is thus in very high demand, with its potential to provide more than 50 million people in the southern African region with broadband internet in the coming years.

Global cybersecurity

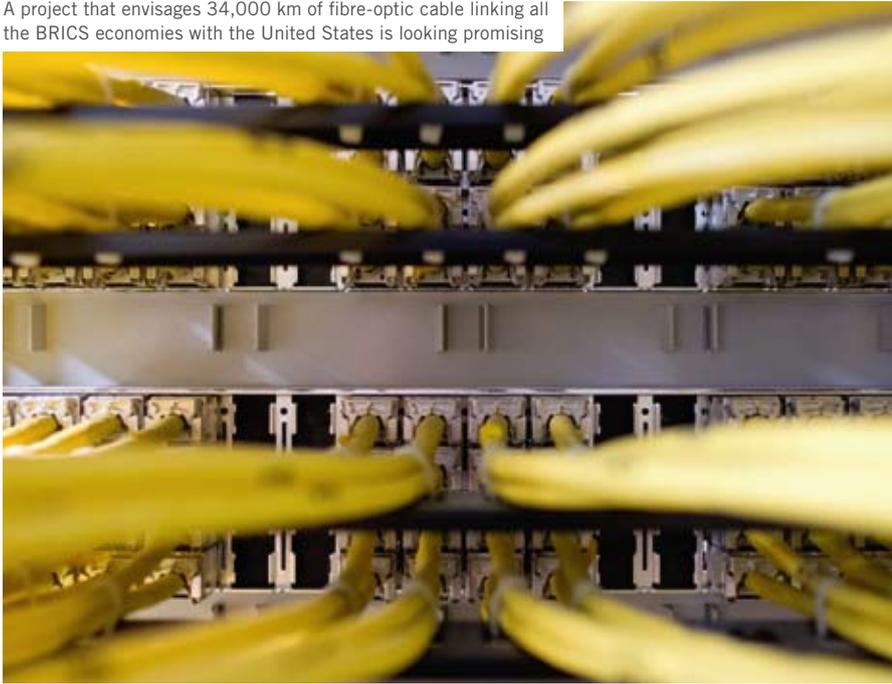
However, tackling the digital divide is not the only mainstream ICT-related activity within the BRICS. Steadily going beyond the economic dimension, the forum is showing increasing interest in global cybersecurity – or international information security, depending on the approach. The latter, focused on content-related security aspects of internet communications, is advocated by Russia and China. In 2011, Russia presented two major initiatives: the conception of a convention on international information security and, in cooperation with China and two central Asian states, a draft code of conduct in the field. Since then, Russia and China

have put much effort into securing support for these initiatives among their BRICS partners. India and Brazil showed interest and supported crafting an international legal regime of cyber and information security, probably extending beyond the scope of soft law and involving content-related aspects. However, these ideas met strong criticism from the US and Europe, so now the BRICS leaders are focusing more on soft law approaches and emphasising cybercrime and cyberterrorism.

ICT will mainly arise on the agenda of the Durban Summit in its security dimension – namely cybersecurity. One of the top issues is the exchange of best practices of national cyber emergency-response teams (CERTs). This again proves that the approach pushed by Russia and China in the global arena, focused on content-related aspects of international information security, is not yet dominant within the BRICS.

Developing cooperation on CERTs is very much a technical exercise in trust building, typical for such international forums as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Moreover, Durban is focused on countering cybercrime rather than dealing with cybersecurity challenges of a military, political or strategic nature. In some ways that is reasonable, as it is

A project that envisages 34,000 km of fibre-optic cable linking all the BRICS economies with the United States is looking promising



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cybercrime – not hackers or politically motivated cyber activities – that are a particular headache for countries that have a rapidly rising ICT sector. In 2012, the BRICS states reportedly accounted for around 50 per cent of global economic losses related to cybercrime (worth around \$55 billion).

Addressing cybercrime

The BRICS group started addressing cybercrime and cyberterrorism at the beginning of 2012, and the issue will be an increasing priority in coming years. Practical activities, such as joint training and expertise sharing, and legal initiatives, such as crafting a new global regime to fight cybercrime or harmonise national cybercrime legislation within the BRICS countries, could be anticipated and discussed at Durban.

Unlike cybersecurity, however, internet governance is not a top priority at Durban. Shortly after the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) conference in Dubai in December 2012,

which almost became a point of division for internet governance, it is now not easy for BRICS leaders to reduce their ambitions to the lowest common denominator. In Dubai, a group of states led by Russia and China launched a campaign to introduce major changes to the International Telecommunication Regulations – a treaty signed in 1988 to govern international telecommunications.

Moscow and Beijing sought to include the internet as a separate type of telecommunications, thus bringing global internet governance under the intergovernmental ITU. Today, internet governance largely centres on the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a non-governmental corporation often criticised for being accountable to the US Department of Commerce. Thus, the 'reformers group' in Dubai wished to bring key issues of internet governance under intergovernmental control, as a more appropriate form of responsibility and representativeness.

Those efforts split the BRICS members. Russia and China headed the campaign, while India reportedly supported it and South Africa abstained. Brazil initially backed the campaign, but later denied its support for changing the regulations. At Dubai, more than 50 states refused to sign the final updated treaty, which introduced some amendments that Russia and its allies called for. Discussing further steps in internet governance is now quite problematic, as no one seems to have a clear vision of how to interpret the outcomes of Dubai and set a global agenda. Even if the subject arises at Durban, the BRICS leaders will likely gloss over its rough edges.

The largest internet market

Still, on global ICT development, the BRICS potential is even greater than in general economic development. Destined to govern the world's largest internet market, the BRICS leaders will have to make this issue one of the forum's top priorities. They realise this. At the same time, the turbulent and intensely dynamic realm of ICT and the internet reveals, better than anything else, the weak points of the BRICS forum, such as diverging social and economic trends and a general lack of internal consonance. Although Durban might not be a litmus test for the future of the BRICS forum, it will likely be a milestone in the development of its ICT agenda, which will more closely relate to security aspects than to more traditional financial and economic areas. ■

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